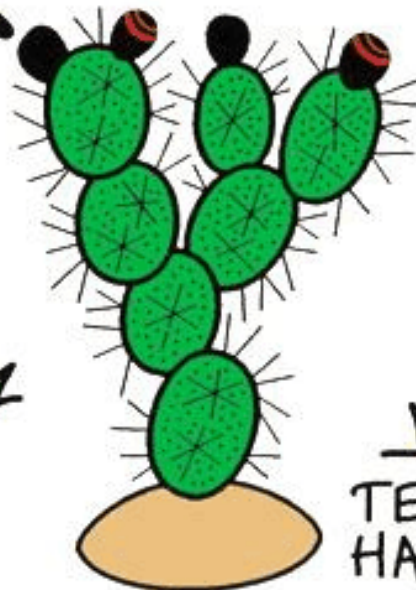




You expect me to play
the straight man?

Don't
take it so
figuratively.



TEDDY
HARVIA

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.

AS I WALKED OUT ONE MORNING

2016-11-12

photos by Dale Speirs

At the risk of sounding like a bad folk song, the day after Remembrance Day the unseasonably warm weather inspired me to stroll perchance along the bonny banks of the Elbow River. Just downstream of Stanley Park in the central Calgary area, I spied an elm tree gaily decorated in red ribbons and cloth. There was no identification as to who decorated the tree, but it seemed to be a kindergarten class, judging from handprinted slips attached to the elm. There were photos of soldiers from the Boer War to Afghanistan, and the red colours of everything made it apparent that this was a Remembrance Day project.





Left to right: WW2, Afghanistan, Boer War.





SUPERMOON

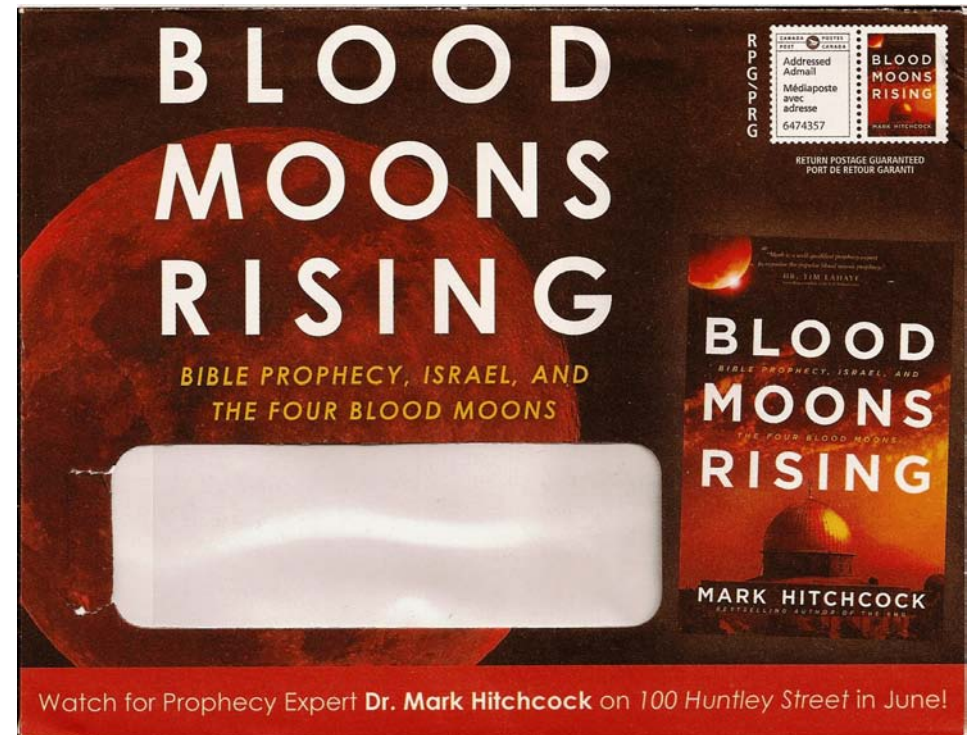
by Dale Speirs

2016-11-14

There was much ado about yet another supermoon, the closest approach of the Moon to Earth since 1948. The Moon didn't look any bigger than usual, but I was surprised at how bright it was. For a moment I thought the City had finally put in a new bulb in the streetlight in front of my house, but it was actually the Moon. It was easy to tell because the tree in my front yard was casting two shadows at very different angles. The Moon had the brighter shadow.

In recent years, it seems that the news media have been paying more attention to minor astronomical events such as supermoons and blood moons. This also stirs up a few doomsday prophets, although their credibility doesn't seem to be what it used to, since blood moons are common and yet nothing happens. The doomsayers claim it was their prayers or supporters' donations that prevented the crisis. Sure it was. The envelope shown below is from 2014.

CHQR, a Calgary radio station, plays old-time radio shows after 23h00 every night. For the supermoon night, one of the shows was the Ray Bradbury story "And The Moon Be Still As Bright" from X MINUS ONE. Someone at the station obviously has a sense of humour.



AS I WALKED OUT ONE AFTERNOON
photo by Dale Speirs

2016-11-17

As I walked out one afternoon in downtown Calgary, I saw this study in blue. The view looks south, yet the north side of the middle skyscraper shines brightly from reflected sunlight of skyscrapers behind the camera.



TRANSIT FANNING IN CALGARY: PART 15

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 14 appeared in OPUNTIA's #256, 258, 260, 264, 269, 275, 283, 298, 302, 327, 333, 341, 348, and 357.]

