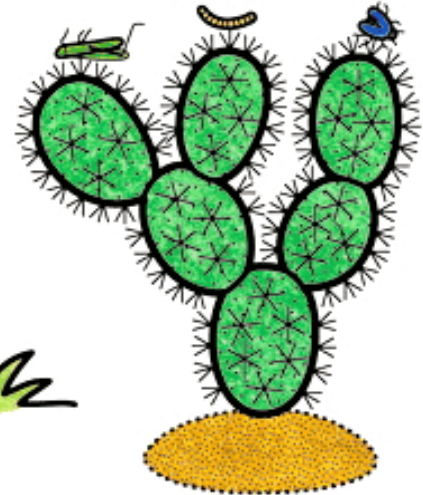


OPUNTIA 356



Butcher birds impale prey on cactus spines to eat later but sometimes they forget and it is left to rot.

I tell everyone it's organic jewelry to reduce the yuck factor.



TEDDY
HARVIA

Halloween 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.

EDGAR GALLOPING POE: PART 4

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA's #325, 332, and 344.]

Edgar Anthology Poe.



ON A RAVEN’S WING (2009) is an anthology edited by Stuart Kaminsky. It leads off with “Israfel” by Doug Allyn, about a rock musician named Izzy, who is a rising star now plummeting to the ground because of his drug use. Supposedly his guitar playing makes him one of the best, but in actuality he is a sad imitation of Syd Barrett. His Goth band’s gimmick is that they are themed on EAP, with songs based on his poems.

Roddy, the narrator and the only sober one in the band, accidentally snaps Izzy’s neck while trying to shake him out of his stupor to go on stage. He decides to impersonate Izzy and do the performance himself. Only after starting the show does he discover that Izzy had planned to immolate himself and had booby-trapped his position on the stage. Roddy finds this out the hard way. This is one of those annoying stories where the narrator dies at the end, which begs the question as to how his thoughts were recorded for the reader.

“The Golden Bug” by Michael A. Black is about U.S. Marine commandos infiltrating a Japanese-held island in the South Pacific during WW2. They were sent to make contact with resistance fighters previously sent in and who hadn’t been heard from since. They find that the sole survivor, named Legrand, has gone native and fallen in with cannibals. The tribe finished off the Japanese by eating them. Legrand found a gold beetle amulet which he expects will lead him to buried treasure. And so it does, along with all the usual adventures afterwards and a last-minute escape.

“William Allan Wilson” by Jon L. Breen is about a mid-list author, name as per the story title, who gets an offer to write a collection of EAP pastiches. They roll from his keyboard with ease until he gets to a Marie Roget pastiche. EAP based his story on the true incident of the death of Mary Rogers of New York City. Wilson decides to base his pastiche on the death of a young woman at Wilson’s college when he was a student there. He uses it to exact revenge on the man he thinks murdered her, and drives him to suicide.

“The Tell-Tale Purr” by Mary Higgins Clark pokes fun at cozy mysteries based on themes such as Miss Marple types who own a bookstore, cook, or, in this case, have cats. She adapts EAP’s vicious cat to a cozy mystery. A greedy man is tired of waiting for his grandmother’s inheritance, and decides to help her on the way to the next world sooner rather than later. She is nervous around cats, so he plots an elaborate method to frighten her to death. It fails, and he is resigned to her living to be 100.

“Nevermore” by Thomas H. Cook has a rabbi dealing with his dying father by reading EAP’s poems to him. They trigger memories in the old man about his divorce when the rabbi was a small boy. From there, the story goes into angst-ridden flashbacks. There are lots of references to EAP, but I got the impression that the story could just as easily used Coleridge or Tennyson as its source.

“Emily’s Time” by Dorothy Salisbury Davis is about a gentleman of leisure who marries a young woman half his age. He is also a cat lover, an important plot point. The wife leaves, the cat doesn’t, and various Poesian events happen. The story trickles out and is nothing more than a series of vignettes with a faint plot that goes nowhere.



“The Cask Of Castle Island” by Brendan DuBois is set in modern Boston. It is the revenge story you expect from the title, only instead of Amontillado there is cocaine. The bricked-up chamber is in Fort Independence, where EAP once served when he was in army. A straightforward re-telling, but not bad for all that.

“Bells” by James W. Hall is about a woman named Janet who hears the faint sound of bells in her apartment, but her husband Isaac doesn’t. She isn’t imagining them; Isaac rigged soft chimes hidden in the ventilation ducts, controlled by his laptop. He wants to be rid of her by insanity without having to pay a divorce settlement. The problem is, the bells go out of control. Isaac removes them but still hears them. Janet leaves and Isaac tears the walls out of the apartment trying to find the tell-tale bells. He is the one who goes insane.

“In My Ancestor’s Image” by Jeremiah Healy begins with a private investigator named Rory Calhoun (his mother was a movie fan) being hired by Edwina Ellen Poe, a mystery writer whose Edgar Award trophy was stolen. His investigation seems rather perfunctory, but he does find it. The maid took it because it reminded her of her father. Good thing he didn’t look like Lovecraft. There is another twist that seems very implausible but it does provide a happy ending.

“The Poe Collector” was apparently the last story written by prolific mystery writer Edward D. Hoch before his death. It is narrated by a bookseller who befriends a collector at an auction. One of the lots is a copy of the 1832-01-14 issue of the SATURDAY COURIER, a Philadelphia newspaper that had the distinction of publishing EAP’s first story “Metzengerstein”.

The lot is withdrawn for unknown reasons and the bookseller goes after the consignor. It turns out to be a fraud and he was rooked. The bunco man is caught by the bookseller’s girlfriend, who is suddenly identified as a police officer. She noticed a very esoteric error on the forged document. A deus ex machina ending, with an instant expert descending from the clouds to point out the solution.

