

# OPUNTIA

## 67.1D

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### SHERLOCKIANA: PART 4.

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in issues #63.1B to #63.1D respectively.]

#### The Fandom.

While many detectives in literature have their fans and even occasionally a fan club, none have such an infrastructure as Sherlock Holmes. The Holmes clubs may meet regularly or instead publish occasional ephemera and indulge in an annual banquet. The original Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle are known as the canon, and stories published by other authors are called pastiches. Holmes fans publish commentaries on the canon that make the Talmud seem like a four-page pamphlet. They also worry about the decline in their numbers; the younger generation doesn't seem to produce many Sherlockians. The Baker Street Irregulars of New York City are the premier club of Sherlockians in North America. Clubs formed afterwards around the world are referred to as scions, and their names are a story title or well-known phrase from one of the canon.

On my shelves of Sherlockiana is the essay collection VIOLETS AND VITRIOL (2004, trade paperback), edited by S.E. Dahlinger. In the introduction she mentions that the earliest printed appearance of "Sherlockian", by which name we Sherlock fans

identify ourselves, was in the February 1903 issue of THE BOOKMAN. It seems an obvious neologism, and undoubtedly circulated verbally prior to that date.

I won't review every essay. The first one, for example, is a reminiscence of the writer's exposure to Sherlockiana, mildly interesting but not breaking any new ground. Some essays are about Doyle's other writings, such as the Lost World or the Brigadier stories. There are several essays about the women in the stories. Some are sorted out by type, whether victims or perpetrator. Another essay sorts them by age. The clients tended to be younger women, others who showed up later in the story were middle-aged or elderly. The marital status of the women is discussed. Mrs. Hudson, the housekeeper, was sui generis among all these women.

In "The Monster Within" by Barbara Rusch, she considers the Holmes stories from the point of view of Gothic tales, with crumbling manor houses and gloomy moors. Doyle admired Edgar Allan Poe and considered him the founder of the detective story, an opinion widely agreed with today. Poe's fiction is largely Gothic, and the influence is evident in the Holmes stories. Doyle, despite being a spiritualist who believed in fairies, set up supernatural plots which Holmes then debunked and found rational explanations for. "The Hound Of The Baskervilles" is as Gothic a story as one could find.

"Canonical Scribbles" by Roberta Davies

-2-

is a look at the practical side of penmanship and letter writing in the Victorian era. Steel nib pens had recently displaced quills, and the fountain pen, invented in 1884, was cutting-edge technology. Ballpoint pens were still science fiction. Handwriting analysis for forensic purposes was just starting to spread in the Victorian era. Holmes was one of the pioneers, identifying suspects on the basis of how they dotted their "i"s and crossed their "t"s, or what kind of mood they were in by how often the pen was lifted from the paper before making the next letter. For example, people in a hurry or a highly emotional state tend not to lift the pen, such that words flow into each other.

"Autolycus In Chicago" is a vignette by Susan Rice about Vincent Starrett, a founding father of organized Holmes fandom. He was a gentleman in looks and deportment, in the David Niven/Vincent Price style, and a noted conversationalist. Starrett worked a decade as a newspaper reporter, then became a freelance writer the rest of his life. He produced thousands of articles, poems, and short fiction, a few novels, and is best remembered for his mystery stories. For Sherlockians, he was a book collector who spotted the rarities and encouraged Holmes fandom.

CANADIAN HOLMES (1997, hardcover) is an anthology of articles extracted from the clubzine of the same name of a group of Toronto Sherlockians. The Bootmakers of Toronto was founded

in February 1972. The club gets its name from the only reference in the canon to Toronto, a bootmaker named Meyer therefrom (in “The Hound Of The Baskervilles”). This book collects essays from its first 25 years.

One such essay is “Almost A Zen Master” by James Heap, who considers the canon as a series of moral tales. He feels that the enduring popularity of the stories is not because of the plots but because the stories delineate a way of life, how a proper Briton should live. In particular, Holmes is an example of how to avoid distractions and emotions when concentrating on what we consider important.

