

OPUNTIA

280

Stampede 2014

Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. Since you are reading this only online, my real-mail address doesn't matter. My eek-mail address (as the late Harry Warner Jr liked to call it) is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

Each year in Calgary, a large group of people dress up in funny costumes, act out roles, and come together to party hearty. No, not a science fiction convention, but the Stampede rodeo, first held in 1912.

After what happened last year, Cowtowners were more emotional than usual about this year's rodeo. The great flood of June 21, 2013, devastated Calgary, and it was only by working around the clock with hundreds of contractors that the Stampede was able to open on time two weeks later. The rodeo infield and horse race track were waist-deep in water after the Elbow River decided to take a short cut across the grounds. Most of the damage has been cleaned up, but the City is still rebuilding the riverbanks and raising the levees. Calgarians now get nervous when the weather forecaster says "periods of rain". When he predicted that on June 20, 2013, the periods of rain turned into 190 mm of solid downpour in one day. The mountains and foothills caught 250 mm, and all that water

drained into Calgary, forcing 100,000 people out of their homes and flooding the downtown skyscrapers for a week. The Bow and Elbow Rivers rose five metres above normal, and spread out kilometres wide. (See OPUNTIA's #264 to 266 for the details of the great flood.)

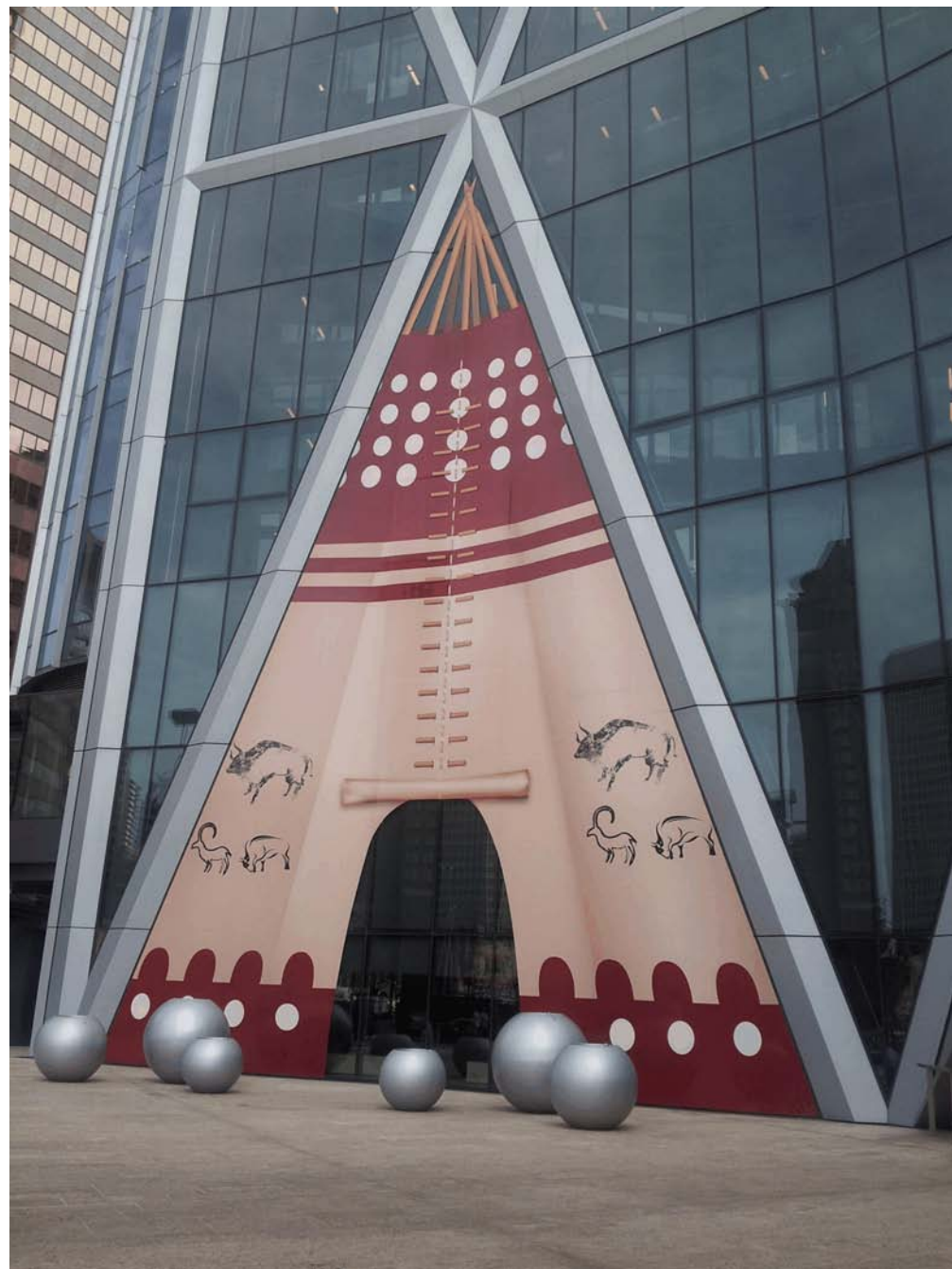
The Writing On The Windows.