Calgary Transit has added mustaches to some of its vehicles in November 2016 in support of Movember, a men's health charity.

On the next page is one of CT's articulated buses, used on the heaviest routes.





SHERLOCKIANA: PART 22

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 21 appeared in OPUNTIA's #63.1B, 63.1C, 63.1D, 67.1D, 68.1C, 69.1E, 70.1A, 71.1B, 251, 253, 256, 261, 269, 270, 276, 288, 309, 333, 340, 348, and 356.]

The original Sherlock Holmes stories are referred to as the canon, while stories written by other authors in the Holmesian setting are called pastiches. Short-story pastiches compiled into a book are a collection if they are all done by one author, and an anthology if done by several authors.

Pastiches: Collections.

THE SECRET NOTEBOOKS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (2004) is one of several collections of pastiches by June Thomson. This one leads off with “The Case Of The Upwood Scandal”, which happens just after that nasty business with the Baskerville dog. The owner of a gambling club suspects two members of cheating at cards, and asks Holmes to investigate. He eventually determines that the duo are using code words and gestures to communicate their cards to each other. One of them does a mind reader act in a music hall, so after Holmes recognizes him from there, the rest soon follows.

“The Case Of The Aluminium Crutch” (note British spelling) is about the career of Whitey Johnson, a crippled man who worked as a “stall” and a “stickman” for a pair of snatch-and-run jewel thieves. In thief parlance, a stall is someone who gets in the way of a pursuer while looking like a passing pedestrian and slows him down to allow the thief to get away. A stickman takes the handoff of stolen jewels from the running thief and hides it so that if the thief is caught, there is no evidence on him.

The actual method used by the jewel thieves was a bit more complex than that, especially in the method of casing a jewelry shop before the grab. The virtue of this story is in how Holmes elucidates the method step by step in logical order. After that, he and the police only had to wait for the next grab.

“The Case Of The Manor House Mystery” begins with a nephew concerned that a fraudulent servant has insinuated his way into his uncle’s manor and probably an inheritance. The plot is predictable and the story is padded out by dragging Mycroft Holmes into it.

“The Case Of The Cardinal’s Corpse” is about an unfortunate cleric, Cardinal Tosca, who had arrived in London on private business and later turned up dead. Using clues such as mud on the dead man’s boots, Holmes traces the location of his death, which turned out to have been natural from a heart attack. The people he was visiting panicked and disposed of his body elsewhere in order to cover up a scandal. Holmes lets them get away with it since it would serve no purpose to expose the matter. As he has done in the canon, he acknowledges that justice and the law are two different things.

“The Case Of The Arnsworth Affair” is a recollection by Holmes about the hunt for a spoiled young noble, Lord Gilbert Arnsworth, wanted for murder of which there was no doubt. His mother the Dowager is a battleaxe who hides her only child in the manor house, a stately pile riddled with hiding places and secret passages. Holmes smokes out the culprit, not just figuratively, by lighting a smudge and shouting “Fire!”. No one would stay in a hidey-hole if the house is burning, and so Arnsworth is flushed out.

“The Case Of The Vanishing Barque” is based on one of Watson’s throwaway remarks in the canon about cases that were never written up, this one being the disappearance of the ship Sophy Anderson. Holmes and Watson are visited by Thomas Corbett, first mate on board the Lucy Belle, formerly the Sophy Anderson. The ship had not sunk but was renamed and repainted as part of an insurance fraud. Years later, Corbett’s conscience is bothering him because the crew had a falling out and murder was done. Holmes uses a fraud of his own to get the other crew members to confess and hang the captain.

“The Case Of The Gustaffson Stone” concerns a valuable jewel which was substituted for a fake. Holmes is hired to switch them around again and let the thief have the fake. The difficulty is that the jewel belongs to the King of Sweden, and was stolen by one of his barons. Absolute discretion and quiet had to be kept, not an easy task.

On the whole, this collection can be said to be workmanlike. No clangers but mostly average pastiches and a few good ones.

THE SECRET ARCHIVES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES (2012) by June Thomson is another collection of her pastiches. The first story is “The Case Of The Conk-Singleton Forgery”. Holmes is consulted by an art dealer about a forged painting brought to him for authentication by the widow Elvira Greenstock, about whom he has suspicions. Forensic analysis uncovers a

second painting on the reverse side, which turns out to be a Dutch master worth a fortune. Greenstock, real name Conk-Singleton, had painted the forgery, hoping to pass it off as a genuine landscape by Constable. She didn't know the recycled canvas she was using was a valuable genuine painting.

“The Case Of The Stray Chicken” is a sequel to the Lady Frances Carfax story of the canon, where a husband-and-wife pair of thieves preyed on widows. This time they are posing as physician and sister, imposing themselves on the widow Huxtable, whose personal companion Miss Pilkington has become alarmed about them and called in Holmes. The criminal pair have persuaded Huxtable to move into their “clinic”, where she will undoubtedly be bled dry of all her financial assets and then be disposed of. Holmes brings in Lestrade, and the pair are netted before any harm is done. Not an overly imaginative sequel, but it does tie up some loose threads from the original story.

