

# OPUNTIA 365

## Lunar New Year 2017

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## Gung Hei Fat Choy 2017

photos by Dale Speirs

The Lunar New Year is one of the most popular festivals in Calgary, located in and around the Chinese Cultural Centre in the heart of Chinatown. The actual date is January 28, but everyone begins celebrating the weekend before and carries on into February. The celebrations were so crowded that a few years ago the events were spread out in both time and space instead of trying to cram it all into one day.

At right are dragon dancer banners at the LRT station at 7 Street SW, a few blocks from Chinatown.





The Calgary Chinese Cultural Centre is by definition the heart of Chinatown. At bottom is an artist who does incredibly detailed cut-outs, the examples shown being the animals of the Chinese zodiac.







Below are closeups of the scene shown at left. The tree is decorated with red envelopes, it being a tradition to put small amounts of money in them for children, or, in this case, charity.





The comperes were trilingual, announcing everything in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. I was late getting to the lion dances and had to stand at the back of the crowd. Since the Chinese standing in front of me were a head shorter than us guailos, it was no problem for me to aim my camera above them.





**TRANSIT FANNING IN CALGARY: PART 16**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 15 appeared in OPUNTIA's #256, 258, 260, 264, 269, 275, 283, 298, 302, 327, 333, 341, 348, 357, and 359.]

**Take The Eh? Train.**



It was a cold and snowy January. I got on to an LRT train at the University station and spotted these drawings on the frosted doors of the train.

When I took this photo with my smartphone camera, the daytime high was -25°C.

**Transit Fiction: The London Underground.**

“A Case For Gourmets” by Michael Gilbert (1960 February, ELLERY QUEEN) tells how Det. Inspector Patrick Petrella tied together two apparently unrelated cases in the London Underground. A warehouse district is being robbed by employees but the question is how they are getting the loot away. Ronald Duckworth is before a judge for tearing down advertising posters in Underground stations for no apparent reason.

Petrella talks it out with Duckworth, who thinks he has shifted into a parallel universe while drunk. He was riding the train and got off into a non-existent station. As he wandered about it, he was slugged from behind and woke up elsewhere.

The London Underground has many kilometres of abandoned tunnels and forgotten stations, so Petrella has a railfan conduct him through one such tunnel. They find Duckworth’s station, and discover that the reason he was slugged was that the fences were storing stolen goods just down the tunnel, then moving them out through the abandoned network.

“The Pied Piper Of Hammersmith” by Nicolas Royle (1997 October, TIME OUT) is a bizarre tale of Michael, a movie fanatic who sees his daily rides to and from work on the Underground as filmed sequences. The morning commutes are rehearsals and the trips home are takes. As the train moves along, each moment is a New Angle, Dissolve To, Ext Outside Train, Medium Shot, Pan, and so forth.

Michael’s train stops at a station near the RNIB, so he frequently sees blind people waiting for the Hammersmith train. One day Michael decides to shoot his own horror film. He guides a group of blind people into an empty car at the far end of the platform. Once ensconced within, he pulls out a cleaver and begins acting out the splatter scenes. White Out, Music Fades, Roll Credits, as the bloody train moves along.

BRYANT AND MAY OFF THE RAILS (2010) by Christopher Fowler is part of a series of novels about the Peculiar Crimes Unit of the London, England, police. The PCU is under pressure from the Home Office after a serial killer they arrested escaped from their police station, killing a constable in the process. Budget cuts aren’t helping either. Arthur Bryant and John May are the senior detectives in charge of taking the blame for the debacle.

The killer is working in the Underground. Simple things, like pushing a woman off the top of a steep staircase. The Underground security cameras aren't as good as they should be, so the police can't identify who shoved her. Since the victims are chosen at random, questioning family and friends is useless. Other victims are killed and it seems a deranged transit fan must be at work.

After many false leads, the PCU narrows the case down to a boy whose father committed suicide in front of him at King's Cross station under a train on 1987-11-18. The suicide was never investigated further because it happened three hours before the great fire there that killed 31 people.

At that point, the case takes a dramatic twist. A separate group of people who were playing a tag-style game with passengers had drifted into random murders. That intermixed the attributions of the killers. The psycho's story is told with great feeling, and the reader can't help but feel empathy for him. There are a lot of damaged people out there.

Notwithstanding the serious crimes, the book is a humourous read, interleaved with infodumps on the history of the London Underground. Well recommended.

**Transit Fiction: Inter-Urban.**

The trouble with riding buses is that you never know who'll sit down next to you. "A Friend Of A Friend" by Morris F. Baughman (1966 October, MANHUNT) is about a narrator who has that problem on the bus from Los Angeles to Phoenix.

