

OPUNTIA

310

World Environment Day 2015

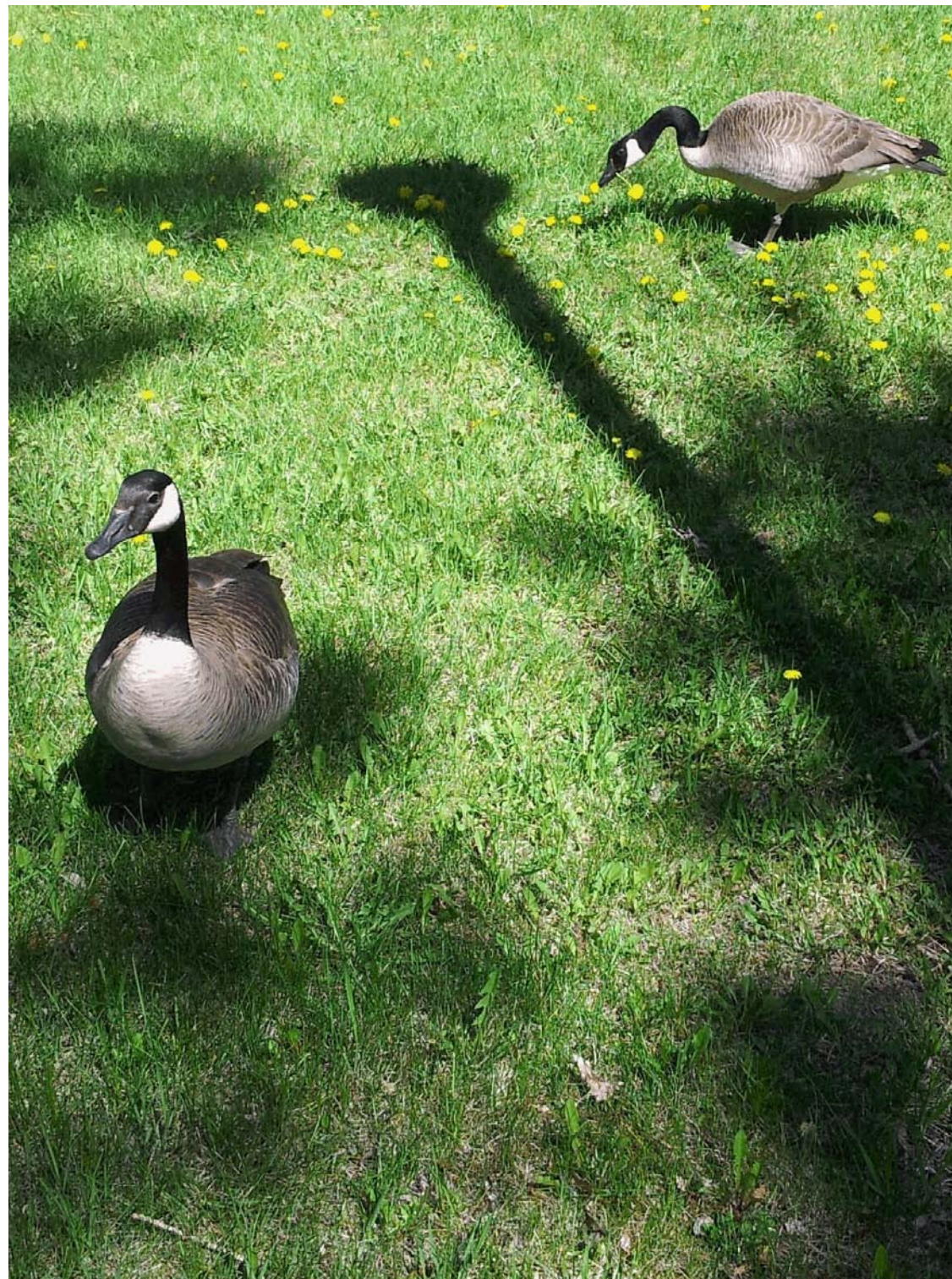
Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. My e-mail address is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

GEESE MAY SAFELY GRAZE

photos by Dale Speirs

At right are a pair of Canada geese seen along the Bow River north shore in downtown Calgary. Look closely at the one in the rear and you can see it is munching on a dandelion flower.

On the next page is a utility box at the corner of Macleod Trail SW and Heritage Drive. I've never seen pelicans on the Bow River downtown but they do nest in Fish Creek Provincial Park in south Calgary. When I was working for the city Parks Dept., which had land adjacent to FCPP, I often saw pelicans flying to nearby lakes for a day's fishing. They are ungainly birds on the ground but in flight are beautiful and graceful.





LOOKING FOR

I am looking for a Italian male who dated a ethnic young lady during her final exams at the University of Calgary back in 2012. I need some information about an event from back then. If you are the right person, you will be **greatly rewarded** for your help.

NOTE: this is not about paternity or anything like that :-)

Thank you in advance



Left: Seen in the Sunnyside district by the LRT station.
Below: An electronics repair shop in Eau Claire district.



