

OPUNTIA

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Remembrance Day 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.

LEST WE FORGET IN 2016

photos by Dale Speirs

Remembrance Day on November 11 is commemorated at dozens of locations throughout Calgary. I attend a different ceremony each year. Shopping malls put up memorials in honour of the dead, and we wear poppies on our lapels.

A couple of decades ago, veterans were worrying that there would be no one to carry on the ceremonies after the Korean War veterans died off. Then came the Balkan wars, followed by Afghanistan and Iraq. Many new names were added to the lists of Canadian Forces war dead. The ceremonies have seen a resurgence in the last decade. They are no longer for Grandfather, but for parents, uncles, siblings, and cousins who never came back home.

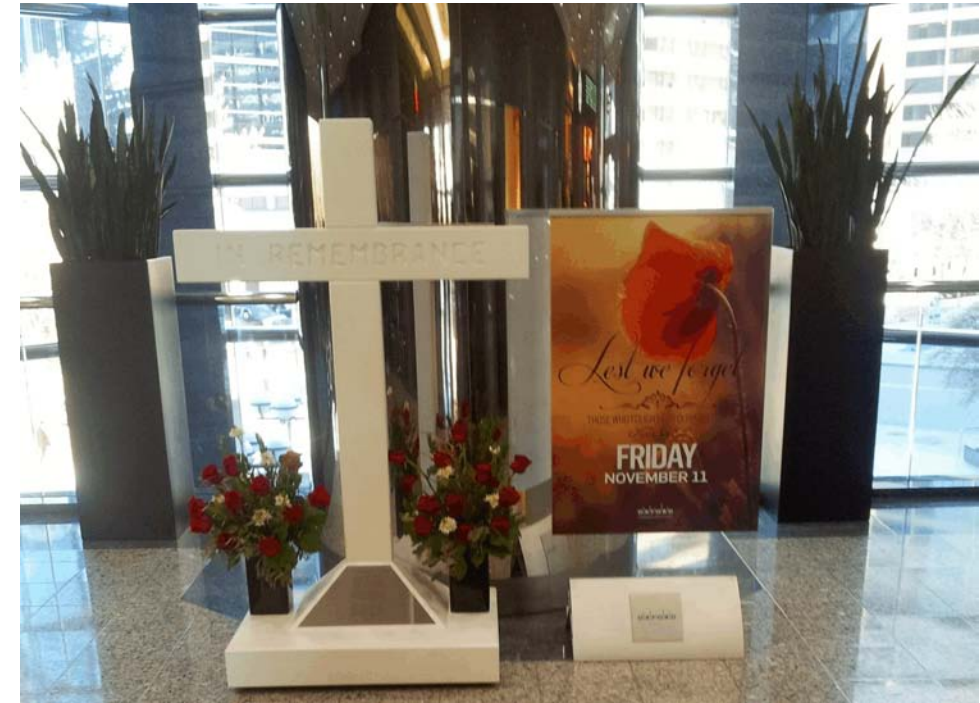
At right: TD Square mall in downtown Calgary.



Chinook Centre mall.



Devon Tower downtown.



Purdy's Chocolates downtown store.



In the last issue of OPUNTIA there were photos of the new Flanders Avenue interchange where the military base once was. CFB Calgary extended quite a ways south along Crowchild Trail to Glenmore Trail. Halfway along is the interchange with 50 Avenue SW. The utility box on the southeast corner of the flyover was recently painted with remembrance poppies as seen here.



Central Memorial Park in the Beltline district of inner-city Calgary on November 11. This is Calgary's oldest park, and has the main cenotaph and other war memorials. The adjacent streets were closed off to handle the crowd of thousands who attended this event.



The park was decorated with poppies for the occasion. It was a calm day and very warm for November.



Each ceremony throughout Calgary had a different military unit attending. For this location, it was the Calgary Highlanders militia. They fought in both world wars, Korea, and Afghanistan.





Top left: The start of the wreath laying ceremony.

Below left. The finish of the ceremony.

Below right: After the ceremony has concluded, it is customary for the spectators to come forward and place their lapel poppies on the memorial as a gesture of respect.



