OPUNTIA

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COWTOWN PARTIES HEARTY

by Dale Speirs

2012 is the centennial of the Calgary Stampede, the world's largest rodeo, which this year had 1.4 million paid admissions over ten days. All the stops were out this year. Canada Post issued two stamps in honour of the occasion, and the souvenir shops are bursting with commemorative knickknacks and doodads. At public functions you couldn't turn around suddenly without tripping over a politician wearing a cowboy hat and gladhanding the crowd, even if the rest of his clothing was by Harry Rosen rather than Lammle's Western Wear.

I've written accounts of past Stampedes in previous issues of OPUNTIA but because they only change slowly from year to year, I ran out of ways to write them up. I'll take a new tack and just write only on one specific aspect of the show each year.

One of the major activities of Stampede time is the free pancake breakfast. This began in 1923 when a chuckwagon race contestant set up on a downtown street and start cooking flapjacks and handing them out free to passersby. In those days the chuckwagons were actual working wagons brought in from the ranch, not the purpose-built racing wagons now used. A chuckwagon was the cook wagon, used to feed hungry cowboys out on the range.


Ghostpine
ROCKY
MOUNTAIN
EQUIPMENT

Nowadays just about every shopping mall, realtor, church, labour union, or fraternal organization sets up in a parking lot once during the Stampede and hosts a free pancake breakfast. Many host their breakfast in the few days prior to the Stampede so as to get a jump on the festivities, much like department stores put up Christmas decorations before Halloween. Everybody dresses Western, with cowboy boots and denim jeans.

Almost always there is a band to entertain the audience while they wait in line for their food. Every band in the city, regardless of what kind of music they normally play, converts to western for their Stampede gigs. If they have a good booking agent, they can do two shows a day for two weeks, once in the morning for someone's pancake breakfast and once in the evening in a tavern. All the fortnight long, bands that are obviously punk or heavy metal judging by their tattoos and big hair, put on cowboy hats and pump out "Ghost Riders In The Sky" and "Four Strong Winds" (Alberta's unofficial anthem; look up the lyrics).

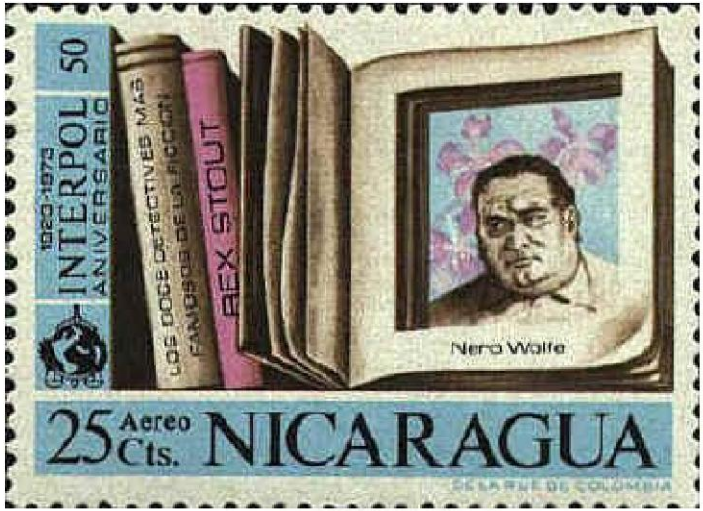
The quality and quantity of the breakfast varies with the number of moochers expected. A suburban business on a side street can afford to have flapjacks, bacon or sausage, scrambled eggs, and orange juice and coffee because they'll just get a couple of hundred people. Downtown breakfasts give you one flapjack and a piece of bacon. Chinook Centre, Calgary's largest mall, gets 70,000 people for its breakfast. I don't know what they serve because I have never been to that mob scene. They have dozens of stoves and serve 20,000 people an hour before shutting down. And SF fans think the Worldcon is big.

This year I worked my way down the 8th Avenue pedestrian mall in the downtown core. The lines moved quickly since there were so many breakfasts, and I was able to go through three of them. The photo on page 2 shows an example on the west side of the Olympic Plaza, where the mall ends in front of City Hall. There are stoves on those chuckwagons, just like the old ones of yore. You can see two line-ups; I took the photo from the third one.