Another essay is about what is an issue only among Canadian Sherlockians: bilingual fandom. Chris Redmond writes an account of visiting Montréal fans in “A Bimetallic Inquiry Into The State Of The Nation”. The scion club there is called The Bimetallic Question, taken from the story “The Bruce-Partington Plans”, one of the few references in the canon that mentions Canada specifically by name. (Holmes’s brother Mycroft is said to be able to analyze complex relationships between “*the Navy, India, Canada, and the bimetallic question*”). About 30% of the club membership is francophones, bilingual of course. Meetings and the club publications are in English, with no apparent hassles by the language police. Members of the club agreed that this was because of the number of anglophones in Montréal. If a scion

club was formed in Chicoutimi or Cap Rouge, it would be francophone, and they would read the French translations of the canon, just as anglophone science fiction fans read Jules Verne in English translations.

Chris Redmond has another historical essay, on female Sherlockians in “The BSI Says Yes”. The Baker Street Irregulars was founded in New York City in the 1930s and operated as a men’s club. Like science fiction fans in those days, the male geek predominated, but unlike science fiction fandom, which welcomed female fans when it could find them, the BSI remained stag. Women were allowed to hover around the fringes but were denied membership. By the late 1980s, there were numerous scion clubs in North America and women were found throughout them, but the BSI stayed mono-gender. It didn’t matter too much as by then Sherlockian scholarship had spread elsewhere, and the BSI was no longer relevant, living only for an annual banquet and coasting on its rapidly fading reputation. In 1991, a new leader began investing female members, reviving the club somewhat, although its time has passed and it is now on the fringe.

### **Yes, Virginia, There Really Was A ...**

Sherlockians like to operate on the premise that there really was a Holmes and Watson, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was merely the literary agent for Watson.



The verisimilitude of the stories is such that in the early days of the stories many letters would be addressed to Holmes by readers who thought he was real.

A 2007 short story “... But With A Whimper” by Greg Wilson, published in ON SPEC (a Canadian Science fiction semi-prozine) ponders this premise. Professor Moriarty’s son gets his revenge on the great detective by employing an army of librarians to reclassify the Holmes stories as fiction, and replace all book reviews in the magazine back issues with altered ones treating him as fiction. Moriarty fils then visits the elderly detective, a feeble old man puttering around his bee hives in the Sussex Downs. Holmes indignantly tells Moriarty that he will never get away with it; there are thousands of people who knew Holmes and Watson in the flesh. To which is given the reply that they are elderly and rapidly dying off, and soon the next generation will only believe what they read, that the great detective was fictional. Moriarty leaves laughing loudly at his successful revenge, while Holmes is left with the shock that posterity will think of him as but a character in a mystery story series.

### **Holmes And The Law.**

Watson often described Holmes as an emotionless, coldly logical man, but this was not entirely so. Julie McKuras, in her essay “The Compliments Of The Season” in VIOLETS AND VITRIOL,

points out that Holmes often preferred not to let the law get in the way of morality and justice. Out of 37 felons known to Holmes in his cases, he let 14 go free. Sometimes it was to protect families and reputations, other times because it seemed out-of-character for the perpetrator and there was little risk of re-offending, and a few times he used what is known among the police as “constable’s discretion”. -4-

“Sherlock Holmes: Lawbreaker” by Ray Rawlings (from CANADIAN HOLMES) categorizes all the offenses Holmes commits while solving cases. The milder ones involve impersonation with intent, false representation, and possession of tools for the purpose of breaking and entering. Holmes also commits assault, theft, grave robbing, and giving false information to a police officer. He obviously takes the attitude that the ends justify the means.

### **Holmes As A Genius.**

Wayne Swift, in his essay “The Curious Incident Of Holmes’s Electronic Brain” (from CANADIAN HOLMES) disputes the idea that Holmes was a mathematical genius. The most famous example involves the Dancing Men secret code, which supposedly took Holmes hours to solve and required advanced calculations to determine the frequencies of letters.

Real-life cryptographers have pointed out that for a simple substitution code such as that, cribbing is the faster and easier method, where one follows certain rules for guessing letters and words and seeing if they make sense. Nor, in another story, could Holmes have glanced from a speeding train, timed the passage of telegraph poles, and then in a couple of seconds calculated the speed of the train.