Canadian casualties since Calgary was founded in 1875 and began sending troops to war.
Boer War: 7,000 Canadians served, 300 killed in action
World War One: 650,000 served, 68,000 KIA

World War Two: 1,000,000 served, 47,000 KIA
Korean War: 26,791 served, 516 KIA
Afghanistan: Serving number not available, 159 KIA, including first female combat soldier



THE GROVES OF ACADEMIA: PART 3

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 and 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #67.1F and 262.]

Murder On Campus.

“Blood On The Campus” by Cyril M. Kornbluth (1948 June, DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE) has a detective investigating the murders of two physics professors at a small university. One of them apparently stood in the neutron beam of a particle accelerator and had his nervous system shut down by the radiation. (How come he didn't turn into a superhero like all the others exposed to radiation?) The other professor is found dead by a blunt instrument that bashed his head in but is nowhere to be found. The solution is that a deadfall dropped a huge block of dry ice on the victim, then evaporated by the time the body was discovered.

The professors were jealous rivals in academia. It transpires that the two died at each other's hands via booby traps. The story doesn't work too well. In particular, the means of dispatch made for implausible weapons. Kornbluth was a better SF author than he was a mystery writer.

“The Great Elvis Presley Mystery” by Will Folke and Dick Ashbaugh (1960 April, KEYHOLE MYSTERY MAGAZINE) introduces Beasley Grove, a high-level Asperger savant on campus as an amateur murder investigator. Like Miss Marple's village, the Eastern University campus has a murder rate that surpasses anything Detroit or Manhattan ever had. The story is satirical, playing it straight as a cozy mystery but making fun of amateur detectives. The case in this story is a coed found strangled in her sorority house room, clutching a framed photograph of Elvis Presley. The murderer had searched her room for something but wasn't able to find it before being scared off.

The dead woman's hobby was photography of a certain kind, using a new type of camera that could take photos in available light without a flash. Standard today, but remember this was back in 1960, when film speeds were slow and interior shots usually looked like they were taken inside a coal mine.

Grove interviews a few people and determines that the coed liked to take photos of her roommates in the nude without them being aware of it and then show the photos around. Her fatal mistake was sneaking a photo of a Big Man On

Campus (remember them?) having it off with the sorority house mother, who didn't appreciate it. The photo was hidden though, and it was Grove who figures out it was pasted behind Elvis's photo.

“The Demon At Noon” by Stephen Dentinger (1963 February, THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE) has police detective Capt. Leopold dealing with a mad bomber whose infernal devices are detonated always at noon. The bombs are not the traditional sticks of dynamite and a clock, nor plastique explosive, but are medieval devices not seen or used in centuries.

Leopold discovers that the bomber is using an ancient text of which only one copy exists, in the local university library. The police then have to winnow through thousands of names to identify the suspect. Proceeding in logical order, they eliminate students who live in dormitories because the bomber wouldn't have any privacy to put together the devices. It must be someone who doesn't have any classes after 11h30, otherwise he wouldn't be able to place the devices, which have only short fuses.

Step by step, the police winnow the names. Chemistry students wouldn't use archaic methods to build the bombs, so Leopold makes a calculated guess that the bomber is a history student who came across the ancient text. The police finally get their man, but not before he is chased up into a campus clock tower where his final device detonates. An interesting study in logic and deduction.

THE BISHOP GOES TO THE UNIVERSITY (2003) by Andrew M. Greeley is part of a series about Bishop Blackwood Ryan, an ecclesiastical amateur detective. Greeley is a Roman Catholic priest who teaches sociology at university and thus knows whereof he writes.

The novel is a locked-room murder at the University of Chicago Divinity School. A Russian Orthodox priest was suddenly sent into the next life with the help of a shotgun at point-blank range to the head. The Chicago Cardinal asks Ryan to make enquiries, unofficially since the police are still investigating. The deceased was apparently involved in some sort of international high-jinks, judging by the number of highly-placed people trying to put a lid on the case.

Several different spy agencies from various countries, including the Vatican, are involved. “*The spooks tend to bungle, an occupational hazard that arises from their inability to let the left hand know what the right hand is doing.*” Everyone has something to hide, which slows Ryan's investigation.