“A Nomad Of The Night” by Rupert Holmes is about a Film Studies graduate student named Andris Riga, who has just produced a horror feature-length movie for under \$700 plus borrowed equipment and facilities at his alma mater. Now he has to try to get it distributed in theatres, not an easy task.

The movie has nothing to do with EAP, but Riga figures that if Roger Corman can make EAP movies that only use the title and nothing else, so can he. Riga decides to attribute the movie as a lost story by EAP, since the name is a guaranteed market for cult horror film fanatics. Riga meets up with a shlock distributor named Canaan Twill, who takes it. The story ends with a neat twist when Twill uses the Amontillado method to dispose of Riga and keep all the money for himself.

“Rattle, Rattle, Rattle” by Stuart Kaminsky is narrated by a man in 1901 who inherited a decaying mansion from his uncle. The latter lost his young bride Bernice and went insane. The big house gets on the narrator’s nerves and he begins hearing rattling sounds. Eventually he discovers a hidden box with Bernice’s teeth in it, a la EAP. From there to insanity and a twist ending with his own teeth.

“Development Hell” by Paul Levine begins at Diablo Pictures, where a befuddled EAP finds himself sitting before a Hollywood producer. He makes a deal to sell one of his stories to the studio. Then the usual rigamarole begins, such as title changes (“*We may have to lose the Pendulum. It’s three syllables.*”), inserting a love interest, and replacing the French Army with a U.S. Navy SEAL team when the hero is rescued. EAP is appalled and refuses to sign the papers, at which point an interesting twist appears because he was making a deal with the Devil.

“The Deadliest Tale Of All” by Peter Lovesey is an interview by a newspaper reporter who intrudes on EAP’s time while he is trying to write. Hilarious as the reporter goes after EAP as if he were a Hollywood actress.



“Poe, Poe, Poe” by John Lutz opens in a Baltimore tavern circa the 1800s, where Poe staggers in, already drunk. The barmaid is Mary Roper (with a ‘p’, not a typo), one of the sailors drinking at the bar is from the good ship Amontillado, and the raven gets a mention by the third page. The reader can see where this story is going. Roper’s husband is Montresor Pitt, who is spoiling for a fight and gets one. He confines Roper’s boyfriend into a closet and nails it shut. On that dark and dreary night, Lutz works in as many Poesian references as he can for a short story. EAP toddles home with his notebook filled with story ideas. An interesting read but so self-referential that you have to be well up on EAP’s works to catch all the jokes.

“The Tell-Tale Pacemaker” by P.J. Parrish transplants EAP’s story to a Florida condominium complex, where the perpetrator is haunted by the tap-tap-tapping of the cane of a fellow resident he murdered. It is EAP modernized and not much more.

“Seeing The Moon” by S.J. Rozan is about an art detective hired by a museum curator who was gypped by an art dealer who substituted a fake copy for a valuable piece of art. The detective and curator get even with a reverse scam by selling the dealer EAP’s opium pipe. The dealer, like every EAP fan, knew that the writer was a drug addict. What he didn’t know was that EAP never smoked opium; he took it in liquid form as laudanum.

“Challenger” by Daniel Stashower didn’t belong in this anthology. The story has nothing to do with EAP, directly or indirectly, so I won’t discuss it.

“Poe, Jo, And I” by Don Winslow is about a student who doesn’t like reading EAP. His English literature teacher works on him to the point that in later life he becomes a successful mystery novelist.

“Rue Morgue Noir” by Angela Zeman imagines EAP as a struggling writer in today’s world of cellphones. He supports himself as a waiter while trying to make that big sale, fights with his agent, and finally sells a screenplay. Mostly people shouting at each other as in bad sitcoms, as EAP’s script journeys through development hell.

And so to the end of the anthology. All told, it was a good read, with one real clunker out of twenty, and the rest enjoyable despite any nitpicks. Recommended.

Edgar Collected Poe.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MASTER (2009) is edited by Michael Connelly and is a compilation of EAP’s short stories with added commentary by a variety of authors. The stories do not need reviewing. Most of the commentaries are trivial anecdotes about how the author found EAP as a child and was gob-smacked, but a few stand out.

“The Curse Of Amontillado” by Lawrence Block discusses his beginnings as a best-selling mystery author and how he read Poe as a young boy. Mundane to that point, but then he mentions his wife Lynn is the daughter of Emilie Poe, a collateral descendent of EAP. The man himself had no issue, but Lynn is a many-greats niece of EAP. It gave Block great satisfaction, more so than average, to win several Edgar Awards from the Mystery Writers of America.

“Pluto’s Heritage” by P.J. Parrish follows EAP’s “The Black Cat”. She and her husband adopted an abandoned kitten missing one eye, and named it Pluto after the cat in the story. Notwithstanding his story, EAP loved cats; his favourite was a tabby named Catarina. This appears to be the first mystery story where a cat exposes a murderer. Today there is an entire sub-genre of cat mysteries.

Stephen King, yes, that one, comments in “The Genius Of The Tell-Tale Heart”. He points out that among EAP’s many firsts in writing, he was the first to write a story about a criminal sociopath. EAP is generally accepted as the inventor of the detective story.

STEAMPUNK POE (2011) is a collection of some of EAP’s short stories and poems, illustrated by Zdenko Basic and Manuel Sumnerac. Full-colour paintings adorn every third or fourth page, faithful to the text but in the steampunk style.

**LAST
EDITION**

Edmonton Journal

DAILY CIRCULATION
TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 1914
16,817
Selling Price for Inspection.

Vol. 10, No. 283

EDMONTON, ALBERTA WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 1914

EIGHTEEN PAGES

LORD ROBERTS SAYS FAREWELL TO THE CADETS

Canadian Boys Will Sail for
Their Homes on
Thursday

WILL RETURN AS MORE LOYAL CITIZENS

Henry Bourassa Tells Empire
Editors of French-Can-
adian Sentiment

Special Editor of the Dominion Post writes from the Montreal office: "The Lord Roberts, who has been in the city for the last few days, has been very popular with the French-Canadian people. He has been very kind and has been very interested in the people. He has been very kind and has been very interested in the people. He has been very kind and has been very interested in the people."