“The Case Of The One-Eyed Colonel” elaborates on Thurston, a friend of Watson who was only mentioned once in passing in the canon as someone who played billiards with him. In this pastiche, they are fellow members of the Kandahar Club, for veterans of India and Afghanistan. Thurston introduces Watson to Col. Godfrey Carruthers, ex-India Army. Watson, for reasons he can't quite explain, takes an instant dislike to the Colonel. Holmes coaches Watson on how to investigate him, and then later joins in the investigation. Between them, they deduce that their prey is a faker, and running a confidence game to steal chequebooks for fraud.

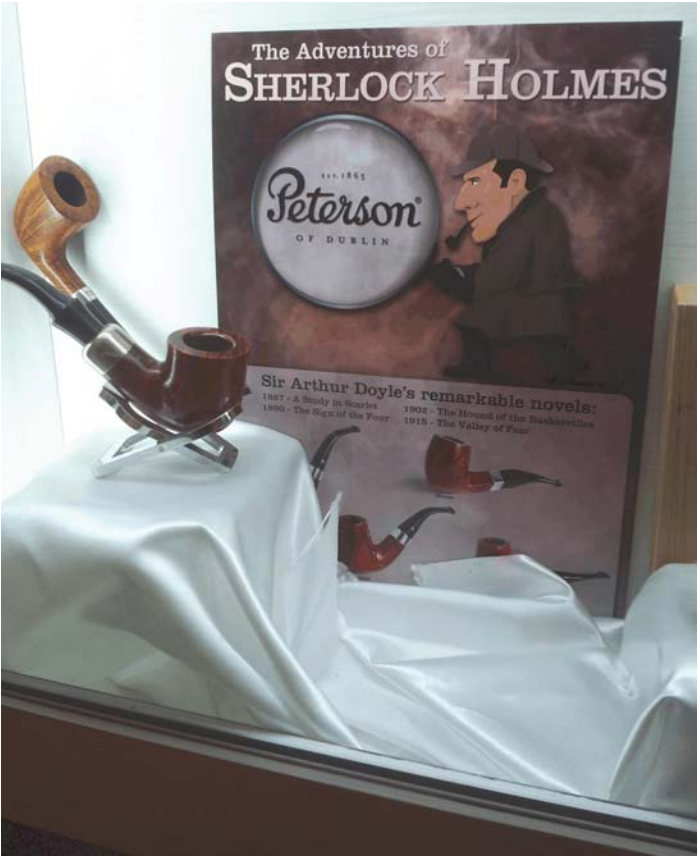
“The Case Of The Three-Handed Widow” is a reminiscence by Holmes of a case from his early days before he met Watson and was still living in Montague Street. He was consulted by a vicar, one of whose parishioners had been robbed of her purse just after services. Holmes realizes immediately it had to have been a female pickpocket working as part of a gang. He begins casing churches and village fetes to locate the gang. With the help of Lestrade and a constable, they run in the pickpockets. And the three hands? The woman who picked the purses wore a jacket with a false arm and hand in one sleeve, while she kept her real hand hidden inside and ready to slash open a purse.

“The Case Of The Pentre Mawr Murder” takes Holmes and Watson out to the land of coal mines and male choirs, that is, Wales, to defend a farm boy against the murder of his father. There are several romantic entanglements to provide motivation, and clues are scattered about like road salt. The weapon used is obvious to the reader, but not the police. There are a plethora of suspects. The

solution to the crime cites more names than a telephone directory, and the epilogue is just as tangled up with who went where after the case was solved.

“The Case Of The Missing Belle Fille” has Lestrade coming to Holmes for help in a murder case. A decayed body has been found in a back yard in one of the cheaper districts of London. All the inhabitants of the house speak French only, which hampers Lestrade. There is a stepdaughter who wanted her inheritance, and there were numerous petty jealousies and intrigues in the house. Unfortunately the case is not solved from the facts given in the story, but instead from hidden facts suddenly brought to light in the denouement.

“The Case Of The Watchful Waiter” begins with a man maintaining surveillance on 221B. It ties in some loose threads from Reichenbach Falls. Moriarty is dead, but Col. Moran and the gang are still on the loose. They are now working for the greater glory of the Reich. This pastiches drags in loose threads from other stories in the canon where unnamed conspiracies had been mentioned, and which are now part of the Kaiser's conspiracy.



Setting aside the caveats mentioned above, this collection is a good read.

This window display seen in a shop at Chinook Centre mall, Calgary.

TECHNICOLOR EPICS

by Dale Speirs

Television had its birth pangs in the 1930s, but because of the Great Depression and World War Two, didn't really get going until 1948. By 1955, it had killed old-time radio. Movie producers were initially complacent about television but then began scrambling to produce full-colour epics on giant screens to pull audiences away from the television set. These movies had star-studded casts and ran long enough that they had intermissions. Colour television didn't reach the mass market until the late 1960s, after which movies could only compete with large-screen spectaculars.

I am just old enough to remember going to some of these epics as a young lad. (I was ten years old in 1965.) Now, in the DVD era, I watch them again. Those of us who are Baby Boomers are familiar with the casts, although the Millennials have no idea, anymore than us Boomers knew who Rudy Vallee was. My favourite movies of this era are the grand epics of journeys and chases from one place to another. The movie goers of the 1950s and early 1960s were still relatively naive and untraveled, so the grand sagas on the silver screen attracted them more than they would today.

Modern Odysseys.

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS is a 1956 movie based on the Jules Verne novel, adapted for screen by James Poe, John Farrow, and S.J. Perelman. The movie was very loosely adapted, and has lengthy non-Verne sequences inserted, such as a bullfight, song and dance numbers, and a long balloon trip. At three hours running time, including an intermission, it was a full night out, and on the DVD was split over two disks.