The novel then takes a lengthy detour from Ryan to the murdered priest's diary, which has been found and covers decades. It is quoted at very great length. The deceased had been in a Russian monastery for decades. The idea was that he would be a sleeper agent for the Roman Catholic church, ready to ordain priests to convert Russians from Orthodoxy to Catholicism. The problem was that when the Communist regime fell, it was Orthodoxy that was triumphant. The priest/agent left newborn Russia as a complete and abject failure.

There is a twist though. The murdered man may have been an imposter. The foreign spy agencies competing for the diary thought it named names of people who preferred to stay anonymous. It didn't, and could have been published without raising a blush on anyone's cheek.

Mercenaries working for the Russian FSB stage a raid on the university library where the diary is kept, but police anticipated them and are waiting. From there, the plot gets complicated very fast. The Vatican and the spy agencies all had different agendas which converged onto the Divinity School.

The final explanation takes up a chapter, although it is quite readable. Various hypotheses are postulated and discarded before arriving at a final answer. A complicated plot, yet quite understandable. Greeley has a page-turning style that keeps one reading. A good book.

THE DINOSAUR FEATHER by S.J. Gazan was published in her native Denmark in 2008 and translated into English by Charlotte Barslund in 2013. The novel is about doctoral candidate Anna Bella Nor, whose dissertation is on the saurian origin of birds. Her supervisor Lars Helland starts the novel going by being murdered at his desk. The investigating officer Supt. Soren Marhauge soon learns a university can match any legislature when it comes to politicking and any waterfront tavern when it comes to sharp practice and intrigue.

The novel is slow to move anywhere, with too much filler, such as an extended dream sequence and infodumps about the supporting characters. It peps up a bit when Helland makes his bloody exit from this life while reading Nor's dissertation. The manuscript is held by police, which concerns Nor because she only had four copies made. She didn't much like Helland, but she wants her manuscript back.

The back story is filled about the feuding between Dr Clive Freeman and his faction of palaeozoologists who say that birds did not evolve from dinosaurs,

and Helland's group who say they did. (The latter view is the majority view in real life. Dinosaurs never became extinct; they became birds.) Freeman is a professor at the unlikely-named Dept. of Bird Evolution, Palaeobiology, and Systematics at the University of British Columbia at its non-existent Vancouver Island campus.

Freeman arrives in Denmark, ostensibly for a scientific conference, but really to act the part of Suspect #1. Nor, meanwhile, shows up everywhere. If someone dies, has their apartment ransacked, or stubs their toe on a sidewalk crack, she will be there. Not surprisingly, police consider her as Suspect #2.

The autopsy shows that Helland carried a load of a rare internal parasite that was attacking his nervous system, which explained his erratic behaviour before he died. Someone had to have deliberately infected him via his food. It was unfortunate that he was murdered before he could die of the disease. Helland's assistant is the next person to turn up dead, but that was apparently unrelated.

Everyone else, though, seems to be related, as various people find out who was adopted by whom, raised as a foundling, or was an illegitimate child. One wonders how the palaeontology staff at the university found any time to study fossils, they were so busy acting out soap operas. The third body is the perpetrator of Helland's murder, who commits suicide by scorpions, forcing the police to hire a pest-control exterminator before the lab boys can examine the crime scene.

In the epilogue, Suspects #1 and #2 have it out with each other debating bird origins. Since Nor's dissertation supported birds as dinosaurs, Freeman is obligated to lose to her. A straw man fight, like Perry Mason badgering a prosecution witness on the stand, except that Freeman didn't murder anyone. Gazan was determined to work into the novel everything she learned about dinosaurs, and darn near does.

The book reads reasonably well, as far as can be determined for a translation. Certainly you will come away better educated about the evolution of birds.

Blackmail On Campus.

"Academic Freedom" by Glenn Canary (1962 April, MANHUNT MAGAZINE) is about young and handsome university president Aaron Warren, who has been diddling an underage coed. A no-no, of course, not only for

professors but any man in places with statutory rape laws. An ambitious Eng. Lit. professor finds out about it, and visits Warren in his office, demanding to be appointed head of the English Dept., with a \$5,000 signing bonus.