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New Brunswick's Worst Fishing Disaster Costs Lives of a Hundred Men

Fleet from Chaleur Bay and Coast of Gaspé is Caught in Ter-
rible Cyclone and Many Boats Lost Along With Their
Crews—Hon. J. D. Hazen Promises Aid to Families

Montreal, June 9.—The fishing fleet from Chaleur Bay and the coast of Gaspé, which was caught in a terrible cyclone last night, has been reported as having lost a hundred men and many boats. The Hon. J. D. Hazen, Minister of Marine and Fisheries, has promised aid to the families of the missing men.

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NEWS IS SLOW IN REACHING WORLD

By J. D. Hazen, Minister of Marine and Fisheries

SEVERAL PERSONS BURNED TO DEATH IN TENEMENT FIRE

Edmonton, June 9.—A fire broke out in a tenement house in the city last night, and several persons were burned to death. The fire was caused by a gas leak, and the fire department was called to the scene. The fire was very large and the firemen had a hard time to get it under control. The fire was very large and the firemen had a hard time to get it under control. The fire was very large and the firemen had a hard time to get it under control.

35 BOATMEN WERE DRIVEN ASHORE

Edmonton, June 9.—A group of 35 boatmen were driven ashore last night by a heavy fog. The boatmen were on their way to a fishing ground, but the fog was so thick that they were unable to proceed. The boatmen were driven ashore and the fog was so thick that they were unable to proceed. The boatmen were driven ashore and the fog was so thick that they were unable to proceed.

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FRENCH SOCIETY CONVENES WITH GREAT SUCCESS

Most Important Session Being
Held Wednesday Night
In Separate School

SCHOOL QUESTION IN DISCUSSION

Rev. Father Maurice Gives In-
teresting Address on
History of the West

Edmonton, June 9.—The French Society, which was organized last year, has held its most important session to date last night. The session was held in the separate school and was attended by a large number of members. The Rev. Father Maurice gave an interesting address on the history of the West, and the question of the school was discussed. The session was very successful and the members were very interested in the discussion.

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SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE, sketched by "Stan,"
The Journal's staff artist, as the creator of Sherlock
Holmes stood in the entrance of the King Edward
Hotel this morning getting a little Alberta sunshine.



Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in City;
Thinks More English Capital
Should Come Into the Dominion

ADMINISTRATION OF EDMONTON POLICE CAUSE OF MUDDLE

Ex-Chief Billas Carpenter Con-
demns Interference, Sug-
gests Commission

DEPARTMENT HEAD NEEDS FREE HAND

Aldermen Frequently Men of
Little Knowledge—Like to
Mix in Police Affairs

Edmonton, June 9.—The administration of the Edmonton Police Department has been the cause of much muddle, according to Ex-Chief Billas Carpenter. He has suggested that a commission be appointed to investigate the department and to suggest reforms. He has also suggested that the department head should have a free hand in the administration of the department.

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Herewith is the essential part of the interview for Sherlockians.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the famous English author, and Lady Doyle are in Edmonton en route to Jasper Park, where they will spend ten days as the guests of Col. Maynard Rogers. Sir Conan [sic] and his wife registered at the King Edward Hotel.

Sir Arthur did not bring along Dr Watson of Baker Street, but tottering about is Sherlock Holmes, who is to play an important part in a new book that is to be published under the title “The Valley Of Fear”. The action of about half of this novel is to take place in England, and Canada is to be the scene of the other half. This story will be a detective one in which Sherlock Holmes will [illegible] be the hero.

[The second half of THE VALLEY OF FEAR was actually set in the Pennsylvania coal mining district, not Canada. I guess Sir Arthur thought we were too nice for the blood and guts he wanted in the story. He evidently never heard about the coal mines of the Red Deer River badlands, sometimes referred to as The Western Front because of unions battling each other for supremacy.]

Of An Inquiring Mind.

The first impression one gets of Sir Arthur is that the distinguished visitor is of an inquiring nature. He is always looking about and asking questions about strange things he sees. For instance, as he stood in front of the King Edward Hotel he watched two men who apparently had just come in from the grade, and as they passed, asked “What kind of men are they?”. Then when it was explained that such classes, garbed in similar clothes could be seen in bigger buildings farther north on 101st Street. The author said, “I think I’ll walk up that way.”

[I have no idea what “just come in from the grade” means. I lived in Edmonton for four years in the middle 1970s while a student at the University of Alberta and never heard that expression.]

At first it was thought that the author would not be able to address the members of the Canadian Club, but this morning he agreed to give a short address and President Stuart arranged for an afternoon tea to be held at five o’clock. This function will be held in the Empire auditorium.

[The EDMONTON JOURNAL is a morning paper. The microfilmed copy was the Late Edition, so readers would have bought it mid-morning and have had time to rush over and buy tickets, assuming it wasn’t a private function.]

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is known over the entire world, if not in person, by his books. Nearly every man and woman has read at least some of his famous detective stories and his next book of it containing [illegible] stories, should find a big market on this side of the ocean. He is a man who can talk on practically any subject of the day, politics, religion, war, or suffragism. During the interview it was with ease he shifted the conversation from one to the other, first talking about Irish Home Rule, then criticizing the action of the militant suffragettes and winding up with a review of the Mexican situation and giving his opinions on various other matters that are before the public eye at the present moment.

He is the kind of a man that becomes interested in whatever he sees and being the possessor of a wonderful memory, he recalls all things. The hustle and bustle of the morning in Edmonton attracted his attention and he found it fascinating to watch the men as they went to and from work, and the woman as they hurried into the stores to do their morning's shopping.