It begins with a overture, then an irrelevant documentary about a silent movie based on Verne's story FROM THE EARTH TO THE MOON, next the main story, with an intermission halfway through. There are extended views of landscapes, a bison herd, and spectacular disasters. Just about every famous Hollywood actor had a cameo role, and the extras exceeded 68,000.

The basic plot is adapted from the novel, with Phileas Fogg taking a bet at his club that he can travel around the world in 80 days. Accompanied by his manservant Passeportout, they travel by train, ship, balloon, railroad, elephant, and just about anything else the producer could think. The route is across

Europe, through the Suez Canal, over India to Hong Kong and Japan, thence to the USA, and finally over the North Atlantic. A police inspector is pursuing them, thinking that Fogg has robbed the Bank of England. There are various other misadventures along the way, including rescuing a young widow from suttee in India and bringing her along the rest of the way.

The pace picks up slightly towards the end of the movie, but every minute of scenic views the second-unit director filmed is added in. In the 1950s, when most movies were still black-and-white, and few people traveled beyond the adjacent valley of their home, these colour panoramas would have been well worth the price of admission. Today they are just tedious.

The final part of the movie has more action, and a trick ending. It appears that Fogg has lost his bet. At the last moment, Passeportout realizes they gained a day because they were traveling east. They rush into the club with 14 seconds to spare.

At that point, the movie ends. For all that the movie squandered time on those scenic views, it halts abruptly. The film would fail today, because audiences are more sophisticated and have traveled more, so the foreign locations are not as awe-inspiring as they were sixty years ago.

IT'S A MAD, MAD, MAD, MAD WORLD (1963) isn't quite the journey of the Verne epic, but probably holds the record for the longest car chase, at 2 hours and 41 minutes. An all-star cast with dozens of cameos by famous names, in a screenplay by William and Tania Rose. Slapstick and smash-ups galore, plus the usual intermission.

The basic group of leading actors come across an accident scene. The victim is a bank robber who knows he is dying, and tells the group where he hid \$350,000 cash. Big money in those days. Add an extra zero to convert it into our modern depreciated currency. The contestants, pardon me, lead actors set off on a race through the southern California hills to get to the money. Greed overpowers all of them, as well as others they pick up along the way who are let in on the secret.

Crashes put some of them into other means of transport, including airplanes. I admire one character, a middle-aged man wearing coveralls and hat who was forced to use a bicycle, and pedaled across the California desert without breaking a sweat. The cast all manage to arrive at the same time at the treasure

site. En route, they do everything from completely demolishing a service station to blowing up a hardware store. During their escapades, the local police and county sheriffs are watching from a distance, hoping they'll lead them to the loot.

The constabulary are also keeping a long list of charges to be preferred, from multiple counts of dangerous driving to criminal trespass and damage to property. When the buried cash is discovered, a police detective succumbs to temptation and steals the money, triggering one final car chase.

Lots of visual gags. One is unintended. Chrysler supplied the cars, so other than a handful few of other makes, everyone is driving the exact same model car, both civilian and police. Back then, the southern California desert hills weren't quite the cliché they later became, when studios used them as stand-ins for everything from England to upstate New York.

Off To The Races.

THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN IN THEIR FLYING MACHINES (1965), written by Ken Annakin and Jack Davies, is set in 1910 when aviation was still being born and long-distance air races were front-page news around the world.

This comedy rounds up an endearing cast well known to the adult generation of that time, and puts them through their paces in slapstick. It captures perfectly the pre-war British class system and the tensions of European politics that would plunge the world into war only four years later. The antique aircraft were actual working replicas, and some of the crashes were real. At the time the movie was being filmed, there was a major antique car rally underway in England, and the producers were able to rent large numbers of authentic motorcars of that era.

The movie begins with Richard Mays, an ambitious young British Army lieutenant who has his own flying machine. His fiancée Patricia is the daughter of a newspaper magnate. Through her, he manages to convince Lord Rawnsley to sponsor a London-to-Paris air race, open to anyone. To ensure international participation, the prize is £10,000, a tremendous fortune back in 1910. Patricia is a suffragette, tolerated by her bemused father, but he strictly forbids her to fly.

The contest is a success, with contestants arriving from Germany, Italy, France, the USA, and Japan. Mays is one of the British fliers, another being Sir Percy Ware-Armitage, who is a bounder and a cad. Sir Percy manages to sabotage

quite a few of his competitors before the race gets underway. The foreign competitors are all stereotypes, but in a non-malicious way. The Germans are pompous and rigidly bureaucratic. The Japanese are ah-so types except the pilot, who studied at Eton and speaks English with a perfect posh accent. The French pilot is a womanizer, while the Italian is inept, noisy, and constantly crashing his planes. The movie was released at the peak of the Space Race, so the audience was aware of the analogies.

The race has all manner of aerial stunts. Some were inadvertent because the replicas weren't much better than the originals and tended to break apart in midair or run into a tree. There is a romantic subplot thrown in to pace the comedy. The movie runs more than two hours, so an intermission is included.

Once the race is underway, the plot bounces from one crash or cast-of-thousands scene to the next. The race is done in stages that take a couple of days, because the piano wire and balsa wood aeroplanes of that time were not capable of a continuous sustained flight from London to Paris. The competitors are winnowed down to three, and there is a heartwarming finish.