Further to the theme of Holmes's shaky abilities is an essay by Don Cox, "The One Fixed Point In A Changing Age" (from CANADIAN HOLMES). Holmes made many of his deductive chains of logic based on questionable assumptions. As an example, he concludes that the initials C.C.H. on a walking stick indicate that the owner is a doctor from Charing Cross Hospital, who was unambitious and moved to the country. Setting aside the fact that the initials could have stood for a million other things, it never occurred to Holmes that sometimes people move from the city to the country for a better life. All of this further assumes that the walking stick wasn't bought secondhand or inherited from an elderly uncle.

### **Holmes Per Se.**

In the canon story "His Last Bow", Holmes tells Watson about a case he was working on undercover under the alias of Charles Altamont, during which time "*I gave serious trouble to the*

*constabulary at Skibbereen*". Peter Wood takes up this passing reference and elaborates it as a humorous pastiche "The Irish RM Meets Altamont" (from CANADIAN HOLMES).

Holmes is trying to infiltrate the Fenians, and the Protestant overlords of Ireland are keeping an eye on him. The village squire, also the county justice, has the misfortune of having to deal with Holmes qua Altamont at the Monday hearings of the court. Holmes disrupts the procedure of the courtroom, makes an impassioned speech for Irish independence and otherwise behaves to get himself a conviction, thereby ingratiating himself with the Fenians.

### **You Have Been In Afghanistan, I Perceive.**

The Holmes stories would be nothing without his faithful Boswell, Dr. John Watson. Cameron Hollyer, in his semi-essay "How Many Wives Did Watson Wed?" (from CANADIAN HOLMES) discusses one of the more vexing questions of the stories. We know that Watson was wed at least twice from casual references in the canon, and possibly a third time. His marriages, if they could be fixed, would go a long way to improving the chronology of the stories. Unfortunately Hollyer gets coy and writes his story up as a pointless dream. A waste of ink.

## The Most Dangerous Man In Europe.

David Hammer writes the self-explanatory essay "A Psychological Study Of Mr. Sherlock Holmes In The Year 1891" (from CANADIAN HOLMES). He concludes that Holmes was definitely paranoid, and eventually developed his conspiracy theory centred around Professor Moriarty. No one else heard of or had proof of Moriarty's supposed evil empire; it was always described by Holmes but never seen. If a loose slate shingle fell off a roof and narrowly missed Holmes, it wasn't a random accident, it was an attempt on his life. If he narrowly missed being run over by a speeding coach, it wasn't a near-miss traffic accident, it was a deliberate attempt by Moriarty's henchmen.

Michael Kurland has been writing a series of pastiches from the point of view of Professor James Moriarty. "The Picture Of Oscar Wilde", in the June 2008 issue of THE STRAND MAGAZINE (new series), has Wilde coming to Moriarty to help him deal with a blackmailer who has a highly incriminating photo of Wilde and another man doing something that was highly illegal in Victorian England. The ending is a *deus ex machina* where the bad guy kills and is killed. One gets the impression that Kurland wrote this story so he could show off his knowledge of how Victorian-era cameras worked.

MORIARTY is a novel by the late John Gardner -6- (2008, hardcover) which takes a different twist on the professor, who survived the struggle at Reichenbach Falls and is now attempting to regain control of his evil empire. However, the professor is not the original professor; he has been usurped by his younger brother, who murdered him and took over his identity. This is a pointless sub plot and detracts from the storyline.

Sir Jack Idell, known in the underworld as Idle Jack, is fighting for control with Moriarty the younger. Moriarty is at first hampered by having to reclaim his empire from Idell, to sort out the sheep from the goats, and to find out who he can trust. He knows there is a traitor within his executive but doesn't know who, until the penultimate chapter of course. After an aborted assassination attempt on Idle Jack, Moriarty finally manages to finish him off with a plot lifted directly from "The Hound Of The Baskervilles".

The novel is written in the noir style but reads well, although it is not a book you would give to a young child or your mother. It is obvious that the author found a glossary of Victorian underworld argot somewhere and was determined to use every word in it as authentic colour. A sequel is promised in the last few pages. The author died shortly after finishing the book so this may be doubtful, but perhaps it may be farmed out to a sharecropper writer. I hope not; this pastiche strays too far from the canon.



## The Most Dangerous Woman In Europe.

Irene Adler was The Woman to Holmes, who outsmarted him in “A Scandal In Bohemia”. She has always seemed a different sort of character to Sherlockians, and in the essay “What’s So Great About Irene Adler” (from CANADIAN HOLMES), Dayna McCausland discusses why. She concludes that Adler’s attraction was because she was a liberated woman during the Victorian era, a far harder task to accomplish then than nowadays.