Every Calgary resident knows that you don't try to do serious business during Stampede, and stays out of stores in the morning because the staff are out feeding on flapjacks. Many Cowtowners comb the newspapers and Internet to make up schedules of where to go for breakfasts, and swap tips with each other as to where the best ones are. It is considered greedy to ask for seconds, so instead people try to hit several in the neighbourhood.

Stampede is no place for politically correct vegans, lactose-intolerant, or other special-menu people. This isn't Toronto, this is beef country, with triple burgers, shredded beef on a bun, prairie oysters for the very brave, steaks in the sit-down restaurants, and lots of sugared mini-doughnuts for dessert. Yeehaw!

THE MAN FROM MONTENEGRO: PART 2
by Dale Speirs



Although Wolfe spent most of his time in his brownstone, he did leave occasionally, usually for an orchid show or some other business. Any trip was a major operation, classified in Wolfe's mind in the same category as the Scott Expedition or Sherman's march through Georgia.

TOO MANY COOKS (1938) has Wolfe lured out of his brownstone to attend a gathering of the world's greatest chefs. The novel starts off with Wolfe and Goodwin taking a train trip to Kanawha Spa, West Virginia, where Wolfe will give the Guest of Honour speech. Although the train trip is quite smooth for ordinary mortals, Wolfe carries on like an hysterical five-year-old. Whatever he makes, Goodwin isn't paid enough. En route, Wolfe settles down once he meets some fellow gourmands heading to the same gathering. They gossip, and the conversation informs us about Phillip Laszio, a master cook who steals recipes and wives from the other chefs. It is a wonder Laszio is still alive, given the death threats against him.

But finally to the resort, the kind of place with a manicured garden that has a man to dust the trees daily. There is a grand dinner with grand recipes, and gluttony reigns. Following that, there is a sauce tasting contest, during which Laszio abruptly departs this life, not with poison as one might expect but with a knife in the back. No one wastes a breath on motive, and the only question is whodunit.

The investigation proceeds on two fronts. The County Prosecutor and the local sheriff immediately latch on to the wrong man as a suspect. Wolfe, on the other hand, prefers to collect the evidence first and then find a suspect to match it. In his usual style, he interrogates witnesses from the comfort of his chair. Some of the

suspects are laying down their own smokescreens for other reasons. Everyone has something to hide and Wolfe must sort through the mess.

What makes this novel stand out is its treatment of racism. Remember that it was published in 1938. Almost all of the kitchen and serving staff are Negroes, and the civil rights movement was still a couple of decades away. The sheriff and other white folk freely use the nigger word, as people did then. Wolfe does not. He gathers the kitchen staff together in a group and speaks to them frankly and honestly that he does not know how to question Negroes so as to break down the barriers and get at the truth. One of them saw something, but no one wants to get tangled up in the white man's court system. Rex Stout was very good at writing conversations, which is the strength of the Wolfe novels just as the gaslight era scenery is for Sherlock Holmes. Here he outdoes himself in a subject that few other mystery novelists would address directly in those days.

Most of the novel is conversational, but a fillip of excitement is thrown in when a gunman fires through a window at Wolfe. More investigation is done, and in the denouement the two culprits, yes two of them, are caught out with some tricky questioning.

SOME BURIED CAESAR (1938) opens with Wolfe and Goodwin sitting in a wrecked car just seconds after the vehicle slammed into a tree when a tire blew. They were on their way to a flower show, where Wolfe was going to display some of his orchids, hence the reason for him leaving the brownstone. Out in the country, there is nothing else but to walk for help. Taking a shortcut across a pasture to a farmhouse, the two men have an unfortunate encounter with a prize Guernsey bull. The angry bovine is Hickory Caesar Grindon, worth $45,000 in Great Depression money.

The farm owner, Thomas Pratt, also owns a chain of restaurants and has announced that the bull will be barbecued and served. This deliberate sacrilege is intended as a publicity stunt and succeeds. An angry delegation from the National Guernsey League shows up and utters threats. Pratt isn't budging. He's already alerted the press and the show will go on. After a large number of supporting characters are introduced, Wolfe and Goodwin stay the night, having been hired on the spot to help guard the critter. There are two neighbouring farm families involved, the older generation feuding like the Hatfields and McCoys, and the younger generation busy courting and sparking each other and ignoring their elders.

