

# OPUNTIA

## 274

April 2014

**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. Since you are reading this only online, my real-mail address doesn't matter anymore. My eek-mail address (as the late Harry Warner Jr liked to call it) is: [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com)

When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message text.

### FOR NEW READERS

by Dale Speirs

If you are reading this zine for the first time online, a bit about its history. OPUNTIA #1 appeared in March 1991, a few months before Dr. Tim Berners-Lee started up the World Wide Web. Since then, up until issue #273 in March 2014, OPUNTIA was a paper zine only, and a defiant survivor in the Papernet. But on 2014-03-31, Canada Post raised postage rates in one giant leap to the point where it would cost me \$1,200 per year in postage for monthly publication. By contrast, printing was and still is only \$50 per issue, or \$600 for the year. I am a comfortable middle-class pensioner, but not for long if I spent so much money on postage. Therefore, with reluctance, I am forced onto the Internet and to cease publishing OPUNTIA as a paper zine.

I have scanned the back issues and will gradually put them online as well but not just all at once. By fortuitous circumstance, OPUNTIA has always been published in paper as a horizontal format 8.5 x 5.5 zine, so no reformatting was required for the scans. Besides

[www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com), I am looking for other depositories for OPUNTIA. If you know of any, please drop me a line via eek-mail. I have copies of the last dozen or so paper OPUNTIA's (which won't be online for quite a while), so if you'd like some, let me know and I'll use up the last of my postage and send you some by real mail.

And who is Dale Speirs?

Born and raised in rural west-central Alberta. Decided that herding cattle on the farm wasn't for me and went to University of Alberta (Edmonton), graduating in 1978 with a B.Sc. in Horticulture. Immediately moved to Calgary because I couldn't bear the thought of another winter in Edmonton. Worked in private industry for a couple of years, then got on with the City of Calgary Parks Dept. for three decades. Took early retirement in 2010 at age 55 on a reduced pension thanks to wise investments in commodities and stocks which supplement my pension nicely. Single with no kids (that I know of). Enjoy hiking in the Rocky Mountains adjacent to Calgary, am writing the postal history of Alberta, and publish my zine OPUNTIA.

The photo is my favourite portrait of myself. It was taken in 2004 at Bow Lake, Banff National Park, with Crowfoot Glacier in the background. I wear different glasses now and my beard is mostly grey, although my hair is still brown, but other than those changes, I look the same today.



## WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION 2013

Actually I don't get vacations anymore since I am retired, but I did spend the summer of 2013 making trips through the Porcupine Hills. This is a chain of Rocky Mountain foothills running south from Calgary down to the Crowsnest Pass. It is entirely cattle ranching within the hills, with hayfields and canola on the flatlands to the east, and mountain tourism on the west side of the hills.

The west side is separated from the mountains by the Livingstone valley. I took the photo below with a telephoto lens from about 25 km away, looking northwest from the Crowsnest Pass towards the Livingstone Range, its valley, and, at centre-right, an outcrop of the Porcupine Hills.

On the next page is a photo taken inside the hills at the north end, at the gate to the Lyndon Ranch, established in 1881. It stayed in the Lyndon family until 1966 but is now owned by a different family. 2013 was a wet summer and the grass growth was magnificent, up to the bellies of the cows. You can see a calf almost completely hidden by the grass, with only its head sticking out.

The south end of the Porcupine Hills, at Pincher Creek, is where the winds come blowing out of the Crowsnest Pass. I do not exaggerate by much when I write that my car burns a half-tank of fuel going into the Pass, and only two drops coming out with the wind behind me. There are numerous rows of wind turbines around Pincher Creek. Calgary Transit brags that it runs its LRT system entirely on wind-generated electricity from the area.







A few of the wind turbines at Pincher Creek, on the very southern tip of the Porcupine Hills.



Lundbreck Falls on the Crowsnest River at the exit of the Pass. Note the wind turbine peeking over the ridge.

## NEW WORLD BEING BORN

by Dale Speirs

JACQUARD'S WEB by James Essinger (2004, hardcover) is the story of how Joseph-Marie Jacquard invented the programmable loom in 1804 that led to programmable mechanical machines a century later and from there to our world of laptops, tablets, and smartphones. The book starts off with the history of silk and weaving. Early looms could easily make solid-colour bolts of cloth, but to weave a picture or abstract pattern into the design was a complicated and slow process. Looms could only weave patterned silk at the rate of two or three centimetres per day, hence the costliness of silk garments and drapes.

Jacquard was born in 1752 into a silk-weaving family in Lyons, France. His family slowly fell into poverty and Jacquard drifted through life. During the French Revolution he managed the neat trick of fighting for both sides, then went over to Napoleon Bonaparte. Sometime shortly after the year 1800, he began working on how to speed up production of patterned cloth. Jacquard wasn't alone; new and improved looms were the dot.coms of their day. Merchants and bankers invested heavily in start-ups with new looms designed to solve everyone's problems, with about the same results as the dot.commers.

Another inventor named Falcon, whose first name has been lost to history, had the idea of using punched cards to control the weaving. Each thread on the loom was controlled by a rod which was or was not activated by the presence or absence of a pin poking its trip lever. If a punched card was placed where the pins rotated on a cylinder over the trips, a blank spot would prevent the pin from tripping the rod. That point on the cloth would remain as part of the solid background colour. If there was a hole, the pin would go through, trip the rod, and move a different coloured thread to produce a small spot of colour. The problem with Falcon's machine was that the cards were put on the loom manually one at a time by a small boy. Even a basic simple design on the cloth needed 4,000 sets of cards, one for each thread. Sets, not cards; the total number of cards was much higher depending on the intricacy of the design and how large it was. A complicated design would use tens of thousands of sets, or hundreds of thousands of individual cards. That

assumed the small boy put the cards on the machine in the correct order, a mind-numbing dull task that made automobile assembly lines great fun by comparison. Falcon's machine failed commercially for the obvious reasons.

Jacquard's innovation was to invent a self-feeding apparatus which would automatically feed the cards through the loom control mechanism. He patented the design in 1804, which wove silk 24 times faster and with a lot less work. Only one man was needed to operate the loom. It was instantly successful. In 1805, Napoleon issued a decree making the Jacquard loom public property that anyone could manufacture. In compensation, he awarded Jacquard an annual pension of 3,000 francs for life and a royalty on the machines for the first six years. Jacquard enjoyed a prosperous retirement, received many honours from nations across Europe, and died in 1834 as a recognized hero.

Even today, Jacquard looms are the standard means of mass-producing cloth, now powered by electricity and using electronic computers to scan a design and then control hooks that lift the correct thread in the correct place. The greatest advantage of Jacquard looms, whether controlled by punched cards or a computer chip, is that the designs can easily be changed. If red roses embroidered on sofa cushions fall out of fashion, and everyone decides they want cushions with pictures of wide-eyed kittens instead, the weavers can quickly alter their production.

At this point the book is only a quarter done, for Jacquard's legacy did not stop at weaving. The book carries on with those who built on Jacquard's system. A few years after his death, an English mathematician named Charles Babbage became interested in punched cards. He had been working on calculating machines that would be capable of storing instructions so the machines wouldn't have to be re-set after each calculation. Babbage's devices never went into production. The main problem was that machine parts were handmade in those days by craftsmen. No one could produce gear wheels and metal rods to a standard precision. Babbage also had a bad habit of leaving one job unfinished because he got caught up in the enthusiasm of his next idea.

His final idea was an Analytical Engine programmed by three sets of punchcards. The first set specified what type of operation the Engine would do, the second set to tell it where the number to be operated on was to be fetched from, and the third set was the actual raw data. This methodology is exactly how modern electronics operate.

Ada Byron, daughter of the famous poet, knew Babbage as a family friend. She collaborated with him to the point that historians still argue today whether or not she was the first computer programmer or merely an interpreter of his work. Tragically, she died young. Babbage outlived her by many years but because he never got any working mechanical computers into production, he was forgotten and died in obscurity in 1871.