Watson stated in many of his stories that he had changed the names of people or places, either to protect them or because even at that late stage the truth would shake the Empire were it known. This creates all sorts of ambiguity for Sherlockians to speculate upon and, by logical deduction, arrive at conflicting conclusions. That is part of the sport of being a Sherlockian.

In the essay “Russian Roulette” by Nancy Beiman and Mia Stampe (from VIOLETS AND VITRIOL), they discuss the Scandal, which has led to many guessing games among Sherlockians as to who the King of Bohemia really was. Bohemia ceased to be a kingdom in 1620, so the consensus is that Watson had changed the name to protect either Edward VII or a German prince. Here the two authors argue that it was really Tsar Alexander III.

## The Most Famous Address.

221B Baker Street needs little introduction to anyone, fiction reader or not. Trevor Raymond has walked down Baker Street many times and discusses its current condition in his essay “Baker Street Again” (from CANADIAN HOLMES). The Marylebone Library, just round the corner from Baker Street, has an extensive collection of Sherlockiana. Meanwhile, on the street itself, the privately-run Sherlock Holmes Museum at #239 is feuding with the Abbey National Building Society (#215 to #229) over who has the rights to #221. (The B means the second floor, not what North Americans would call a duplex address.) Today’s Baker Street was not created until the 1930s after the canon was written, when three streets were merged, so in other words Doyle created 221B out of thin air. The house at 41 Upper Baker Street became 221 Baker Street but was immediately demolished along with others for the office building Abbey House.

In the Did-We-Really-Need-To-Know-This? Department, Don MacLachlan noticed that people were forever springing out of chairs or sitting down in them in the rooms at 221B. In his essay “Dr. Watson Takes A Chair” (from CANADIAN HOLMES), he studies the number and types of chairs mentioned in the canon, in more detail than most of us would care to know. He concludes there were 11 chairs, 2 stools, and a sofa, which means the room had to be rather large or rather cluttered.

# THE ALGONQUIN ROUND TABLE CONSIDERED AS PASTICHES

by Dale Speirs

## Introduction.

The Algonquin Round Table were a group of young literary and stage people who met for lunch at a New York City hotel. There were some regulars such as Alexander Woollcott, Robert Benchley, and Dorothy Parker, and other logrollers such as the Marx Brothers who dropped in from time to time. They traded spontaneous epigrams and quips they had been rehearsing all week, and wrote up each other's wisecracks in their newspaper and magazine columns, a mutual admiration society if there ever was one. Most are out of print, although there are enough biographies about them to ensure they will be generously footnoted in history books, much like we remember Samuel Johnson because of Boswell but do not read his books. The Round Table's fame was at its height during the Roaring Twenties, but declined when things turned sour in October 1929 and the Great Depression began.

## You Might As Well Live.

Dorothy Parker is survived mainly by her Algonquin bon mots and a book of poetry still in print for her famous poem about

unsuccessfully trying to commit suicide.

-8-

A tiny woman, she was a beauty in her prime but unfortunately outlived her era and died a lonely alcoholic widow in a residential hotel. George Baxt wrote a 1984 novel THE DOROTHY PARKER MURDER CASE, which borrows historical characters from the New York City of 1926.

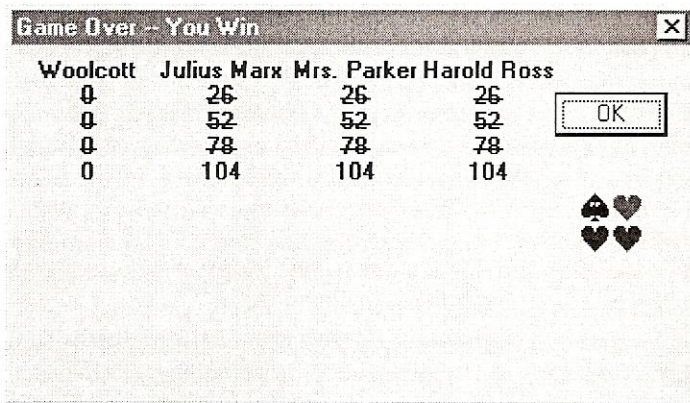
Pause for digression. There is at times entirely too much name-dropping in this novel, but this is a common fault of pastiches, where authors feel it necessary to drag in every famous person of an era, whether or not they would actually have met. It is like writing a contemporary novel where Wayne Gretzky crosses paths with Condoleeza Rice and Neil Armstrong in a Chicago nightclub while investigating the murder of a washed-up jock. Alternative history is much the same, with the added fault that AH authors often feel compelled to introduce magic or time travel as well.