The young lovers kiss on the Paris airfield, and as they do so, they hear a roar up in the sky. They look up and so does the camera, as six jet fighters zoom by in wing formation. The movie suddenly snaps ahead to the modern era. A portentous announcer declaims that thanks to modern technology, passenger aircraft can fly from London to Paris in minutes. Jump cut to a planeload of passengers waiting in an airport terminal because their flight has been delayed overnight due to weather. And so to the credits. An enjoyable film that captures the excitement of the dawn of aviation.

THE GREAT RACE, written by Arthur A. Ross, was released the same year as TMMITFM and was loosely based on the 1908 New York to Paris via Siberia auto race. It was the American equivalent of TMMITFM, with a cast of American stars and character actors. It didn't do as well as its British counterpart because there was too much slapstick and not enough comedy.

The director Blake Edwards was a devotee of silent film comedies but didn't understand that audiences had moved on from what was big box office in the 1910s. He threw in all the old routines he could think of, but only proved the saying about trying too hard.

The story of THE GREAT RACE is mainly about ongoing competition between The Great Leslie (the good guy, always immaculately dressed in white) and Professor Fate (the villain, dressed in black with flowing cape). The two are stunt performers constantly trying to one-up each other in daredevil stunts. Leslie's stunts always work, while the Professor usually ends up crash landing in a farmer's pig sty.

Leslie convinces the Webber Motor Car Company to sponsor a race from New York to Paris via Siberia. The Professor takes on Sir Percy's role as the bounder and cad, or in American terms, the scoundrel and con man. He is basically a Wile E. Coyote, whose mad inventions are constantly backfiring on him. The young suffragette part is Maggie DuBois, the first female reporter for a New York newspaper.

The continual slapstick becomes boring. The actors overplay their parts too broadly, substituting shouting for emotion. There are long detours in the film for an extended Old West barroom brawl, a stage musical number, and a Prisoner of Zenda parody, none of which belonged to the movie or added anything to it. According to Wikipedia, the movie still holds the record for the largest pie fight in history, with more than 4,000 pies thrown in just over four minutes of screen time.

The plot is about the same as TMMITFM, but the acting is worse, and there is not the good cheer and fun of the latter. I've watched my DVD of TMMITFM many times, and find it pleasant and enjoyable. On the other hand, I've only watched THE GREAT RACE twice, first when I bought the DVD, and secondly when I wrote this review. It was mildly amusing the first time around, but mostly annoying on second playing.

Fiction About Epic Movies.

“William The Conqueror” by Michael Innes (1967 March, THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE) is about a murder carried out during the filming of a great epic about that fatal day in 1066. It also proved to be a fatal day here and now. A cast of thousands of extras are representing Harold's and William's troops at Hastings, only a handful of whom have any knowledge of archery.

Mark and Claire Bullion are the leading actors, but she has become too friendly with a supporting actor named Giles Barcroft. When filming is over for the day, a house party is held at a local manor, where the women try their hand at

archery. Barcroft is shot by an arrow, which Mark blames on Claire, part of his plot to dispose of them both. The body tumbled down a slope, yet the arrow was intact, indicating that it had been stabbed in after Barcroft fell. Mark will hang for that. Not the first time that there was ill will between cast members, nor the last.

SANDS OF OBLIVION (2007) is a movie that starts off from a factual basis and then veers into fantasy. In 1923, Cecil B. DeMille filmed THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, an epic if ever there was one. It was a silent film that ran 2.5 hours, not including intermission. The California desert was an obvious choice for location filming, with full-scale sets of ancient Egypt. When the filming was completed, the sets were abandoned and left to decay over the years. No EPA in those days to enforce a cleanup.

SANDS diverges from our timeline by having DeMille order the sets torn down and buried. The problem, which only he and a few trusted employees knew, was that while most of the set had been built locally, some of the furnishings were imported from Egypt. Somewhere amongst that material was something malicious that killed people, although the deaths were passed off as accidents.

Jump forward to the present, where an archaeological dig of the site is in progress. The malicious doodad, an amulet, is dug up. You can guess the rest of the plot. First the ignorance. Then the slowly-dawning comprehension that something wicked this way is coming. Finally the shouting and screaming as the ancient jackal-headed demon gets down to serious work.

The bodies begin to pile up faster than the state troopers can haul them away. The death toll steadily rises as Jackal Head and a giant cobra made of sand go on a feeding frenzy. There are various alarums and excursions, including a dune buggy chase. The hero and heroine finally obliterate Jackal Head and the amulet with a shoulder-fired missile.

The SFX of this movie were uneven. The landscape and green-screen shots were acceptable back in the 1990s but were flat and obvious in this movie due to low-resolution rendering. The best SFX were when the hero was fighting a group of 2-D Egyptian warriors who peeled themselves off a temple wall and attacked. The creature SFX were not bad, but on the whole the SFX could have been done better in 2007.

THE ART WARS: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #44.1B.]

Stewart Home has since drifted on to other things, but his books on the avant-garde of the 1980s and 1990s still provide amusement. I reviewed other books of his in OPUNTIA #44.1B. Home was part of it, but never took himself or the movements seriously, and delighted in taking the starch out of them.

Groups such as Neoists, Plagiarists, Art Strikers, and the London Psychogeographical Association had faded into obscurity even by then, and certainly by the early 2000s. Home points out that many of these organizations were only a couple of wanna-be artists churning out press releases and manifestos, or five guys meeting in a basement and calling their gathering an International Congress.