Next to take centre stage was Herman Hollerith, an American who was one of the founders of what is now IBM. He was hired for the American census of 1880 by the government. The population of the USA had risen to the point where collecting and analyzing the data was surpassing the ability of an army of clerks to do it with ledger books and index cards. It took seven years to analyze the 1880 census and everyone was in agreement that the 1890 census would not be finished by the time the 1900 census was due. Hollerith was personally aware of the Jacquard loom since his brother-in-law was in the silk-weaving business. Hollerith developed the idea of a card-punching machine that would allow data on an individual to be entered on one card. This would reduce errors since there was no need to recopy the data for each column analysis. From there, the punchcards were fed through sorting machines that could sort cards by categories such as male or female, residence, income, or any other demographic field entered on the card. Each batch of sorted punchcards could then be re-sorted a second time to produce, for example, the number of females in New York State or the average income of working men in Pennsylvania.

Hollerith's machines were used for the 1890 census and analyzed the data within three years. By 1907, sorting machines were equipped with electro-mechanical printers and became known as tabulators. The punchcard system was so successful that it survived until the 1970s, even as the machines that used them went from mechanical to

electro-mechanical to electronic. Punchcards are still used today in some specialized applications where a hard copy of the individual data is needed on the spot. The basic principles used to operate laptops and smartphones trace their ancestry back to Jacquard.

THE MAN WHO INVENTED THE COMPUTER (2010, hardcover) by Jane Smiley is a book that illustrates the old adage that success has many fathers while failure is an orphan. This is the biography of John Atanasoff, a physicist at Iowa State College who built the first all-electronic computer. Tired of doing tedious mathematical calculations all day, he thought up and designed an electrical programmable computing machine in 1939. It was never patented, as a result of which there was a big court fight against Sperry Rand, which tried to claim all rights to computers and eventually failed in 1973. Atanasoff was born in Bulgaria during the death throes of the Ottoman Empire. When a child, his family fled to Florida. He grew up with a unique accent, part Slavic and part southern drawl, worked his way through college, and eventually wound up as a physics professor at Iowa State.

In the 1920s and 1930s as the science of quantum mechanics was being born, Atanasoff and his students were frustrated by the tedium of calculating multi-variable equations by hand or with analogue devices such as slide rules. In the mid-1930s, IBM began leasing tabulating machines which used punchcards to sort statistical data. They were helpful for censuses and business inventories but not especially useful for quantum mechanics.

At about the same time that Atanasoff was thinking about how to solve the problem, so were others. Howard Aiken at Harvard University would eventually build the Mark 1 computer. Alan Turing invented modern programming theory with his thought experiment on Turing machines and the Turing test. Konrad Zuse is unfamiliar to most, but in Germany in the late 1930s he built electronic calculating machines using binary code. Atanasoff did not know of Zuse's work but independently decided to use vacuum tubes for binary digit processing.

Other groups in computing were hung up on using decimal computing, which was slower and more complex. Binary computation was faster because it only needed two registers (0 and 1) instead of ten registers. When a final result was obtained in binary, it could then instantly be converted to a decimal number. At the time, IBM's best tabulator had 33 bytes of memory. By mid-1940, Atanasoff and his student Clifford Berry had an electronic machine operating, which they called the ABC (you can guess what the initials stood for). The war sped up computing science dramatically on both sides of the Atlantic, as everyone tried to decode everyone else's messages.

The ABC machine was to have been patented but the paperwork was set aside in the rush of war. After 1946, the security classifications on many of the machines were lifted. A patent war then developed between all the groups of scientists and technicians, each believing they were the pioneers and the others were thieving johnny-come-latelys. In 1963, Berry died under suspicious circumstances. His death galvanized Atanasoff, who thought the murder was due to the computer patents dispute. Atanasoff cooperated with the other litigants fighting Sperry Rand's claim to have invented the electronic computer. The trial was lengthy and expensive, with 157 witnesses, 31,000 exhibits, and 20,000 pages of documents. In 1973, the trial staggered to a close, with Atanasoff acknowledged as the father of the electronic binary computer. Because no patents were filed on the ABC computer, the basic principles of electronic computer hardware entered the public domain, allowing anyone to build them. Atanasoff died in 1995, his honour upheld and his priority of invention vindicated.

GRACE HOPPER AND THE INVENTION OF THE INFORMATION AGE by Kurt Beyer (2009, hardcover) is about a woman who was a pioneer in computer programming in the post-WW2 era. The title is misleading. Hopper only dealt with standalone mainframes which operated in isolation and were used for scientific and military calculations, or business payroll and inventory. She died in 1992 at age 86, just as the Internet was being born, and had nothing to do with the so-called Information Society.

The earliest mainframe computers, built in the 1940s, had to have their instructions for each project written line by line, which took huge amounts of skilled labour. During the 1950s, computer technicians began writing re-useable software which could be stored within the computer and run for different projects which had the same repetitious tasks. Methods such as compilers, subroutines, branching decisions, code compression, and debugging became automated and transformed into standardized software. Hopper was in the middle of all this.

She was born Grace Brewster Murphy in a well-to-do Manhattan family, the daughter of a highly-placed insurance company executive. She attended Vassar College in the 1920s, which was usual for women of her age and wealth. She then got a PhD in mathematics from Yale, which was not usual, and was the first woman to get such a degree from there. In 1930 she married Vincent Hopper and both became college professors, settling into a routine of teaching in the academic year and summers at the cottage. After Pearl Harbor they both enlisted, and she became a Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy WAVES. She and others assumed that because she was a mathematician she would be put to work as a codebreaker after graduating from Midshipmen's School.

Instead, she was assigned to work at Harvard on its room-sized Mark 1 computer, which was officially classed by the Navy as a "land-based ship". She worked for Dr. Howard Aiken, a pioneer in computing. They all learned how to work the Mark 1 together, a device so new there was no operator manual. The computer was programmed with punched paper tape. The tape had three sections: one to tell the machine where the data was, one to tell it where to place the computational results, and one to describe what process was to be used. The paper tape was only wide enough to have 24 holes. A hole was the binary digit 1, and blank paper was read as a zero. This is the real reason why the byte developed as eight-bit codes, not because of any prior mathematical logic.

The Mark 1 was used to calculate artillery trajectories, navigational tables, steel manufacture (the correct alloy ratios for a given hardness), and other Navy problems. The computer staff were heartbroken after the war to find out that few gun crews used the artillery tables.

The gunners just fired a couple of rounds to bracket the enemy and then used experience and intuition to home in on the target. However most of the calculations were vital and could not be done manually.

Hopper and her staff learned how to speed things up with batch processing and coding. They invented the first hacking. Code embedded in the unused registers of the computers was used to format the printouts so no one had to number the pages by hand or specify line breaks for every single calculation. This embedded code was inside the actual problem code, since then and now most computer cycles during data processing are empty space while the computer waits for a process to complete or the next batch of data to arrive.

Debugging code was a time-consuming activity. The reason we say today that a computer has crashed is because when the Mark 1 suddenly stopped its electro-mechanical relays due to a code error, the loud bang could be heard throughout the building. Bugs were often exactly that, a stray moth or beetle that got into the machine and jammed a relay with its gory squashed remains. This book includes a photograph of a page from the Mark 1 maintenance logbook with a squashed bug taped to the page as proof of the problem.

The war effort meant that staff had little time off. The laboratory operated exactly as a Navy ship would. The staff worked watches, not shifts, wore uniforms at all times, and followed standard Navy protocol. Hopper was second-in-command after Aiken and prepared the watch lists. She was not having a good time in her private life. She divorced her husband during the war, starting drinking, and became a full-blown alcoholic, hiding flasks around the laboratory. In the immediate post-war years, staff went back to civilian dress and began working on new mainframes. Hopper and others began producing catalogues of standardized codes, called subroutines. She joined a start-up computer company which didn't do well, and hit her nadir when she was arrested in Philadelphia in November 1949 for drunk-and-disorderly in a public place.