RADIO FICTION: PART 3. VERBA VOLAT

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 and 2 appeared in issues #301 and #302 respectively.]

Almost all modern novels about radio are mystery novels involving talk show hosts. This is probably because they are the ones who come into conflict with callers and stir up controversy. The host of a classical music show is more likely to put his audience to sleep.

MURDER OFF MIKE (2003) by Joyce Krieg is about talk radio host Shauna J. Bogart at a Sacramento, California, station. She gets a caller who says he saw men in uniforms go into a neighbour's apartment who was lying on the floor dead. The neighbour turns out to be Dr. Hipster, a colleague of Shauna's who had been advertising that his next show would blow the lid off the current election campaign for state governor. Dr. Hipster was a right-wing, pro-gun, survivalist but he gave Shauna her first big break on the station and was at heart a sentimental old fool.

Shauna plays Miss Marple after the police say it was suicide. There is a fake suicide note that mentions Shauna, so she feels justified in doing her own investigation. Along the way there are more murders, an attempt to blackmail Shauna with fake photos, and the station transmitter is sabotaged, putting it off the air.

Eventually the story is traced back to a contract signed by the original partners of the station, which in some aspects was a tontine. The station is one of the few remaining independents, and if the tontine winner succeeds, he will sell it to a chain broadcaster. There are the usual alarums and excursions, and Shauna comes close to death before the final expose. A routine murder mystery but quite readable.

OPEN LINE (2008) by Ellen Hawley is about talk show host Annette Majoris, stuck in Minneapolis and going nowhere fast. Looking for something sensational, she tells an on-air caller ranting about the USA's decline that the Vietnam War was a hoax, a mind-control experiment of epic proportions.

She doesn't believe it, but she needs the ratings and this seems as good a method as any. The phone lines light up, of course, but any Vietnam veteran who says he was there is told he is obviously a victim of mind control. Annette uses the

methodology of UFO nuts and conspiracy theorists. The slightest shred of information in favour is trumpeted as proof. Major flaws are ignored or papered over.

The lunatic fringe picks up on it. She winds up being sucked into the maelstrom of the lecture circuit, and eventually gets a new job on a Chicago station. The copycats soon emerge; there was never any slavery, etcetera. As the publicity builds up, she begins to suffer from the conflict between her ambition and the obvious lie she is using to further it. It gets to her and she has a nervous breakdown. But even as her mind spins out of control, she is thinking how she could use her collapse as the basis of a new show. There is unfinished business here.

GHOST RADIO (2008) by Leopoldo Gout is somewhat annoyingly illustrated with mediocre black-and-white art, never a good idea in mass-market paperback format where the cramped space doesn't do the drawings any justice. The novel is about midnight talk show host Joaquin (no last name given) who works on a Mexican radio station broadcasting over the border to the USA. The callers share stories about vampires, poltergeists, and anything else that goes bump in the night.

The narrative takes a long time to get going, as Joaquin's rather tedious back story is filled in chapter by painful chapter. Gabriel, a friend of his also on the radio, died under mysterious circumstances. This foreboding having been established, there next appears a supernatural being that is hunting Joaquin in order to feed off his fears. With all the subtlety of a shovelful of gravel thrown against a window, the spirit is evidently Gabriel's unhappy ghost. Joaquin's relationship with his girlfriend Alondra is also tense.

Joaquin seems to be a success, even if he doesn't feel it. The show has been picked up for national syndication in the USA as another COAST-TO-COAST AM, except the host is Hispanic instead of Arabic descent. Gabriel's ghost keeps haunting Joaquin and causes him all sorts of trouble.

Unfortunately the story ends with a twist not much better than it-was-all-a-dream, only in this case it was all a long story by a caller into a talk show suddenly hosted by Alondra. Some people like novels where characterization takes precedence over plot and pacing, and where the characters are all eventually stomped flat. I don't.

HAND OF FATE (2010) by Lis Wiehl and April Henry is set in Portland, Oregon, at radio station KNWS. Jim Fate is an obnoxious talk show host, which doesn't matter much to the reader since he departs for the next world on page 9. Someone mailed him a package, which he opens in his studio while on a commercial break. As he tears it open, a gas canister fires into his face and he is dead from the poison before the hazmat team can get there.

It is specifically stated that the first-responders arrived within two minutes of the 9-1-1 call, which is difficult to believe. Even if the fire hall was immediately adjacent to the radio station, they couldn't have arrived in less than fifteen minutes, nevermind the traffic on the road if the fire hall was elsewhere. During the 1980s part of my career, I was a Pest Control Foreman, and it took us at least ten minutes to get into the hazmat suits we used daily for spraying insecticides.

Be that as it may, there was panic in the streets as the fear of a larger gas attack spreads. Rumour travels beyond the horizon while Truth is still pulling on its boots, as the saying goes. For the next nine chapters we are treated to a blow-by-blow account of crowds running hither and yon, and the police are swamped by 9-1-1 calls from hysterical citizens.