Warren doesn't panic, but sets up a meeting in a secluded place and kills the blackmailer. There is no evidence to link him to the crime and he gets away with it. Except that his secretary overheard the conversation with the blackmailer and transcribed it, putting the papers in a safe place so Warren can't silence her. She is a woman of a certain age who sees life passing her by and doesn't want to become an old spinster. Her blackmail demand to Warren is simple: marry her or else.

WITH DISTINCTION (2012) by Edward Cline is set at Sloane University in the Massachusetts town of East Auberley. A small place, dependent entirely on the university for its economy. Chess Hanrahan is the police chief, with a dozen sworn officers and four clerks. Unlike the big cities, he sometimes goes out on calls if no one else is available. Such was the case on December 28 when Sloane University Security reports a suicide, a professor who shot himself.

Hanrahan concludes it was murder, not suicide, and begins an investigation. Not long after, a second body appears, washed up on a riverbank directly on the boundary line separating East Auberley from Auberley. His torso was in the former and his legs in the latter. Hanrahan manages to unload that case on the Auberley police. Both regret that the river didn't take the body further downstream into Cambridge. The second defunct was a private tutor for Sloane students, and who sold ghostwritten term papers to them.

The body count doesn't stop there, but Hanrahan is busy tracing the past life of the victims and their still-living coworkers. It is not a pretty tale. It is one of favoured students being allowed to slough off and yet still pass their courses because Daddy is not only a senator but a big contributor. Faculty members who have much to be modest about because they come from unaccredited colleges with fake credentials. Political maneuvering on campus for higher positions where one doesn't have to associate with undergraduates. Sharp practice with promotions, demotions, and golden parachutes to get troublemakers out of the way. Not one but two separate blackmailers, operating unaware of each other.

The novel concludes with the traditional J'accuse! and loose thread tying. A good read and not too exaggerated account of college life.

Academic Politics.

Woodrow Wilson was challenged by news reporters about his qualifications for the American Presidency. He replied that he had been at Princeton University, and academic infighting made federal politics look like a walk in the park.

Which brings us to "Fungus Soup" by Libby MacCall (1966 December, THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE). Very well educated scientists could create havoc with their technical knowledge if they were motivated. Or, for that matter, their brighter students. This story is about a professor who likes mushroom soup. He is one of the competitors for a vacant Department Head position opening up, which explains why a dinner he hosted includes the wrong kind of mushrooms in the soup.

The student who supervised the picking of mushrooms from a local park made sure the wrong species was included. The mushrooms didn't actually kill anyone but were intended to sicken his guests and sabotage his chances for the promotion. The plan almost succeeds.

The Worst Sin.

The greatest crime an academic can commit is plagiarism. Murder, rape, and theft are just mundane. In a community that lives by publish or perish rules, plagiarism is far worse.

MURDER IS ACADEMIC (2004) by Christine Poulson is set at Cambridge University. Professor Cassandra James, newly divorced, takes on a position at St. Ethelreda's College in the Department of English. Margaret Joplin, the Head of the Department, has been murdered in her garden while marking exam papers for final-year students. The wind then distributed the papers into a backyard pool. When James stops by for a visit, she finds papers scattered about and Joplin's body in the pool.

After the funeral, all the Miss Marples come out of the woodwork, female and male. Some of the exam papers were found in a rubbish bin, put there by someone, not blown in by the wind. That raises questions. All of the exam papers are recovered one way or another, but questions are focused on them.

James is asked to take over as Acting Head of Department. It is not a sinecure, for in addition to the usual duties, the College is coming up for a major

academic review in 18 months. In the Dept. of English, the faculty have not been publishing as much as they should, and as a result they may perish, academically speaking of course. The pressure on James is tremendous, not helped by her becoming pregnant by her lover.

James finds love letters of the deceased. She destroys them and other evidence because she doesn't want to ruin Joplin's reputation. By page 60, she has done enough to get her sent up the river for a decade on charges of obstruction and public mischief.

The body count rises, there is a fog-shrouded manor house, and various alarms and excursions, mostly triggered by James acting like an idiot. The murderer turns out to be a plagiarist, one of the greatest crimes an academic can commit.