The start-up failed and its pieces were bought by Remington Rand, who thought they were buying an office equipment company and had no idea

what a computer was. In 1951, as she still battled alcoholism, Hopper wrote the first compiler, which revolutionized computer programming. The compiler looked up subroutines from an internal catalogue, used them as needed, allocated memory cells on its own, and managed the flow of data. Programmers no longer had to specify each line of code or the exact cell a data point was in. Subroutines could be linked into bigger subroutines that solved bigger problems, and which themselves could be stored as a new subroutine for future use. Further, each subroutine was labeled with a name so that non-mathematicians could code a computer. "cos" would calculate the cosine of a number for an engineer, and "oap" would calculate the pension deduction on a payroll cheque.

Hopper's greatest step was to encourage compilers to run on any computer, not just a specific make and model. She believed that software should be free and shared, not copyrighted, an idea which didn't survive past the 1960s as computer manufacturers, especially IBM, tried to lock in customers to their brand only. By the late 1950s, Hopper was working on plain language programming designed for everyday users. She didn't do it alone but she is recognized as the mother of COBOL (Common Business-Oriented Language). It was run-anywhere software designed to allow accountants and clerks to write code in plain English, such as "Multiply base-price and discount-percent giving discount-price", rather than "BP \* DP = DP". A dirty little secret of the computer industry is that COBOL code survived inside other software long after it was assumed dead, and many businesses still use it today.

Hopper gradually retired from what was now Sperry Rand and from the Naval Reserves. She was re-instated by the U.S. Navy in 1977 and went on to do major work on their computer problems, especially in the area of training operators. She rose to Rear Admiral and became the oldest active officer in the Navy, finally retiring a second time in 1986 at age 80. She died in 1992 just as the mainframe was fading out and giving way to the distributed network.

## **BROKE DOWN UNIVERSE**

by Dale Speirs

Ron Goulart is one of my favourite SF authors. He wrote mostly humorous short novels and short stories. He has published more than 180 SF and mystery novels and non-fiction books, and ghost-wrote the Tek War stories. I won't review more than just a selection (and certainly not the Tek War which I have not read and never will), partly because I'm not a completist and partly because to review every one of his works would take years. All are mass-market paperbacks unless stated otherwise.

Goulart's stories are usually set in various common universes. Sometimes the stories had continuing characters, while many others were independent with only the setting in common. Some universes seem independent, but there may be passing references that unify them with another universe of stories. The characters may overlap or may be in separate story arcs. There are also interesting gadgets, such as talking business cards, which inevitably don't have proper volume controls and upon being presented, bellow out in deafening tones "INTRODUCING MISS TIMMY TEMPEST ... ". Flying cars with autopilots and AI brains just as inevitably are sarcastic and mouth off like a taxi driver who's convinced that he is a fount of wisdom.

The Fragmented America universe involves a future America with shoddy robots and automata, in a chaotic country of enclaves and no-go zones where Kafka has triumphed over Orwell. The Barnum System is a stellar system with a variety of planets, many of which people live on because they have to, not because they want to. There are catmen, birdmen, toadmen, and others so called after their resemblance to animals, which may either be separate humanoid species or the results of human evolution into subspecies. Other stories involve characters who are often part of a broader universe, such as the Ex-Chameleon Corps stories or Odd Jobs Inc., but which focus narrowly on the characters. Frequently several different organizations stumble through the story, from inept terrorist organizations to do-gooders who know what is best for everyone and will raise hell to bring the jubilee.

## **Fragmented America.**

WHAT'S BECOME OF SCREWLOOSE AND OTHER INQUIRIES (1973) is a collection of short stories from the 1960s, not explicitly set in a broke-down universe but obvious forerunners. The opening story "What's Become Of Screwloose?" has a private investigator searching for a missing woman whose deceased father was a servomechanism tycoon. He was very protective of her and left numerous devices behind to guard her, such as an attack dishwasher appliance and an android nanny she had named Professor Screwloose. She tries to run away but Screwloose keeps following her. The story seems to peter out but the final line has a neat twist. The P.I. travels through an America with defective computers and run-amok technology that just won't work properly, as if Bill Gates had bought out the Ford Motor Co. and applied Microsoft quality standards to cars.

"Hardcastle" is about a couple who move to California and stay in a house run by artificial intelligence. The husband has trouble adapting to all the gadgets, which don't seem to work properly for him. His wife loves it though, and in the end the marriage falls apart because she and the house are truly in love with each other.

"Monte Cristo Complex" is a case of a man whose life has been ruined by bureaucratic computers and androids which refuse to admit they made a mistake. He retaliates by disassembling androids in a rather violent manner.

"Keeping An Eye On Janey" reads like it was written the same day as "Hardcastle". A man is suspicious of his wife and thinks she is cheating on him with a member of the Amateur Mafia (no Italians allowed), so he hires an android who disguises himself as a bed. The husband's efforts backfire when the real Mafia mistake him for a member of the Amateur Mafia and send a couple of gunsels to take him out.

AFTER THINGS FELL APART (1970) is a novel set in San Francisco of an alternative timeline when the USA has fragmented into numerous enclaves and republics. Nothing works well; computers are uppity and disobedient, earthquakes are frequent, and

robots and other machinery keep breaking down. Jim Haley is a private investigator who is asked to track down a feminist terror group called Mankill Inc., led by the mysterious Lady Day. They are assassinating male politicians left, right, and centre. Haley soon determines a crucial suspect/informer is Penny Deacon (sometimes Penny Duncan due to sloppy editing). His search takes him through various enclaves, from back-to-the-Earth to the Amateur Mafia to a colony of retired FBI agents. Penny Deacon/Duncan is kidnapped by Mankill and spends most of the novel off-stage, but eventually Haley finds and frees her, and together they capture Lady Day. The dialogue and some of the characters might seem plausible to teenaged boys but are not realistic. However, Goulart does have a knack for inventing weird societies and cults, most of which could have existed in our timeline and probably some of them do. This book could have used a good editor and proofreader.

THE TIN ANGEL (1973) is a standalone sequel, about Bert Schenley, agent and guardian to superstar Bowser, a cybernetic dog whose television show is top-rated in the year 1999 of Fragmented America. Bowser has a computer implant to upgrade his intelligence, an electronic larynx so he can talk and sing, and a naturally-inflated ego that can match any Hollywood human actor. As a piece of foreboding, the opening chapter mentions the U.S. Transition Service, which offers free funerals to everyone. Its logo is a silver representation of St. Gabriel, popularly known as the Tin Angel. The plot gets rolling when a network announcer goes missing while covering the war in Mexico. Schenley and Bowser are asked to investigate since they're going down there to entertain the troops in a road show. Various other spies and factional henchmen make their appearance. The USTS is revealed to be an assassination outfit using free funerals as cover for its own special-order funerals of people who hadn't planned on one. The overall plot is that of separatist factions trying to carve out their own empires or enclaves in the western USA.

Cyborg dogs make a reappearance in "Prez" (from WHAT'S BECOME OF SCREWLOOSE AND OTHER INQUIRIES (1973)) with Norbert competing for the attention of a young beauty named Benny, who has a cyborg dog named Prez. Norbert and Prez are constantly trying to kill each other and make it look accidental so the winner can have Benny.

There are twists and countertwists until Prez pulls off the final stunt and takes out Norbert. Man's best friend indeed.

WHEN THE WAKER SLEEPS (1975) begins with handsome man-about-town Nate Koebean diddling the beautiful wife of Dr. Shuster Dumpus. The mad scientist gets even by injecting Koebean with a serum that will make him sleep for fifty years, then be active for ninety days before repeating the cycle. He will not age while sleeping but will while active. His first wake-up cycle is in the year 2035 in the State of Northern California, where he was being used as a living altar by a Satanist group. No one has heard of Dumpus or knows what Koebean is talking about, so he begins collecting plot coupons that might help him, traveling from one enclave of Fragmented America to another. He finds another awakened sleeper, Gena Herbert, and off they go. They meet up with a group of awakened sleepers, who are working on a cure, but Gena doesn't consider the problem a disease. Her view is that it is a wonderful chance of near immortality, to see how the future turns out. The nappers, as they call themselves, are also worried about where they will sleep in safety during the next cycle. They are also concerned about how their financial investments will fare while they are gone, since they can't trade them to stay ahead of inflation. Few people understand the cumulative effect of inflation over decades and how it impoverishes them, but when you're a napper, it is forcefully demonstrated each time you awaken.