Rather than repeat a general account each year of my Stampede visits, I write about a different theme each year. For 2012 it was about the free pancake breakfast tradition (in issue #253). For 2013 it was about the massive demand on Calgary Transit (and, unfortunately, the great flood) in issue #264. This year, I'll show off photos of a few window displays. Since Stampede lasts ten days and Cowtowners start celebrating a week before, businesses find it worth their while to spend money on fancy window art. The example at left is the downtown Scotiabank. It seems a strange slogan.





This banner was the same one the Bank of Montreal used last year. The generic slogan should certainly save money, and we all know how careful banks are about money. (Not yours, the CEO's salary and bonus.)



The Bow Tower, at the east end of the downtown core, is the tallest building in Canada outside Toronto. The X-beams give it a distinctive look. Kudos to the building management for using the natural shape of the building when decorating it for the Stampede.





The Parade.

2014-07-04

I was surprised to learn that Shatner has a legitimate connection to cowboydom. He has raised horses for years on his Kentucky farm and is an equestrian competitor. The day before the parade he hosted an exclusive gathering at the Stampede grounds for those who could afford it, and talked about his life as a horseman. Before and after Star Trek, he was in various western movies and television shows and was no stranger to the saddle.

The Honourary Grand Marshal. Of the 2014 Calgary Stampede parade. Was none other than. The Star Trek captain himself. William Shatner. That's how Shatner would have enunciated it, had he made the public announcement. The world's largest rodeo, with 1.2 million paid admissions over ten days, starts off with a parade on Friday morning. About 200,000 people watched the parade as it snaked through the downtown core.



I have no idea who is the woman riding with him.



These are not the cowboys you are looking for.



I took about a hundred photos of the parade, but don't worry, I'm not going to show them all here. Just a few items.





Vulcan is a town about an hour's drive southeast of Calgary. It was named after the Roman god of fire and patron of blacksmiths. The town has no natural tourist attractions, so they are trying to rope in the Trekkies. They have an annual Star Trek convention and a small museum of Trekiana, as well as a large statue of the starship Enterprise.

This particular starship was belching steam from its nacelles. Hmm, a crossover between Star Trek and steampunk? Notice the spectators giving the Vulcan salute.



I was watching the parade on 9 Avenue SW, which runs parallel to the transcontinental railroad. The engine crews were assembling a unit train in the rail yards behind the crowd, and tooted their horns every time they went past.

Note the brakeman in the yellow glow vest waving from the engine. The railroad forms the southern boundary of the downtown core.