Matters are not helped by hazmat-suited technicians wandering around outside the radio station waving handheld instruments to check air quality levels, which only confirms to the mob that the end of the world is nigh. When I was in Pest Control, we only sprayed in parks on the graveyard shift and always warned the 9-1-1 call centre ahead of time what we were doing.

For television news reporter Cassidy Shaw, this is her chance to get in on a big story, even if it kills her. Not only that, she and the suddenly defunct talk show host once had an affair and she still has the key to Fate's condo. The panic subsides and all the postmortems begin, one for real and the others figurative.

More is revealed of Fate's life. He was a right-wing shock jock who also had to have the last word, and not surprisingly had many enemies. There are several subplots, mostly involving women who are pregnant, have very young children, or in one case, temporarily fostering a small child separated from her mother during the gas attack panic.

The novel meanders through the FBI investigation of the case, at times turning into a police procedural. Fate had been harassing Congressman Quentin Glover, so they gather evidence to fit the suspect. At a press conference, Glover denies

he did anything wrong but then negates his own case by taking out a handgun and shooting himself in the head, live on camera, film at 11.

The real culprit of the murder worked at KNWS and held a grudge against Fate. So much so, that she planted the mail bomb. But she comes out of nowhere near the end of the novel, a *deus ex machina*. The ending then wraps up on the double, as if to rush the reader past it without time to reflect on the plausibility. The novel is a brisk read, and I'm sure it gave a few readers an idea on how to get rid of that pesky co-worker and how to do it.

TALK (2014) by Michael Smerconish is about Stan Powers, a talk radio host in the Tampa Bay area of Florida. Powers works for a conservative broadcast network, although he does have a few qualms which he is smart enough to keep to himself. The novel is a near-future history. President Summers has announced he will not run for a second term. Obama is mentioned in past tense and none of the candidates on either side are names known in today's world.

The novel goes into excruciating detail about the Presidential campaign, with all the candidates' biographies and their chances in the primaries. Just as that infodump concludes, another one starts on Powers' back story. It isn't until the final quarter of the novel that the plot begins to move forward. Texas Governor Margaret Haskell is running for the Republican candidacy and Powers has helped her along half-heartedly. Powers has the ability to destroy the major contender against Haskell. The man is a Scientologist, secretly of course, because Americans may have elected a Catholic and a Negro to the Presidency but certainly would not accept a Hubbard disciple. Powers makes the move and Haskell wins the nomination.

Suddenly the novel comes to a dead stop for a lengthy sermon by Powers during his next radio broadcast. It is a "I'm mad as Hell and I'm not going to take it anymore" speech that goes on and on and on. It's not emotional enough to be a rant, just the kind of sermon that a preacher might give to see his audience put to sleep. It erodes away the real ending of the book like a sandblaster on a piece of softwood lumber. The book as a whole was steady reading but it needed better pacing, and unfortunately wimped out in its ending.

Who Knows What Evil Lurks.

And now let's go to the movies. Most people have heard of the old-time radio character The Shadow, even if they have never listened to an episode or read a

story. The chronology of The Shadow from his origin in 1930 to his peak in the late 1940s is one of huge inconsistencies and no attempt at continuity. He was an early multimedia character, born on the radio, simultaneously living in his own pulp magazine, and appearing in several movies.



The changes in The Shadow’s back story would need a book to document the messy continuity or more correctly, the lack of any attempt to keep the storyline straight. He is remembered today as Lamont Cranston, a wealthy young man-about-town who had the power to cloud men’s minds so that they cannot see him, and was accompanied by his constant companion the lovely Margo Lane. However, that was from the 1940s radio shows and often conflicted with the pulp magazine and movie versions.

I told you that so I could tell you this. In the 1937 movie THE SHADOW: INTERNATIONAL CRIME, there is yet another reboot. Cranston is now a 40ish news reporter hosting a daily show on radio station EMOR. He broadcasts under the nom de audio as The Shadow, with fast-paced crime news about bank robberies, safecrackers, and armed bandits. It is not publicized to the general public that Cranston and The Shadow are the same man, but certainly all his fellow newsmen and the police know it and it is an open secret.

There is no Margo but Cranston is trailed by cub reporter Phoebe Lane, the station owner’s niece. Police Commissioner Weston isn’t happy about Cranston’s show making the police department look inept and the city seem to be more dangerous than it is. There has been a murder, that of Gerald Morton, for reasons unknown since he was apparently an upright citizen. Unlike Miss Marple, Cranston does get run into a jail cell for his amateur detecting, as indeed would happen in the real world. Fortunately he still makes his next broadcast when Lane gets him out on a writ of habeas corpus.

While airing the latest scandal to his listeners, Cranston is interrupted by a gunman, a safecracker named Honest John, who resents some of the remarks Cranston made about him on air. No sooner does Cranston jolly Honest John out of his spite than another angry listener appears. Roger Morton, brother of the deceased, is upset by Cranston’s remark on the air that perhaps Gerald was not the paragon of virtue people thought he was. The two brothers were bond dealers, and Roger will sue if anything more is said.