This book has an unusual ending. I daresay it is the first mystery novel where Miss Marple, pardon me, James, catches the culprit while she is in labour. The baby arrives in between the J'accuse! and the climax.

“Academic Circles” by Peter Wood (2016 September, ASIMOV’S) is about Kate Warner, a minor English literature professor at a minor college, who is accused of plagiarism after her articles in minor learned journals turn out to have been submitted by her colleague Thomas Marzano months before she did. It turns out that he has access to a time machine, and from there the story trundles through the plot.

Being an academic, Marzano's jealousies take precedence over ruling the world, unmeasurable wealth, and other advantages of time machines. In the original timeline, he was a mediocre author at best, whereas Warner is a rising star, so he solves two problems at once. The difficulty is that there are follow-on effects in the new timelines, as the world adjusts slightly each time.

A Poor Player Who Struts And Frets.

THE ALPINE PURSUIT (2004) by Mary Daheim is a cozy mystery set in the village of Alpine, Washington State. This book is part of a series where the local Miss Marple is Emma Lord, editor and publisher of THE ALPINE ADVOCATE newspaper. Since this is an extended series of novels, the cumulative murder rate in the village makes any big city outside of Iraq and Syria look like a peaceful haven.

The body count begins at a community college play, staged by the local amateur dramatic club with all the finesse and acting ability that we expect of such things. One of the actors is Hans Berenger, Dean of Students at the college. He takes his final bow when someone loads a prop gun with real bullets.

The deceased was a candidate for the next college President. The Board of Trustees, who would decide the matter, operate as if they were in a soap opera. The trustees range from an old biddy who inherited money and never lets anyone forget it, to young turks who, Come the Revolution, know exactly who they will put up against the wall.

The second death is a pet dog who got its neck snapped deliberately. Enough text is wasted on the critter to put the reader on guard that it will somehow tie in. Lord does her investigative reporting, crossing paths with the local police as they exchange information and keep the plot moving forward.

Everyone in Alpine has something to hide, and suspicion is scattered about like road salt. Some of the connections seem far-fetched, especially those that dredge up Berenger's unsavory past and explain why his death was poetic justice. This is a reasonably good novel when judged as a cozy mystery.

THE PHILATELIC LIFE EXAMINED

by Dale Speirs

Stamp collecting is an inexpensive hobby. Contrary to popular belief, not all stamps are worth a fortune. The vast majority cost pennies or under a dollar. Stamp dealers are constantly plagued by people bringing in a fill-in-the-spaces stamp album, hoping to pay off their mortgage or put the kids through college. Such albums are what are known as packet grade material. Stamps are not valuable because they are old, or even because they are rare. Also, the top prices are for material that is in top quality condition, with no tears, thinned paper, hinge marks, or blunted perforations.

The first postage stamp was issued on May 6, 1840, by Britain. Other countries soon followed, and by the middle 1850s there were enough stamps that people began to seriously collect them. The first full-time dealers began business in the

1860s, and stamp clubs arose not long after. By the 1880s, there were so many philatelic publications that only a few rich men could afford to subscribe to them all and buy the back issues to complete their runs. During the late 1800s, national societies arose. The oldest extant society is the Royal Philatelic Society of London, established in 1869. The American Philatelic Society was founded in 1886, and the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada in 1919.

Which brings me to NASSAU STREET (1960), an autobiography by American stamp dealer Herman Herst Jr. He was a prolific writer in philatelic journals and wrote with a chatty and humorous approach. Occasionally he didn't let the facts interfere with a good story. You do not have to be a philatelist to enjoy this book. Herst writes in a non-technical manner, and explains anything that might need explaining to a non-collector.

Herst came from Portland, Oregon, graduating with a journalism degree just as the economy was descending into the depths of the Great Depression. There being no work of any kind out west, he rode the boxcars to New York City. After working a variety of jobs, he found himself as a bond runner on Wall Street. Each delivery of bonds to a broker was worth tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, for which he received \$15 per week, a good wage for a single man. Because of the value of the bonds, they were delivered directly to Mr Big at each brokerage. This put Herst into contact with many great names on Wall Street.