Pretentious Drivelism.

NEOISM, PLAGIARISM, AND PRAXIS (1995) by Stewart Home, a pseudonym of Kevin Llewellyn Callan of England, is a collection of articles summarizing the fringe art movements of the 1980s and early 1990s.

There was a fad at that time to use shared pseudonyms such as Karen Eliot or Luther Blissett. This was hailed as a revolutionary breakthrough, as if pulp magazines, to take one example, hadn't been using house names for decades. A variation on this was to use the zine title SMILE by different publishers. There was the Art Strike of 1990-1992, during which artists no one had heard of went on strike. Their absence was unnoticed by the rest of the world, although they continued to churn out manifestos by the score.

Neoism began among mail artists in Montreal and was quickly taken over by performance artists elsewhere. The latter were mainly posers, trying to disgust mundanes and hopefully be arrested by police to make themselves martyrs and gain free publicity. They tried things like throwing vials of their own blood against a wall or using their bodily fluids mixed with paint on canvas. They didn't succeed. They held Apartment Festivals, supposedly as avant-garde reactions against the art gallery system. Truth be told, they were covering up the fact that their audiences were minuscule and could comfortably gather in someone's living room.

Home wrote considerable criticism of avant-garde groups, particularly the Situationists, who constantly tried to hijack the history of other groups to make themselves look more important and influential. When punk rock flowered in the 1980s, the Situationists claimed it was their musical branch. Successful protest groups were said to be due to the influence of Situationism.

In actual fact, the avant-garde groups were camp followers, waiting to see how events transpired, then rushing out manifestos claiming credit. It is said that history is written by the victors, but it is also true that followers can rewrite history to make themselves into leaders.

Papernet Blog Wars.

Home published numerous chapbooks during the 1990s. DISPUTATIONS ON ART, ANARCHY, AND ASSHOLISM (1997) is a collection of did-not-did-too articles by Homes and his critics responding to him, culled from zines and newspapers. The chapbook documents the feuding of the British avant-garde artists in the 1990s, which would be tedious to read about were their pretentious writings not so inadvertently funny. The combatants wrote of art movements as if nations rose and fell because of them. Few of the so-called movements were widely known, any more so than some local gardening club feud about judging in the local flower show or a parish hall kerfluffle over who would bring what dishes to a potluck supper.

The disputations of the Papernet in the 1990s touch a familiar chord when online blogs of today are compared to them. The Sad Puppies debacle of 2015, when the Hugo Awards establishment was hoisted on its own petard, is little different from the art gallery drivellists who thought they were the centre of the known universe.

In his essay "Feuding Considered As Performance Art", Home tells the story of a student at the National Art Library who weighed the press cuttings files of modern artists and then compiled a Fame Index based on who got the most coverage. Home was in the Top 20, which he thought amusing because the method didn't account for the content of the clippings. In the hopes of winning future Fame Indexes, Home began photocopying his press cuttings onto card stock and sending them to the NAL. Today we have online what's-trending charts, which ensure that Kim Kardashian is far ahead of real actors.

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: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2006-11-19

OPUNTIA #354: Beautiful shot to begin with [of James River district in central Alberta]. I hope it's all farm land; I'd hate to see it spoiled by a golf course or two. I remember one-lane bridges, but I also remember Murphy bridges, which were portable, and quite moveable, especially if you were driving on them. They were set up if there was extensive construction or demolition of an existing bridge, which put it out of service.

[That bridge is a Bailey bridge from World War Two surplus. They were used by sappers as quick and easy bridges in battlefields. There are hundreds of them in rural Canada, still as strong as they were 70 years ago.]

So, whither Vulcan, Alberta? If the Trek museum is gone, can they continue to have their annual festival? I guess there just wasn't enough business to keep them in town, or Drumheller gave them a better offer.

[The festival will continue, and all the other attractions are still there. See OPUNTIA #342 for photos. The museum couldn't make it because the tourist season is so brief in such an out-of-the-way place, and it had too much overhead for the rest of the year.]

Too many people walking with their heads down, studying their smartphones, have contributed to record numbers of pedestrians being killed on the streets of Toronto. Some might say evolution in action, and others would say death by misadventure, or by plain stupidity, in my opinion.

I can confirm that I am now the web historian for the CSFFA. One project I have for this winter is to go through the records of nominees and winners, confirm them, see if there are any gaps to fill in, and do some research back to see if we can reconstruct the list of the nominees and winners of the Auroras' predecessors, the Caspers. There is always more to research, learn and enter onto the website. And, the Grand Canadian Steampunk Exposition was great fun, and we are eager to go again in 2017.

OPUNTIA #355: [re: Calgary cemetery] Headstones are always an interesting read when exploring the history of your community. I remember one marker that had not only the names of the couple on it, but the names of eight of their children, who were also buried there. They all died before the age of 12, no doubt to disease and perhaps starvation.

OPUNTIA #356: Hello to Teddy [Harvia, the cover artist].

[The goddess Opuntia is always appreciated.]

I have the Steampunk Poe book on the shelf by my desk, and it was an interesting read and look, but it was stretching for steampunk references at a few points. I fully agree with your remarks on the Murdoch Mysteries episodes with Arthur Conan Doyle as a guest star, portrayed by Geraint Wyn-Davies.

