

OPUNTIA 344

World Wide Party 2016

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.

URBAN COYOTES

by Dale Speirs

I took the photo below in February 2003 when I was driving about in my job as City of Calgary Parks Dept. Trouble Calls Supervisor (retired 2010). This was in the Rosedale neighbourhood of central Calgary. I took the photo from inside the truck cab. As soon as I stepped out, the coyote took off at full speed. There are hundreds of coyotes in the city. They come up the river parks and look for prey. More on the next few pages.



LINEAR WORLD

by Dale Speirs

[This article originally appeared in CYBRER BUNNY #4, a zine published in 1994 by Tara and Robert Glover, of Leeds, England. I came across it while sorting out a batch of zines and decided it was worth another appearance.]

[At the time of its publication, I was a District Foreman for the City of Calgary Parks Dept., and was in charge of the Southland Depot. It was located at the north end of Mapleridge Golf Course in southeastern Calgary, and both were on an escarpment adjacent to Deerfoot Trail, the major north-south highway through the city. On the far side of Deerfoot Trail from us was a riverbank park and then the Bow River. Another freeway called Blackfoot Trail terminated directly in front the depot and formed a T-intersection with Southland Drive.]

[Immediately adjacent to us on the escarpment was a steep slope where coyotes denned. Parks Dept. workers considered them to be mascots. They were never any threat to us. As we went about our tasks, the coyotes went about theirs. We occasionally stopped to watch them, and they occasionally stopped to watch us. This is the story of one female coyote who raised several litters of pups over the years in a den just below Southland Depot.]

The coyote has no name. She has no concept of the wider world beyond her territory, where the treeless prairie stretches 1,500 km from the Rocky Mountains to the boreal forest of Ontario. Her world is made of linear strips. The Bow River, along the banks of which her ancestors came trotting from the wider world. Inside Calgary city limits, the Bow River floodplain in that area has been cut longitudinally down the middle by Deerfoot Trail SE. A strip of riverbank, a strip of six-lane divided highway, a strip of natural escarpment overlooking the Bow valley, a strip of golf courses and parks, and another strip of freeway. Then the suburbs, twisting about in confusing crescents, closes, drives, mews, and places, sprawling westward up into the foothills of the Rockies.

Does the coyote ever notice the blue and white Rockies glittering in the west in the morning sun? Or their jagged purple silhouette as the sun sets behind them in the evening? Probably not. She is mostly crepuscular, and in the day her view is blocked by the houses of the urban sprawl. Her world is bounded by the Bow River and the golf course along the escarpment. Deerfoot Trail, running along the base of the escarpment, has six lanes of traffic at 140 km/hr, except during peak hours when it becomes a 50-km long parking lot. 20,000 vehicles per hour travel it.

Deerfoot Trail effectively isolates the escarpment and turns the slope into a *de facto* wildlife sanctuary. For birds, the freeway is of no account. Two seconds to fly over it as they travel between the riverbank on one side and the

escarpment on the other. For coyotes, the freeway is a major barrier, crossed at great risk. In the ditch on the escarpment side is the carcass of a coyote who didn't make it. Hit by a vehicle, it lived long enough to crawl into the ditch. Wounded animals try to hide, so as not to become a target for predators looking for easy eats. This coyote found a drainage sump, where it laid down and died. The magpies and ravens discovered the corpse and took what they could.

On the escarpment above the ditch is where the nameless female coyote had her den. The slope is part of the golf course. Along the top are the fairways and greens, the garbage cans and buildings that provide food to a population of mice and ground squirrels. (There are no rats in Alberta.) The rodents live on the slope and commute to the feeding grounds above.

The coyote hunts along the slope, sometimes by day. Ears pricked up, head down, nose sniffing for the scent of prey, she trots along the slope. Below her, 20,000 vehicles per hour are as oblivious to her as she is to them. She will scavenge what she can get and the magpies haven't already beaten her to. Grasshoppers, berries, mice, ground squirrels, snowshoe hares, whatever fills her stomach and indirectly those of her pups.

Her world is mostly the linear strip of the escarpment, but hunger is a great motivator, and she often travels across the golf course to the houses on the other side. There are cats and small dogs in many backyards, as good a food source as any ground squirrel or snowshoe hare.

The cats are rarely caught unless she can surprise them napping. They have the advantage of being able to travel in three dimensions and escape her by climbing a fence or tree. Domestic dogs are stupid. They may have some of the basic instincts of self-defense, but are inclined to still be barking in defense of their territory by the time the coyote has slashed their throats.

Canis latrans is the scientific name for coyotes, translated as “barking dog”. I've never heard one howling in the city, or for that matter back on the ranch where I grew up. If they do bark or howl in the city, they are drowned out by the traffic noise. And they are dogs, and will cross-breed. It is illegal to keep wolf or coyote half-breeds, but few would want to because they are unmanageable.

The nameless coyote with her den on the slope was not harassed by the golf course staff. They knew she reduced the number of ground squirrels which

might otherwise be tempted to dig burrows on the fairways. Since she does not travel on the fairways by day, golfers are unaware of her existence. The homeowners on the other side assume that Fluffy went missing because he was hit by a car somewhere. Rarely, if ever, can anyone find evidence that a coyote was the cause.

The snowshoe hares are bolder than coyotes, often sunning themselves in the middle of a park. They allow humans to approach within about five metres before moving. At first, the hares move slowly in a hobble, but rush them and they accelerate to full speed, bounding out to a safe distance, then stopping to see what you might do next.

Calgary has a common boundary at its southwest corner with the Tsuu T’ina Reserve. They have their share of mythology and stories, one of which is that when the human race has disappeared from Earth, the coyote will still be around. As Calgary sprawls, it is interpenetrated by strips of freeways, utility rights-of-way, riverbank parks, and other linear worlds that provide a home to coyotes. The urban coyote population is increasing and they are well adapted to city life. The pups of the nameless coyote that lives in our linear world will disperse further into the city.