The first corpse makes its appearance, apparently gored to death by the bull, but Wolfe asserts the deceased was defunct before the bull even saw him. From there, a parade of suspects, witnesses, and spear-carriers pass before Wolfe.

The second murder is that of the prime suspect. After the usual tangle with the District Attorney and county police, Wolfe identifies the culprit and motive.

It was neatly done. The clues were briefly mentioned at the beginning of the novel, and I immediately noticed them because they involved a farmer's herd being affected by anthrax. This is a natural disease found in the soil everywhere. My father was a livestock veterinarian and as a young boy I would ride with him on farm calls, where sometimes he acted as an Health-of-Animals inspector for the Ministry of Agriculture. I had been wondering why the clues weren't brought forward and assumed they must have been planted as red herrings. The clues finally reappear near the ending and make sense.

In Wolfe's explanation of the crime, there is a lengthy infodump about how individual livestock are identified by farmers. The infodump was necessary because city slickers don't realize that a herd of cattle is a herd of individuals, so the trick has to be explained to them. Farmers can recognize individual cattle and know their behaviour. Once Wolfe started his explanation, I immediately guessed the murderer's true identity, but only about one page ahead of the denouement. Everything tied up neatly at the end, and the novel was well done.

BLACK ORCHIDS (1941) is actually two novellas with unrelated stories. The first begins with Goodwin casing a New York City flower show where some rare black orchids are on display. Not pure genuine black (such didn't exist in those days) but as Goodwin describes them to Wolfe, molasses on coal. The orchids, the only three specimens known, are owned by Wolfe's horticultural rival, the millionaire Lewis Hewitt. Wolfe finally makes a trip out of the brownstone to visit the show and make Hewitt an offer he can't refuse. Alas, he does refuse it. As Wolfe and Hewitt argue, a murder takes place at one of the horticultural displays, and much to their annoyance they have to break off their debate about the orchids.

Inspector Cramer shows up to investigate and a variety of supporting characters are brought into the plot. Wolfe notices that the evidence was set up to frame Hewitt and offers to exonerate him, not for the usual $10,000 plus expenses, but for possession of the black orchids. Facing the electric chair, Hewitt realizes that this is truly an offer he can't refuse. While Cramer is haring off in the wrong direction, Goodwin brings in more than just the usual suspects for Wolfe to interrogate in his office. From there the story meanders around a bit before the final meeting, not in Wolfe's office but in the fumigating room upstairs in his rooftop orchid greenhouse. He sets a trap so that the murderer fumigates himself instead of everyone else. Ruthless and cold-blooded, but it certainly saves the state the expense of a trial.

At this point, the novella abruptly ends and a completely unrelated case starts up. Bess Huddleston has been getting poison pen letters and comes to Wolfe for help. Goodwin goes out to her estate to investigate, but nothing much seems to happen until Huddleston dies a few days later from tetanus. Not a commonly used method of murder, and it had to have been done by someone in the family or a close friend visiting the manor. Cramer is pestered by Huddleston's brother, who thinks it was murder, so the case is re-opened by Wolfe. There are romantic sub-plots, one of which led to the murder.

At the final meeting in Wolfe's office, he shines the spotlight from one suspect to another. In each turn, Wolfe piles up the evidence until the reader is convinced this must be the culprit, but he then suddenly moves on to the next person and repeats the process. The truth comes out though, but the misdirection is very well done. Wolfe feels guilty about not having done enough to protect Huddleston from her murderer, and he does his penance by sending black orchid flowers to the funeral to decorate the coffin.

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2012
by Dale Speirs

The second annual When Words Collide literary convention was held in Calgary on the weekend of August 10 to 12 at the same venue as the first, the Best Western hotel in Motel Village near the university. This is a readercon for them that has read a book. No costuming or video room, no actors, no gamers, just authors, publishers, and readers (the majority). The dealer bourse was almost entirely small-press publishers, with two local bookstores taking tables as well. Guests of Honour were Kevin J. Anderson (SF), Kelley Armstrong (urban fantasy), Anthony Bidulka (mystery), Rebecca Moesta (young adult), Adrienne Kerr (publisher, from Penguin Canada), and Vanessa Cardui (poetry).

