

OPUNTIA 319

International Whale Shark Day 2015

Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on www.efanzines.com and www.fanac.org. 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.

SAINT PATRICK'S ISLAND

photos by Dale Speirs

Calgary has several parks on the islands of the Bow River where it flows through the centre of the city. The great flood of 2013 devastated the island parks and it has taken several years to rebuild them. (For details of the flood, see OPUNTIA's #264 and #265.)

St. Patrick's Island, just downstream of the downtown core, re-opened on the August long weekend. It being beautiful sunny weather, I took a stroll on the island.





The flood carved some channels across the island. They were preserved as such in case of future big floods. This explains the long bridge here across what seems to be dry land.



Another flood channel was converted into a wading pool.

This is apparently art, although the lights do actually shine on various parts of the park at night.





Looking west from the upstream tip of the island.

The bridges in the distance carry the main traffic into the downtown core from north and east Calgary.

The City pays artists to paint murals on the bridge supports to eliminate graffiti. The next page shows an example. This particular mural sums up Calgary's history, with scarlet-coated Mounties who founded the place, cowboys who gave the city its first major industry (beef packing), and the transcontinental railroad that grew Calgary from a hamlet to a city.



The new pedestrian bridge that connects the island to the downtown core.



After the Stampede rodeo concludes in early July, the festival season begins in Calgary. Every weekend there is always something happening in the city. Ethnic and folk music festivals are downtown at Olympic Plaza, Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall, and/or Prince’s Island. When the dry season begins in August, community associations throughout the city begin staging street festivals.

I try to take in as many street festivals as I can but don’t report them all because they tend to be the same. Five or six blocks plus side streets are barricaded by police, a hundred or more business and non-profit groups set up tents along the sidewalks, a dozen food trucks line up on the side streets, and several tens of thousands of Cowtowners descend on the festival. Most of the exhibitors and food trucks are the same from one festival to another.



I live in the Marda Loop neighbourhood of central Calgary, which has one of the biggest street festivals. It actually takes up both 33 Avenue SW and 34 Avenue, plus the connecting side streets. The festival is called Marda Gras. Note the spelling, “Marda”, not “Mardi”.

Marda was a businesswoman back in the early days when it was in the outermost

Calgary suburbs. The loop was Route 7, one of the oldest bus routes in the city and still looping around on the same route.





I always look for this fellow, the Dogfather, who works all the festivals selling gourmet hot dogs and sausages. My favourite is the honey garlic smokie. A meal in itself.



All kinds of performers, again often the same ones at all the street festivals



TWIN BUTTE, WAY DOWN YONDER
photos by Dale Speirs

Twin Butte is in the deep southwest corner of Alberta. All that is left of it is a

crossroads general store and a house, and the house had a For Sale sign. Directly across the road from the store was this clump of polled Angus cattle. At the time I took the photo in mid-August, they outnumbered all the humans in Twin Butte, myself included.



I had hoped to take many photos of majestic mountains, but alas, forest fires burning just across the border in Washington State created a thick haze.

The photo below was taken south of Pincher Creek, and shows a typical area of the Twin Butte district. Quite a contrast to Marda Gras.



RADIO FICTION: PART 4. MORTUUS AERIS

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA #301, 302, and 310 respectively.]

Radio stations try to avoid “dead air”. In the literary world, the phrase is an obvious pun for a murder mystery set at a radio station, as shown by the novels below, all of which have the same title. Titles cannot be copyrighted, although names contained in them can be trademarked. So don’t bother writing a novel titled DARTH VADER IN THE GAME OF THRONES. Feel free, though, to crank out yet another DEAD AIR novel.

DEAD AIR (2002) by Iain Banks begins in London, England, where radio shock jock Ken Nott is at a brunch given by friends who are losing the lease on their artist loft because the building is being demolished. The story starts off slow and tedious, but the party livens up when people begin tossing stuff off the balcony. First some fruit, then junk, then unwanted furniture. Points for technical merit and artistic achievement in the tossing. Fortunately they hadn’t yet thrown off the television set when everyone’s cellphone begins ringing. The messages from friends or family are all the same; turn on the telly, because two passenger jets have just been flown into the Twin Towers.

Like every other radio and television show host in the world, Nott’s regular on-air schedule goes out the window. He suggests to his listeners that if Bin Laden is captured, wrap the body in pigskin and bury it 110 stories beneath Fort Knox. He and his producer squabble endlessly over who to insult next, the Muslims, the IRA, the Ulster Loyalists, or the Jews.