UTILITY BOXES OF CANMORE

photos by Dale Speirs

In previous issues of this zine, I’ve illustrated various utility boxes in Calgary that have been painted as part of a graffiti reduction scheme. When I went out to the mountains this spring, I found that the town of Canmore had done the same thing over the winter.



EDGAR GALLOPING POE: PART 3

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 and 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #325 and 332.]

Edgar Dying Poe.

The death of Edgar Allan Poe occurred under strange circumstances that have been the subject of much speculation ever since. His death was noted in the newspapers because he was a celebrity at the time. EAP was last seen alive in good condition just before midnight September 26, 1849. He was leaving Richmond, Virginia, on a train journey to New York City to drum up funds for a new magazine he would edit.

EAP vanished for a week and was next seen in a tavern in Baltimore, Maryland, on October 3, drunk to the point of insensibility. He was wearing someone else's clothes, two sizes too big for him and the kind worn by lower classes. After being recognized for who he was, he was taken to a hospital where he lingered delirious four days before dying on the morning of October 7. Attempts to interrogate him were fruitless. He was incoherent and babbling, sometimes shouting out "*Reynolds!*". He had no friends or family by that name.

There was no coroner's inquest. EAP was a famous author known to be an alcoholic, and since his final symptoms resembled delirium tremens, the coroner, family, and friends saw no need for an inquest. Accounts of his death were published in newspapers as a cautionary tale, and everyone accepted alcohol as the cause of death.

Over the nearly 170 years since then, many causes have been proposed for his death. Assorted diseases and medical conditions were trotted out, with no physical evidence to support them save for contemporary descriptions of EAP's symptoms. EAP was a binge drinker who stayed sober for long periods of time and then went on multi-day booze-ups. Another proposal is that he fell afoul of "coopers", who drugged men and then trotted them around to different polling booths to vote for their candidate. There was a federal election on October 3, and cooping was a common problem in the area.

MIDNIGHT DREARY is a 1998 book by John Evangelist Walsh that comes to a different idea about EAP's final days. Walsh reviews all the past hypotheses about how EAP met his death. They had few, if any, facts to support their

conclusions. After setting up and knocking down each of them, he gets to his own hypothesis.

Just prior to EAP's death, he had been courting a wealthy widow, Elmira Royster Shelton. Her brothers George, James, and Alexander Royster considered him a profligate fortune hunter, and were opposed to the romance. They felt, probably correctly so, that if a marriage took place, EAP would squander her money on his magazine startup. On very minimal evidence and lots of supposition, Walsh concludes that EAP was ambushed by the brothers. They force-fed him whiskey and when he was too drunk to defend himself, beat him badly. They then dumped him in a tavern to bring further disgrace on him.

Walsh's hypothesis is no better than his predecessors. The idea about the brothers only takes up the final chapter. Most of the book details all the people and circumstances of EAP's death. On that basis the book is a good read.

THE POE SHADOW is a 2006 novel by Matthew Pearl taking place just after EAP's mysterious death. Quentin Clark is a young Baltimore lawyer who decides to imitate EAP's fictional detective C. Auguste Dupin and determine why EAP died as he did. Clark became involved when he inadvertently saw EAP's internment at a cemetery, without ceremony, mourners, or flowers. He becomes indignant that a great author should be treated thus.

The novel backs and fills quite a bit at the start, in lieu of an infodump, to provide details of Clark's life. He is engaged to Hattie Blum, and practices law in partnership with Peter Stuart, a childhood friend. Clark has corresponded with Poe, and began researching his life. Out of nowhere, a stranger threatens him and tells him to lay off, thus beginning the plot.

Clark makes contact with a cousin of EAP, also a Baltimore lawyer. From there, he begins tracking friends and family of EAP, picking up threads of clues one by one. He becomes obsessed and is blocked by many who would rather he left the matter alone. The obsession threatens his engagement to Blum and his partnership with Stuart.

The novel shifts to France, where Clark meets the real-life Dupin, whose name is Duponte. After assorted vignettes and mini-adventures, he convinces Duponte to come to America with him. Back in Baltimore, they meet up with Baron Claude Dupin, who let EAP's mysteries go to his head and now plays at being a private detective.

The three of them make progress. The mysterious Reynolds is found, as indeed are many others from the shadows of EAP's life, and the list of cast members begins to grow. Clue upon clue is uncovered. Eventually a narrative of EAP's final days is constructed, at which point the novel fizzles out.

For all the detecting going on in the novel, there is nothing for a proper conclusion except the author's guess at how EAP spent his final days. No J'accuse! meetings, no villains exposed, just a muted ending explaining how the thing was done. Nonetheless, it was a good read, and events progressed logically to a clear, if muted, ending.

Edgar Amorous Poe.

MRS POE is a 2013 romance novel by Lynn Cullen. It is set in New York City in 1845, when "The Raven" had made EAP a celebrity. Virginia, his wife, is fragile and slowly dying of tuberculosis. He takes up with a single mother, Frances Osgood, who is trying to raise two children on next to nothing. She is an author who can't seem to sell anything. After meeting EAP, she is caught up in his spell and becomes part of a love triangle.

Virginia becomes dependent on Osgood, whether or not she suspects the truth. Both women are emotional wrecks. Much of the novel is soap opera, but it takes a sudden turn into the macabre in the final chapter.

Virginia's mother, the indomitable Mrs Clemm, knows her daughter is dying. She thinks that, using some sort of psychic mumbo-jumbo, she can transfer Virginia's soul into Osgood's body at the moment of death for both of them. Since Osgood is in good health, Clemm will ensure the transfer takes place on time by using a hammer on her. EAP finds out at the last moment and stops the attempted murder.

Edgar Adventurous Poe.

PYM (2010) by Mat Johnson (one "t" in his first name, not a typo) is a novel about an attempt to find the real places of EAP's only novel THE NARRATIVE OF ARTHUR GORDON PYM. The protagonist is Chris Jaynes, a black professor who didn't get tenure for good and sufficient reason. He becomes obsessed with EAP and in particular the Pym story, a very flawed book.