Sir Arthur spoke very strongly against the tactics of the militant suffragette. This subject, he declared, was dead for a generation so far as party politics were concerned. The patience of the British public had become exhausted with them and it had come in a time when the people would not stand for any more outbursts and public opinion was now very much against them. He said that the English suffragettes had not only been placed in the disfavour of the rich but [illegible] with the poor, and the more lowly women of England were now against them; [rest of article too illegible to transcribe].

[In Canada, it didn’t take a generation. Under the leadership of Nellie McClung of Calgary, the suffragists got the right for women to vote in western provincial and municipal elections in 1916. The eastern provinces and the federal government granted the vote in 1919 or shortly thereafter.]

The Canadian Sherlock And Sir Arthur.

MURDOCH MYSTERIES is a popular Canadian television series, now in its ninth season, about William Murdoch, a Toronto police detective of the late 1890s who uses Sherlockian methods to solve crimes. It also frequently crosses

over to steampunk. Indeed, the very first episode in 2008 involved Nikola Tesla. The series has good quality production values, and is well worth viewing on DVD. The acting is good, although many of the later scripts have predictable plots. The screenwriters often apply modern standards of ethical behaviour to the 1890s to make the stories politically correct.

The first season in 2008 had two episodes where Sir Arthur Conan Doyle crossed paths with Det. William Murdoch. Episode 4 of Season 1 was “Elementary, My Dear Murdoch”, written by Jason Sherman. Doyle comes to Toronto to give a lecture on spiritualist research. He meets up with Murdoch, and the two attend a seance whose medium, Miss Pensall, channels a suddenly-departed paranormal investigator. The spirit tells them where her body is buried. Doyle gets an opportunity to tag along and see how the Canadian Sherlock investigates a homicide.

The victim, Mrs Ida Winston, was a member of the Toronto Paranormal Society, and had been in conflict with Pensall. Winston was also having an affair with an executive of the TPS, and the husband wasn’t happy. She died from two bullets inside the TPS building, but who killed her?

Pensall has an alibi, but Murdoch exposes her as a fake during the investigation. She has a network of spies and informants who feed her information for her seances, hence her ability to describe the burial site. One of those informants saw the body being buried.

A running gag through this episode is that Doyle is constantly plagued by fans asking him when he will revive Sherlock Holmes, recently killed off at Reichenbach Falls. Murdoch’s superior officer Inspector Brackenreid, a great Holmes fan, bores Doyle with an endless story about a vicious dog in the Scottish Highlands where Brackenreid grew up, and how it would make a great Holmes adventure.

Meanwhile, the body count climbs as the murderer tries to tie off any loose ends. Murdoch uses newborn forensic techniques such as ballistics and fingerprints to narrow down the suspects to someone in the TPS. He also applies psychology and uses a seance to trick the culprit into a confession.

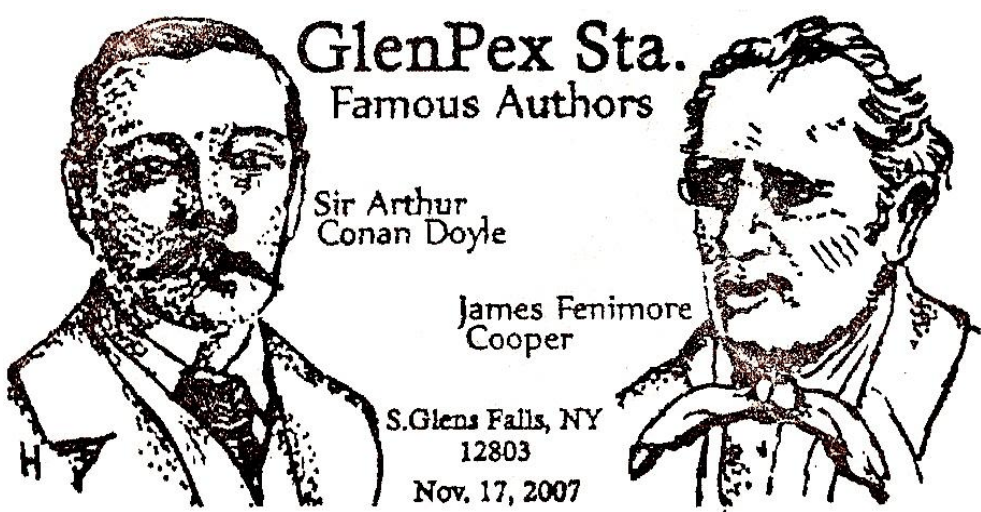
Episode 9 was “Belly Speaker”, which begins with a murderer caught in the room of the deceased. The culprit was the dead man’s son Harcourt, a ventriloquist who will only communicate through his dummy Mycroft.

Harcourt signs a confession but corroborating evidence is needed. Just then, Doyle returns to Toronto, imbued with the idea of creating a new series of stories about a colonial detective based on Murdoch.

Brackenreid is delighted to see Doyle again, and resumes pitching his story about the hellhound, this time proposing to move the venue to the cliffs of the Scarborough Bluffs of Toronto, and have a climatic ending with the hero boxing the dog to death on the edge of a cliff.

Doyle takes up an apparently unrelated cold case and fails too late to prevent an innocent man from going to the gallows. The case isn’t as unrelated to the story as it might first seem. Murdoch and Doyle hash things out together and realize the Harcourt case has threads that can be tied if only attention were to be paid to details. In the process, Murdoch realizes that Harcourt was protecting the real murderer.

The ending initially appears contrived, with a evil twin brother appearing out of nowhere to take the blame. However, the plot is redeemed by a twist ending that suddenly jerks the story around 180°. Well written by Larry Lalonde and Philip Bedard.



Pictorial postmark from South Glen Falls, New York. I don’t know why.

STEPHEN LEACOCK: PART 6
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 5 appeared in OPUNTIA's #64.1A, 351, 352, 354, and 355.]

Laugh, I'd Thought I'd Chuckle.

Much of Leacock's humour was topical. It was undoubtedly hilarious in its day, but jokes about the Hohenzollerns fall flat to today's generation, who have no idea who they were.