The death threats from listeners are laughed off but Nott gets into more serious trouble because he was diddling about with the wife of a gangster. Unlike his radio persona, Nott is not as strong and bloody-minded in private life. After a beating from the gangster that leaves him near death, the story trickles off to a close. This novel is noir-style life in mundania, not to be read on a rainy Sunday afternoon when you’ve nothing else to do and feeling depressed.

DEAD AIR (2009) by Deborah Shlian and Linda Reid is set at Ellsford University, a New England college where Sammy Greene (female, despite the name) has a talk show on the campus radio station WELL. The novel starts off with trouble and strife everywhere on campus, from animal-rights protestors to illicit medical experiments to corruption in the athletics faculty.

Bodies show up in wholesale quantities, mostly suicides but at least one definite murder. Greene is busy running about trying to get scoops on the deaths for her show. First she does a special on the suicides, and her producer has booked an episode for the spontaneous riot next Wednesday. As always, open lines; tell us what you think, the number to call is ... , etcetera.

Greene stumbles across not one but two conspiracies, first a right-wing televangelist planning to run for the Senate on the animal-rights platform, and a Japanese pharmaceutical corporation doing questionable experiments on Ellsford students in order to develop an AIDS vaccine. Who then is the sinner?

The novel takes a while to get going but there are several good twists back and forth. For Greene, the denouement means only one thing, not saving lives but scoring a scoop for her radio show.

DEAD AIR (2010) by Mary Kennedy is about a talk show psychologist at WYME’s “On The Couch With Maggie Walsh”. Walsh starts off with the usual nutcases, including a furrie cosplayer indignant about the station’s coverage of their convention, and a threatening call that coincides with a detonation shaking the building. When the smoke clears and the firefighters arrive, it is found not to be a bomb but a dim-witted secretary who wanted to make popcorn in the microwave using a sealed metal container.

That excursion aside, Walsh has on her show the New Age guru and psychic Sanjay Gingii. Her roommate Lark Merriweather is a devotee of the smarmy con man. Gingii doesn’t make it to the next sunrise, which demonstrates that he wasn’t much of a psychic. The police suspect Merriweather of the murder.

Walsh’s behaviour isn’t helping any. 32 years old and still behaving like a giddy teenager, both around eligible bachelors and police detectives. She does a Miss Marple, and it isn’t too long before obstruction and withholding evidence are among her offences. Merriweather was the last person to see Gingii, visiting his hotel room as a naive disciple who believed he admired her for her mind. When he made advances, she pushed him away and ran for it. So she says, but the police are busy finding evidence to fit the suspect.

Walsh blunders about stirring up trouble while she tries to find clues. Meanwhile she still has her radio show to do, and granted that free psychological counseling is worth what you pay for it, she doesn’t strike one as a psychologist that one would prefer to visit. Gingii turned out to be a con man

who specialized in investing and then losing people's money while much of it stuck to his pockets. The question therefore is not motive, since many people were happy to see him dead. In the final few pages, Walsh manages to get herself trapped at the point of a gun held by the murderer, one of Gingii's victims, but of course she makes it to the epilogue.

DEAD AIR (2012) by Scott Overton is about radio morning man Lee Garrett. His ratings are down at CTBX Sudbury and his marriage is gone completely. The radio station is steadily automating, including voice tracking (announcers pre-recorded chat between songs). The local skinheads are threatening him after he made jokes about them on the air. The afternoon man was just fired and replaced by software. All in all, not a good start to the day.

Someone begins harassing Garrett. Small acts of vandalism, disturbing notes, and chlorine bleach in his mouthwash. Then it gets serious with an attack by flamethrower from a masked man on a black snowmobile. (This is Canada, remember; we all drive snowmobiles in winter and wear touques.) The violence steadily escalates in proportion to the station's steady march to a format change and automation.

There are not one but two violent denouements, for it transpires that Garrett had made more enemies than he thought. The skinheads are first disposed of after a battle royale. Then a colleague at CTBX decides to take his revenge with a gun while Garrett is on the air. More blood, but Garrett survives, a sadder and possibly wiser man.