EAP was a short story and poem man whose one attempt at a novel clearly demonstrated that he had no sense of continuity in the longer form. Characters are introduced without warning and suddenly vanish with no explanation. The narrative is about a ship in Antarctic waters, where it encountered a polar bear, with tight curly hair no less. The crew land on Tsalal, a tropical island in the cold Southern Ocean, populated by Negroes instead of Polynesians. The narrator, Pym, is said to have died in Antarctica at the story's end, yet the novel begins with a preface from him dated long after his return to the USA.

Jaynes comes into possession of an 1837 manuscript that appears to have been the source of EAP's novel. It also appears to be factual, and Jaynes is excited at the thought there really might be a Tsalal. He gets up an expedition of misfits, an all-black crew, to travel to what he thinks is utopia. This being the modern age, the expedition has its own Website, and judges its success not by what they are finding but by how many posts they get on their blog.

Instead of Tsalal, the ship fetches up in the ice sheet on a different island. The explorers find a tunnel in the ice and follow it down. There are albino humanoids on the island, white Bigfoots if you will. They take the expedition members hostage and use them as slaves.

Meanwhile, something has gone terribly wrong in the outside world. News reports indicate a collapse of civilization worldwide, then all telecommunications are cut off. There is some sort of Armageddon happening but just what is unknown. The expedition is rescued from the ice island but only to another hideaway in the Southern Ocean, a settlement of people who wanted to get away from it all and did, living in a biosphere dome under the ice.

Paradise is not trouble-free, and the dome is attacked by the albino Bigfoots who want revenge on their escaped slaves. Everything and almost everyone is destroyed in the final conflict. A few escape and finally arrive at Tsalal, at which point the novel trickles to a close.

The novel is mildly humorous throughout, with lots of bizarre plot turns that are never fully explained. The narrative makes several major jumps without explaining anything in between. Nonetheless, it is a worthy read and much different from the average SF novel.

THE MAN FROM MONTENEGRO: PART 13

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 12 appeared in OPUNTIA's #252, 253, 275, 278, 279, 289, 304, 307, 319, 332, 335, and 337.]

THREE AT WOLFE'S DOOR compiles three novellas from 1960. It opens with "Poison A La Carte", where Wolfe and Goodwin attend the annual banquet of the Ten For Aristology. To save you the trouble of looking it up, aristology means the science of dining, although Wolfe protests that dining is an art, not a science. He wasn't a member and admitted that when they first phoned, he himself had to look up the word in the dictionary. The Ten want to borrow Wolfe's chef Fritz Brenner to prepare a gourmet meal, so naturally Wolfe and Goodwin are invited along, making it an even dozen sitting down at the table.

The company are waited upon by twelve maidens in purple stolas, one for each man at the table. Originally they hired waitresses for their dinners, who kept tripping in the stolas, so now they used a dozen young actresses from an agency. The actresses were used to walking in costumes, and for \$50 plus a gourmet meal, serving such a table was a nice gig to have.

Naturally there is a murder. During the first course, one of the guests, Vincent Pyle, complains there is sand in his caviar, but he is a rude boy to begin with and the other guests take no note. They do take note after the second course, when Pyle becomes ill from what is soon determined to be arsenic. He is taken to a bedroom while waiting for a doctor to arrive but dies before the dessert. The women were each assigned to one specific diner, but it transpires there was a mixup in the serving order for that first course, which makes investigation more difficult.

The subsequent investigation narrows the suspects down to five women. Pyle turns out to have had a nasty history with aspiring actresses, sufficient for the motive. Wolfe decides on the culprit with the help of a charade, where one of the chef's at the fateful dinner phones each of the women and says that he saw what she did. Four of the women complain to the police or Wolfe, while the fifth, Carol Annis, arranges a restaurant date where she tries to flavour the chef's spaghetti with arsenic and is caught in the act by undercover police.

The story is about average, with a good start and then Wolfe muddling through because Stout was muddling through. Remember the name Annis though, because it is not common. I gave away the name of the murderer because Rex

Stout re-used the name in a strange way in three stories written the following year. (See below in the Trifecta section.)

"Method Three For Murder" has Goodwin in a tiff with Wolfe and quitting (for about the fortieth time) when Mira Holt approaches him on the doorstep with a fantastic story. She made a bet with another woman about being a female cab driver and now has a cab with a dead body in the back. While driving the cab, she had stopped and gone to a building to talk to her separated husband Waldo Kearn. He didn't answer the door and when she returned to her cab, the body was in the back seat with a knife sticking out of it.

The body is that of Kearn's girlfriend, which explains why Holt didn't go straight to the police because she would be blamed. Holt covered it up with a canvas and went driving for help, finally deciding on Wolfe. Goodwin and Wolfe patch up their differences and take on the case.

The plot was rather elaborate, with a cast of about a dozen characters, some of them lying to everybody else, and far too many of them with bad manners. The key to the case is something that happened when Holt first arrived at the brownstone. Police arrived on the scene minutes later and searched the cab. There were no witnesses to the original incident, and the body was covered so a passerby couldn't see it, so who called the police about it? The murderer, obviously.

With that it becomes apparent that the dead woman was merely a prop, and the murderer wanted revenge against Holt for something else. This time Rex Stout plays fair and drops a clue in the text, and the J'accuse! meeting doesn't rely on hidden knowledge. The story is average, mainly because the plot is too complicated.

"The Rodeo Murder" begins with a bunch of infield competitors performing at the Madison Square Gardens. They talk the way city slickers think all cowboys talk, with Texas accents thick enough to slice with a knife and a corn pone vocabulary. I was pleased that Rex Stout gave a shout-out to Calgary, although that was just a passing mention by one of the cowboys bragging about his rodeo trophies, one of which he won at the Stampede. Cowtown played no further part in this Noo Yawk adventure.

The opening sequence is set in the penthouse terrace of Lily Rowan, an idle heiress who is Goodwin's girlfriend. She was usually only mentioned in

passing in most of the stories after she was introduced in *SOME BURIED CAESAR* (reviewed in *OPUNTIA* #253). In that novel, Goodwin and Wolfe were chased by a bull out in the country, leading her to give Goodwin a pet name of Escamillo.