The seminar panels are reported below by theme, rather than in chronological order. And as a quick jump ahead to 2013, next year's WWC will be moving to the Carriage House Inn in south Calgary, which has hosted a number of SF conventions in the past. The Best Western changed ownership since WWC 2011, and there were some minor problems with the new management, although the main reason for the change is that WWC needs more space. As the only readercon in western Canada, it is attracting an increasing audience who are grateful for a Trekkie-free convention. WWC 2013 will be held August 9 to 11.

Details from www.whenwordscollide.org

Mystery Panels.

"Playing In The Victorian Sandbox" used Sherlock Holmes as the specimen for analysis on character building in fiction, with panelists Charles Prepolec and Jeff Campbell. This year is the 125th anniversary of the first publication of Holmes. Charles said the initial success of Holmes was slow compared to other now-forgotten bestsellers. Holmes was not the first detective but remains popular even today because he was a full-fledged character built up over many stories. Poe came before Doyle and countless others came after, but their characters were either one-shots or stayed in cardboard without change. None have produced so many pastiches as Holmes. Charles felt that Doyle's work remained popular because be wrote in a clear and direct style compared to most of his contemporaries who wrote in elaborate verbiage too painfully slow to read today. It must be remembered that the Holmes stories were written as contemporary fiction, not the gaslight era period pieces that we view them as today. Charles also noted that stage plays about Holmes were simultaneous with the story publications, and each reinforced the other. Multimedia publicity is no new thing.

Jeff said Holmes' popularity was due to Watson and supporting characters fleshing out the stories. Holmes stories could not have succeeded with him as the sole protagonist and everyone else as spear-carriers.

"Dead Men Still Talking" was a sequel from WWC 2011 by Calgary Police Service Det. Dave Sweet, once again to a full ballroom. Calgary had 14 murders for 2011, plus a number of suspicious deaths. The latter are investigated by police but prove to be suicide, bizarre accidents, drug or alcohol overdoses, or decayed bodies found in the bush where the cause will never be known. The CPS Homicide Squad has two Staff Sergeants, fifteen detectives, three cold case investigators, two missing-person investigators, two analysts, and two scanning clerks. The latter scan all documents generated by the investigation and compile them into a single computer file along with photos and other forensic evidence. Investigating officers thus don't have to waste time on routine filing and clerical work, and all the information is in one place for browsing. Initial investigations are front-loaded, that is, every available officer helps out gathering evidence or talking to witnesses. There is a team commander for each murder case but rank doesn't matter. He directs the flow and provides support for the investigators, but it is they who decide how to handle the case.

The Calgary solve rate for murders is officially 69% but this is only for actual convictions. In almost all the other cases, police know who did it but don't have enough evidence to convict. Unlike Hollywood cases, witnesses never break down on the courtroom stand under the relentless questioning of the Crown Prosecutor and sob: "Yes, I did it! And I'd gladly do it again!"

Sweet said that as a result of the CSI Effect, police now have to spend time in court explaining why DNA evidence was not needed.

The three points of investigation are not motive, means, and opportunity as most people think, but the body, the history of the deceased, and the crime scene. Police use the Locard Principle, which states that every criminal leaves a trace at the scene and carries away a trace of the scene with him. CPS gets numerous calls from psychics but pay no attention to them. Even if the psychic made a lucky guess, it wouldn't hold up in court. The greatest boon to police are cellphones, since they can get the telephone company records that track the geographical movement of the suspect and what calls he made or what texts and e-mails he sent. If the deceased had a cellphone, those records come in handy as well. CPS recently solved one case because the victim knew she was about to be attacked by her ex-boyfriend and managed to set the video camera on her cellphone to record from a nearby table before she died.