Interspersed throughout the parade, usually following directly behind large horse rider groups, are the City of Calgary Roads Dept. street sweepers. They perform a vital service that is particularly appreciated by the marching bands who have to follow the horses. The sweepers are decorated for the parade.



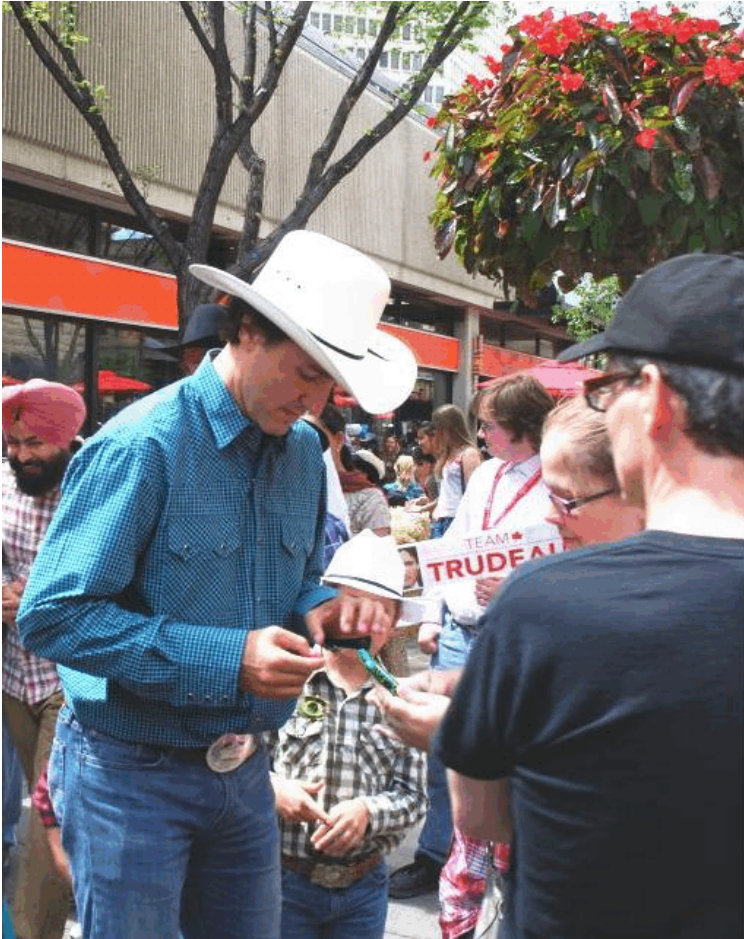
Unlike ordinary beauty pageants, rodeo queens and princesses have to be farm girls who are good equestrians. Good looks are important, of course, but there is no swimsuit competition, and public speaking is an essential skill.



The parade route was 4 km long. You do the math.

In Enemy Territory.

After the parade was over, I wandered over to a food court for a bite to eat, then began ambling down the 8th Avenue pedestrian mall. I noticed a scrum of television cameras and passersby with smartphone cameras in action, all clustered around one tight spot. Just as I came near, they started moving away down the mall, with some of the cameramen running on the double. I couldn't see what it was, so I galloped around them to get in front. What it was, was none other than Justin Trudeau, party leader of the federal Liberals and the Opposition Leader in the House of Commons.



I admire his bravery in visiting Calgary, which is Canada's petroleum capital. He has made derogatory remarks about the oilsands, without which Canada's economy would be Third-World rank. His father Pierre expropriated a good chunk of the oil industry with the National Energy Policy of 1979, which looted billions

in oil royalties from Alberta to subsidize the voters of Ontario and Quebec. Calgary has not elected a Liberal M.P. since 1968, when Justin's father was Prime Minister.

However, I won't visit the sins of the father upon the son. Justin was a crowd pleaser on the mall. He was walking with his children and stopping every few metres for autographs and selfies. I never realized how tall he is; once I spotted him it was easy to track him because he was a head taller than those around him. He is young, rich, and handsome; what else is there? The photo below shows him with his daughter and son, posing with a tourist.



SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Heers, A.M., et al (2014) **From baby birds to feathered dinosaurs: incipient wings and the evolution of flight.** PALEOBIOLOGY 40:459-476

Authors' abstract: *“Some of the most iconic, well-studied fossils with transitional features are theropod dinosaurs, whose skeletons and feathered forelimbs record the origin and evolution of bird flight. However, in spite of over a century of discussion, the functions of forelimb feathers during the evolution of flight remain enigmatic. Both aerodynamic and non-aerodynamic roles have been proposed, but few of the form-function relationships assumed by these scenarios have been tested. Here, we use the developing wings of a typical extant ground bird (Chukar Partridge) as possible analogues/homologues of historical wing forms to provide the first empirical evaluation of aerodynamic potential in flapping theropod protowings. Immature ground birds with underdeveloped, rudimentary wings generate useful aerodynamic forces for a variety of locomotor tasks. Feather development in these birds resembles feather evolution in theropod dinosaurs, and reveals a predictable relationship between wing morphology and aerodynamic performance that can be used to infer performance in extinct theropods. By spinning an ontogenetic series of spread-wing preparations on a rotating propeller apparatus across a range of flow conditions and measuring aerodynamic force, we explored how changes in wing size, feather structure, and angular velocity might have affected aerodynamic performance in dinosaurs choosing to flap their incipient wings. At slow angular velocities, wings produced aerodynamic forces similar in magnitude to those produced by immature birds during behaviors like wing-assisted incline running. At fast angular velocities, wings produced forces sufficient to support body weight during flight. These findings provide a quantitative, biologically relevant bracket for theropod performance and suggest that protowings could have provided useful aerodynamic function early in maniraptoran history, with improvements in aerodynamic performance attending the evolution of larger wings, more effective feather morphologies, and faster angular velocities.”*

Speirs: Technically dinosaurs didn't become extinct, they evolved into birds. Evidence is accumulating that feathers were originally for insulation. The animals with feather-covered limbs could go up slopes or tree trunks faster by flapping their limbs. From there it was just a matter of flattening the limbs for better lift and improving metabolism for faster flapping, before finally gaining

the ability to glide and then to actively fly. The evolutionary advantages were obvious.

Alnabulsia, Hani and John Drurya (2014) **Social identification moderates the effect of crowd density on safety at the Hajj.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES (USA) 111:9091–9096

Authors' abstract: *"Crowd safety is a major concern for those attending and managing mass gatherings, such as the annual Hajj or pilgrimage to Mecca (also called Makkah). One threat to crowd safety at such events is crowd density. However, recent research also suggests that psychological membership of crowds can have positive benefits. We tested the hypothesis that the effect of density on safety might vary depending on whether there is shared social identification in the crowd. We surveyed 1,194 pilgrims at the Holy Mosque, Mecca, during the 2012 Hajj. Analysis of the data showed that the negative effect of crowd density on reported safety was moderated by social identification with the crowd. Whereas low identifiers reported reduced safety with greater crowd density, high identifiers reported increased safety with greater crowd density. Mediation analysis suggested that a reason for these moderation effects was the perception that other crowd members were supportive. Differences in reported safety across national groups (Arab countries and Iran compared with the rest) were also explicable in terms of crowd identification and perceived support. ... This process also helps to explain national differences among pilgrims in feelings of safety during the event. In contrast both to engineering approaches, which neglect crowd psychology, and traditional crowd psychology, which assumes that the crowd is inherently a “problem,” this study shows how the crowd can be part of the solution in crowd safety management."*