THE NOT-SO-DEAD PAST

The Internet claims another victim. In OPUNTIA #55.3, I discussed bloggers who lost their jobs because of postings they made that came back to haunt them. Canada will have a federal election on October 19, but the Liberal candidate for Calgary-Nose Hill was forced to withdraw as a candidate on August 18 because of tweets she made as a teenager. Ala Buzreba wrote things such as "*You're mother should have used a coat hanger*" to an Israel supporter, and a separate tweet dissing lesbians. The future will see many more politicians and celebrities taken out by things they wrote decades ago.

THE MAN FROM MONTENEGRO: PART 9

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 8 appeared in OPUNTIA #252, 253, 275, 278, 279, 289, 304, and 307.]

Nero Wolfe was a natural for radio, albeit the broadcast history of the old-time radio (OTR) shows was a complicated mess. Rex Stout licensed Wolfe and Goodwin for radio but the scripts were written by others. He basically held his nose while taking the money to the bank. The radio scripts were original stories, not adaptations from Stout's work.

The OTR shows moved from one network to another between 1943 and 1946, with a final series on NBC in the 1950-51 season. Five men played Wolfe over the life of the OTR shows, and seven men did Goodwin. Sydney Greenstreet is acknowledged as the best Wolfe in any acted format. The other four played Wolfe as a heavy baritone in leaden performances, but Greenstreet knew how to inflect Wolfe's voice with humour and sarcasm. The Goodwin actors were all adequate in their performances, but none stand out. Most of the Greenstreet OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.archive.org.

Wolfe a la Greenstreet.

The Greenstreet stories are not bad if you are not a critical listener. In the written canon, Goodwin is a ladies man, and this is magnified in the radio series to the point of occasional implausibility. Goodwin is so wolfish (pardon the expression) to women that he often makes heavy-handed propositions to them while their husband's body is still cooling.

Both the literary and radio plots are sometimes contrived. Rex Stout's excuse was that he wrote the individual stories over decades and occasionally lost track of their continuity and frequently repeated their plots. For a radio series that was recorded over a few months, such an excuse should not apply.

The Greenstreet series always opened with, in the announcer's words, the urgent ringing of the telephone, followed by "*Nero Wolfe's office, Archie Goodwin speaking.*" There is a one-sided conversation by Goodwin with a new client, while Wolfe snipes from his desk that he doesn't want the business. Goodwin ignores Wolfe and books an appointment. On hanging up, Goodwin reminds Wolfe that the bank account is low and they need the work. And so to the plot.

Stout did not write the radio plays but the scriptwriters did catch the essential essence of the milieu of Wolfe and Goodwin. Inspector Cramer doesn't make as many appearances as one might expect, and is often referred to by others but not heard, presumably to save money in casting. That has always been one advantage of literature over radio and television. You can write in as many characters and as many scene settings as you like without worrying about the production budget.

Wolfe a la CBC.

Nero Wolfe was revived for thirteen episodes in 1982 on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio network, this time using the original stories by Rex Stout. The series was later released on cassette by Durkin Hayes Publishing, of which I have a few. I do not listen to CBC Radio, so I only know a few of the episodes from the cassette series. A full cast production was used, and the production quality is excellent. The scripts stick reasonably close to the original stories. I have just three cassettes but each has two short stories, each story about fifty minutes long. CBC Radio is non-commercial, so that length allows for ten minutes of news and sports at the top of the hour, then the story uninterrupted by pitchmen touting appliances or toilet paper.

Durkin Hayes subsequently produced several cassettes which were readings by a male voice. The technical quality is okay but the readings are not as good as a full cast production. The main problem is a male reader trying to use several different high pitches to do the female voices just cannot do it well. I never did like readings of any kind, because they sound like someone reading a script, not only saying the dialogue but also reading out loud the stage directions.

Checklist Of Radio Shows.

Not all of these are still available, but www.archive.org has the Greenstreet series on NBC as free mp3s. The list is taken from Wikipedia.

ADVENTURES OF NERO WOLFE (ABC)

- "The Case of the Bloodstained Orchid" (July 5, 1943)
- "The Case of the Vacant Blonde" (July 19, 1943)
- "The Case of the Noisy Ghost" (July 26, 1943)
- "The Case of the Deadly Million" (August 2, 1943)
- "The Case of the Stuttering Records" (August 9, 1943)