Meanwhile, back at the novel, playwright George S. Kaufman has found his mistress dead in his pied-a-terre, and appeals to Alexander Woollcott to help find the murderer. A discreet police detective is brought in on the quiet, and unlike any real-world constable, he tolerates the help of amateurs doing legwork. The deceased had been escorted by Rudolph Valentino to a party ten days earlier, and he too was now defunct, albeit from a perforated ulcer, not strangulation. Mrs. Parker ("There was a Mr. Parker.") is a dear friend of Woollcott and does much of the investigating,



consorting with brothel madams, gangsters, publishers, playwrights, and other lowlifes.

As per usual in murder mysteries, there is never just one corpse, and suspicion is thrown about like salt on an icy sidewalk. In the course of her investigation, Mrs. Parker falls for Lacey Van Weber, a wealthy young man-about-town with no past that anyone can find out. As Mrs. Parker discovers, he is not what he appears to be and is a front for drug smugglers. The finale is a raid on the secret headquarters where everything blows up, burns down, or crashes, much like any action-adventure movie. All the loose threads are suddenly tied up, and Mrs. Parker is left a sadder but not wiser woman.



This novel does give a glimmer of how life was for the Algonquin Circle at its peak, in a New York that was blissfully unaware of its impending doom in October 1929. The Algonquin wisecrackers were not noted for great oratory, and neither is this novel. Everyone speaks in snappy dialogue, which does move the plot along but makes it seem more like a blog than a novel.

### Marxism, But Not The Serious Guy With The Beard.

The Marx brothers occasionally sat in at the Round Table when in New York, albeit not all at the same time. *YOU BET YOUR LIFE* is a 1978 novel by Stuart Kaminsky. It begins the pastiche in 1941 when Chico Marx (pronounced “chick-oh”, not “cheek-oh” as many people think) is being threatened by Chicago gangsters for \$120,000 in gambling debts he didn’t owe. His movie studio wants the whole thing hushed up, and hires a private investigator named Toby Peters to look into it. Someone is impersonating Chico and running up gambling debts in his name, proving that identity theft is no new thing. Peters checks into a Chicago hotel room, and shortly afterwards so does a gangster, whose bullet-ridden body is found in a closet in Peter’s room.

From there it is a matter of plodding about from one clue to another. The plodding is made worse for both Peters and the reader by the constant emphasis on the wintry weather Chicago is experiencing and Peters’ endless flu.

This is apparently an attempt by the author to make the novel seem more like a hard-boiled detective story. It doesn't work because you can't do it with the Marx brothers wandering about the plot annoying hotel clerks and gangsters alike with humorous epigrams.

Besides the constant meteorological reports, other "As you know, Professor, ..." data dumps include an explanation of how a Tommy gun works, addressed directly to the reader. Such things can barely be tolerated in science fiction where the author has to explain the background, but few readers are likely to need an explanation of how a sub-machine gun works. At least in Westerns, the cowboy hero doesn't stop in the middle of a gunfight to explain to his trusty companion how a revolver works; "As you know, Tonto, the revolver fires six shots from a rotating cylinder ..."

Groucho, Chico, and Harpo barge into the plot here and there, and Peters convinces them to sequester themselves in a hotel while he searches for Chico's impersonator. The standard clichés are followed, such as irrelevant name-dropping. Peters' investigation takes him into an illegal gambling club where he almost loses his life but for the intercession of an Englishman named Ian Fleming. As usual, more bodies appear, including the impersonator. But all ends well, except for a few more corpses, and Chico is cleared with the surviving gangsters.