"A Pharmacy Of Death" was presented by Dwayne Clayden, who worked three decades as a paramedic and is currently Dept. Head of the paramedic training programme at a Calgary polytechnic. Clayden mentioned that it wasn't until the late 1800s that technology improved to the point of being able to detect poisons and prove it to a court. Using a poison today is like using a gun; it will be very difficult to avoid detection. The current technology has advanced considerably because of testing race horses and professional athletes, which methods can also be applied to forensics. Tests take time, not one hour like CSI.

Historically the top five poisons were arsenic, atropine (belladonna), strychnine, cyanide, and thallium. From a mystery writer's point of view, anything will kill people but if you want to do it in the first four chapters then use a fast-acting drug, not one that takes years to kill. Drugs that kill instantly go to the heart, while drugs that locate elsewhere take longer to kill. The best method of evading arrest for poisoning is to give an overdose of the same drug the victim is taking for medical reasons if the drugs are types such as beta-blockers (which affect the heart) or depressants (which either slow the physiology to a stop, or if the victim is suicidal, pushes him over the edge). Alcohol magnifies the effect of many drugs, so if you can get your victim to down a few beers before slipping crushed pills into his pizza, then so much the better.

Science Fiction Panels.

"Should Genre Be Taught Academically?" was hosted by two women working for their graduate degrees in creative writing, Paula Johanson (M.A. student, Univ. of Victoria) and Heather Osborne (Ph.D. candidate, Univ. of Calgary).

Paula noted that the needs of school teachers are different than those of university professors. She is a freelance YA (young adults) writer, who specializes in non-fiction for high school level publishers and has dozens of books to her credit. Her most recent book is a biography of Lady Gaga, which led to a quip from the audience "Why are you suddenly writing fantasy?".

Notwithstanding Paula's professional bibliography, when she applied for an M.A. in speculative fiction, she ran into some resistance. When considering candidates for writing degrees, most universities explicitly do not accept SF, fantasy, erotica, romance, or westerns as valid credentials. They don't consider genre books to be good writing that expands the boundaries of the student's abilities.

Professors won't teach politically incorrect authors unless they are safely dead and can be revised without objections from the authors themselves. One reason Margaret Atwood objected to having her books labeled as SF was because she is an academic and even with tenure a genre book could hurt her career and cause critics to stop taking her seriously. Bestsellers are sneered at, but with more valid reason because it takes about fifty years to tell which will last and which won't.

Heather mentioned that the problem with academic teaching is that they want students to follow a restricted template and write to a specific form. The style of fiction writing taught in universities is not the style that the general public wants to read. This is why such books and short stories are published by small presses and never go back for a second printing.

"100 Years Of Planetary Romance" noted that this year was the centennial of Edgar Rice Burroughs novel A PRINCESS OF MARS. Panelist J.Y.T. Kennedy (her published byline but she answers to Jennifer) said the planetary romance of a century ago was a hangover from historical fiction where knights rescued fair maidens, not the modern definition of romance. Kevin J. Anderson said that planetary romances lend themselves to stories on a vast scale that allow novelists such as himself to do seven-volume trilogies. He felt that the present-day decline in hard SF is due to us being surrounded by brilliant technology that would have left 1950s SF fans gob-smacked. Rebecca Moesta (Kevin's wife and also a novelist) doesn't like most planetary romances because they are maiden-to-be-rescued stories. She regretted that kids these days find science too difficult and prefer to read fantasy instead of hard SF.

"How Science Fiction Has Influenced Science And Technology" was given by Dr. Jason Donev, a physicist from the University of Calgary. Star Trek is famous for anticipating flip phones and tablets (tricorders), and is said to have inspired countless young geeks. However an international survey of physics and astronomy

university students showed the vast majority took up the subject because they had a natural interest in it. Only about 15% cited movies or television shows as inspiration. In movies scientists are usually villains or naive geeks who don't realize what they are doing, which subconsciously discourages many students.

SF has had more misses than hits as far as prediction goes, but has scored some interesting points. Tom Swift used an electric rifle that became a taser in our era. In 1914, H.G. Wells predicted the atomic bomb. Robert Heinlein was the father of the waldo, robot arms used today around the world on assembly lines. One popular misconception is that Arthur C. Clarke invented the idea of geosynchronous satellites, but he actually stole the idea from a story by Herman Potocnik in SCIENCE WONDER STORIES.