Nate doesn't get a chance to continue his investigation before falling asleep again. He wakes up in 2085 in Brazil #2 (there was a war) as a pet of the Generalissimo's mistress. The USA is split into six countries, and Greater Britain now includes the Irish Republic. The nappers have divided into two factions, and both are still trying to find out how Dumpus made his serum. But once again Nate doesn't get anywhere before his next sleep to 2135. He awakes after the collapse of Western civilization, due to a war to end all wars which did end all wars and give the planet the peace of the graveyard. But this is the last iteration for the nappers; the story ends with them on their way to pick up the antidote and finish off their lives in one chunk.

UPSIDE DOWNSIDE (1982) has Federal Police Agent Zack Tourney discovering that he has been infected with a slow virus that will kill him within a year. Prominent financiers and politicians have been infected with it and are being held to ransom for the antidote. Zack appears not to be an intended target but was accidentally exposed because he didn't pick his friends carefully enough. The urban areas are divided into Upside and Downside, and many have formed into semi-independent enclaves, such as CalSouth, the ones that haven't been wholly bought up by real-estate billionaires. Zack wends his way from one enclave to another collecting plot coupons and trying to find the man who has the antidote. He crosses paths with people suffering from Ellison's Syndrome "*a whole package of bizarre actions and behavior*" which will be funnier to the reader who knows who Harlan Ellison is. In the end, Zack finds the cure and the end dribbles to a close. The enclaves of Fragmented America are only hinted at in this novel, but one can sense the broke-down world.

### **The Barnum System.**

"Society For The Prevention" (from the SF prozine GAMMA #3, 1964) is about Bob Dadigan, a surplus-goods store manager on the planet Weldon caught between nutcase vigilante groups, just as he is trying to set up his big sale on wicker temple urns, freshly imported from the planet Peregrine. The Housewife Hussars, self-appointed Buy Weldon supporters, object to him bringing in outside merchandise. The Young Girls Space Police and Welfare Committee have just arrived on the planet, and are determined to bring happiness and sunshine into everyone's lives whether they want it or not. The Hussars successfully steal his stock of wicker urns and burn them, fortunately as it turns out, for the wickerworks were actually shapechanging aliens intent on invading the planet. Dadigan dodges his way around the chaos, and while he doesn't get to stage that big sale, most things work out reasonably well.

From WHAT'S BECOME OF SCREWLOOSE AND OTHER INQUIRIES (1973) is the story "In The Shop", about a lawman in a remote area of Barnum who has a defective law wagon, an automated cruiser that can identify wanted criminals, capture them, put them inside

a chamber, and judge and execute them. Lawagon A10 begins identifying innocent people as the murderer Sheldon Kloog and executing them. Then it comes after the lawman. This is actually a rather chilling story and one that is not too farfetched for our own future. Someday there will be police drones that malfunction the same way and come after you.

"Dingbat" (1973 November, WORLDS OF IF) has a freelancer named Sand being hired by the government of Barnum to help recover 300 war robots, known as dingbats (the inventor was being whimsical when he named them). The dingbats were to be decommissioned but were stolen by a revolutionary group, much to the chagrin of another revolutionary group who were also trying to steal them but arrived too late. Sand goes off into the jungle, meets the inventor's beautiful daughter, everybody from every side shows up for the climax, and all ends well for Sand and the girl. His only problem is that the Barnum government are too cheap to pay a decent wage. Inflation, you know.

SHAGGY PLANET (1973) is set on the planet Murdstone, one of the less pleasant planets of the Barnum system. Peter Torres is hired by the Mirabilis Agency to locate a Barnum secret agent who went missing. Off he goes to the jungle, where a revolutionary army is forming, and a secret organization called the Trophologist Co-op is experimenting with some sort of biological warfare. Torres meets a young woman who hacked a fully-automated university campus that had been abandoned, and who was now living like a queen with a android empire. She does have trouble with defective machines, including a database computer that stutters, and android servants in student dormitories who insist on serving meals for a hundred when only one person is sitting down to breakfast.

Meanwhile, in the farming areas adjacent to the jungle, local inhabitants have been having problems with hummels wandering in to their settlements. Hummels are an indigenous animal species, four-legged shaggy creatures who are normally very shy and stay deep in the jungle. Yet lately they have started to enter inhabited areas and wander the streets. Torres discovers that the Co-op has invented a spray that turns humans into hummels, as a humane alternative to

executing dissidents and a cheaper alternative than running expensive prison camps. Just spray an undesirable, turn him into a hummel, and let him harmlessly roam the jungle. The difficulty is that the humans converted to hummels are instinctively returning to their homes, where, of course, the residents don't know who or what they are.

Torres sorts out all the trouble and gets done with it. The plot is standard Goulart, and one can see that Torres is the same as Ben Jolson and other Barnum adventurers. The hero wanders about the plot the long way, meeting up with villains and supporting characters, all of whom are either incompetent or falling to pieces (if they are androids). Government bureaucrats would run amok but for their inability to do their jobs properly. The Barnum system is a place where Kafka trumps Orwell.

SPACEHAWK, INC. (1974) is set on the planet Malagra, not one of the more picturesque spots of the Barnum system. The hero is Kip Bundy, ne'er-do-well scion of Bundy Konglom Enterprises, whose uncle puts him to work on Malagra. Among other things, Bundy Konglom manufactures androids, and a defective batch of butlers was accidentally sent to Malagra. It seems they may become surly and disobedient, not the sort of butler you'd want helping you off with your coat or serving dinner. Kip is in the bad graces of the rest of his family, so he is nominated to do the dirty work of tracking down the android butlers and repairing them. The work is to be done on the quiet with no public recall. Kip's cover is that he will be an agent of the family's private detective business Spacehawk, and to ensure his probity they decide to have him escorted by a photographer named Palma. A poor choice, as Palma, who shows up as a supporting character in many other Barnum novels, is a woman-chaser obsessed by breasts, and hardly the type to keep Kip under control.

Malagra is described by everyone as a pesthole, which seems unfair to pestholes. The weather is either lousy or worse, radical groups keep blowing things up, and things fall apart more often than not. Kip meets up with April, a damsel in distress who is looking for her missing brother Dillon who, it transpires, had preceded Kip through Malagra doing something to the android butlers. At this point there are a couple of

pages of dialogue where no one finishes a sentence ... Everyone is either interrupted or ... It is annoying to read all those thoughts trailing off ... Not just a few times ... Every sentence ...

As Kip, April, and Palma travel about, they use a sentient car named Ace that has a grudge against local wildlife and citizenry, a bad habit of constant sarcasm, and who simply won't stop talking. There are run-ins with assorted groups such as the Boy Scouts Liberation Army, and the Gypsy Harmonikids, who are a band of android musicians who kidnap people and force them to watch their shows. Also appearing are Silverthorne (a android bandit leader who has trouble making his false beard stick to his chin), and, of course, the henchmen who are up to no good with those android butlers. A few chapters before the end a rival manufacturer of androids is introduced to muddy the waters, and in the denouement a member of the Bundy family is exposed as a drug smuggler who used the androids for his trafficking.

A WHIFF OF MADNESS (1976) has newsman Jack Summer investigating King Waldo of Laranja East on the planet Peregrine. On arrival on the planet, Summer's assistant and photographer assigned to him turns out to be Palma. They have several plot threads to keep track of. King Waldo might be moonlighting as the notorious Phantom of the Fog, a night stalker who strangles elderly women. There is a fake claimant to the Starbuck fortune (nothing to do with coffee; this was written in 1976) who has deluded the matriarch of the Starbuck family into thinking he is her long-lost heir. Also putting in an appearance is the Scarlet Angel, a highwaywoman, as well as various catmen, lizardmen, and other supporting characters.