Speirs: I got to thinking about this paper in relation to science fiction conventions. The fan-run conventions that have problems with troublemakers seem to be the big-tent events with disparate groups attending, each with their own focus and not mixing with others. One convention in the USA had trouble with S&M sex posers who were tolerated in the name of diversity and busted up hotel rooms carrying out bondage procedures. Many conventions have learned the hard way not to book into college towns when classes are in session, as the frat boys find out about the free drinking parties and don't care what kind of mess they leave behind. This is why I prefer small focused conventions such as readercons. The big-tent conventions say they have to be all-inclusive to

afford the costs and that they can't afford the costs unless they are all-inclusive. I disagree entirely that the success of fan-run conventions is measured by how many people attended and how large the facilities were. Leave the big tents to Dragon Con, the Comic Cons, and other commercial businesses that cater to media fans, who willingly stand in line for four hours and pay \$25 for an autographed photo of a minor actor who played the starship navigator on a cancelled television series.

Corbella, Licia (2014-01-20) **Neil Young chooses his own comfort over his convictions.** CALGARY HERALD www.calgaryherald.com

Author's remarks: "While Neil Young spoke to a Calgary news conference at the Jack Singer Concert Hall prior to his Sunday night show, five rock star-style motorhomes were left running outside, spewing fumes into the Calgary air, even though they were mostly unoccupied. Inside the concert hall, the 68-year-old rock 'n' roll legend was talking about the "elephant in the room," which he later explained was man-made global warming. The only elephant I could see was his enormous carbon footprint and his even bigger hypocrisy between his walk and his talk. ...

Calgary was the last stop on Young's four-city Honor the Treaties tour, which is designed to raise awareness and money for the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, which is suing the federal government and Shell Canada in an effort to stop Shell's Jackpine Mine expansion proposal in northern Alberta. ... The irony wasn't lost on me that the person who chirped up to come to Young's defence on his high-flying lifestyle was David Suzuki, the CBC television star who is fond of flying hither and yon and is severely over housed, as he owns several large homes and often insists on his own limo when he goes on CBC shoots rather than travel with the rest of the film crew. Two CBC camera men, who have asked to remain anonymous, have told me so. Outside, Young's diesel buses spewed away, keeping the interiors toasty warm, with a big-screen television displaying a football game to no one at all.

How do I know that the buses were running while Young was inside the Jack Singer concert hall? Because I spoke to a security guard tasked with keeping fans away from the five buses parked along 9th Avenue across from the Epcor Centre of the Performing Arts and also in the parking lot and in the loading dock. When asked if the buses had all been kept running for the past hour, he said they had been running for longer than that. I knocked on the doors of all

of the buses, rented or leased from Florida Coach Luxury Design and Leasing, and only one was opened by a young man who introduced himself as a cook. The chef explained that the motorhomes, must be kept running to run the equipment aboard. "But some of the buses don't appear to have anyone on board," I said. "We just always keep them running whether they're occupied or not, but we use bio-diesel which is trucked in from the U.S., so it's OK." ... Never mind that biodiesel is causing great hardship for the world's poorest citizens since staple food crops like corn are used to power vehicles rather than grow their food, causing their food prices to spike."

Speirs: Ethanol and hydrogen are energy-negative fuels that require more energy to produce them than is gained back in use. Biofuels are no problem unless you are a poor city dweller in the Third World who spends 40% or more of his income on food, and now has to pay more because corn is diverted from food to cars. The so-called Arab Spring wasn't because the peasants were yearning for democracy, it was because food prices spiked.

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE

The fourth annual readercon in Calgary will be held from August 8 to 10, 2014. By then I will have digested all the pancakes I ate during the Stampede and will be able to look a sausage in the eye again. When Words Collide brings together the literary genres of science fiction, fantasy, mystery, historical fiction, and romance to provide. Authors, publishers, editors, and readers come together to demonstrate that there is fun without SFX and loud orchestral music as the hero saves the universe.