There was a display case in the dealer bourse of various Aurora Awards, the Canadian equivalent of the Hugo Award for SF. I attended a panel on the Auroras and a relatively new one called the Sunburst. The Aurora Award originally began as a single lifetime-achievement award for Canadian SF, but as more Canucks began publishing SF, it expanded into multiple categories voted on by fandom. One of the administrators of the Auroras was miffed at a perceived slight and left to found a new juried award called the Sunburst in 2001. This award was named after the first novel of Phyllis Gotlieb (1926-2009), often referred to as the grandmother of Canadian SF.

Literary Panels.

"A Quick Comment About Flash Fiction" introduced the latest Internet fad, what are variously called sudden fiction, micro-stories, short shorts, or postcard fiction. These are stories of less than 1,000 words, often less than 500 words. Kimberly Gould mentioned a number of Websites where each day writers are given a photo, plot outline, or sentence, and have to complete a flash fiction story that day, or sometimes within 15 minutes. Many Websites pay for such fiction, and the four panelists all earned money from such sites. Kim mentioned that there is no space to develop a back story in flashfic, and the characters have to be quickly developed.

Amber Hayward is a published novelist who had to retire from long-form writing after buying a ranch near Jasper National Park. (As someone who grew up on a cattle ranch, I can understand why.) To keep her hand in, she resorted to flash fiction writing. She was used to plotting out her novels with outlines but writing flashfic every day meant she didn't have time to think about where the story was heading. The biggest problem she had was not repeating character names, so she keeps a checklist.

Ron Friedman got his training writing flash fiction and used it to step up to his first print publication. Rona Altrows found that the novels she wrote turned into novellas

after she finished editing them, and her novellas into flash fiction. She thus drifted into it by default, from the opposite direction that Ron went.

"Mastering Point Of View" was a talk by bestseller novelist Robert Sawyer, always a crowd-pleaser who knows how to keep an audience's interest. He discussed the first-person "I", second-person "you", and third-person "they" writing. Second-person POVs are rare in writing because authors would be addressing the readers and telling them what they are thinking, which destroys suspension of disbelief. First-person POVs are difficult because the interior thought processes of other characters can't be illuminated, especially if there are subplots not involving the narrator. It does allow the author to withhold information from the reader and spring it on him and the narrator as a surprise.

One reason why the printed word will remain, whether ink or electrons, is that POVs can be expressed in many ways by the written word, but stage, television, and movie POVs are controlled by the director. Television and movies are like watching a Ping-Pong match because cameras keep switching between characters as they talk, bouncing the POVs around at the director's decision.

Related to POVs are anachronisms, which can suddenly yank a reader out of the story. Robert cited a story set in 1902 which referred to a mechanical monster as a robot, a word which didn't enter the English language for another two decades.

On The Lighter Side.

"Humour In Fiction" was moderated by stand-up comedian turned writer Tim Reynolds. He said humour is serious business. Toilet humour may get a brief laugh or shock value but does not invite re-reading. Better-class horror uses humour to lighten the story, while one long sequence of horror or diatribe leaves the reader exhausted. Dave Gross remarked that puns, often said to be low humour, were the highest form of humour because they required an education to understand the word play.

Novelist Dave Duncan finds humour for his novels in the juxtaposition of incongruous people or events. There was disagreement between the panelists as to whether or not humour is transferable to alien cultures, since there are enough problems doing it between human cultures. Tim mentioned he had a Jewish in-law who described his job with a publisher as being the "word count Nazi". If Tim had said that on stage, even with a smile on his face, his stand-up career would have been considerably shorter.

"Writers At The Improv" has been a long-running feature at Calgary conventions for years, originally with the now-defunct gencon Con-Version and today with WWC.

It is staged by a Calgary writers group, the Imaginative Fiction Writers Association. Writers assemble at the front table, some of whom are IFWA members, some are pro authors slumming, and a few audience members selected at random. The moderator asks the audience for a word and the writers come up with a sentence. Puns are encouraged but otherwise as much humour as possible. The sentences are then read out and the audience votes for their favourite. The process is repeated and a short-short story is built up. A great deal of fun, and an event I never miss.