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New Kingston, NY 12459

*[Pictorial postmark issued by New Kingston, New York, post office.]*

## DEATH COMES FOR THE RUBBER STAMPER

by Dale Speirs

I used to laugh at the idea of NASCAR romances. I've never read any and don't intend starting, but I browse the mystery section in bookstores regularly and have come across a plague of new subcategories there. Mystery sub-genres have long been established for cats, bookstore dealers, food, and crossword puzzles. These are invariably amateur women detectives snooping around in rural villages with a murder rate that makes back-alley Detroit look like a bucolic tropical island.

As a philatelist, I am relieved to say that our series, by Lawrence Block, involves a stamp collector who works as a hit man to pay for his hobby. This is probably because the public thinks of stamp collecting as a male hobby (not true), which saves us from being afflicted by Miss Marples wandering about checking if our stamps are unhinged.

Recently there have been new series of detectives who come across mayhem and murder in the quilting, scrapbooking, and knitting hobbies. Mail art being one of my interests, I was pleased to see that the Berkley imprint has rushed in to fill the gaping void in rubber stamp mysteries, an evident want which I am sure many critics have decried in the past. STAMPED OUT by Terri Thayer (2008, mass market paperback) involves a woman who earns her living by rubber stamping in a rural town with a murder rate that makes Detroit etcetera etcetera.

April Buchert and her father Ed are commissioned to restore a manor house, he being a contractor and she rubber stamping the wall trim. The first two chapters establish that everyone has something to hide, and also that rural town economics are apparently different in Pennsylvania, where not one but two people can actually earn a living rubber stamping full-time.

Ed is also doing a demolition job, on a house he built 15 years ago and which was abandoned uncompleted when the owner went

bankrupt. As the walls come tumbling down, a skull comes tumbling out. The local Deputy Dawg immediately suspects Ed before the skull even stops rolling, and calls in the state police. With the police investigation trundling along, April does her best Miss Marple imitation, and more hidden secrets come to light about her old high school classmates.

Every so often, all the action stops so that April and her friends can have a rubber stamping hen party. At the final stamping party, the truth starts to come out in the collages the women are doing, which leads to the denouement a bit later as to who the murderer was. The ending was telegraphed in the penultimate chapter, so the only suspense was how the murderer would actually be taken into custody.

I have collected a few short stories about rubber stamping. From the August 1974 issue of ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, is the story "Do Not Bend Etc." by Frank Sisk. The elderly supervisor of a morgue keeps finding bodies who have been rubber-stamped with such things as "Do not bend", "Past due", and "Fragile: Handle with care". The police are baffled because none of the victims have the slightest connection with each other. It doesn't take them long to figure out that the deceased do have one thing in common, the same morgue attendant. It seems that life is deadly dull down there in the coolers,



so the morgue supervisor decided to liven things up, if you'll pardon the puns, by stamping the corpses.

The January 1979 issue of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE has a short story by Jack Ritchie titled "The Midnight Strangler". A serial killer, specializing in middle-aged male victims, rubber stamps their foreheads with "Sinners must pay". Henry Turnbuckle has been falsely arrested for the murders and is being railroaded for the crimes. The man who set him up is discovered after he tries to improve the case by slipping the rubber stamp into Turnbuckle's coat pocket *after* the police had already searched Turnbuckle and emptied out his pockets. The list of new suspects is quickly narrowed down. The true culprit is caught because he forgot about the ink pad, still in his car, with a faint imprint of "Sinners must pay".

The March 1998 issue of the MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION has the short story by Marina Fitch titled "Imprints". A single mother rents a cottage to Mrs. Grady, a blind woman who has a huge collection of rubber stamps, and uses them to stamp out messages in the form of scenes. She helps others stamp out such scenes, some of which start to come true. The problem develops when a 7-year-old girl starts to stamp a vision of the future her mother doesn't want to see.

## ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$3 cash (\$5 overseas), trade for your zine, or letter of comment on a previous issue. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). USS banknotes are acceptable around the world. SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, sercon is serious-constructive, a genzine is a general zine]

**Cherry Monocle #?** (The Usual from Phlox Icona, 1215 Mississippi Avenue, Chattanooga, Tennessee 37405) Handprinted collage zine.

**Elephant Mess #21 and #22** (The Usual from Dan Murphy, Box 3154, Moscow, Idaho 83843) Minizine of philosophical musings and angst.