OPUNTIA #357: [Re: goddess Opuntia cover] And the prickly pears would have won, if it weren't for you meddling kids

Yarnbombing has happened here, too, but like the painted utility boxes, they have been vandalized, and then removed. I am not sure why people do these things, but they do.

[I've never seen any vandalism of Calgary yarnbombing or the painted utility boxes. Indeed, that is why the boxes are painted, to eliminate graffiti.]

Transit: While I do have a small stack of TTC tokens, I also have my Presto card, which will eventually replace tokens and Metropasses, if only they can work out all the bugs in the system. A local friend works for Metrolinx, which is responsible for all transit in the Greater Toronto-Hamilton Area, and I think he has a job for life. When in London, we used our Oyster cards, the same kind of transit pass, and the Oyster cards seem to work well for everyone, and London also has nine different pricing zones. Presto should study the Oyster model, and see what fits, and make it work.

[Calgary Transit hired a contractor to install an electronic fare box system, where people could tap a card getting on the bus, but it never got past the pilot stage. Now the City is suing, and we continue to use paper tickets and passes.]

OPUNTIA #358: [Re: Remembrance Day] This year, I wasn't well enough to go to the Etobicoke cenotaph at the civic centre up the street, but I did view the

ceremonies from Ottawa on CBC. It does look that the egos of politicians will ensure there are war dead to honour. We've all had a very warm October and November, but as of tomorrow as I write, the temperatures will drop. My new winter coat is ready.

I still have my stamp albums, even though I haven't done anything with them in years. When I do get to them, I will have a pile of foreign stamps that have come from 30 years' worth of fanzines in the mail. One begets the other. When I do get back to stamps, I will need to see if there are any stamp supply stores, or if my local Michaels can help me out.

[You shouldn't have any problem in Toronto, and there are hundreds of Canadian stamp dealers online.]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Kesaraju, S., et al (2016) **A search for meteoroid lunar impact generated electromagnetic pulses.** EARTH, MOON, AND PLANETS 119:1-21

Authors' abstract: *"Lunar white light flashes associated with meteoroid impacts are now regularly observed using modest optical instrumentation. In this paper, we hypothesize that the developing, optically-dense hot ejecta cloud associated with these hypervelocity impacts also produce an associated complex plasma component that rapidly evolves resulting in a highly-transient electro magnetic pulse (EMP) in the VHF/UHF spectral region. Discovery of the characteristics and event frequency of impact EMPs would prove interesting to meteoroid flux and complex plasma physics studies especially if EMPs from the same event are detected from at least two locations on the Earth with relative delays appropriate to the propagation paths."*

"We describe a prototype observational search, conducted in May 2014, for meteoroid lunar-impact EMPs that was conducted using simultaneous, overlapping-band, UHF radio observations at the Arecibo (AO; Puerto Rico) and Haystack (HO, Massachusetts, USA) Observatories. Monostatic/bistatic lunar radar imaging observations were also performed with HO transmitting and HO/AO receiving to confirm tracking, the net delay, and the pointing/timing

ephemeris at both observatories. Signal analysis was performed using time-frequency signal processing techniques. Although, we did not conclusively identify EMP returns, this search detected possible EMPs and we have confirmed the search paradigm and established the sensitivity of the AO-HO system in detecting the hypothesized events."

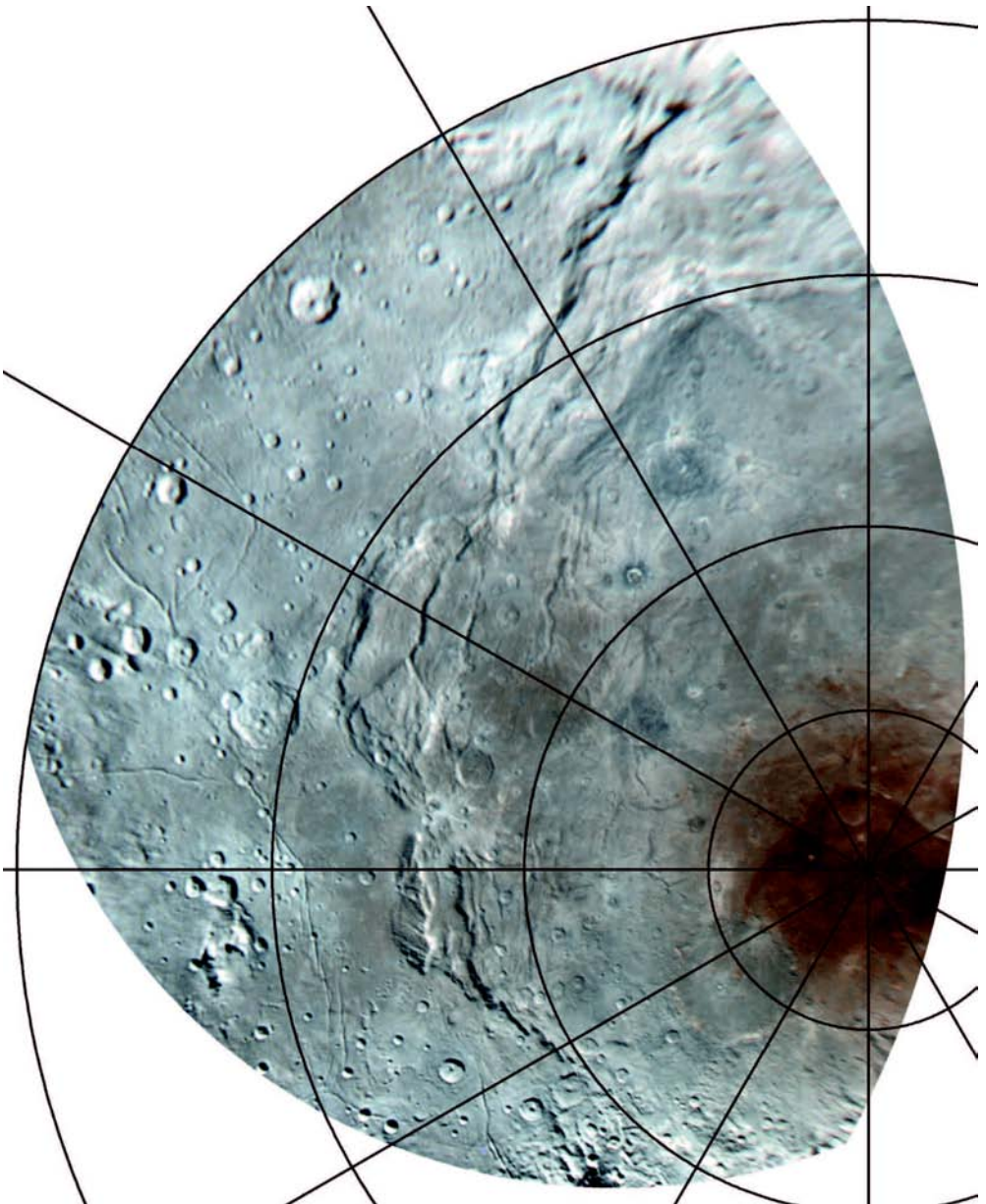
Grundy, W.M., et al (2016) **The formation of Charon's red poles from seasonally cold-trapped volatiles.** NATURE 539:65-68