This notice is more for the record since the 400 cap on memberships has been reached and the convention is now sold out. I will have my usual detailed convention report in the next issue of this zine. On the off-chance that anyone is interested, the three previous WWCs were reported in OPUNTIA #71, #253, and #266. Go there.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to opuntia57@hotmail.com]

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2014-07-07

It has been a while since I read Blish's *Cities in Flight*, and these days, I am not the reader I once was. I suspect that if I was to pick it up and start to read it, I might not finish it, and I might not like it as I did once. That's a shame, for it would prove to me that I do not have the imagination I once did. I hope I'd still have enough sensawunda to enjoy it, but I am not quite the wide-eyed naif I once was. Your description of the books here sounds great, but there are so many books and movies and other entertainments that are attractive, but there are only so many hours in the day, and I would rather be creative and active, rather than passive.

Fukushima has indeed joined Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Chernobyl as words symbolizing nuclear disaster, but the more I see mentions of Fukushima online, the more it looks like the world is ignoring the radiation being given off, and is hoping it will go away. Already, it looks like Japanese radiation is spreading throughout the Pacific Ocean, and nothing is being done about it.

[But where are those giant ants and superheroes that are apparently produced by radiation? Or could it be that Hollywood got it wrong?]

[The World Wide Party] June 21 in Toronto was a major steampunk event in Toronto, Steam on Queen, a large bazaar and costume gathering. We enjoyed ourselves thoroughly, and realized that this is a newer fandom, without much of the baggage SF fandom seems to have built up over the years. That evening, we did have our own World Wide Party, with a toast to fanzine fans, and fans in general, and a quiet evening. May we all find the activities and interests that fulfill us, and make us feel that life is worthwhile and fun.

Your pictures of utility box art in Calgary reminds me that I am starting to see much the same thing in Toronto. Instead of brightly coloured artwork, it looks like the boxes are being painted as if they are covered in green leaves to try to blend them in with surrounding nature. Unfortunately, the shade of green being used is a shade I am sure is not found in nature, but at least the attempt is there.

When [Toronto Mayor] Rob Ford returned from rehab, my previous letter was proved right. I said that he would do or say something stupid/arrogant/sexist/racist, and he's already done most of that, and his brother Doug is adding to the furore, telling his critics to go to hell. I'd happily trade [Calgary Mayor] Nenshi for Ford, and so would many people here. Oh, well, the municipal elections are only a few months away, and we can give the Fords their walking papers then.

FROM: Alexander Case
Wilsonville, Oregon

2014-07-04

I loved your article on the CITIES IN FLIGHT series. I've been reviewing the series on my web show. I've read and reviewed the first three books, but I haven't quite gotten around to doing THE TRIUMPH OF TIME yet. Hopefully I'll get a chance to read and review that book this summer. The moment in EARTHMAN, COME HOME where Amalfi and the city of New York inflict Grievous Harm With a Celestial Body on the Vegan Orbital Fort is, quite possibly, the biggest "Holy Shit" (or, if you prefer the profanity-free version, "Holy Poop") moment I've had with a work of science fiction in any medium in several years.

[For those who haven't read the book, imagine the Jedi accelerating a planet to full speed and taking out the Death Star by the simple expedient of smashing it with the planet. And doing it while Darth Vader is on board sending a message to the rebels that resistance is futile. A message that suddenly cuts off in mid-transmission when the Death Star instantly becomes a puddle of molten metal in a giant crater on the planet.]

While I haven't read all of Rex Stout's original novels, I had read a lot of them, and hearing that someone else had picked up the torch after Stout's passing and carried it with an equal amount of aptitude and flair caught my interest. I'd discovered the series through the A&E TV series starring Timothy Hutton as Archie Goodwin and Maury Chaykin as Wolfe. I enjoyed it immensely, and it inspired me to pick up the books. As far as alternate takes on the series and concept go, there is a Japanese series of YA mystery novels (or "Light Novels" as they're known in Japan) with a similar concept, that were adapted into an anime series called "Heaven's Memo Pad", which got an English language release on DVD a few years ago.