The rodeo contestants have been invited to her place for a publicity stunt. A cowboy will ride down the street and other cowboys will attempt to lasso him from the terrace with a 100-ft lariat. The contestants each have three tries in three rounds for nine attempts at successful rope dropping. One cowboy does it twice and another does it once, so there is a clear winner.

Pause for digression. I grew up on a cattle ranch (see *OPUNTIA* #60.5) and used shorter ropes when lassoing cattle. I have to wonder how a cowboy could handle a 100-ft rope, even allowing for him just dropping the rope straight down. The weight of such a long rope is considerable.

I never used such long ropes on the ranch, but years later, as a professional tree pruner, I sometimes used them for tree falling in confined areas where a bucket truck couldn't reach. The rope would be tied to the top of the tree and the other end to a heavy truck, which would back away and keep tension on the rope so that the tree would drop in the right direction when felled. I would loop a 100-ft rope over my shoulder and climb up the tree, and that rope was very heavy, not something to be twirled about.

Meanwhile, back at the penthouse, after the contest is over, the guests are mingling. There is some bad blood between the cowboys and cowgirls over who got fresh with whose woman, so the reader is not surprised that a body is found strangled in a storage room. The scenes move back and forth between the brownstone and the police station. Rowan is upset that her hospitality was abused by one of the guests who committed murder, so she hires Wolfe. The police aren't much help because they keep going off on wild-goose chases every time someone phones in an anonymous tip. The guests aren't just lying; several of them are actively sabotaging Wolfe and Goodwin with those phone calls.

The truth will out though. Wolfe deduces that the jealousies between the cowfolk are not the real reason for the murder. He sends some of his other legmen to investigate the backgrounds of the guests, working on the premise that if the motive wasn't sex, then it was probably money. That indeed breaks the case open. A fairly good story overall, ah reckon.

HOMICIDE TRINITY collects three stories from 1962. The first is "Eeny Meeny Murder Mo" and starts off with a re-used plot from "Disguise For Murder" (which appeared in *CURTAINS FOR THREE*, reviewed in *OPUNTIA* #335). A woman calls unannounced at Wolfe's office, Goodwin goes upstairs to the rooftop greenhouse to talk to Wolfe while leaving the woman unattended in the office, and returns to find her strangled with a necktie that Wolfe had left on his desk. From there, the plot does freshen up to a different line.

Bertha Aaron's story, before she suddenly departed this vale of tears, was that she was a secretary of a law firm handling an expensive and spectacular divorce case that was very much in the news. She had seen a partner in the firm having lunch with the opposing client, Mrs Sorell, and came to Wolfe to see if he could gather evidence. She never had a chance to name the partner before she was slugged on the back of the head with a paperweight from Wolfe's desk, then strangled with his necktie.

The suspects are narrowed down to three partners in the law firm and Sorell. Inspector Cramer comes by occasionally to bluster as he often does and to try to bully Wolfe, but as usual, doesn't succeed. Some skillful misdirection is used, and the reader will think it was a law partner, but he was only an accomplice.

That Sorell was able to murder Aaron was only due to random chance, reasonably well explained and accounted for. The J'accuse! meeting is rather interesting, with Sorell debating with Wolfe in his office, and half the law firm hiding in an adjacent soundproofed room with Goodwin, listening in via a speaker.

"Death Of A Demon" opens with Lucy Hazen visiting Wolfe for a half-hour consultation. She is on the outs with her husband Barry, sleeping in separate bedrooms. He had a .32 revolver which she removed from his desk and brought to Wolfe, asking that he keep it. Before she even leaves the premises, the news comes that Barry's body was found in a Manhattan alley, shot once in the back.

Since the meeting cannot possibly be kept secret, although the gun can, Goodwin test fires a bullet in their basement range and gives it to Inspector Cramer without saying where the bullet came from. Naturally Cramer is foaming at the mouth, but he can't do anything until the bullet is tested and found to match the one in the dead man. It turns out to have been from a different gun, found in Hazen's car, so that was a false lead.

Barry was supposedly a public relations agent but actually was a blackmailer. He soaked his victims not by demanding a ransom delivered at midnight to a waterfront warehouse, but by charging them a monthly fee for supposed P.R. work, as if an elderly woman needed to pay \$2,000 a month for that or a man not in the public eye should cough it up as well. The suspects are quickly narrowed down to Lucy plus four of Barry's blackmail victims.

Wolfe uses the principle of the dog that did nothing in the night, and claimed to have found the evidence Barry was holding to coerce his victims. The victim who didn't rush to buy the goods was the one who did it, already having claimed the items after murdering Barry. It was a fair read and the culprit could be identified during the J'accuse! meeting just before Wolfe pronounced his guilt.

"Counterfeit For Murder" is the third story of this book. It had a complicated publishing history and appeared in three different versions. I will review it later as what I call a trifecta story.

THE MOTHER HUNT is a 1963 novel that begins with the widow Lucy Valdon visiting Wolfe to have him find out who abandoned a baby boy at her doorstep. A note was attached saying that the boy's father was Lucy's recently deceased husband Richard. The only clue is that the buttons on the baby's clothes were handmade from white horsehair. Goodwin manages to get a trace on a young woman named Anne Tenzer, whose Aunt Ellen out in the country makes the buttons.

Ellen gets a brief walk-on part but a few pages later is sent on to the next world by a strangler unknown. While police are hunting for her murderer, Wolfe is hunting for the mother. Detective work is not always a thrilling rendezvous at midnight in waterfront warehouses or J'accuse! meetings where the murderer stands up and screams "Yes! I did it! And I'd gladly do it again!". Goodwin and three hired legmen spend weeks tracking down women of child-bearing age who knew the late Richard Valdon and might have borne his child. Like much of police work, nothing results and it was all a waste of time, but it had to be done.