Here is this year's piece of deathless prose. The suggested words are underlined. This year's Improv immediately followed the talk on police forensics in the same ballroom, hence the first word.

*The homicide scene was arranged before Dr. Snickers like a countryside landscape; green blood, red flesh, and purple brains. "The spinal column may be broken, but at least the fin is straight." [defenestrate], Dr. Snickers' assistant, the professor of forensic ichthyology, commented.** Before their eyes, the body transmogrified into a Volkswagon Beetle, complete with green body, red lights, and purple trim. An undead whippet shambled out of the Beetle's trunk, ragged flesh hanging from its jaw. Green gobs of pus were pullulating from the whippet's glowing red eyes, and Snickers felt a strange urge to write rhythmic haikus of purple prose. "Hoosier daddy", Snickers asked the whippet, "Grim Tin Tin?". Suddenly the whippet transmogrified into a pterodactyl, prompting Snicker's assistant to say "Dammit Snickers, I'm a forensic ichthyologist, not a palaeontologist!". The whippet transmogrified once more into a vortex of rending flesh spewing green, red, and purple mucus all over Snickers.*

** In the talk on police forensics, the detective mentioned that the police frequently relied on a forensic entomologist to establish time of death where bodies had lain undiscovered for days or weeks.

Science Panels.

"Greatest Unsolved Mysteries In Astrophysics" was a presentation by Larry McNish of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. He presented a list of things still not explained which, as he told the audience, would allow SF authors to write novels about without being called out anytime soon. He quoted the famous 2002 remark by Donald Rumsfeld at a White House briefing explaining that there were known knowns, known unknowns, and unknown unknowns. The mass media ridiculed Rumsfeld but McNish said that it was actually an excellent explanation grounded in logic, and which also applied to astrophysics.

We don't know what caused the creation of the universe. The Big Bang theory only explains what happened after, not why it happened. The observable universe is about 156 billion light years in diameter, but almost all that expansion

occurred during the first few seconds of creation. We can see about 400 billion galaxies, each with an average of 400 billion stars, so that gives SF writers plenty of alien cultures to devise.

We don't know if there are other universes, the so-called foam theory, which compares a multitude of universes to bubbles expanding in some other substrate. This is not even testable, since there is no way to physically pass from one universe to another, not even in theory. We don't know what 96% of the universe is made of, so we call it dark matter for discussion purposes. We know it's there because the gravitational pull of dark matter keeps the galaxies from disintegrating, since they are rotating too fast to retain their stars simply on the basis of the visible mass.

We don't know why there is more matter than antimatter, since they should have been created in equal quantities during the Big Bang. Current thinking is that there was a very slight preponderance of matter over antimatter, thus enabling it to survive after annihilating most of the antimatter. There is a sub-atomic particle called the neutral B-meson, which oscillates trillions of times per second between being matter and antimatter but which converts from matter to antimatter slightly slower than the reverse. During the first few seconds of creation, this would provide a small balance in favour of matter as all the antimatter was destroyed.

We don't know why light behaves both as a wave and as a particle. Camera lenses can only work if light is a wave, but digital sensors can only work if light is a particle, so therefore digital cameras shouldn't work.

"The Aurora: What's Really Happening" was presented by Dr. David Knudson of the University of Calgary. The U of C has had a major research programme on auroras for decades. Auroras occur on planets such as Jupiter and Saturn, which like Earth have a strong magnetic field. Auroras are circumpolar rings of ionization centred on the magnetic poles, not the geographic poles. Because the magnetic lines arch between the poles, the auroras are mirror images of each other. They affect satellites and radio transmissions but not to the doomsday extent that mass media report whenever a large flare erupts on the sun. Knudson mentioned that he was consulted by petroleum companies because their horizontal drilling rigs use magnetometers to stay on course when drilling through the strata, but auroras can distort the signals and send the drill bit off course into barren strata.

"Exploring The Dark Side Of The Universe" by Dr. David Hobill (U of C) was the second lecture to quote Rumsfeld's famous remark. Black holes, dark matter, and dark energy are only observable by their gravitational effects, such as orbital dynamics (their effect on stars and galaxies), gravitational lensing (they bend images around them), and redshifts (they slow down light).