- "Death Played a Dummy" (August 16, 1943)
- "The Case of the Departed Guest" (August 23, 1943)
- "The Case of the Murderous Signature" (August 30, 1943)
- "The Case of the Allergic Blonde" (September 6, 1943)
- "The Case of the Plastered Bride" (September 13, 1943)
- "The Case of the Missing Mind" (September 20, 1943)
- "The Case of the Red-Headed Baby" (September 27, 1943)
- "The Case of the Traveling Pajamas" (January 28, 1944)
- "The Case of the Superfluous Husband" (February 11, 1944)
- "The Princess Charming Case" (February 18, 1944)
- "The Case of the Bewildered Brothers" (February 25, 1944)
- "The Case of the Two-Headed Dolls" (March 3, 1944)
- "The Case of the Wandering Wife" (March 17, 1944)
- "The Case of the Passionate Pigeon" (March 24, 1944)
- "The Case of the Tattooed Terror" (April 7, 1944)
- "The Case of the Lonely Corpse" (April 14, 1944)
- "The Case of the Coy Cadaver" (April 21, 1944)
- "The Case of the Dying Portrait" (April 28, 1944)
- "The Case of the Million Dollar Baby" (May 5, 1944)
- "The Case of the Tenth Tornado" (May 12, 1944)
- "The Case of the Burning Book" (May 19, 1944)
- "The Wrong Leg Murder" (May 26, 1944)
- "The Case of the Invisible Murderer" (June 2, 1944)
- No title available (June 9, 1944)
- No title available (June 16, 1944)
- No title available (June 23, 1944)
- No title available (June 30, 1944)
- No title available (July 7, 1944)
- "The Last Laugh Murder Case [finale]" (July 14, 1944)

THE AMAZING NERO WOLFE (MBS)

- "The Case of the Shakespeare Folio" (December 15, 1946)

NEW ADVENTURES OF NERO WOLFE (NBC)

"Stamped for Murder"	(October 20, 1950)
"The Case of the Careworn Cuff"	(October 27, 1950)
"The Case of the Dear, Dead Lady"	(November 3, 1950)
"The Case of the Headless Hunter"	(November 10, 1950)
"The Case of the Careless Cleaner"	(November 17, 1950)
"The Case of the Beautiful Archer"	(November 24, 1950)
"The Case of the Brave Rabbit"	(December 1, 1950)
"The Case of the Impolite Corpse"	(December 8, 1950)
"The Case of the Girl Who Cried Wolfe"	(December 15, 1950)
"The Case of the Slaughtered Santas"	(December 22, 1950)
"The Case of the Bashful Body"	(December 29, 1950)
"The Case of the Deadly Sell-Out"	(January 5, 1951)
"The Case of the Killer Cards"	(January 12, 1951)
"The Case of the Calculated Risk"	(January 19, 1951)
"The Case of the Phantom Fingers"	(January 26, 1951)
"The Case of the Vanishing Shells"	(February 2, 1951)
"The Case of the Party for Death"	(February 16, 1951)
"The Case of the Malevolent Medic"	(February 23, 1951)
"The Case of the Hasty Will"	(March 2, 1951)
"The Case of the Disappearing Diamonds"	(March 9, 1951)
"The Case of the Midnight Ride"	(March 16, 1951)
"The Case of the Final Page"	(March 23, 1951)
"The Case of the Tell-Tale Ribbon"	(March 30, 1951)
"A Slight Case of Perjury"	(April 6, 1951)
"The Case of the Lost Heir"	(April 20, 1951)
"The Case of Room 304" [finale]	(April 27, 1951)

NERO WOLFE (CBC)

"Disguise for Murder"	(January 16, 1982)
"Before I Die"	(January 23, 1982)
"Counterfeit for Murder"	(January 30, 1982)
"The Cop Killer"	(February 6, 1982)
"Christmas Party"	(February 13, 1982)
"Cordially Invited to Meet Death"	(February 20, 1982)
"Man Alive"	(February 27, 1982)
"Instead of Evidence"	(March 6, 1982)

"Eeny Meeny Murder Mo"	(March 13, 1982)
"The Squirt and the Monkey"	(March 20, 1982)
"The Next Witness"	(March 27, 1982)
"Death of a Demon"	(April 3, 1982)
"Murder is No Joke"	(April 10, 1982)

ZINE LISTINGS

[I only list zines I receive from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on www.efanzines.com or www.fanac.org, then I don't mention it since you can read them directly.]

[The Usual means \$5 cash (\$6 overseas) or trade for your zine. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are still acceptable around the world.]

CHORRADA #9 (The Usual from Kris Mininger, Calvo Sotelo 13B, 4B, Plasencia 10600, Caceres, Spain) Trip report to Scotland and its hostels.