Cranston and Lane find clues, and eventually come across some foreign spies. The spies are trying to stop some international bond issues via the Morton brokerage. Cranston announces on his radio show that he knows who killed Morton and why, which only gets the police after him for withholding evidence. Everyone converges on Roger’s house, there is much running about, and the spies are brought to justice. The Shadow makes his regular broadcast that night in triumph. He knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men.

LET MARS DIVIDE ETERNITY IN TWAIN: PART 1
by Dale Speirs

The number of stories and movies about Mars, while not infinite, is certainly not far from that quantity. Before the Mariner space probes, it was, of course, a favourite locale for civilizations dying beside their canals. As a teenager, I read Ray Bradbury's stories once but even then they were mostly obsolete and too floridly written for my taste. I could never get past the first few pages of Edgar Rice Burrough's Martian stories. I'm not a completist in any of my collections as that doesn't prove anything, but I have been keeping notes on what I read or see on DVD about Mars, and herewith inflict them on you.

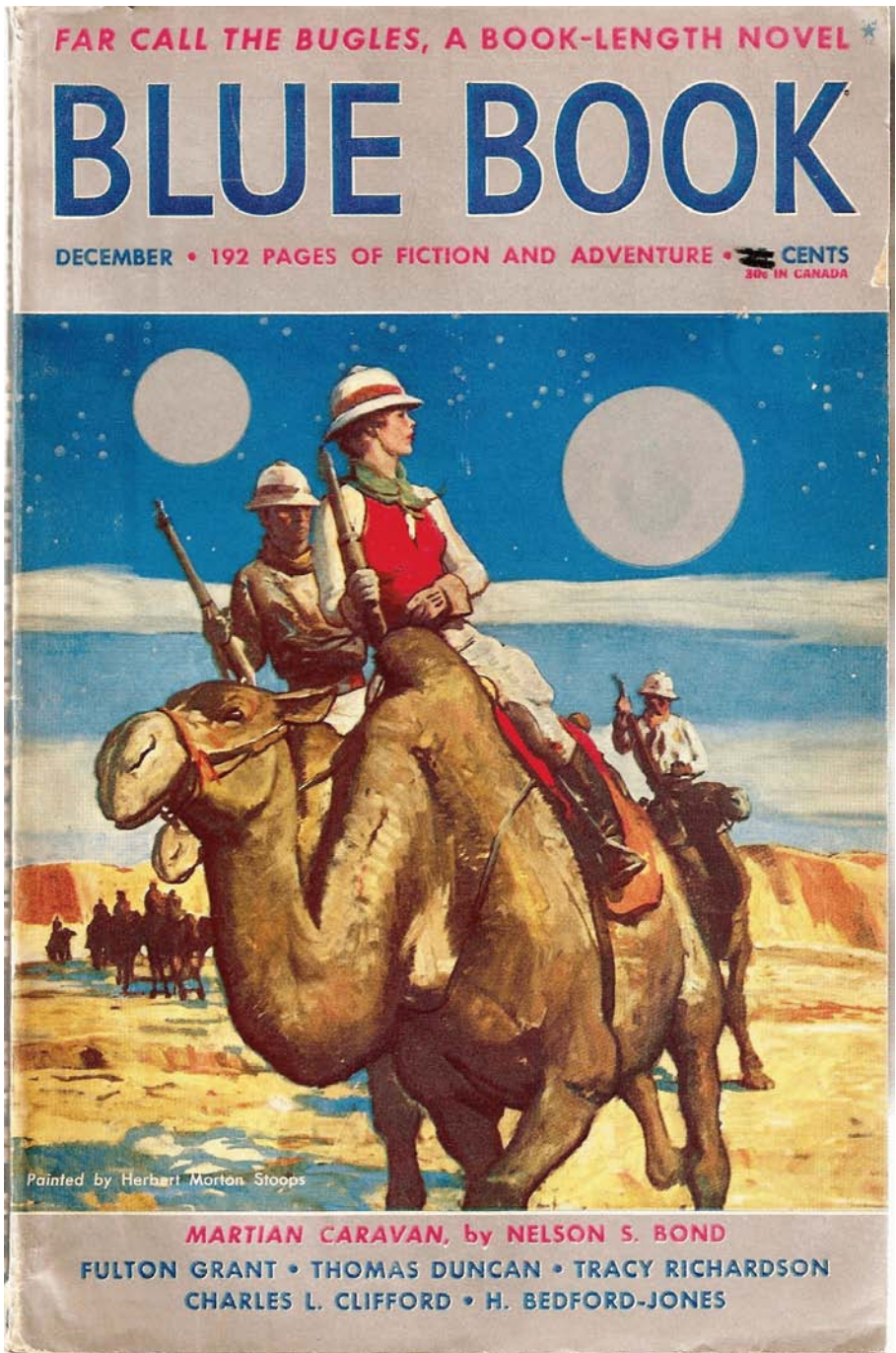
Mars has been responsible for a flood of movies. The outdoor visuals are usually a location set in southern California or the Arizona desert. The shape and style of spacecraft is a reflection of the real-world spacecraft at the time the movie was made. Some of the movies never bothered with Martian sets because they dealt with the planet without anyone setting foot on it. I reviewed the various movie versions of H.G. Wells's WAR OF THE WORLDS in OPUNTIA #289.