**Pajomo #1 and #2** (The Usual from PJM, Box 2632, Bellingham, Washington 98227-2632) Minizine with lots of band reviews and collage art.

**Spread #2 and #5** (The Usual from Jon Hart, Box 24003, Whitby, Ontario L1N 2L0) Collage zine with music and book reviews.

**Challenger #29** (The Usual from Guy Lillian, 8700 Millicent Way #1501, Shreveport, Louisiana 71115) Doorstop-class zine with articles on sports, ancient Christian theology regarding extraterrestrials, convention reports, worrying about the greying of SF fandom, a trip report to Italy, and lots of letters of comment.

**A Fanzine For Corflu Zed** (The Usual from Murray Moore, 1065 Henley Road, Mississauga, Ontario L4Y 1C8) A one-shot convention report which, despite its name, is actually about Boskone 46, not the Corflu convention.

**Musea (2009 Apr/May)** (The Usual from Tom Hendricks, 4000 Hawthorne #5, Dallas, Texas 75219) List of possible television shows. I don't think the 50-show series about American state capitol buildings would do well in the ratings. The proposal for a 30-minute show which "*spotlights our neighbour Canada with news, events, and whatever is interesting*" would be a non-starter as well; any American seriously interested would check the Internet.

**Statement #363 and #364** (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with the usual news and reviews. It also has a very strong astronomy component with info on space probes, meteorites, and other breaking news.

**BCSFazine #430** (\$3 or zine trade from British Columbia SF Association, c/o Felicity Walker, 3851 Francis Road #209, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1J6) SF clubzine with news and letters of comment.

**FOSFAX #215** (US\$4 from Falls of the Ohio SF and Fantasy Association, Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281) 69 pages of microprint. Lots of reading, although much of it is local politics. However, there are lots of book reviews, particularly alternative history and SF, miscellaneous notes, and letters of comment.

**The Hell's Half-Acre Herald #1** (The Usual from Paul Riddell, 5930-E Royal Lane #140, Dallas, Texas 75230) How to feed your carnivorous plants and the use of them for pest control. I'm glad Calgary doesn't have cockroaches.

**The Knarley Knews #132** (The Usual from Henry Welch, 18345 Skyline Blvd., Los Gatos, California 95033) Genzine with articles on the ethics of money, genre fiction writing, old fanzines, old conventions, and letters of comment.

**Zine World #27** (US\$5 cash from Jerianne, Box 330156, Murfreesboro, Tennessee 37133-0156) Reviews of hundreds of underground or alternative zines. I get few of these, so this is a good look at one of the other nodes on the Papernet. **-13-**

**Banana Wings #37** (The Usual from Claire Brialey, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England) SF fanzine with musings on the state of fandom, wargaming, SF ideas, and lots of letters of comment.

**The Juniper #10 to #11** (The Usual from Dan Murphy, Box 3154, Moscow, Idaho 83843) A journal devoted to the smaller, slower, simpler life, with philosophical observations mixed in with the practical details of organic gardening and composting.

**Node Pajomo #1** (The Usual from PJM, Box 2632, Bellingham, Washington 98227-2632) Something we haven't seen in many years in the Papernet since the demise of GLOBAL MAIL, this is a requestzine. This is a type of zine that compiles requests from various mail artists and zinesters for contributions to their projects such as exhibitions or artistamps.

**Vanamonde #778 to #782** (The Usual from John Hertz, 236 South Coronado Street #409, Los Angeles, California 90057) Single-sheet weekly apazine with comments on a wide variety of subjects.

**Media Junky #10** (The Usual from Jason Rodgers, Box 1683, Nashua, New Hampshire 03060) Review zine of underground and punk zines.

## BOOK REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

FEDERATION (1981, mass market paperback) is a compilation of five stories by H. Beam Piper set in his Federation "future history" series. It has become badly dated by subsequent space probe discoveries and politically-incorrect language (men are men, but women are always "girl lieutenants", a "Japanese girl", etcetera). Space explorers continually puff on cigarettes and pipes. The explorers carry along a photocopier in their spaceship, and "photostat" had not become an obsolete word displaced by "photocopy". To be fair though, if someone had to update these stories for our era, it wouldn't be too difficult to edit out archaic references and behaviours, and change ancient Martian civilizations to ancient Zzyxx civilizations.