FURTHER FOOLISHNESS (1916) opens with a selection of short pieces spoofing Germany, Turkey, Mexico, William Jennings Bryan, and Woodrow Wilson. This was during World War One, remember. Funnier then than they are now, even if you know the history. The stories irresistibly remind one of Thomas Gray's elegy: "*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power, and all that beauty, all that wealth ever gave, awaits alike the inevitable hour. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*" The modern-day hysteria over Donald Trump is but a rewrite of Ross Perot, and Brexit will no more destroy Britain than losing India did.

The remainder of the short pieces in this collection are mildly comical, the sort of thing you would read while waiting for an appointment in a doctor's office. The two end pieces are about the rich and an analysis of humour.

Leacock notes that few rich folk think of themselves as rich, and that it is a progressive malady all the way up the income ladder. The man who makes \$10,000 wishes he had \$20,000 so he could get clear of his troubles, while those with \$20,000 worry about how they'll meet future obligations.

I can see the point. When I was twenty years old, \$100 was a huge amount of money to me. Last winter I spent \$900 on a furnace repair and a week later, \$1,500 on car repairs. While they were annoyances, I didn't lose sleep over them. In the same way that "deadwood" is anyone higher up in management than you are, "the rich" is a relative term that depends on your income level.

Leacock notes that humour is also relative. If it happens to someone else, it's funny, but if it happens to you, it's tragedy. If the subject of a pratfall is a pompous rich man, it's funny, but if the person taking the fall is a dear old lady, you rush over to help, even though the incident is identical. People will admit

they have no ear for music, but if you say they have no sense of humour, those are usually fighting words.

FUNNY PIECES (1936) would be better titled as "Mildly Amusing Pieces", which is not to say that the book is a waste of time. Leacock wrote this in his twilight years and could see the shadows lengthening.

He starts off by looking at the school textbooks of the previous century, the ones that he learned from as a child, and the ones he used to teach from as a rural schoolteacher before he escaped to university life. He has no patience for those who yearned, even back then, for the good old days when children were taught with the four Rs: reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and the rod. He dissects some of the old schoolbooks.

Many of those books used the Socratic method, with ridiculous question-and-answer sessions between a schoolmarm and her sole student. There were arithmetic questions such as "31.5 gallons of beer equals what fraction of a barrel?". French language instruction was the same as what I suffered in school during the 1960s, viz: "Have you seen the stained-glass windows?" and "My cousin bought some folding doors". The only French I know today, other than cereal box French, is "Ferme ta bouche" and "En anglais, s'il vous plait"

Most of the stories are short-shorts originally published in magazines. They do not read well *en masse*, but are the kind to be dipped into in between other tasks. The final few pieces are bitter, the result of Leacock being compulsorily retired from McGill University in 1936 against his wishes. He had spent three decades there, and resented being told that it was time to make way for younger professors. He did not go quietly into the night but raged, raged at the dying of the light.

Alternative History.

THE HOHENZOLLERNS IN AMERICA (1919) has what we would consider to be alternative histories. The collection leads off with a novella of the same title as the book, about what it would be like if the exiled Kaiser and his parasitic relatives were forced to earn a living like anyone else instead of a dignified exile.

The story is narrated by the Kaiser's niece, relating how the Hohenzollerns came to America in steerage, like all the other immigrants, moved into a

tenement, and then began the struggle to survive. A few of the family adapted and became merchants, while Kaiser Bill lived on dreams of past glory, and applied for jobs like President of Harvard University. No one outside the family believed his pretensions; he was considered a harmless lunatic with delusions. A workable alternative history.

“With The Bolsheviks In Berlin” was a quarter-century premature, but describes the glorious revolution that overtook Germany after the fall of the Kaiser, as well as the glorious counter-revolution, the glorious counter-counter-revolution, and so forth. Not prescient but an AH easily extrapolated from watching what the Communists were doing to each other in the new-born Soviet Union. At the time Leacock published this book, the USSR had not yet settled down from its civil war. The purges that were to come in the 1930s fit in quite well with Leacock’s alternative Berlin.

Another alternative history is “If Germany Had Won”, about German princes and pompous military officers ruling New York City. It is told in the form of newspaper articles, which, with an eye to the Imperial censor, gush about the wonderful doings of German diplomats and officers. Much like fan magazines today gush about the wonderful doings of Hollywood actors and professional athletes. It is not an unreasonable extrapolation.

Some of the stories in this collection are satires rather than alternative histories. I’ll skip them because their time has come and gone. Any anthology editor churning out alternative history books would be well advised to look at this one.



OUT WHERE THE WEST COMMENCES: PART 2
by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #68.1D.]

When I was eight years old, we moved 50 km east from the village of Eckville where I was born and where my mother’s family had homesteaded. My father bought a quarter-section just north of Red Deer, almost exactly halfway between Calgary and Edmonton.

Dad was a livestock veterinarian, so he had to minimize the workload of the ranch by running it as a cow-calf operation, pasturing the herd of 200 or so Charolais beef cattle out on rented rangeland in the summer. The calves were born there, and the herd driven back in October.

The quarter-section was planted in summer as feed barley to sustain the herd during the winter. Dad also rented hayfields nearby. This was in the days before round bales, so my brother and I spent endless hours baling hay as the small rectangular bales. Nowadays giant round bales are used, and one man can do in a half-day what used to take three of us two days to accomplish.

After the grain was harvested, the herd was brought back in a cattle drive. See OPUNTIA #60.5 for a description and photos of one of those drives. The herd then stayed on the stubble of the quarter-section for the winter, fed with the barley and hay. They also fertilized the land, so we never had to put down chemical fertilizer. Steer calves went to the auction mart as feeders after weaning, while the heifers were fed another year and then bred, to be sold as pregnant cows to other farmers.