Through Darkest Mars With Gun And Camera.

But first, from the printed page. Sometime over the years, I picked up a copy of BLUE BOOK, a general fiction pulp magazine. The 1940 December issue featured cover art of pukka explorers in pith helmets on camels crossing a desert with two giant moons in the sky, which would have been why I bought it. The real Martian moons Phobos and Deimos do not loom so large in the sky, but it is too late to inform the artist. The magazine cover illustrated the story "Martian Caravan" by Nelson Bond, about a camel caravan traveling over a desert from Mars Central to Sandy City. The leader has to deal with a spoiled rich girl, assorted Martian wildlife, a union organizer en route to the mines, and trying to keep the squabbles among the expedition members down to a dull roar.

The first hazard is silicoid pits, recognizable by their slightly different colour of sand. They are quicksand pits with a giant flesh-eating creature hidden underneath. Then there is an attack by loopies, balls of grey slime that roll across the desert looking for warmth, water, and flesh, all of which the humans and camels have. They hurl themselves on their prey like giant amoeba and absorb the victim in seconds by dissolving it with acid. Strangely, the defense against them is to spray them with a squirt gun filled with pepsinase, which

dissolves their protein. The worst problem is the sustained attack by Vegans, who are sentient carnivorous plants. They launch a siege against the caravan and almost succeed but for the timely appearance of an aircraft which makes short work of them.



Yes, no more will the camels a-roving go, for people will now travel by aircraft on Mars, twenty years after the planet was stated to have been colonized. Why the original colonists brought along camels instead of aircraft is a puzzle, considering the immense amount of fuel required to haul either of them from Earth, but that is something to be handwaved away. As a farm boy, my first thought was how much food the camels would consume as compared to the cost of airplane fuel. That is why farmers converted from horse teams to tractors in the first few decades of the 1900s, because they could divert land from oats production to cash crops and buy fuel for less than the cost of maintaining horses.

“The Difficulties Involved In Photographing Nix Olympica” by Brian Aldiss (1986 May, ASIMOV’S) is about the obsession of a Marsnaut to photograph Olympus Mons from the ground. The volcano, 25 km high and about the area of Missouri, has, of course, been photographed thousands of times from Martian orbit. Humans having colonized the planet, no one has yet photographed it from the planet’s surface, and Ozzy Brooks wants to be the first. So he convinces a colleague to come with him and make the round trip from the colony. There and back again, but not much more exciting than a trip to a local resort on Earth. A rather mundane story, especially coming from the pen of Aldiss.

Terraforming Mars.

The main attraction of Mars is that it is close enough to Earth conditions that it might be possible to terraform it and colonize it. “Intervention At Hellas” by Daniel Hatch (1991 May, ANALOG) is about the terraforming of Mars. Large comets have been moved out of their orbits into a slow-speed collision with Mars, the impacts of which will release water into the atmosphere and help make Mars habitable. The Green Party sends out protestors to occupy the spot where impact will occur. They are opposed on the grounds that the terraforming will give humans false hope that they can expand into space and make a better life, instead of reverting to an eco-friendly medieval village culture on Earth and reducing their population. Setting aside the obvious implausibilities in the story, the Greenies were just straw men for the plot. The engineers win without having to spotweld any busbars, and Mars becomes a happier, wetter planet as planned. Heinlein would have been proud.

Another variation of supplying Mars with an atmosphere using comets is “The Martians” by Frederik Pohl (1992 March, ASIMOV’S). The planet has been settled by colonists who live under domes, but that will change in a generation.



The story is mostly about a young child whose family is moved to a safer part of Mars when the first comet arrives to add to the atmosphere. It will be followed by others, all approaching from behind the planet, blown up just before impact to better spread the volatiles. The child is told by its mother that she will not live to walk about Mars without a spacesuit but perhaps the next generation will.

The history of colonization on Earth has certain commonalities that plausibly could be extended to Mars. Eric Vinicoff's short story "The Great Martian Railroad Race" (1988 August, ASIMOV'S) is a rewrite of how transcontinental railroads were built in Canada and the USA. The story is set on a Mars where the Japanese have colonized the North Pole and the Germans the South Pole, with nothing in between.

Two rival contractors propose a railroad track between the two settlements. As was done in Canada and the USA, the contractors were paid in land. On either side of the tracks, a checkerboard was surveyed, with the railroads getting half the lots and the government using the other half to distribute to homesteaders. Each contractor started from one of the poles, to meet each other in the middle, and as an incentive to be paid only in the land adjacent to their portion of the tracks. Then come the homesteaders, from China, to build farms under domes and supply fresh food to the rest of the planet instead of dried rations. The trains are maglev instead of steam, and the sidings will develop into villages and towns over the decades.