Lucy Valdon wanted the baby to be kept a secret but Wolfe convinces her to let it be known that the nurse took her for a stroll twice a day in an adjacent park. The pram is rigged with hidden cameras to photograph any young women who come near. One such woman is identified; she is known to Lucy and had worked briefly with Richard about the right time for a baby. Some more drudgery detective work and she is positively identified as the mother. She says

she didn't leave the baby on the doorstep but had a friend do it and will talk to him about coming clean publicly. When she is found strangled a day later, that identifies the murderer, but she never said his name.

Wolfe has the usual meeting, at the Valdon house rather the brownstone. The guilty party is not immediately named but the reader is led from one red herring to another before the answer is revealed. The murderer is a friend who had been previously questioned by Wolfe but had refused any kind of co-operation and vanished from the rest of the story until the final denouement. His motive seemed over-exaggerated but other than that the novel was a good read.

The Gemini Stories.

Not once but several times, Rex Stout rewrote a story to please an editor after the original had already been in print. He generally expanded a short story into a novella by adding details and dialogue. Sometimes he changed the second half of the plot. On one occasion he converted a book into a novella. The revised version would be published under a different title. Stout often used the same plots in his stories to begin with, and the Gemini stories only reinforced his reputation for doing so. Three of these rewrites were collected in 1985, a decade after Stout's death, under the title DEATH TIMES THREE.

The first story, "Bitter End", is the most unusual. Stout had created several other detectives before the success of Nero Wolfe made them redundant. Tecumseh Fox was one such detective, but he was mediocre at best. Stout wrote a Fox novel in 1940 titled BAD FOR BUSINESS. As was common in those days, magazines bought first serial rights to publish the story before it appeared in book form. The Fox novel was offered to THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE but the editor rejected it as it was.

He told Stout that he would pay double if it were rewritten as a Wolfe novella, and the thing was done as "Bitter End". The two stories had identical plots and supporting characters, but Fox (who worked alone) was replaced with Wolfe and Goodwin. Both versions appeared in November 1940 in separate publications, which must have astonished many readers. I haven't read the Fox version, just the Wolfe variation.

"Bitter End" begins at the dinner table. Wolfe and Goodwin are dining in the brownstone when some liver pate, Tingley's Tidbits by name, turns out to have been spiked with a large dose of quinine, extremely bitter tasting. That sets the

stage for the unannounced arrival of Amy Duncan, niece of Arthur Tingley. She had worked for her uncle but after a falling out with him, was now employed by his competitor, the Provisions and Beverage Corporation. P&B have been trying to buy out Tingley, and Duncan works for his mortal enemy, Leonard Cliff, who is a P&B vice-president.

Goodwin visits the Tingley factory and while they are happy to have a detective help them, they are all cantankerous and on edge from the sabotage. The murder doesn't take long to appear, Tingley himself in his office. Duncan found the body and then was immediately slugged from behind. The factory workers all suspect each other, and Tingley had a ne'er-do-well son who never worked if he could help it and needed an inheritance. Goodwin makes some interesting connections during his investigation, and the story has several good twists and turns.

This was from the early part of Stout's career, when he was still at his peak and hadn't yet begun to be careless about recycled plots or continuity errors. The plot is not only well done, but the important clues, which seemed like trivial padding at first, were there for the reader. Wolfe brings the murderer to justice because she babbled one little detail too many.

The next Gemini story is "Murder Is No Joke", which appeared in the collection AND FOUR TO GO published in February 1958. It begins with Flora Gallant visiting Wolfe. Her brother Alec is a star fashion designer who came to America after the war (she arrived just before it started) and started a design house that is doing quite well. She is described by Goodwin as a dumpy middle-aged woman, poorly dressed considering she worked in a fashion shop. He thinks to himself, "... *if the shoemaker's son went barefoot, I supposed his sister could too.*"

Gallant is not their real name; they changed it during the war while in the French Resistance. Flora is concerned because Bianca Voss, a woman recently arrived from France, has insinuated her way into the company and is weaving an evil spell over her brother. Wolfe is asked to investigate but all Flora has is \$100, and he refuses the case as not worth his time.

Flora dials the number of Voss so that Wolfe can talk directly to her and possibly be convinced by her evilness to take the case. During the conversation, Voss is apparently murdered while sitting in her office at the fashion shop. Wolfe would therefore testify as to the time of the murder. Wolfe later notices

a newspaper report about the supposed suicide of an actress named Sarah Yare, and correlates the two items. Goodwin goes to the fashion shop and asks about Yare. He was not expecting her to be associated with the shop, but to his surprise got spectacular reactions from the staff about her, proving the two cases were connected.

Wolfe and Goodwin soon realize that Flora had not dialed Voss's telephone number but that of Yates, who had been hired to impersonate Voss and pretend she had been murdered. They come to this conclusion when they test dial the two phone numbers. They realize the dialing sounded different because of the time it took for the dial to ratchet back before the next numeral was dialed. A telephone number with low numerals such as 1, 2, 3, and 4 can be dialed more quickly than one with many 7, 8, and 9s. This is a point that will escape readers of the Millennial generation who have only seen touch-tone desk sets and have never used a dial phone.

The resolution comes in one of those dramatic meetings in Wolfe's office, when the facts of multiple love triangles are exposed. Lots of red herrings are strewn about. The murderer turns out to be a female co-worker of Alec's who had been jilted by him. A rushed finish.

The editor of SATURDAY EVENING POST asked Stout to enlarge this story for serialization in the magazine. Under the new title "Frame-Up For Murder", it appeared in the late June/early July issues in 1958, only a few months after its predecessor had appeared in book form. It was never published again until DEATH TIMES THREE.

The first major change was that Flora Gallant became an attractive young woman who intercepted Goodwin while he was tailing a man on another case. She comes on to him, they have dinner, and then she books an appointment with Wolfe the next day. The plot proceeds as per the original version, except that she offers Wolfe \$300 for the investigation. It may have been inflation. In the extra pages added by Stout, Flora plays a greater role with more dialogue and scenes. The end result is the same, with the same guilty woman, but the story reads better because it has been more fully fleshed out.

The Trifecta.