A young punk sits next to him, and chats about the news of a big bank heist in Long Beach carried out by gunman Barney Harris. The punk has been drinking, and soon starts bragging that he knew Harris in school. The narrator doesn't care for this and makes an excuse to get off at the next stop. As he gets off the bus, he trips in front of a policeman, goes sprawling on the ground, and his gun falls out of his pocket. There is a surprise ending, but like all stories of this type, it can only be read once.

**IF YOU AREN'T SQUAMOUS,  
THEN WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO BE ELDRITCH?: PART 5**  
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #298, 333, 340, and 352. Issues #22 and 63.1A have related articles on H.P. Lovecraft.]

**The Mythology And The Man.**

H.P. Lovecraft's stories fall into the Cthulhu Mythos and the non-Mythos stories, but both often share a common background. The Mythos was constructed after the stories began to be published, as HPL built up a universe where humans are not only not the centre of it, but are no more significant than dandelions growing in a vacant lot. August Derleth and others carried it further and in a different direction than Lovecraft might have.

Localities are often reused, such as Arkham, a town where unspeakable horrors occur, and Miskatonic University, where even more unspeakable horrors occur. MU is more interesting than the regular run of universities. I would have been interested in attending had it really existed. (I was an Aggie at the University of Alberta (BSc '78 Horticulture), a rather dull place.)

It is unfortunate that H.P. Lovecraft has suffered more than most authors at the hands of Hollywood. Often only the title of a story and a few character names are all that survive in the adaptation to film. It is far too easy for a producer to take HPL as nothing but horrible monsters and ignore the mythos.

In print, HPL has not fared any better. Too many literary pastiches are just monster stories dressed in the trappings of Cthulhu. They become angst-ridden complaints where everyone is squashed like a bug.

**The Cthulhu Mythos And Other Bedtime Stories.**

"Shoggoths In Bloom" by Elizabeth Bear (2008 March, ASIMOV'S) is about the re-appearance of said creatures during the 1930s. They are giant sacs of protoplasm from the Precambrian era, metres in height and diameter, and living along maritime shorelines just under the surface.

Prof. Harding is studying them along the Maine coast, not having much luck until he is swallowed by one. He survives in the oxygenated protoplasm, and

learns the shoggoths are biddable servants left over from the age of the Old Ones, waiting for someone to tell them what to do. An interesting concept and readable story.

**Re-Animating A Story.**

“Herbert West, Re-Animator” is a non-Cthulhu story about a mad scientist named Herbert West, obsessed with re-animating human corpses and bringing them back to life. He was never very successful at it. Something was always going wrong, and ultimately his creations killed him.

HPL based these stories on the Frankenstein novel. The difference though, was that West re-animated fresh intact corpses with an injected liquid reagent rather than building a new creature from spare parts.

The story as found today in books has six chapters of an episodic nature. This was because it originally appeared as a serial in 1922, then was later combined into a novella. The opening paragraphs of the chapters are repetitious in setting up the scene and characters because each chapter was written as a separate story. It is also the first appearance of dear old Miskatonic University.

In the first chapter, “From The Dark”, the unnamed narrator introduces West. Both of them are medical students at Miskatonic University. West is already under notice by university officials for his experiments in revivification, so the two rent a deserted farmhouse as a laboratory. They steal a fresh corpse from a cemetery and revive it. Its scream terrifies them and they flee, accidentally knocking over an oil lamp and setting the house on fire. The monster is presumed dead. Or is it?