The editors at ASIMOV'S and other prozines often lectured their readers that they did not want stories that could be set anywhere and were not distinctively SF. That was a rule seldom enforced, and this story is an example of a western rewritten by changing places and names.

I was able to predict the plot easily enough, especially since I am descended from homesteaders on both sides of my family. My father's family settled along the CPR tracks in southern Saskatchewan and my mother's family along the CNR tracks in west-central Alberta, exactly by the method outlined in the story. But it does read well, strictly as an ANALOG-type story, where engineers busily spotweld those busbars despite bureaucratic impediments.

"All The Beer On Mars" by Gregory Benford (1989 January, ASIMOV'S) is about a joint American-Russian manned expedition traveling across the surface of Mars. Their long dull search for life suddenly finds traces of organic matter,

and they begin zigzagging their way to the source. Alas, the microbes were from the Russian Mars One probe of 1971, contaminating the planet. This is an issue that rocket engineers have actually worried about. I reviewed an article on the subject in OPUNTIA #71.3 in a "Seen In The Literature" column.

Never Actually Arriving.

BATTLE BEYOND THE SUN (1962) is an edited version of the 1959 Russian film NEBO ZOVET, redone by Roger Corman and Francis Ford Coppola (who was in high school at the time). The movie was heavily padded with NASA publicity newsreels. Much money was saved on dubbing English over the Russian dialogue by having a ponderous narrator explain the plot as the movie went along, using a stern tone of voice that one would expect from a hazmat training video.

When dubbing was used, it was hilariously unmatched to the lip movements of the Russian actors, often ending a second before the actor stopped talking. The Russian SFX were quite good for their day, and I suspect they were the reason why Corman bought the English-language rights to the movie. The only caveat is that spaceships ran their engines continuously instead of a short burst to accumulate delta vector.

The movie is set in the far distant future of 1997. After a nuclear war (insert Bikini Atoll film clip here), Earth has divided into two countries, North Hemis and South Hemis. Just in case the audience didn't get the idea, a map of the post-war world is shown. This makes no sense, as it puts South America, Africa, and Asia together, while North America is united with Russia. Since the only two countries who would nuke each other in 1959 were Russia and the USA, one would expect a West Hemis and an East Hemis.

It doesn't really matter, for the war didn't seem to have disrupted civilization that much. The two hemispheres are now competing to land a man on Mars. Maybe we should have had a nuclear war in our timeline, because in the movie there are large space stations and a massive infrastructure to run the Mars missions. The North Hemis spaceship is the Typhoon, and the South Hemis ship is the Mercury (Rodina in the original movie).

The South Hemis space station is preparing the Mercury for launch to Mars when the Typhoon shows up unannounced and asks for a dock to make repairs. Permission granted, and there is much camaraderie, at least until the North

Hemis astronauts find out the Mercury is about to launch. After some dirty tricks, the Typhoon takes off first for Mars, followed shortly thereafter by Mercury. Typhoon runs into trouble and the crew are rescued by Mercury. The North Hemis ship is abandoned and the combined crew continues to Mars.

The spaceship Mercury is low on fuel because of the rescue and cannot land on Mars. Instead it lands on the Martian satellite Angkor, evidently discovered by a Cambodian astronomer. There is no mention of Phobos and Deimos. The space station sends an automated fuel tanker to resupply Mercury but it crashes.

Angkor is a tiny asteroid made of hexagonal basalt columns and jagged lava pinnacles. The plot being too dull for Corman, he inserted a sequence of two completely different monsters fighting with each other. Angkor is airless, so what do the monsters breathe? It is also clearly shown to be a lifeless rock, so what do the monsters eat?

Those questions don't matter, for after the monster bash the movie continues on with the Russian footage and the monsters are never referred to again. The space station sends a second fuel rocket, this time manned. The Mercury is rescued and everyone returns safely to Earth, to be cheered by massive crowds (this time Russian stock footage). A movie best seen while drunk. Unfortunately I am a teetotaler.

QUATERMASS AND THE PIT (mis-spelled as Quatermass on the DVD, with the wrong cast listing) is a 1967 movie remake of a 1958 television series. It involves Martians but never leaves a small area of London, England. The story begins with an excavation for a new subway line that uncovers some ape-men bones. Further digging reveals a spacecraft of remarkable properties. The fuselage is impenetrable metal, doesn't heat up when a blowtorch is applied, and causes frostbite when touched by the bare hand yet has no ice on it.

Professor Bernard Quatermass, assorted scientists, and an Army bomb squad are brought in to puzzle out the matter. After a few alarms, they open up the cockpit of the spacecraft and find the bodies of giant locusts about the size of a medium dog.

There is vigorous paranormal activity going on. The locusts may be dead but they left psychic messages that enable Quatermass et al to discover they were Martians, dead for five million years. Knowing Mars was dying, they came to Earth but couldn't handle the atmospheric conditions. They then tried to

preserve their knowledge and culture by upgrading the evolution of ape-men, so that at least sapient life would live on.