Another story had three published versions. It was first published as "The Counterfeiter's Knife" over three January 1961 issues of the weekly magazine

SATURDAY EVENING POST. It was then reprinted with a new title “Counterfeit For Murder” in the 1962 collection HOMICIDE TRINITY. A third version in manuscript titled “Assault On A Brownstone”, rewritten that year but never published during Stout’s lifetime, appeared in DEATH TIMES THREE.

“Counterfeit For Murder” begins with Hattie Annis, a middle-aged landlady, trying to barge into the brownstone. As she arrives, Goodwin was just about to leave on an important errand and Wolfe is with his orchids up in the rooftop greenhouse, so Goodwin tells her to come back later. She gives him a package and asks him to hold it until she returns. When Goodwin gets back, there is a different woman waiting on the steps, Tammy Baxter, who is a tenant of Annis and is worried about her behaviour. The conversation goes nowhere and she leaves.

Not long after, Annis returns, half-dead after a car jumped the sidewalk nearby and tried to run her down. She manages to walk the rest of the way back to Wolfe’s before collapsing. Goodwin takes her inside to look after her, and she reveals the package she gave him contains \$10,000 in counterfeit currency. She had found it by accident, hidden in the parlor of her establishment, which the tenants shared.

Just then, a Secret Service agent named Albert Leach shows up enquiring about Baxter and Annis, but Goodwin stalls him and sends him away without him knowing that Annis was in the next room. Her response on learning a T-man was there is to spit venom. She is a cop hater, saying her father was shot by one. She wants Wolfe to turn in the counterfeit currency for a share of the reward, but he points out that there probably isn’t any.

Goodwin escorts Annis back to her house, where the plot starts with the body of Baxter being found in the parlor with a knife plunged into her chest. Baxter was an undercover agent for the Secret Service, looking for the source of the counterfeits. At that point, a three-way contest develops between NYPD Homicide, the District Attorney, and the Secret Service over who is running the investigation. The feds are in first with a court order to seize the package, which angers the DA to no end.

Wolfe solves the crime in one of his usual meetings, with all present. Two of his hired legmen found the print shop and he dumps that out on the floor, along with identifying one of the tenants as the murderer. As Inspector Cramer and Leach squabble over who gets to make the arrest, the scene fades to black.

There is a brief epilogue with Annis, Wolfe, and Goodwin at a later date, squabbling over Wolfe’s bill for expenses.

“Assault On A Brownstone” has the same text up to the point where Annis and Baxter have come and gone from the brownstone. From there, the plot reverses between day and night. Annis is killed by that hit-and-run driver, not just injured as in the previous story. Call it an alternative history of fiction. Goodwin then examines the package she left behind and finds \$9,000 in counterfeit currency instead of \$10,000. He makes the trip to the Annis house, by himself obviously, and calls on Baxter. After talking to her and the other tenants, he returns home.

Leach shows up at the Wolfe residence, demanding to know if they had the counterfeit currency. Goodwin decides it would be wise to take the paper out of the house and hide it in a locker at Grand Central Station. A good thing too, for when he returns to the brownstone, Leach and his cohort are executing a search warrant.

They leave without it and in a bad mood almost as bad as Wolfe. He and Goodwin consider what to do next, and make up a fake package like the one Annis left behind, a counterfeit of a counterfeit. Goodwin goes back to the Annis house to interrogate the tenants. He lets slip that he has the package in his overcoat which he left in the parlor, then hides where he can see who comes to steal it. Baxter does.

Goodwin takes her to Wolfe. As they arrive, Leach is there to arrest Goodwin. The package in the overcoat being a fake, Leach leaves in disgust. The incident exposes Baxter as a Secret Service agent, since Leach had to have been tipped off by her. Yet another charade is cooked up when Goodwin agrees to get the real counterfeit package (yes, that’s an oxymoron) and hide it in Annis’s room so that Baxter can recover it with a plausible cover story. As they set up the room, a tenant, the same one as in the previous story, comes in waving a knife. He loses the fight and gets his just punishment. The epilogue is with Baxter.

Of the two versions, the original seems better. The latter has a lot of mean-spirited people behaving badly. While that story is longer and more fully developed, it leaves more of a bitter taste than the original version.

PAPERPUNK
by Dale Speirs

With apologies to Bruce Bethke, whose 1983 story “Cyberpunk” introduced the word into the English language and created a new sub-genre.

Until the late 1600s and early 1700s, there were no postal systems as we understand them today, nor any mass-market publications that even the lower-classes read. Letters were sent on official business by government and church officials via their own messengers. Merchants and travelers depended on private couriers. The lower classes were illiterate and spent their entire lives in a village or a single valley, so mail service was moot for them. Then it changed.

In the 1600s, printing became cheap enough that a flood of pamphlets was unleashed in Europe, espousing every political and religious cause one could think of, and reporting every scandal and news sensation that looked like it could make money. A public hanging in Newgate or a royal divorce in some European court was good for several dozen pamphlets. Eventually newspapers would evolve but in the beginning the preferred reading material was the pamphlet that was hawked in the streets for a penny or two.

The sensations of the day may or may not have been reported accurately. Internet blogs where posters call each other names and seldom check the facts are nothing new. Pamphleteers were partisans, and customers read the ones that reinforced their own beliefs. Jacobites were the Social Justice Warriors of their day. People followed court scandals as trivial as the Kardashian sisters.**

When The Papernet Was Being Born.

MR COLLIER’S LETTER RACKS (2012) by Dror Wahrman is about the illusionist paintings of Edward Collier (1640-1708), a Dutch artist who emigrated to England and specialized in the trompe l’oeil method. It is the most difficult type of painting, so realistic that the objects on the canvas look three-dimensional and fool the eye for a few seconds. Collier specialized in painting letter racks that held a newspaper or two, letters received, pamphlets, a letter opener, and writing implements. He painted hundreds of them. His paintings are extremely accurate, right down to the postmarks on the envelopes.

** Am I the only one noticing the Kardashians are the modern-day equivalent of the Gabor sisters of the 1960s? Both sets of sisters are famous for being famous, not because they accomplished anything useful.