Some of the brokers were stamp collectors like Herst, and from them he learned. The Great Depression was the height of stamp collecting popularity because stamps held their values better than many investments. In large cities it was possible to attend a different stamp club meeting every night of the month. Stamps were mostly inexpensive enough that average collectors could supplement their income by wheeling and dealing. Hearst became one of them.

He became a full-time stamp dealer when his sideline income from stamps began to surpass his wages at the brokerage. He rented an office on Nassau Street, where the vast majority of stamp dealers were concentrated. He prospered and soon learned the best strategies for doing business.

Capital costs were always a concern. A stamp dealer can't tie up money in cheap common stuff that won't sell, which is why if you take Grandpa's stamp album to a dealer you will get little for it or even a refusal. Nor can a dealer put too much money into fabulous rarities with poor liquidity. This is why the

million-dollar stamps are only sold by auction on behalf of the consignor, so that the dealer doesn't have to lock up his funds. Herst learned to concentrate on the mid-range stock and to aim for fast turnover, not maximum profits.

In 1937, Herst and his mother crossed the Atlantic by steamship and landed in England. Then and now, stamps usually bring the best price in their country of origin and, conversely, lower prices elsewhere. Arbitrage is buying low in one place and selling high in another, and Herst became adept at it. He used his American dollars to buy mid-range USA stamps, ship them back to New York City where he had a partner running his Nassau Street shop, and sell them there at a profit.



Having scoured London stamp shops for several months, he and his mother then moved to France and repeated the process. His mother did some dealing on her own account. Herst was trading in a particular variety of American stamp sheets at 6 francs each, about 18 cents US at the exchange rate. Unbeknownst to him, his mother had unloaded a pad of 100 sheets of the same stamp at \$1 per sheet to the same dealer, who was unaware of their relationship. Years later, Herst revisited the dealer, who still had 98 sheets unsold. “... *in French he made a rather impolite reference to the legitimacy of an American lady which I might have taken as a personal affront as well, but I remained silent.*”

From there, Herst and his mother went through Belgium and Luxembourg before arriving in Germany. The Nazis caused no problems for the Hersts because they were traveling on American passports and had American birthplaces. But Herst had eyes and ears, and saw what was happening to his fellow Jews. He could do nothing while in Germany.

Back in the USA, no one would believe what he told them. The problem was that during World War One, the government and newspapers had circulated propaganda of German atrocities that turned out to be untrue. The second time

around, Herst's friends just pshawed at him and said those were more wild stories to drag America into a foreign war and he shouldn't exaggerate.

Taking the train from Berlin to Dresden, the Herst's compartment door was suddenly yanked open by the Gestapo. "*Juden?*", barked an officer. One man instinctively shrank back. He was grabbed by the knot of his tie, yanked out of his seat, and hauled away. Everyone else had their passports examined. "... *on seeing that we were Americans, the police bowed deeply and apologized for the annoyance. "Wir suchen Juden, das ist alles", he explained nonchalantly.*"

After Germany, Herst and his mother went to Czechoslovakia. For the first time, he learned about the hazards of currency exchange. He bought huge quantities of stamps for US dollars, then multiplied his profits many times over re-selling them in Czechoslovakian kronen. Only after he accumulated a briefcase full of kronen did he find out that it was a blocked currency, meaning that it couldn't be taken out of the country. Nor could it be exchanged for other currencies, except to a limit of \$10 per person.

The Hersts were then incredibly wealthy by Czechoslovakian standards. In an effort to use up some of the kronen, they bought fancy new clothes, moved into the most expensive hotel in Prague, and still couldn't reduce their stash. Herst finally worked out a plan with a local dealer to buy a huge stock of stamps and have them shipped to New York City.

Travels through the rest of Europe weren't as satisfactory, since most good stamps were gone. Refugees fleeing the impending war bought stamps because they could be smuggled out in the lining of a coat or mailed out in the folds of a letter. On arrival in America, they could be sold for cash, if not the full purchase price, then at least something to help the refugees begin a new life.