The first story is "Omnilingual", about a team of archaeologists excavating ruins of an ancient civilization on Mars and piecing together ancient texts. Martha Dane is trying to translate the texts but is getting nowhere. She is being criticized by her fellow archaeologists for wasting time on a useless task. This struck me as unbelievable behaviour on the part of the scientists; any research team would consider it a priority to translate ancient documents. The team finds a university library, but the Rosetta Stone proves to be a large chart of the periodic table of elements in a chemistry laboratory.



From there they are soon reading Martian. Learning an unknown language is basically cryptanalysis once you have a few words.

The next story "Naudsonce" takes place six centuries later, when the Federation is still expanding out into space and so is the bureaucracy. It is a first contact story, as the landing team tries to establish communication with Bronze-Age humanoid natives. This is another unknown language problem, only with the natives still extant. Analysis shows no consistency between sounds and the words or meanings they are supposed to represent. The crew start speculating that the natives communicate by telepathy and the sounds are indeed random. Eventually they learn that the natives are extremely sensitive to pressure waves created by sounds, not the actual sounds themselves. It is possible to kill a native animal by firing a gun at it and missing, because the shock wave from the missed bullet is amplified by internal "ears" and causes the muscles to spasm so violently that bones are broken and lungs collapsed. The answer proves to be sign language.

"Oomphel In The Sky" happens nine centuries on in this future history, as the Federation begins to show signs of decay. Earth is declining but the colonial worlds are still vibrant. The natives are restless on the planet Kwann, and the Terrans are scrambling to keep things from blowing up. The planet has double suns, which are about to align themselves in the sky, and the prophets are predicting the End Times.

The story bogs down a bit in the middle with "As you know, Professor ..." infodumps, but eventually gets back on track. The Terrans invent some mythology to keep the tribes quiet and make them more productive on the plantations, the bureaucrats are put in their place, and private enterprise triumphs. Seen from the perspective of the Panic of 2008, this story doesn't read quite as well as it might have a few years ago.

"Graveyard Of Dreams" is set another two centuries on. Conn Maxwell is a young man returning to his home planet after five years at university. The planet was a supply depot during an interstellar war forty years prior. When the war ended, the military left behind huge amounts of supplies and equipment because they were too expensive to haul away, and since then the planet's population earned their income as scavengers. The people are essentially a cargo cult, and Conn knows he can't argue directly with them about rebuilding their industry and agriculture. Instead, he sets up a chimera for the people to chase, one that requires them to start building their own equipment and spaceships, and thus building a new society.

"When In The Course ..." is the final story of this collection. A space-faring mercantile company has found a planet with a medieval-level civilization confined to one river valley; the rest of the planet is for the taking. The merchants discover that the civilization is a conglomerate of

petty principalities kept petty by a priesthood who have the secret of gunpowder and make certain that none of the princes do. Naturally the merchants, who, by the way, are the heroes of the story, decide to remedy this situation. They start up a little war, supply arms, make money on the produce of the winners, and end up as powers behind the throne of a unified society. Private enterprise at its best.

## **WORLD WIDE PARTY #16 IN 2009**

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

## **CHESTER CUTHBERT (1912-2009)**

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Chester Cuthbert died in Winnipeg on March 20, 2009, at the age of 96. He was predeceased by his wife Muriel, and is survived by five children and nine grandchildren. He was the Grand Old Man of Canadian SF fandom, having been active in the early days of First Fandom, and when Canadian fandom went into a severe decline in the 1950s, kept it going almost single-handed. I corresponded with him in the 1990s and many of his letters appeared in OPUNTIA.

In 1994, when Winnipeg hosted the Worldcon, I visited him and Muriel at their house on Mulvey Avenue. Even then he was ancient, and I remember being surprised at how such a shriveled old man could have such a deep baritone voice. Chester did not attend the Worldcon, so many other fans from around the world made their way to his house to pay homage. Chester gave me the grand tour of his book collection, rooms full of them. In the attic I had to turn sideways to squeeze down some of the aisles. Many of his books were donated to the University of Alberta (Edmonton) a few years ago, and his son Ray, an ERB fan, took over his Burroughs collection. His family were well aware of his accomplishments and the value of his collection, so there was no fear that it would be tossed as happens with other SF fans. Chester's legacy lives on.