Steampunks will be annoyed at Goulart's touch of reality. Steam-powered androids keep blowing up, as do the steam-powered horses that replaced taxicabs. Steam-powered bluebirds twittering away in the trees have a bad habit of going BANG! and spraying park visitors with bits of shrapnel. The steam-powered escalator seldom runs properly.

Laranja West and Laranja East are at war. Biochemical weapons used against the enemy are outlawed in the Barnum system, but it appears Laranja East is using a spray on its own troops

that turns them into murderous berserkers for an hour or so. It may also be the explanation for King Waldo being the Phantom of the Fog.

The characters meander through the plot getting in and out of trouble. At the end, Goulart suddenly realizes he'd better wrap things up, so the story crashes to an end. The King is overthrown, his beautiful daughter takes over, and all ends well. The loose ends are tied up in an epilogue, as Summer and Palma travel off in a spaceship to their next story.

### **Odd Jobs Inc.**

Jake and Hildy Pace run an investigative agency called Odd Jobs. They are a little too good. No matter what the situation they always have the skills, fighting or technical, to deal with it, or at least a gadget hidden in the sole of their shoe. This is helpful because they are forever being bludgeoned unconscious. If medical advice is correct, they should be permanently concussed and dribbling in a nursing home instead of waking up and quickly freeing themselves for the next chapter's excitement.

HAIL HIBBLER (1980) is set in the far distant year of 2003, when humanoid androids are common, skycars are starting to yield to public teleport systems, but people still record video on cassettes, computers spool out paper tape, and government records are kept on microfiche. They do, however, have the "palm-sized talkbox", although newspapers are published on fax machines.

The Paces are hired by the government to investigate the assassination of a muckraking journalist, who had just announced he was onto the biggest scandal ever. Along the way, the couple have to deal with an unknown saboteur who keeps trying to kill them in a variety of inventive methods. They gad about from place to place and adventure to adventure, working their way through the clues. Eventually they unearth the name Dr. Adolph Hibbler, a Nazi scientist supposed to be killed the week before that other fellow with the initials A.H. went to his end. Hibbler had himself smuggled out to Brazil and then cryogenically frozen, to be revived fifty years in the future. Like any good mad scientist, he is now hanging out in a space station equipped with a death

ray which he will use to destroy cities unless he gets 10% of everything in the world economy. But it all ends up as you might expect. In the last chapter the death ray is destroyed and Hibbler gets what he deserves.

BRAINZ, INC. (1985) has the Paces hired by Sylvie Kirkyard to find out who murdered her. She and two brothers were/are co-owners of Brainz, Inc., which manufactures the world's finest androids. The company had perfected a microchip to store a human's personality and memories, not yet generally publicized. Unbeknownst to anyone else, she had an android created that duplicated her physical appearance and a microchip containing her personality, which she updated once a month to keep the memories current. Someone killed her real self, leaving her android to try and find out who killed her, for which purpose she hires Odd Jobs Inc. The Paces find a conspiracy of mad scientists and an evil brother out to take over the world. After jetting about hither and yon in skycars, constantly being captured and escaping, they run the bad guys to ground. There is of course, never any suspense. Henchmen may leer at Hildy with intent, but she always wiggles loose before being raped. Jake always does the stupid thing because of his vanity but always gets loose, usually by coincidence or a helpful supporting character.

Goulart only mentioned in passing the legal ramifications of an android with a personality chip as an heir to the deceased. Granted that he was writing disposable humour, but it would have been interesting to have some debate as to whether transferring a copy of your mind to an android allows the estate to escape death duties or the android to inherit. The possibility of immortality would also be front and centre.

### **Jose Silvera.**

Silvera travels in the Barnum system but has enough stories about him to justify a separate section. He is a freelance ghostwriter who never lets a client stiff him for the fee, and the stories are about his past-due accounts. Along the way, he travels through a broke-down universe, relentlessly pursuing his deadbeats. One of the running gags through the series is the list of works Silvera has ghostwritten, such as "My Disgusting Sex Life", "I, A Rascal", and "The Crumbling Chateau On Grave Spawn Hill",

and its sequel, “Return To The Crumbling Chateau On Grave Spawn Hill”.

“Confessions” (from WHAT’S BECOME OF SCREWLOOSE AND OTHER INQUIRIES, 1973) has Silvera on the planet Murdstone trying to locate a publisher McLew Scribbeley who owes him for three confession novels he wrote. Scribbeley lives in a flying house which he moves about frequently for the good and sufficient reason that Silvera isn’t the only creditor hunting him. There is also some sort of atavistic wolfman on a murdering spree. He is pursued by a police inspector who really wanted to be a lyric poet, and as a result confuses friends and foes alike by always talking in aphorisms. Silvera gets his money, and Scribbeley gets what he deserves.

DR. SCOFFLAW (1979, half of a double paperback, BINARY STAR #3) starts off with Silvera on the Barnum System planet Barafunda, collecting a debt from an author for whom he ghostwrote “Gargoyle Power”. That was the overture, for Silvera accidentally learns that another past client, Dr. Scofflaw, is on the planet. Scofflaw is a cyborg who is 90% machine, and owes Silvera big money. The problem is that Scofflaw ran afoul of the local crime syndicate, who dismantled him and scattered his parts all over the planet. That’s one way to make certain a cyborg stays dead. Silvera must therefore go on a quest to collect all the parts, re-assemble them, and get his money.

It turns out that a splinter faction of the crime syndicate is also collecting the parts. They have Scofflaw’s head and he is directing them in the quest to reassemble him. Silvera asks one of the henchman the obvious question as to why Scofflaw doesn’t just have his head put on a brand-new android body, but it turns out that Scofflaw is very sentimental about his parts. Silvera isn’t just collecting android parts but also some plot coupons. He meets up with another freelance writer Tammany, who faked an autobiography of Scofflaw. She assumed that since Scofflaw was scattered about the planet, no one could say that the biography hadn’t been authorized. Scofflaw’s henchmen are trying to put her out of the way. The next plot coupon is that once Scofflaw reassembles himself, he is going to steal the Eye of Ofego, a giant jewel in a religious shrine guarded by fanatics. Scofflaw is indeed reassembled and steals

the Eye successfully, not by penetrating the heavily guarded chamber, but by hiring a batch of telekinetics who transport the entire shrine away. If you can’t bring Mohammad to the mountain ...

Silvera hires his own telekinetic to steal Scofflaw’s payment for stealing the Eye of Ofego, and so the story ends. An interesting point is that Scofflaw always remains offstage. Even after his reassembly, he never makes an appearance directly to the reader, and only hearsay tells the reader what happened.

### **Ex-Chameleon Corps.**

Ben Jolson is a semi-retired agent of the Chameleon Corps who keeps being recalled to duty for just one more case. He’d much rather be making pottery in his kiln for his crafts business, but his ability to shape-change is too valuable to waste. Physically changing into someone else is all very well, but behaving the same as they would and knowing the same things is a different matter. Jolson fails a few times in each investigation for lack of cultural or behavioural knowledge, but eventually manages to solve the case.

THE SWORD SWALLOWER (1970) has Jolson assigned by the Barnum government to check out the planet Esperanza, a cemetery planet. The Political Espionage Office is worried about peace breaking out on that planet, and more specifically about important Barnum officials who are disappearing there. Wilson Kimbrough is the Barnum ambassador there and he is under suspicion. Jolson goes off in the guise of someone likely to be kidnapped and the plot gets rolling. He wends his way among the Usual Suspects from one vignette to another, so much so that the reader forgets what the plot was supposed to be.

Unfortunately Jolson forgot to change his fingerprints, which the bad guys notice (they’re very sophisticated) and ruins his first attempt at infiltration. As Jolson shapechanges from one person to another he keeps being tripped up by some unforeseen circumstance. Assuming the shape of someone else, he is caught out because he doesn’t know the dances of that person’s home planet. He is also plagued by a PEO aide who is supposed to be helping him

discretely but is so incompetent that the enemy agents have no difficulty spotting her skulking around and kidnap her. Eventually Jolson penetrates into the headquarters of the perpetrators, rescues the girl, and all ends well.