The Hersts returned to England. He met a young lady, courted her, and they were married a fortnight later. His mother returned to the USA but the happy couple were delayed by American bureaucracy, which refused to give her an American passport unless Herst could document that he could support her. Since he dealt only in cash sales, this was beyond him. After months of wrangling, he finally got a work-around. Herst noted that if he had married an American woman abroad, or any woman within the USA, he would not have been asked if he could support a wife. Finally, back to New York City, where the couple settled in a few months before the war began.

World War Two triggered another boom in philately. The Allies had numerous price controls but exempted stamps because it was impractical to establish ceiling prices on a million different varieties. Citizens had cash piling up but no place to spend it due to rationing and artificial scarcities. Once again, stamps showed their value. Putting spare cash into stamps paid better than war bonds. Refugees brought a flood of philatelic material into American stamp stores.

So did soldiers serving overseas, who were always looking for opportunities to supplement their meager pay. No village post office in a battle field was overlooked for pads of stamps to loot. Herst writes of one customer who supplied him with material: "*As he entered each Belgian village, walking down the street looking for snipers, he kept one eye peeled for the post office. Apparently he did not find it difficult to fight his way across Belgium with a stack of mint sheets under one arm.*"

Many dealers had trouble getting help during the war. They couldn't just hire anyone off the street but needed skilled staff who knew stamps, something that takes years of training. Numerous stamp stores, both great and small, simply went to mail order only, which was a more efficient way to operate. (And still is. Think about it: Amazon is the world's largest mail order company.) Auction houses dwindled down for lack of consignments and customers who had the time to come out to a sale.

After the war, Herst's business steadily grew. The remaining half of this book is a collection of humorous anecdotes about collectors and dealers, and Herst's own adventures as he chased about bidding on estates and digging through old mansions in search of material. Difficult to summarize in a review but a good read.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor’s remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to opuntia57@hotmail.com]

FROM: Milt Stevens
Simi Valley, California

2016-10-31

OPUNTIA #351: Diesel Punk? Prospective Diesel Punk writers would have an advantage over most other “Punk” writers because there was so much speculation at the time as to how things were going to play out. I recall reading a book from the late Thirties titled BLACKMAIL OR WAR. It speculated that Germany and Poland might ally to invade Russia. It sounded like a reasonable idea. England and France would have watched happily from the sidelines. The German-Polish alliance would almost certainly have won. However, it would have taken quite awhile.

Some people thought that the United States and Great Britain might have become involved in a naval war in the Twenties. Apparently, tensions were getting higher, and it wouldn’t have taken much. In a rare attack of good judgment, the conflict led to the London Naval Conference rather than war. I don’t think the idea of an Anglo-American naval war would be a popular idea for alternative history fiction.

Another possibility might be that the Communists rather than the Nazis take over Germany. This would probably lead to a Berlin-Moscow Axis with Germany as the senior partner. This alliance would have been a Red Menace that would have been quite menacing indeed. There are all sorts of ways that this situation might have led to war. The outcome of such a war would have been uncertain.

Your mention of world spanning supercomputers running amok reminded me of an early Fifties Poul Anderson’s story titled “Sam Hall”. That story depicted a McCarthyist future where the secret police had a computer system that could keep track of everybody and everything. The protagonist (a disaffected colonel in the security force) adds a bogus person named Sam Hall to the database and creates linkages to make it look like Sam Hall is the leader of an underground movement bent on revolution. Since the story was from the early Fifties, it shows data being input from wire. I imagine the computers had vacuum tubes, although it wasn’t specifically mentioned.

[What leaves me in fear are automatic upgrades to cellphone apps or computers that don’t work and/or disable your device so you can’t communicate the problem.]

I worked on developing police computer systems during much of my working career. Keeping track of all the crimes that occur in a major city is quite an undertaking. The idea of trying to do it for the whole country makes my head hurt. There are a few crimes that are worth tracking over a larger area. The FBI keeps track of those. However, they are the exception rather than the rule.

[These days it isn’t the secret police that citizens should fear, it’s the credit agencies and banks that can mess up your life with bad data almost impossible to correct, assuming that you can even find out where the problem is. The cashless society where everyone pays by tapping their smartphone or card is wonderful, until your account is hacked and stores don’t take cash anymore.]