I told you all that to establish my credentials regarding the genre of westerns. Normally I don’t read western fiction of any kind because 99.9% of it is the cliched gunslinger-rides-into-town stuff that wasn’t true even in the American Old West, much less on the Canadian prairies where the Mounties were there before the settlers.

The North West Mounted Police, today the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, arrived in 1874, while the transcontinental railroad, which triggered mass colonization of the prairies, wasn’t completed until 1883. But I keep my eyes open and have picked up some westerns that seem different.

Woke Up One Mornin’.

One of the books I bought at When Words Collide 2016 convention was *TALL TALES OF THE WEIRD WEST* (2015), an anthology edited by Axel Howerton and Rick Overwater.



“The First Rodeo” by Jackson Lowry starts off the anthology with a tall tale told in a saloon about a cowboy hired to ride herd on a mighty strange bunch of critters. The astute reader, and even those not so astute, soon realizes the animals are dinosaurs that somehow survived in the back country of the Rocky Mountains.

The dinosaurs made good steaks though, and it appears that their extinction is not dated back to 65 megayears ago as we are taught, but to the late 1800s, when the final triceratops was served up medium-rare.

“Bloodhound” by C. Courtney Joyner is about a deputy sheriff tracking a murderer, one who turns out to be a werewolf. The deputy is attacked and about to be killed by the werewolf when an Apache medicine man saves him. A blood and guts type of story, with an ending a bit different than the usual silver bullet.

“Rosie’s Chicken & Waffles” by El Cuchillo is about some sheep herders (there are no shepherds in the West; that’s a European term) who come under attack by flying demons attacking both sheep and humans. Everyone and everything dies by the end. A pointless story.

“The Gifts Of A Folding Girl” by Scott S. Phillips is about two desperados trapped in a cabin by a posse for good and sufficient reason. One of them had been given a magic potion by a Navajo woman, and uses it in desperation. As is so often the case when amateurs dabble in magic, he gets the spell wrong. He

manages to turn one of the posse into a natural-born killer who takes out all the other members of the posse, but, the spell not having had a limit placed on it, then kills the crooks and heads into town for what will be more chaos.

“You Are The Blood” by Grady Cole is a gunslinger saga with a difference. The bad guys he must clear from the village are vampires. They don’t stand a chance, but the story tries to end on an ambiguous note that doesn’t really succeed.

“Dinner In Carcosa” by Allan Williams is set in the desert of southeastern Alberta, an area I am familiar with, the kind of place where the nearest cellphone tower is 100 km away and if your car breaks down it may be a couple of hours before the next vehicle comes along. The protagonist stops off for the night at an abandoned barn, and finds himself invited to dinner by homesteaders nearby. But as the dinner goes along, he finds his mind has been clouded, and those homesteaders are winged creatures with sharp teeth. His escape is fortuitous and depends on some herbs he had in his bag. The plot was predictable at the halfway mark but I suppose this story could make a horror movie for the straight-to-DVD trade.

“Cold Eggs And Whiskey” by Rick Overwater is about a psycho in the Old West who hates crowds and has a long history of thinning out places when all those people start making him feel crowded. He finally moves out to the lone prairie and takes up with a widow on an isolated farm, where he can breathe easier. But not for long, when too many people appear. The psycho’s definition of too many people is four.

“Death Is Daily” by Craig Garrett is a fantasy about ogres. If there was anything western in it, I couldn’t see it. Doesn’t belong in this anthology.

“The Horse Always Gets It First” by Axel Howerton is the final and best story of this anthology. It is about a whiskey trader named Whitley and his horse Chester, pursued through the Red Deer River badlands by the Mounties. As the chase winds its way through the canyons, Whitley stumbles on an abandoned alien spaceship buried in the sediments and partly exposed by erosion. Taking refuge within, he finds what appears to be a supply of water, and being desperately thirsty, drinks it and supplies it to his horse.

The fluid is something else indeed, and the two find themselves communicating by telepathy. They continue to flee, but Chester is soon dead and Whitley

captured. He discovers he has other superpowers and escapes in a bloodbath. The story is written as a potential prelude to a series. A different treatment of the Weird West.

The anthology as a whole was good. The clunker stories were outweighed by the ones that exhibited more original thinking.

Excavating For A Mine.

THE SHADOW was an old-time radio show (OTR) about Lamont Cranston, wealthy young man about town, who had the power to cloud minds so that people could not see him. He was accompanied by his girlfriend, the lovely Margo Lane, who was the only person who knew his secret. Her functions were to scream loudly at intervals, be kidnapped by bad guys, and have the plot explained to her by Cranston in the epilogue. They traveled together extensively without benefit of clergy (which was surprising for those puritanical times in the radio industry), and always put themselves into the middle of the nearest murder scene in the first five minutes. This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.archive.org.

“Ghost Town” was a 1940 episode set in an abandoned mining town Out West. Cranston and Lane are doing the tourist thing, and mosey on in to the ghost town to see what there is. Only one old-timer remains, and he quickly brings them up to speed about all the mysterious goings-on. They soon find out for themselves when they decide to stay the night. There is a gunfight in the middle of the street, and one of the cowboys is killed. His corpse mysteriously vanishes. The noise of a dance hall is heard, but no one is inside it.

Unlike other tourists, the duo don’t get the hint, and stay in the town. Lane is kidnapped by desperados who are illegally operating the supposedly closed mine, having found a vein of pure gold. Cranston comes to the rescue, and the two are trapped inside the mine when the outlaws blow the shaft to silence them forever. As the sound of the explosion reverberates, Lane screams on cue, and the commercial cuts in, also on cue.

Like most serials of the day, the climatic scene reveals that with a giant bound they leaped to safety at the last second. Since they were the stars of the series, you knew they would never come to harm. The bad guys are vanquished and the ghost town is sans ghosts. Cranston ties up the loose threads for Lane in the epilogue as per usual.

ME AND THE YUCK FACTOR
by Dale Speirs

I never cared much for horror fiction. It is partly because the real world has more and worse of it, and partly because I was inured to gore and splatter as the son of a livestock veterinarian and as a farm boy. The yuck factor never bothered me.