“Hobo Jungle” (from WHAT’S BECOME OF SCREWLOOSE AND OTHER INQUIRIES, 1973) finds Jolson assigned to track down some missing government money that the Barnum government gave to the Murdstone government as foreign aid. The amount is \$1 million, which used to be real money back in the 1960s when supervillains would hold the world’s leaders to ransom for that sum. Evidently in the far future of the Barnum system the debt problem has been solved and the central banks have gone back to the gold standard. Jolson travels across Murdstone impersonating various people as he tracks the path of the missing money. The story trails off to an end after he recovers the money. I kept waiting for something exciting to happen but it never did.

FLUX (1974) has Jolson being sent by the Barnum government to the planet Jaspur, where a local revolutionary with the nom-de-guerre of Sunflower is using brainwashed teenagers as suicide bombers against the Provisional Government. Suicide bombers were science fiction back then, remember. The Barnum government assigned the Political Espionage Office the job of taking down Sunflower and his movement, and they in turn dragoon Jolson. Jaspur is divided into theme suburbs, such as a Wild West suburb, or just plain conform-or-else suburbs. Jolson goes through a variety of impersonations but mostly goes as the folk singer Tunky Nesper. He does do a turn as Dr. Mowgli, a prolific author who has written hundreds of books and who the well-read SF reader will recognize as not unlike Dr. Isaac Asimov (Goulart was having some fun here with the Good Doctor.)

As Jolson travels about Jaspur, his best turn is as Tunky Nesper, famous for such songs as “I Tripped Over A Salt Lick And The Good Lord Picked Me Up And Dusted Me Off” and “Roof Blew Away In A Tornado And Killed My Cow Blues”. Since he is on a planet of urbanites, he gets complaints from them that they can’t understand him. “*What’s a hay bale?*” asks one. The plot meanders about, including meeting up with a renegade Chameleon Corp man who enjoys

impersonating women entirely too much. Finally Goulart reaches the end of his word count and abruptly wraps up the novel. Jolson walks into Sunflower’s secret laboratory, arrests him, and they walk out. Just like that. No “as you know” lectures, no superscience machines blowing up in sparkly electrical displays. Rather refreshing actually.

DAREDEVILS, LTD. (1987) begins a new stage in Jolson’s life. He is retired and happy running a ceramics business but ends up working on call for the Briggs Interplanetary Detective Service. One of their agents was murdered on the planet Farpa in the Hellquad system. The suddenly deceased worked for Daredevils Ltd, a subsidiary of Briggs, and they not only want his killer found but the case he was working on solved. Someone is systematically killing of the top executives of Plazhartz Corporation. The founder of the corporation was Simon Lenz, supposedly dead for two years, but the single eyewitness to the killings is sure it was him.

It turns out that various appearances of Lenz are copycat androids, and that there is a sinister villain who is suppressing dirty secrets. She has arranged that politicians, businessmen, and anyone else who might be useful have PlazHartz artificial hearts installed in them. The hearts inject mind-controlling drugs into the blood and are booby-trapped with explosives so if the patients don’t co-operate, they will be splattered all over the room. Jolson eventually collects all the necessary plot coupons. The villain is sent on to the next life and the novel wraps up in time for everyone to get home for supper.

STARPIRATE’S BRAIN (1987) begins with a space pirate downloading his mind into a microchip due to an incurable brain disease. The chip is stolen because it contains two valuable data files: where the pirate hid his treasure, and reams of blackmail information on various politicians. Everyone and their cousin is after the chip, either to profit from the treasure, continue blackmailing the politicians, or in the case of the politicians themselves, to stop any further blackmail.

Jolson is hired by a private detective agency on behalf of a client who wants the chip and is promptly murdered. Molly Briggs, the agency operative, and a robot dog named Sniffer keep

telling Jolson to be a team player. Jolson tells them he can do it himself, as a result of which he is constantly being rendered unconscious and kidnapped by the bad guys. His ego is only matched by Sniffer's antagonism toward him, rightly justified, that Jolson is a loose cannon on deck. The novel wanders through various locales and escapades on the planet Esmeralda, with an assortment of bad guys zapping Jolson with stunguns. He never seems to recover consciousness in the same place twice. The chip is finally recovered, more in spite of Jolson than because of him.

EVERYBODY COMES TO COSMO'S (1988) is the follow-on to the Starpirate story, with Jolson, Molly, and Sniffer on the hunt for a missing heiress on Murdstone, a planet in the Barnum system. The missing heiress may be a frozen embryo or may have been implanted in a surrogate mother, so not only does Jolson not know what she looks like, he doesn't know how old she is.

All the usual suspects are there, such as malfunctioning androids, and all the chasing after plot coupons. Jolson's impersonations seem to work somewhat better, although the people he's impersonating often meet violent ends. He reprises his mimicry of Tunky Nesper in Bumtown, the dumping ground on Murdstone where alcoholics, addicts, and messy-looking street people are relocated so the urbanites don't have to look at them. Sounds like a good plan actually. The Salvation Commandos do their best to bring the lost souls back to sobriety and God.

The action eventually shifts to an orbiting casino/hotel satellite called "Cosmo's", although no one has actually met Cosmo. By then Jolson has discovered the missing heiress's identity. She is a newshen who may not be aware of her status. Both Jolson and the bad guys are well aware, and the young woman is kidnapped back and forth. Considering the title of this book and the big buildup to Cosmo's, the action in orbit is very brief, and after a few chapters everyone returns to Murdstone. The heiress is rescued, as you knew she would be, and restored to her rightful place on the throne, pardon me, as head of the family business.

## **Jake Conger.**

Jake Conger is a retired government agent from the Wild Talent Division who wants to stay retired and run his natural fakefood (made from organic plants, not chemically synthesized) restaurant. It's hard to get good help though, so the agency keeps bringing him back out of retirement for one last job. His talent is invisibility, at will.

THE PANCHRONICON PLOT (1977) begins with concerns that the American President is disposing of his enemies by sending them back in time to other eras, using an unlicensed time machine. Conger is dragged away from his restaurant to help in the case. Since no quest can go directly to its destination, Conger must first take the scenic route via several alarums and excursions to find Buford True, a man who can time travel without machines. All the President's men are chasing True as well, and like a game of musical chairs, True is kidnapped back and forth. Conger uses his invisibility often, but is hampered because while most people can't see him, some government agents working for the President's conspiracy have a workaround and can see him. After Conger gets whacked on the head or a gun barrel in his kidneys a few times, he learns to respect his opponents and realize that he isn't invincible.

Finally all the plot coupons are collected and True jumps back in time to Vienna, taking Conger with him. The President's men are also on the hunt. The Austrians talk in dodgasted German that even old-time vaudevillians never used for their Hans and Gretchen jokes, and which is less funny in this book. Conger and True are separated in time and space, jump about the timeline rounding up exiled politicians, save a damsel in distress en route, and only once alter their timeline due to the changes they made. The President is forced from office and decides to jump back in time to regroup. He does, but just as he jumps, Conger makes an adjustment to his time machine to ensure he's not coming back. The novel ends abruptly.

Like most paperbacks produced by DAW Books, the editing was sloppy, with frequent typos. A shame, because it detracts from the author's work and yanks the reader out of the story.

HELLO, LEMURIA, HELLO (1979) begins in April 2022 when Conger foils an assassination attempt on him and gets the plot rolling. The WTD folks show up, and conscript him into an investigation into the Lemurians, who are trying to conquer the world. Conger starts off by infiltrating the annual convention of the Crackpot Writers of America, who will be presenting their Goofy Awards. He is hunting P.K. Stackpole, who published a book about Lemuria and may know something, as well as country singer Amos Binky, who may also know something.