Wahrman analyses the variant paintings of Collier in detail, and ties them in with the explosion of publishing in the 1600s. Collier’s paintings are so widely scattered around the world that no museum had more than one. Scholars who mentioned his work overlooked the significance that while the paintings were superficially similar, there were intentional differences.

It wasn’t until the advent of the World Wide Web that Wahrman could pull together images of Collier’s paintings from around the world and compare them side by side on the screen.

Collier used his paintings to subtly illustrate the issues of the day. The Jacobites were in full force during his time, and the folded newspapers on his painted racks showed headlines of the King addressing Parliament.

The English language was still evolving. Some of the newspapers in the paintings are dated Munday instead of Monday. Collier, like Shakespeare and many others of that era, signed his name differently each time. It was mass-market printing that stabilized the written word and standardized the alphabet in the 1700s. Only then in the English language did the letter pairs “i” and “j”, and the trio “u”, “v”, and “w” separate and become distinct.

Wahrman speculates that Edgar Allan Poe may have seen a Collier painting and been inspired to write “The Purloined Letter”. I suspect that more likely EAP saw plenty of real-life letter racks, even in his own home, because they were common everywhere.

I remember my grandmother’s letter rack in her kitchen, with letters from the Old Country that were meant to be shared with any interested visitors who could read Suomalais, assorted papers such as utility bills, holiday photographs, and recipe clippings from the local newspaper.

On the next page are two of Collier’s paintings. Spot the differences if you will.



WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2016

Calgary's annual readercon will be held this year on the weekend of August 12 to 14, returning to the Delta Hotel at Southland Drive SE and Bonaventure Drive. The membership cap is 650. As of June 19, they are more than 90% sold. The Steampunk Banquet is completely sold out. Details from: www.whenwordscollide.org

When Words Collide covers many genres of literature such as science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, westerns, and historical fiction. You can read my account of the 2015 event in OPUNTIA #318 to get an idea of the seminars and events. The Aurora Awards will follow after the Steampunk Banquet.

Above: Collier painting from 1690s.

Below: Collier 1704.



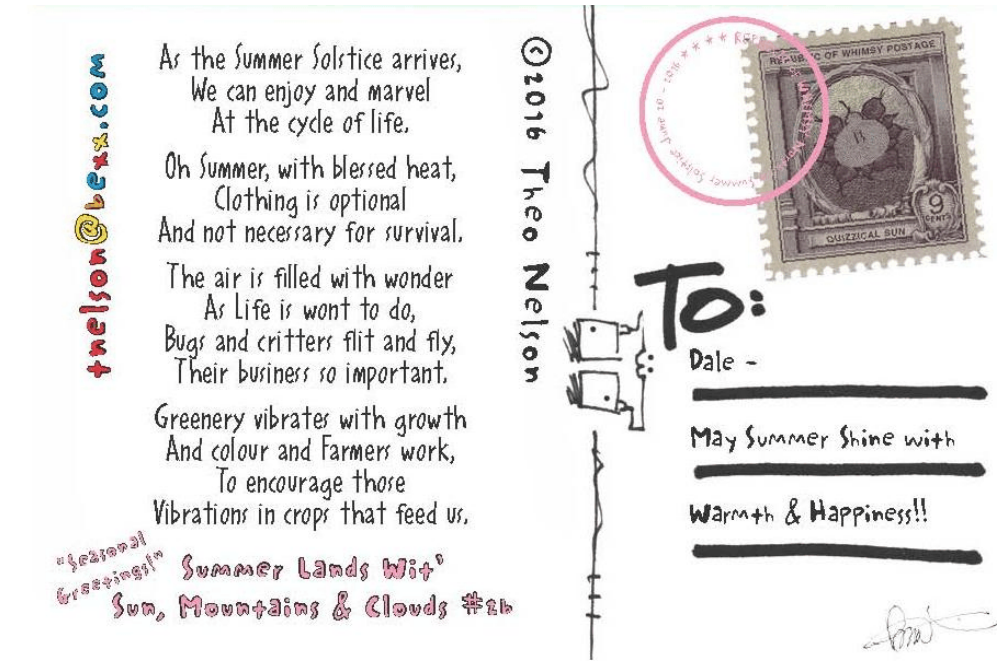
WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. 2016 was the 23rd year.

At 21h00 local time, everyone was invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of zinedom around the world. It was 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.

I celebrated in my traditional manner. At 21h00, I faced to the east and saluted those who have already celebrated. Then I faced north, then south, and toasted those in my time zone who were celebrating as I did. Finally, I faced west and raised a glass to those celebrating WWP in the later time zones. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

Theo Nelson of Calgary sent me this postcard. The view side is his own art.



SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

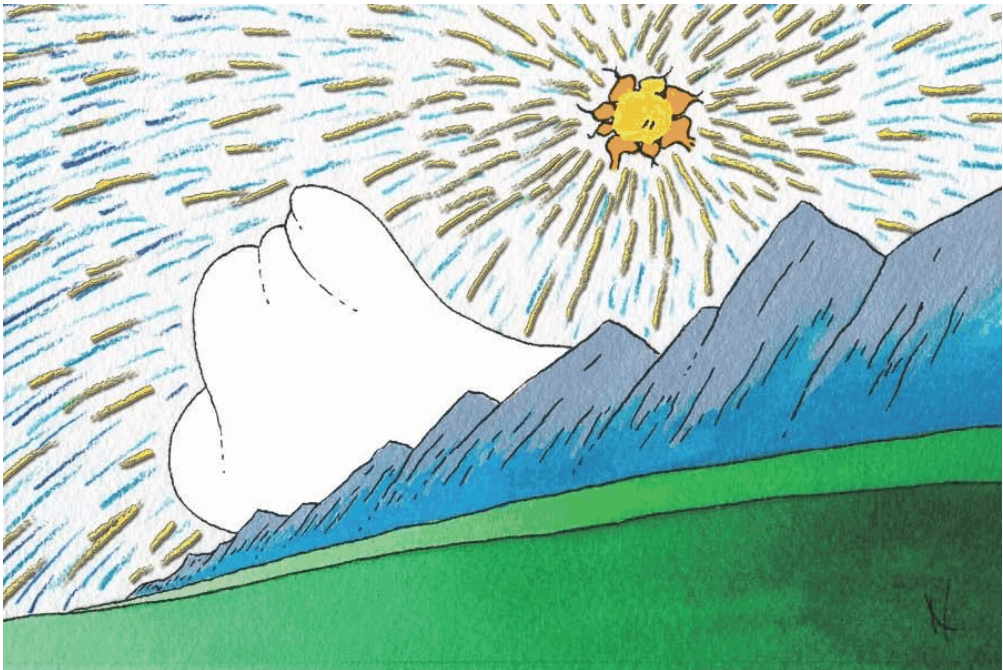
McKenzie, N.R., et al (2016) **Continental arc volcanism as the principal driver of icehouse-greenhouse variability.** SCIENCE 352:444-447