Black holes are not cosmic vacuum cleaners, cannot be formed in the Large Hadron Collider as some fear (because the pressures are nowhere near what is needed), cannot be used as portals to other universes, and are not made of dense material. Black holes formed from collapsed stars, are completely empty, and are cold at absolute zero. They are the boundary between our universe and the singularity, about which no one knows anything (in other words, the singularity is a known unknown). Dark matter is need to explain why galaxies rotate so fast without tearing themselves apart. Dark energy is causing the universe's expansion rate to speed up.

SHERLOCKIANA: PART 10

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in issues #63.1B to #63.1D, Part 4 in #67.1D, Part 5 in #68.1C, Part 6 in #69.1E, Part 7 in #70.1A, Part 8 in #71.1B, and Part 9 in #251.]

Pastiches: Fandom

"The Adventure Of The Purloined Paget" by Phillip and Jerry Margolin is from the 2011 anthology A STUDY IN SHERLOCK. A wealthy Sherlockian who built himself a replica of Baskerville Hall out on the moors has invited some equally wealthy Sherlockians to visit him. The object is to bid on a previously unknown Paget drawing illustrating an unpublished Holmes story. The owner departs this life suddenly due to high-velocity lead poisoning and the drawing, worth a fortune, disappears. One of the other Sherlockians must have done it, but who? As soon as the type of firearm used to fire the bullet was mentioned it gave away the culprit and made it easy to guess the answer. Fannish stories don't seem to work any better in Sherlockiana than they do with SF fandom. A fair to middling read.

The story immediately following in the anthology is "The Bone-Headed League" by Lee Child, also set in modern times. The narrator is an FBI agent seconded to the American embassy in London, England, where he spends most of his time on immigration paperwork, and off-duty hours indulging in his passion for Sherlockiana. He is called out by Scotland Yard to assist them in investigating the murder of an American national on Baker Street. The clues, some of which appear to have been deliberately set, point towards the canon story "The Red-Headed League". But who is being decoyed? The ending wraps up quickly and disturbingly.

Also from that same anthology is "The Case That Holmes Lost" by Charles Todd, concerning someone threatening to launch a lawsuit against Sherlock Holmes, much to the puzzlement of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Apparently the mysterious litigator is upset because a forthcoming Holmes story will adversely affect sales of an historical non-fiction book about to be published. This is absolute nonsense, of course, for no one can sue because another author has pipped the field. However, Doyle's consultation with his solicitor triggers a memory that makes him remember a real-life murder case and realize who committed the crime. I had trouble suspending my disbelief but the final section of the story brought things back on track.

"The Imitator" by Jan Burke is set in post-WW1 America among the upper crust, when automobiles were just starting to displace the horse in daily life. An ardent fan of Holmes, who dresses the part always, becomes involved in solving a kidnap and attempted murder, using his methods. When one Model T looked much like the next, it becomes an important clue as to who drove what car before, during, and after the ambush.

The final story in the anthology is "A Spot Of Detection" by Jacqueline Winspear, set in London, England, in 1900, where a schoolboy bedridden by measles reads Sherlock Holmes and tries to apply his methods to what he thinks was a case of murder. A well-written fannish story, with a twist that the boy was the young Raymond Chandler.

"The Audience Of The Dead" by Andrew Lane (2011 June, STRAND MAGAZINE) has Holmes summoned to investigate a theatre whose patrons were found sitting there dead. Holmes determines that one of the corpses is more dead than the others, and appears to have been the main target. That corpse was a receiver of stolen goods who left a fortune in gemstones somewhere. Holmes and the perpetrator race to find them. You know his methods; apply them.

"The Adventure Of The Vintner's Codex" by Lyndsay Faye (2011 October, STRAND MAGAZINE) takes place in Holmes' early days before he met Watson. A vintner who decorated his shop with frames of rare illuminated manuscripts had them stolen while he was away. One of his two clerks must have done it, but which one? Holmes notices some damp cotton wool in the dustbin and a few other miscellaneous clues. The actions of the two suspects were the usual cliche; the guilty one acted innocent and the innocent one had something to hide.