From the CWA convention to Binky's hotel in Mississippi and onward, the chase develops. Binky is bumped off, and various suspects come out of the woodwork or orbiting satellites as the case may be. The Lemurians are busy killing off anyone who might help Conger and foil their plans. Everyone, good guys or bad guys, is searching for Stackpole, but no one can find him. The plot veers off into Lovecraftian mythos, with an underground battle against eldritch and squamous horrors, with assorted squids. Someone should send a copy of this book to Margaret Atwood. It all ends in tears for the Lemurians, and the world is saved.

This novel parodies everything from Dianetics to politically-correct midgets. Anyone familiar with SF in the 1960s and 1970s will recognize allusions to famous writers and magazines of that era.

### **Come Buckle My Swash.**

Some of Goulart's novels feature Harry Challenge, an American adventurer who works for his father's detective agency. The stories are a send-up of historical fantasy novels, not that there is much difference. Like television newscasts, it is often difficult to distinguish between the real thing and its parody.

THE PRISONER OF BLACKWOOD CASTLE (1984) is one such parody as Challenge runs afoul of the Crown Princess Alicia of Orlandia and tries to win his way back into her heart. Her father the King is on his deathbed, and the kingdom is awaiting the imminent transition.

As per standard fantasy practice, the hero can never go from Point A to Point B, slay the dragon, and win the beautiful princess. If he did, the story would be over in two chapters, three if the author spins out an extended fight scene. Challenge hardly gets a look-in at Alicia before he is diverted by his father to help rescue a client's rich uncle.

The book follows Goulart's standard plot and characters. There is the perky news reporter, in this novel named Jenny, who is working at cross-purposes with Challenge. His friend The Great Lorenzo is a stage magician whose act occasionally comes in handy. Challenge runs afoul of automatons (which would make this an early steampunk novel), and lycanthropes (he forgot to load his gun with silver bullets). Assorted villains try to kill Challenge but all of them fail because instead of just shooting him in the head or stabbing him with a sword, they use elaborate and complicated remote-control set-ups to try to finish him off from a distance.

One of the villains is building clockwork automatons that are almost perfect replicas of people they are replacing, including most of the ones Challenge is dealing with, not excluding Princess Alicia. Challenge manages to sort them all out and stop a clockwork Princess Alicia from being crowned Queen. It is a disappointment to steampunks everywhere when the flesh-and-blood Alicia takes the throne.

THE CURSE OF THE OBELISK (1987) is the sequel, which starts off with Challenge in Paris of 1897. He quickly meets up with perky Jenny and The Great Lorenzo, and the plot gets rolling. A museum is supposedly being haunted because it has some Egyptian antiquities, but Challenge soon determines that someone is faking the walking mummies etcetera for an evil purpose as yet unknown. The first suddenly-deceased real corpse makes its initial appearance, and Challenge is off and investigating.

The MacGuffin of the plot is the Osiris Obelisk, a small pillar about head-height and covered with ancient inscriptions. The villain of the piece appears to be Max Orchardson, but other players are in the field for their own nefarious purposes. Everyone is chasing the obelisk before it is delivered to its new owner but fails.

Halfway through the novel, it appears the story is concluded but we know better. Challenge is assigned to a new missing-person case which appears unrelated to the obelisk, but again we know better. The chase resumes again.

It turns out that the obelisk has hidden within it a supply of immortality potion, or at least enough to keep someone alive for several centuries. As Challenge chases after the fair maiden who is the missing person, it develops that the perpetrator is also the one who is hunting for the obelisk. There are the usual alarms and excursions, the drug is found to be missing because someone got to it offstage, and the fair maiden is rescued. The plot is standard Goulart but it makes for a pleasant way to kill an hour.

### **Hollywood And Other Bizarre Inhabited Places.**

SKYROCKET STEELE (1980) is set in Hollywood during the early 1940s. Pete Tinsley is a pulp writer who has just graduated from SF magazines at one cent per word to Star Spangled Studios at \$150 per week (very good money in those days). He was signed to write a space opera serial called “Skyrocket Steele”, the studio’s attempt at doing something different as long as it’s the same as Flash Gordon (but not too much the same since they don’t want to be sued for plagiarism).

Tinsley had annoyed some gangsters in private life, and was saved from them by a cute studio assistant named Tracy Flinn. She has precognition and telekinetic powers, and Pete has to wonder what else she is involved in. They start a romance, troubled by her reticence about her powers, and a studio prop department whose props are out of this world, and not just figuratively. The stun rays really are stun rays. The course of true love never runs smoothly, when Tinsley discovers Flinn is a humanoid from the planet Esmeralda, seeking to invade Earth ahead of the planet Peregrine, also seeking to invade Earth. At this point there is a rush to the conclusion and everything is wrapped up in the last two chapters. Both alien invasions are stopped, Tinsley gets the girl, and the author gets his word count in before moving on to the next book contract.

### **Miscellaneous Stories.**

Not all of Goulart’s stories fit into his various universes and future histories. “Junior Partner”, from the collection WHAT’S BECOME OF SCREWLOOSE AND OTHER INQUIRIES (1973), is about a young man controlled by a domineering father and working in the family business. The old man shows him a collection of voodoo dolls, one for each employee, which he uses to control them and make certain they work hard. Junior doesn’t believe him and when his father dies and leaves him the company, doesn’t bother about the dolls. It isn’t until later when he drops the tray of dolls and breaks them that he finds out there is a link. After accidentally smashing them, he sits in his office, terrified of going outside and determining why it is so quiet out there. A chilling story.

Also from the Screwloose collection is “The Yes-Men Of Venus” is a parody of dime novel action-adventure stories. It doesn’t work. The problem is that the language and feel of such stories are so far out of date that they read as a parody in their own right today, no matter how seriously they were intended a century ago.

“Why The Funnies Museum Never Opened” (ALFRED HITCHCOCK’S MYSTERY MAGAZINE, December 1978) is about two comics fans, Errol and Rollo, in competition for a rare illustration by a Hearst newspaper columnist, the only surviving item of his work left. It was a political cartoon of Columbia holding her torch, done as a life-size head-and-shoulders drawing. When the collector who had it in his collection dies, Errol and Rollo compete to get it off the widow, with the former succeeding. He is planning to open a comics museum in an old mansion formerly owned by two elderly spinsters, the Fairfield sisters. It’s a spooky house that comes with not only ghosts but the widespread belief that the sisters had hidden a lode of gold coins in the house somewhere. Errol spends more time in the basement digging for the supposed gold than he does renovating the house for the museum.

Rollo decides that while Errol is busy in the basement, he will sneak in and grab the Columbia drawing from the second floor. How does anyone carry a large painting down stairs?

You hoist it to your waist and carry it on the side of your body away from the wall. Errol hears the noise and comes out of the basement into the dark house to see what he thinks is a Fairfield ghost floating down the stairs. Like any good American, he opens fire with his handgun, killing Rollo. Rollo's dying words form the twist ending to the story. Mildly amusing.

Sometime after I wrote the above review, I was doing some housecleaning and came across the letter shown at right. I had apparently sent a copy of Goulart's story to the newly opened Canadian Museum of Caricature in late 1990 (before I started publishing this zine). This museum was opened in 1989 but did not survive Canada's financial crisis in 1994 when the Liberal government of the day was forced to acknowledge that the supply of money to pay for luxuries is not infinite. (The USA has not had a similar crisis yet but eventually will. This was why Canada was one of the few nations not seriously affected by the Panic of 2008.)

### **And In Conclusion.**

Goulart wrote these books to a standard plot but they are generally amusing if read in moderation. The paperback publishers aimed these books at the gosh-wow market, and shoveled them out onto the bookshelves without spending too much money on frills and extras, such as proofreading. Buy them cheap in secondhand bookstores (the ones that are left) as fun reads that don't require any learned analyses.



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K1A 0N3

Your file    Votre référence

Our file    Notre référence

17 January 1991

Mr. Dale Speirs  
Box 6830  
CALGARY, Alberta  
T2P 2E7

Dear Dale:

Thank you very much for your note with its enclosure from Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine. Our division is always interested in seeing tidbits about humour museums. Unfortunately, "Why the Funnies Museum Never Opened" does make us a little uncomfortable, since truth is sometimes stranger than fiction! I especially liked the part about cartoonists arguing over the relative merits of their work, and how much it is worth to collectors. Luckily, no one has yet been injured while trying to make off with any original cartoon art.