Authors' abstract: *"A unique feature of Pluto's large satellite Charon is its dark red northern polar cap. Similar colours on Pluto's surface have been attributed to tholin-like organic macromolecules produced by energetic radiation processing of hydrocarbons. The polar location on Charon implicates the temperature extremes that result from Charon's high obliquity and long seasons in the production of this material. The escape of Pluto's atmosphere provides a potential feedstock for a complex chemistry. Gas from Pluto that is transiently cold-trapped and processed at Charon's winter pole was proposed as an explanation for the dark coloration on the basis of an image of Charon's northern hemisphere, but not modelled quantitatively. Here we report images of the southern hemisphere illuminated by Pluto-shine and also images taken during the approach phase that show the northern polar cap over a range of longitudes. We model the surface thermal environment on Charon and the supply and temporary cold-trapping of material escaping from Pluto, as well as the photolytic processing of this material into more complex and less volatile molecules while cold-trapped."*

"At higher latitudes, colours are redder across all of the longitudes observed, although the trend is not perfectly uniform. Deviations may be related to local variations in topography or other parameters. The red coloration is interrupted by a few impact craters with diameters of several kilometres. Impacts that size occur rarely, probably much less frequently than once every million years, so their existence implies that the red material must accumulate slowly."

"Charon's surface temperature responds to solar forcing on diurnal (6.39 Earth days) and annual (248 Earth years) timescales. The high obliquity (currently 119°) causes polar latitudes to experience long periods of continuous darkness, during which they become extremely cold. Complicating the situation, the eccentricity of Pluto's heliocentric orbit, currently 0.253, results in a factor of 2.8 difference in the intensity of sunlight between perihelion and aphelion."

Speirs: Pluto is slowly losing its atmosphere, most of which drifts directly out into space. About 2.5% of it is intercepted by Charon and condenses temporarily at the poles during the winter before volatilizing again in summer and continuing on its way. Charon's year is 248 Earth years, so it is a slow-motion process. The montage below is from the Grundy paper.



Yu, Yi, et al (2016) **System crash as dynamics of complex networks.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:11726-11731

Authors' abstract: *“Complex systems, from animal herds to human nations, sometimes crash drastically. Although the growth and evolution of systems have been extensively studied, our understanding of how systems crash is still limited. It remains rather puzzling why some systems, appearing to be doomed to fail, manage to survive for a long time whereas some other systems, which seem to be too big or too strong to fail, crash rapidly. In this contribution, we propose a network-based system dynamics model, where individual actions based on the local information accessible in their respective system structures may lead to the peculiar dynamics of system crash mentioned above. Extensive simulations are carried out on synthetic and real-life networks, which further reveal the interesting system evolution leading to the final crash.”*

“Studies on such applications would be of future research interest, in particular:

- i) Research areas may heat up and cool down. Although early movers may leave a research area when important work has been done or low-hanging fruit has been collected, many others may only make up their minds to leave when their colleagues are leaving (similar to q cascade) or when they have lost their collaborators (similar to k cascade). Dynamics of the decline of a research area needs to be studied.*
- ii) Collective intelligence systems such as Wikipedia may have an increasing coordination cost when growing in scope. Whether and how participants of a collective intelligence system may decide to leave due to increasing coordination cost are surely worth careful studies.*
- iii) Decentralized adoptions of new technologies, such as voluntary installations of solar panels on house roofs, may be subject to certain constraints. For example, there may be an upper bound to the penetration level of grid-tied photovoltaic power. Certain policies therefore may have to be installed to restrict the adoption of the technology. Predicting whether adopting such policies might result in decline or even crash of the technology adoption is of significant importance.”*