A demonic ghost is brought into life by the research team's activities in the excavation pit and much excitement ensues. This is one of the better SF movies. Some of the props are primitive but the script and acting are good. Recommended.

Never Actually On Stage.

Frederik Pohl wrote several stories over the years about the discovery of Martians but without actually bringing them on stage front and centre. From Harlan Ellison's famous anthology of original stories DANGEROUS VISIONS (1967) is Pohl's "The Day After The Day The Martians Came", narrated by a motel manager near Cape Canaveral, Florida. A spaceship sent to Mars has returned with a real live sentient Martian, found in a building on Mars. The manager's narrative is entirely concerned with the flood of news reporters booking up every available motel room within a hundred miles of the Cape as they chase the story. On the one hand, he appreciates their business, not just the room rentals but the vending machine and restaurant sales. On the proverbial other hand, they cause a mess that his staff can barely keep up with. That the event is one of the greatest in world history means nothing to him; only the cash flow it will generate for his motel.

This story is true to life, for we have all seen it duplicated, not with Martians obviously, but with any great doings in your home town. The pedlars come out with their cold drinks and hot dogs, the shopkeepers sell souvenirs, and restaurant owners rub their hands with glee. In today's world, people take selfies at disasters or post a paragraph on their blog. Probably even as the dust settled from the fall of the Twin Towers there were pedlars in Manhattan flogging T-shirts and postcards.

Pohl's "Iriadeska's Martians" (1986 November, ASIMOV'S) is a humorous story about a minor advertising executive Charlie Sanford who is hired by some Iriadeskan military leaders as a public relations man for the coup d'etat they are planning in a country not unlike Thailand, where one or two coups a year are the standard.

The big news is that an expedition is on its way back from Mars, bringing with it Martians that bear a startling resemblance to Iriadeska's native chupri

(manatee or dugong). Sanford has a rough time trying to do his job in the face of incompetent military planning and casual attitudes to schedules and times of day. The generals design a new flag incorporating a chupri, hoping to capitalize on the Martians. They have a falling out over who has precedence and the coup never gets started, so the national flag remains as it always was, sans chupri or Martian.



Pohl's sequel to the above story is "The View From Mars Hill" (1987 May, ASIMOV'S). A Russian tour guide in Greece, who had defected from the Soviet Union after working on the fringes of their space programme, is hustling American tourists and is unknowingly being hustled in turn. The story takes a considerable time to get going, as an extended infodump fills in the Russian's biography. The Americans are real estate developers looking for fresh names for the new suburb they are building.

The Russian, trying to get help to emigrate to the USA, keeps exaggerating his importance in the Soviet Mars probes, notwithstanding that an American expedition has just returned from Mars with real live genuine Martians. The Americans sign a contract with the Russian for \$200 to supply translations of Greek names relating to Mars. Their scam is that it enables them to deduct the cost of their vacation as a business expense.

And that is the whole story; no Martians or anyone from the expedition front and centre. Although the story is well told once it gets going, it is not science fiction. It was this trend in ASIMOV'S that eventually drove me away from the magazine.

The Martians Are Coming! The Martians Are Coming!

Another movie to see only while drunk is SANTA CLAUS CONQUERS THE MARTIANS, supposedly a children's comedy but one of those so-bad-it's-good movies. The movie was released in 1964 but the props, costumes, and sets were unchanged from 1940s sci-fi serials. It was made worse by being a colour movie, so that one can see how the actors' makeup doesn't match from one scene to the next. The movie has gained additional fame because one of the child actors playing a Martian was Pia Zadora, nine years old at the time. Even then she displayed her ability to recite her lines woodenly.

Martian children are watching too much Earth television, especially in December when Earthlings are going on about Santa Claus. Some adult Martians decide to kidnap him and do so, taking a couple of Earth children in the bargain. They fly in a 1940s model spaceship, with lots of blinking lights and everyone sitting around a console. The landing gear is lowered by pulling hard on some levers.

The Martians want Santa Claus to make the children happy by bringing them presents, so the jolly old man builds a factory on Mars to grind out toys. Other Martians are against this cultural imperialism and sabotage the factory. After the usual excursions and some awful slapstick, the bad Martians are foiled again. Santa and the Earth children return to their home planet. Mars is indoctrinated into the true spirit and meaning of Christmas, that is to say, materialism and crass commercialism. Jesus said his Father's house has many rooms, but evidently Mars isn't one of them.

THE MUNSTERS was a 1960s television comedy show with gags so bad that an artificial laugh track was used because even the drunkest audience wouldn't laugh at them. The setting was a family of monsters living in suburban southern California. Herman Munster was a Frankenstein-type giant but very gentle and very stupid. His wife Lily was a ghoul and her father, called Grandpa by everyone, was a Transylvanian vampire.