Once more, thank you for your interest in the caricature museum and program.

Sincerely yours,

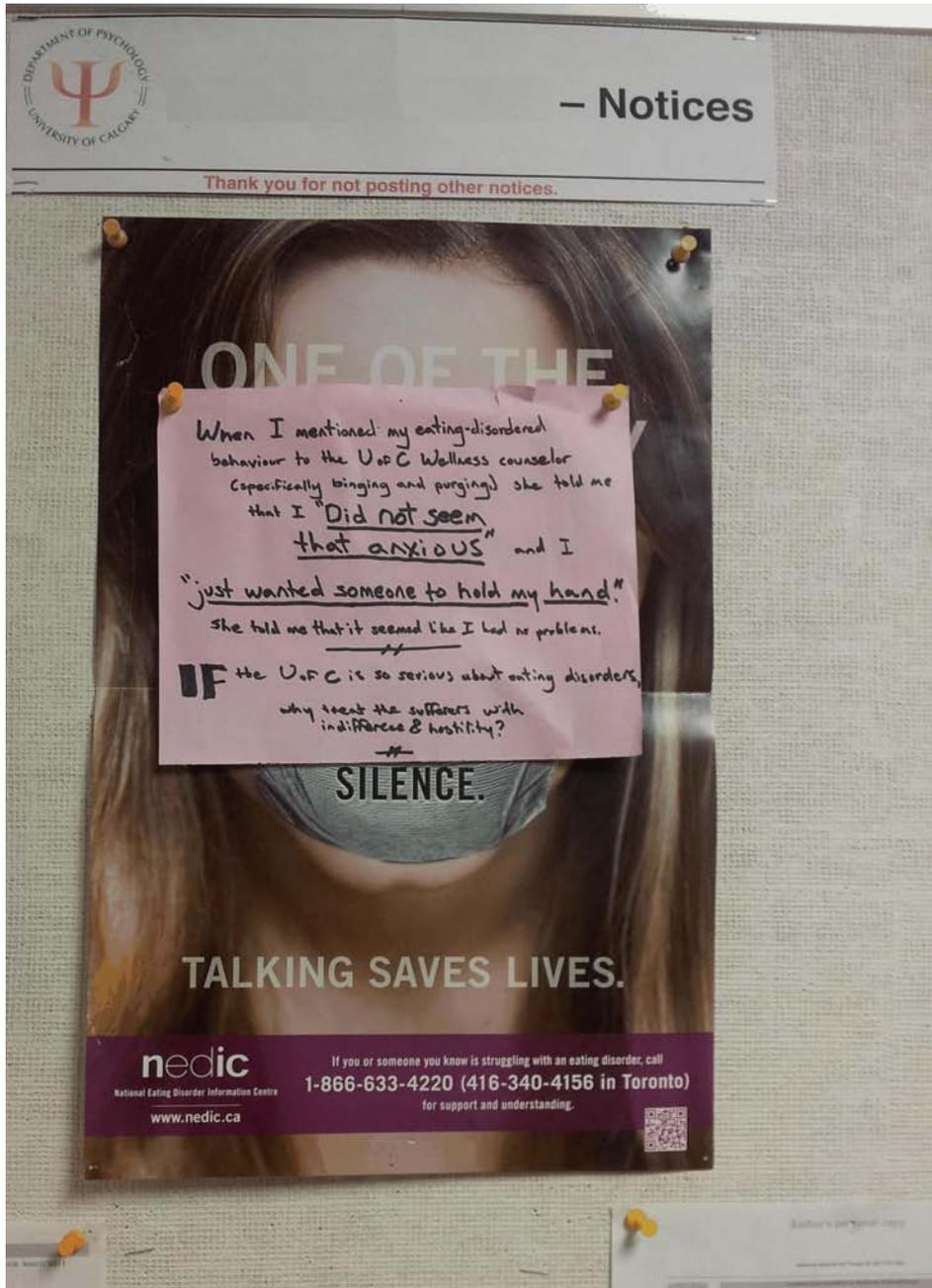
Lilly Koltun  
Director  
Canadian Museum of Caricature

Canada

## PEOPLE JUST WANT TO BE LISTENED TO

photos by Dale Speirs

Some signs I've seen around Calgary in 2014. The one below was on a bulletin board in the Psychology wing at the University of Calgary.



This one was on a sound barrier along Crowchild Trail SW. I think there was more to the story here than just some teenaged kid acting up.



## WORLD WIDE PARTY #21

2014 will be the 21<sup>st</sup> annual World Wide Party, held every year on June 21<sup>st</sup> at 21h00 your local time. It was invented by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria). The idea is to get a wave circulating the planet as zinesters and science fiction fans toast each other. At 21h00, you are requested to raise a glass to fandom. Do a one-shot zine or some mail art, have a party with fellow fans, or whatever else you can think of to celebrate our connections. Let people know how you celebrated by writing it up.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Hersh, Eltan D. (2013) Long-term effect of September 11 on the political behavior of victims' families and neighbors. PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES (USA) 110:20959–20963

Author's abstract: *This article investigates the long-term effect of September 11, 2001 on the political behaviors of victims' families and neighbors. Relative to comparable individuals, family members and residential neighbors of victims have become, and have stayed, significantly more active in politics in the last 12 years, and they have become more Republican on account of the terrorist attacks. The method used to demonstrate these findings leverages the random nature of the terrorist attack to estimate a causal effect and exploits new techniques to link multiple, individual-level, governmental databases to measure behavioral change without relying on surveys or aggregate analysis.*

*... By leveraging geo-coded government data collected on nearly every individual, I was able to pinpoint a study of geographic proximity: in studying neighbors of 9/11 victims, I investigated individuals who lived on the same floor of apartment buildings or on the same block of a street as victims. ... For each 9/11 victim in New York, I searched through records of every other person in New York to identify individuals who appeared most similar to the victim. This comparison provides some leverage in estimating a causal effect of 9/11 on victims' relations.*

*... The research began by acquiring a list of registered voters in the state of New York that was accurate as of summer 2001. [Because all of the identifying information in this study stem from public records, the study was deemed exempt from Institutional Review Board review (Yale University Human Subjects Committee Protocol no. 1305011974).] The database contained personal information of all 9,995,513 New Yorkers registered at that time. Culling information from digital obituaries of 9/11 victims, I matched all 9/11 victims residing in New York to the statewide voter file (for reasons of cost and data availability, this study was restricted to 9/11 victims residing in New York at the time of the attack). Of the 1,729 victims from New York, I identified 1,181 (68%) as registered voters.*

*... I used information contained in the statewide voter file to identify the family members in their households who were also registered and to find their nearest residential neighbors. For victims' families and neighbors and for the control victims' families and neighbors, I matched their identifying information to current 2013 records of registered voters and to Federal Election Commission records of campaign contributors.*

Speirs: The thing that struck me about Hersh's study was not its conclusion, that people directly affected by terrorists then become small-c conservatives, but the frightening amount of detail Hersh was able to collect about people just from public databases. Everyone fusses about the NSA harvesting the Internet (wait until the Apple fanatics find out that their fingerprints on their new smartphones are now in police databases) but private industry is doing far more with the data. Hersh was able to legitimately use public data as no researcher could before the era of cheap computing, and identify people to their apartments and how they voted. Elsewhere in the real world, car rental companies now put black box recorders in their cars to track how you drive, and insurance companies would love to have that data, if they aren't already buying it. Nevermind NSA, CSIS, or GCHQ tracking your phone calls to Pakistan or Saudi Arabia, there are carpark operators scanning your licence plates and selling the data to retailers. Park near a strip club, even if you never set foot in the place, and some advertiser will draw the wrong conclusion. Guilt by association will be a standard practice in the future.