Authors' abstract: "*Variations in continental volcanic arc emissions have the potential to control atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂) levels and climate change on multimillion-year time scales. Here we present a compilation of ~120,000 detrital zircon uranium-lead ages from global sedimentary deposits as a proxy to track the spatial distribution of continental magmatic arc systems from the Cryogenian period to the present. These data demonstrate a direct relationship between global arc activity and major climate shifts: Widespread continental arcs correspond with prominent early Paleozoic and Mesozoic greenhouse climates, whereas reduced continental arc activity corresponds with icehouse climates of the Cryogenian, Late Ordovician, late Paleozoic, and Cenozoic. This persistent coupled behavior provides evidence that continental volcanic outgassing drove long-term shifts in atmospheric CO₂ levels over the past ~720 million years.*"

Speirs: All the carbon taxes in the world are nothing compared to one volcano.

Faigenbaum-Golovin, S., et al (2016) **Algorithmic handwriting analysis of Judah's military correspondence sheds light on composition of biblical texts.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:4664-4669

Authors' abstract: "*The relationship between the expansion of literacy in Judah and composition of biblical texts has attracted scholarly attention for over a century. Information on this issue can be deduced from Hebrew inscriptions from the final phase of the first Temple period. We report our investigation of 16 inscriptions from the Judahite desert fortress of Arad, dated ca. 600 BCE, the eve of Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem. The inquiry is based on new methods for image processing and document analysis, as well as machine learning algorithms. These techniques enable identification of the minimal number of authors in a given group of inscriptions. Our algorithmic analysis, complemented by the textual information, reveals a minimum of six authors within the examined inscriptions. The results indicate that in this remote fort literacy had spread throughout the military hierarchy, down to the*



quartermaster and probably even below that rank. This implies that an educational infrastructure that could support the composition of literary texts in Judah already existed before the destruction of the first Temple. A similar level of literacy in this area is attested again only 400 y later, ca. 200 BCE.”

DeCellesa, K.A., and M.I. Norton (2016) **Physical and situational inequality on airplanes predicts air rage.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:5588–5591

Authors’ abstract: “*We posit that the modern airplane is a social microcosm of class-based society, and that the increasing incidence of “air rage” can be understood through the lens of inequality. Research on inequality typically examines the effects of relatively fixed, macrostructural forms of inequality, such as socioeconomic status; we examine how temporary exposure to both physical and situational inequality, induced by the design of environments, can foster antisocial behavior. We use a complete set of all onboard air rage incidents over several years from a large, international airline to test our predictions. Physical inequality on airplanes—that is, the presence of a first class cabin—is associated with more frequent air rage incidents in economy class. Situational inequality, boarding from the front (requiring walking through the first class cabin) versus the middle of the plane, also significantly increases the odds of air rage in both economy and first class. We show that physical design that highlights inequality can trigger antisocial behavior on airplanes. More broadly, these results point to the importance of considering the design of environments, from airplanes to office layouts to stadium seating, in understanding both the form and emergence of antisocial behavior.*”

Speirs: There is a reason that the rich have learned to live in gated communities. They know it makes the lumpenproletariat resentful to see how the 1% live.

Mayera, J., P. Mutchlera, and J.C. Mitchell (2016) **Evaluating the privacy properties of telephone metadata.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:5536–5541

Authors’ abstract: “*Since 2013, a stream of disclosures has prompted reconsideration of surveillance law and policy. One of the most controversial principles, both in the United States and abroad, is that communications metadata receives substantially less protection than communications content.*

Several nations currently collect telephone metadata in bulk, including on their own citizens. In this paper, we attempt to shed light on the privacy properties of telephone metadata. Using a crowdsourcing methodology, we demonstrate that telephone metadata is densely interconnected, can trivially be re-identified, and can be used to draw sensitive inferences.”

Speirs: These researchers were able to use telecom records (as would any police investigator) of who the cellphone user called. They then cross-checked Facebook and other social media to build up a detailed portrait of unknown individuals without actually looking at any data other than publically-accessible links. They were able to identify if the person was single or married, what kind of health problems they had, what religion they were, and who their social groups were. It was not necessary to read texts or Web pages, only to know what numbers were dialed or email addresses, and what links were on a Facebook or other social media page. None of it involved hacking; all of it was from public data easily available.

Guadalupe Frias-De Leon, M., et al (2016) **Diversity and characterization of airborne bacteria at two health institutions.** AEROBIOLOGIA 32:187–198

Authors’ abstract: “*The aim of this study was to identify the types and abundance of airborne bacteria of two health institutions and to determine the genetic association between environmental and clinical isolates of Staphylococcus spp. Environmental sampling in institutions 1 and 2 was conducted for 1 year (dry and rainy seasons) using M Air T sampler. The bacteria and their susceptibility to antibiotics were identified. The colony-forming units per cubic meter (CFU/m3) of air were quantified for all the isolates, and the diversity and abundance of species were calculated. ... At both of the institutions, the genera most frequently isolated were Staphylococcus and Bacillus, and the greater concentration of airborne bacteria was detected during the dry season than the rainy season.*”

Speirs: Many people who go into a hospital come out with a different disease than the one they had when they went in.