When a young lad, I used to ride with my father out on farm calls and watch him do surgery on livestock, castrate colts or male calves, or autopsy a dead cow to verify cause of death for the Ministry of Agriculture or the insurance company. Surgery was normally done only on prize breeding animals. A stock cow looking poorly wasn’t worth the expense and would be shipped to the packing plant to put her out of her misery.

Castration is commonplace on farms. In a herd of cattle, there can only be one bull. This is to keep the bloodlines straight for pedigreed cattle, and because if there were two or more bulls, they will start fighting every time a cow comes into heat. All the male calves of a season are normally castrated when a few months old and turned into steers. Colts are commonly castrated because geldings are better behaved than stallions and easier to ride.



Calving cases were common in the spring. In Alberta, cows are bred in late summer or autumn so that they will give birth in spring. Cows carry their young nine months, the same as humans. This method gave calves a better start in life, having the summer to grow and be weaned by autumn. On our ranch, many

times I saw cows with afterbirth hanging out their backsides, or newborn calves covered with membranes and blood.



On farm calls, if a calf was a breech baby, Dad would strap a heavy winch device called a come-along onto the back end of the cow, reach into her, and rearrange the calf's position so it would come out easier. The cow had to be in a squeeze chute and her legs blocked because she would be in a lot of pain and kicking hard. Often this meant pushing the calf back into the uterus a bit in order to straighten out its legs. Dad would then loop a rope around the legs or shoulder of the calf. We (it went better with several people pulling) would then ratchet the come-along and pull the calf out.

In that era before cellphones, the 1960s and early 1970s, farmers frequently called Dad at supper time because they knew he would be there. The telephone was always at his elbow while he ate, since almost never was a suppertime call for anyone else in the family. He was very skilled at eating with one hand while writing notes with the other and tucking the phone under his ear.

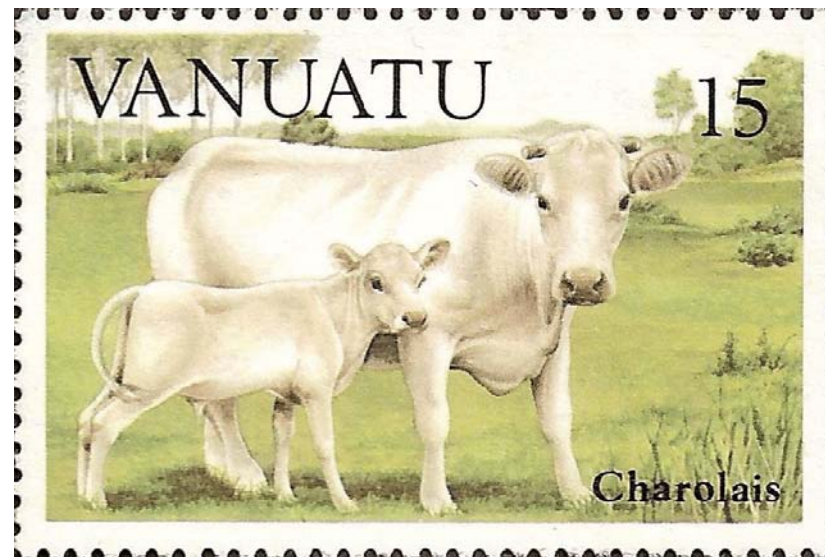
We could tell what kind of case it was by his questions. Invariably the first thing he asked the farmer was "Is she sitting up or flat out?". If the latter, it was an emergency, and he would quickly gulp down his meal and head out. If the cow could still sit up, she wasn't in such a bad way, and Dad could finish supper before leaving. Another question was "What colour was her discharge?". This one was usually heard during the calving season, but often it could be a cow sick from some sort of problem and producing bloody urine.

A common call for Dad in the calving season was milk fever, a calcium deficiency caused by the stress of pregnancy. Today it is rare because farmers are better educated about feeding calcium supplements to pregnant cows. The problem is that immediately after calving, the cow's body has trouble mobilizing enough calcium to replace what the calf took during gestation. The

blood chemistry goes out of whack and in serious cases will kill the cow. The treatment is easy and produces fast results. The cow will be sitting down or flat out because she hasn't the strength to stand. Dad would administer a 2-litre intravenous injection of calcium solution. The bottles came in 1-litre sizes and took a while to drain. Dad would punch the needle into the cow's neck vein, let some blood spurt out, and then attach the IV line.

I got to hold the bottle, up high so it would drain faster, which was hard on my arm sometimes. Meanwhile Dad and the farmer would talk politics. Once the second litre was in, we watched the cow. When she began shifting about within five or ten minutes, we stood clear as she lifted herself up. Cattle and horses sitting on the ground always lift their back end into the air first, then push themselves up with their front legs. A sick cow might initially lurch about, so we didn't want to be inside the stall and get crushed by her. The cure for milk fever was quick and spectacular. Within an hour of arriving at the farm, the cow would be up and munching hay while her calf suckled.

My father first taught me to drive a tractor since I couldn't hit anything cultivating out in the middle of a field. When I got a learners permit for a car, I rode out with him on farm calls, driving a Volkswagen Beetle. The country roads were empty in the evening, and a safe place for novice drivers to practice. Dad used Beetles for farm calls because of their high clearance, good for driving over farm fields to the sick animal. If a cow goes down in the field, that's where she stays. The rear-mounted engine sat over the drive wheels and provided excellent traction, something that mattered on unplowed roads in winter.



SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

García-Ruiz, A., et al (2016) **Changes in genetic selection differentials and generation intervals in US Holstein dairy cattle as a result of genomic selection.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:E3995-E4004

Authors’ abstract: “*The introduction of genomic selection in dairy cattle improvement programs in 2008 was expected to increase rates of genetic gain, particularly for traits with low heritabilities, such as fertility and longevity. Our analysis of the US national dairy database found that generation intervals have decreased dramatically over the past 6 years, and selection intensity for lowly heritable traits has increased considerably. Genetic trends rapidly increased for fertility, lifespan, and udder health. These results clearly demonstrate the positive impact of genomic selection in US dairy cattle, even though this technology has only been in use for a short time.*”

“*Genetic improvement of livestock during the second half of the 20th century using pedigree and performance data has been very successful, particularly in dairy cattle populations. The improvement of dairy cattle has depended heavily on the use of artificial insemination (AI) to maximize the impact of elite bulls globally. Historically, progeny testing, or the characterization of these AI bulls by measuring and comparing performance of daughters, has been a critical step in identifying the very best bulls for widespread use. However, traditional genetic improvement schemes in dairy cattle have been limited by time required and expense of the progeny test paradigm. This process remained relatively slow because of the substantial time needed to accumulate sufficient daughter phenotypes to compute genetic evaluations with high accuracy. The recent development of genomic selection programs based on single-nucleotide polymorphism genotypes was expected to increase rates of genetic gain in several ways, including shortened generation interval(s) and increased reliability of predicted breeding value(s).*”

Speirs: I don’t think the average city slicker realizes how far agriculture has advanced in the developed countries. As this paper shows, DNA testing has allowed remarkable increases in productivity and longevity of dairy cows within seven years of introduction. Because cattle have rapid generation times, within three years, breeding for traits can be sped up far faster than for humans.

Miraldo, A., et al (2016) **An Anthropocene map of genetic diversity.** SCIENCE 353:1532-1535

Authors’ abstract: “*The Anthropocene is witnessing a loss of biodiversity, with well-documented declines in the diversity of ecosystems and species. For intraspecific genetic diversity, however, we lack even basic knowledge on its global distribution. We georeferenced 92,801 mitochondrial sequences for >4500 species of terrestrial mammals and amphibians, and found that genetic diversity is 27% higher in the tropics than in nontropical regions. Overall, habitats that are more affected by humans hold less genetic diversity than wilder regions, although results for mammals are sensitive to choice of genetic locus.*”

Corman, V.M., et al (2016) **Link of a ubiquitous human coronavirus to dromedary camels.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:9864-9869

Authors’ abstract: “*Our results raise a scenario for the natural history of a ubiquitous respiratory coronavirus (CoV) that has established itself in humans after it was likely acquired from camels. This scenario reminds us of the pandemic potential of the Middle East respiratory syndrome CoV, an agent that is thought to be acquired from camels without presently causing sustained human-to-human transmission.*”

“*The four human coronaviruses (HCoVs) are globally endemic respiratory pathogens. The Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS) coronavirus (CoV) is an emerging CoV with a known zoonotic source in dromedary camels. Little is known about the origins of endemic HCoVs. Studying these viruses’ evolutionary history could provide important insight into CoV emergence. In tests of MERS-CoV-infected dromedaries, we found viruses related to an HCoV, known as HCoV-229E, in 5.6% of 1,033 animals. Human- and dromedary-derived viruses are each monophyletic, suggesting ecological isolation. One gene of dromedary viruses exists in two versions in camels, full length and deleted, whereas only the deleted version exists in humans. The deletion increased in size over a succession starting from camelid viruses via old human viruses to contemporary human viruses.*”

“*Live isolates of dromedary 229E viruses were obtained and studied to assess human infection risks. The viruses used the human entry receptor*

aminopeptidase N and replicated in human hepatoma cells, suggesting a principal ability to cause human infections. However, inefficient replication in several mucosa-derived cell lines and airway epithelial cultures suggested lack of adaptation to the human host. Dromedary viruses were as sensitive to the human type I interferon response as HCoV-229E. Antibodies in human sera neutralized dromedary-derived viruses, suggesting population immunity against dromedary viruses. Although no current epidemic risk seems to emanate from these viruses, evolutionary inference suggests that the endemic human virus HCoV-229E may constitute a descendant of camelid-associated viruses. HCoV-229E evolution provides a scenario for MERS-CoV emergence.”

Jakicic, J.M., et al (2016) **Effect of wearable technology combined With a lifestyle intervention on long-term weight loss: The IDEA randomized clinical trial.** JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION 316(11):1161-1171

Authors’ abstract: *“Participants were placed on a low-calorie diet, prescribed increases in physical activity, and had group counseling sessions. At 6 months, the interventions added telephone counseling sessions, text message prompts, and access to study materials on a website. At 6 months, participants randomized to the standard intervention group initiated self-monitoring of diet and physical activity using a website, and those randomized to the enhanced intervention group were provided with a wearable device and accompanying web interface to monitor diet and physical activity.”*

“Among young adults with a BMI between 25 and less than 40, the addition of a wearable technology device to a standard behavioral intervention resulted in less weight loss over 24 months. Devices that monitor and provide feedback on physical activity may not offer an advantage over standard behavioral weight loss approaches.”

“The enhanced intervention group was provided and encouraged to use a commercially available wearable technology that included a web-based interface (FIT Core; BodyMedia). This system included a multisensor device worn on the upper arm that provided feedback to the participant on energy expenditure and physical activity through a small display or through web-based software developed by the manufacturer.”

Speirs: The conclusion of this study was that FitBit didn't work.

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 it directly.]

THE FOSSIL #369 (US\$10 per year from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) This group works for the preservation of zines and the history of zinedom. The issue at hand has reports of a joint session of several apas at the 2016 Amateur Journalism Conference at the Madison campus of the University of Wisconsin, which holds the Library of Amateur Journalism. The Library has thousands of zines from the 1800s onward, and is already being used for research in history.

COWTOWN UTILITY BOX ART



Seen along the Sunnyside river bank of the Bow River.

Notice the security camera hanging out over the stormwater outfall. It is there to watch for fools trying to infiltrate the stormwater drains.

On the next page is a larger set of boxes next to the outfall.