The 1965 episode "If A Martian Answers, Hang Up" had Herman trying out his latest hobby, ham radio operating. He crosses signals with two young boys playing in a nearby park. Their father gave them a pair of walkie-talkies, a toy flying saucer about the size of a dinner table, and spacesuit costumes. As they pretend to be Martians landing at a spaceport, Herman overhears them and thinks they are real Martians, notwithstanding the fact they are speaking

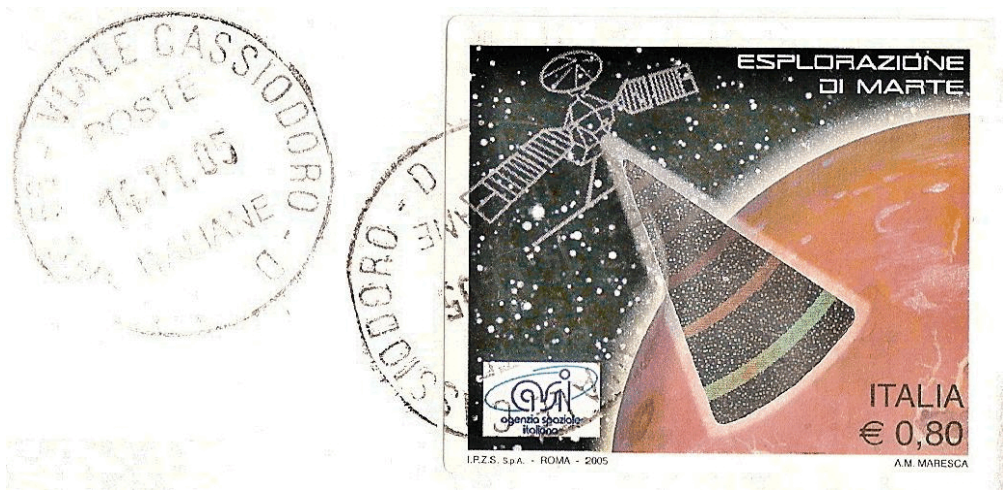
English. He convinces Grandpa that there is something to it, and the two track down the Martians. They see what appear to be two little men from Mars in the park, but when they approach, the boys understandably run away.

Herman takes a photo of Grandpa next to the saucer, and the latter takes it in to a USAF officer. The whole thing is laughed off and Herman is humiliated. In the epilogue, Herman is back at his shortwave radio set when he hears another Martian calling. He insults the sender thinking him to be another faker, but who happens to be a real Martian.

Parody.

“Danny Goes To Mars” by Pamela Sargent (1992 October, ASIMOV’S) has lost much of its topical humour but is still a funny read. American Vice-President Dan Quayle is sent along on a Mars expedition for promotional purposes, mainly to make him into a hero so he can run for President after Reagan retires. The story is told from his viewpoint, not necessarily as the dunce he was often made out to be, but as an inarticulate man who talked faster than he thought.

An accident kills all the other Marsnauts shortly after arrival in orbit, leaving Quayle as the only one who can go down to the surface and become the first human to set foot on Mars. NASA takes care of everything with remote controls, but then the lander won’t lift off to take Quayle back home again. He has supplies to survive until the rescue ship arrives but his greatest worry is his Presidential campaign. His wife Marilyn runs as a candidate instead. The story ends with him playing golf on Mars with improvised clubs and balls, the better to ensure his immortality in the history books.



WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21

Founded by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21 every year. 2015 will be the 21nd year of the WWP.

At 21h00 local time on June 21, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world. It is important to have it exactly at 21h00 your time. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. Rescheduling it to a club meeting or more convenient time negates the idea of a wave of celebration by SF fans and zinesters circling the globe. At 21h00, face to the east and salute those who have already celebrated. Then face north, then south, and toast those in your time zone who are celebrating as you do. Finally, face west and raise a glass to those who will celebrate WWP in the next hour.

Raise a glass, publish a one-shot, have a party, or do a mail art project for the WWP. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2015

Calgary's annual readercon When Words Collide returns on the weekend of August 14 to 16, 2015, at a new and bigger location, the Delta Calgary South Hotel on Southland Drive SE, just east of Macleod Trail. There have been SF conventions at this hotel in previous years, and the building is a good venue. More details at: www.whenwordscollide.org

This is a literary convention designed to cross genres, with author Guests of Honour from fantasy, science, fiction, mystery, romance, and young adults. The convention has become very popular with literary agents, editors, and publishers, who take rooms for pitch sessions and private negotiations.

The panels are mostly literary but there is a strong science track. The dealer bourse is almost entirely small-press publishers and a couple of book dealers. The convention Website has some selected podcasts available as free mp3s at: <http://whenwordscollide.libsyn.com>

WHAT ONCE WAS

photo by Dale Speirs

I have been writing and publishing articles in the philatelic journals about the postal history of Alberta, working on a district by district basis.

This photo was taken in the Gladys Ridge district southeast of Calgary, and shows all that is left of the village of Farrow. It died in the late 1950s when a new paved highway bypassed it to the north and left it stuck on a dead-end gravel road. All that remains is the grain elevator and the railroad depot; the tracks have long been torn up. Nothing is forever.