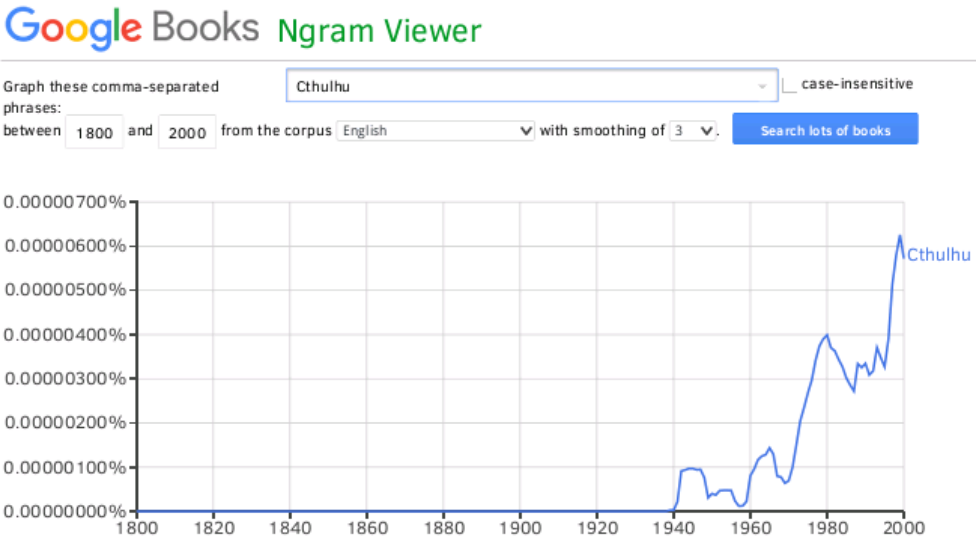
“The Plague Demon” takes place during a typhoid epidemic in Arkham. West’s problem is that he needs fresh corpses with no undecayed tissue, something not easy to find even during a surplus of dead victims. None other than Dr Allan Halsey, the university’s Dean of Medicine, succumbs to the plague, and is used by West as a test subject. Halsey’s revived corpse escapes and goes on a killing spree in the Arkham district.

“Six Shots By Moonlight” is the next revival, which apparently dies and is therefore buried out back. It isn’t entirely dead though, and this time the revived creature comes after West.

“The Scream Of The Dead” takes place in 1910, and has West resolving the problem of not getting corpses that were fresh enough. He invents a new type of fluid that will preserve the defunct until the revivification can take place. It does work, but the corpse stays alive only long enough to shout a curse at West.

“The Horror From The Shadows” is set in 1915, when West and the narrator have enlisted in the Canadian Army for the Great War. (Numerous Americans crossed the border because, as it was in both world wars, the USA was the last entrant, while Canada was in them from the beginning.) The front is heaven for West, with a steady supply of fresh corpses to experiment upon. He revives a decapitated body, with an unusual response from the head sitting elsewhere.

“The Tomb Legions” is the finale for West. The war is over but he has managed to find a fresh supply of corpses. The revived bodies turn on him and kill him. Here endeth the lesson.



**Re-Animating A Movie.**

RE-ANIMATOR (1985), written by Stuart Gordon, William J. Norris, and Dennis Paoli, was the first of three movies using the novella as its basic text. I only have the first one, as a DVD from the bargain bin. It uses little of the original story, although it does treat the theme with respect. The movie is definitely R-rated, with blood, gore, nudity, and sex, so it is not recommended as a birthday gift for your young niece.

In the movie, the narrator character, who doesn't actually narrate, is a medical student named Daniel Cain at Miskatonic University. He is dating Megan Halsey, daughter of the Dean of Medicine, who does not approve of him being with her. Cain falls in with West, who revives a corpse in the MU morgue. The corpse runs amok, killing Dr Halsey, who West then revives in turn with his miracle reagent. The revived Halsey is put into an asylum for insanity, the authorities being unaware of what really happened.

Dr Hill is a competitor of West, and tries to blackmail him. West kills him and then decapitates him because he wants to see if a head and its body can be revived separately. The answer is yes, but what West discovers the hard way is that the head can control the body. Another run-amok, this time walking about carrying its head in a tray.

Notwithstanding that handicap, Hill manages to gain control of the revived Halsey and make him (it?) obey his orders. Hill is obsessive about Megan, and orders Halsey to bring in his daughter so that Hill can have his evil way with her. And almost does, in a unique rape scene.

Hill revives a mob of corpses from the MU morgue, and sets out to conquer the world, bwah-ha-ha! Blood and gore aplenty in the fight, including an attempt by a revived corpse to use its intestines to strangle West. Cain and Megan escape but just before they make it to freedom, she is murdered by a corpse. Cain injects her with the reagent. As the film fades to black and the closing credits, we hear her agonized scream as she is reborn.

Judged by horror movie standards, this is actually a good one. No idiot plots, just obsessed mad scientists who lose control. HPL's plots are not followed, but many elements from his stories are incorporated into the movie. A good movie when judged by the standards of its genre.

**Movies: Derivatives.**

THE LAST LOVECRAFT: RELIC OF CTHULHU is a 2009 movie written by Devin McGinn about what happens when Cthulhu fans meet up with the real creatures from the mythos. The premise is that HPL was disguising the truth as fiction. Fanboy Jeff Phillips turns out to be the last living relative of the author. (Incorrectly stated to be a descendent, but HPL had no issue, so Phillips had to be a collateral relative.) He has been entrusted by a Miskatonic University professor with a relic that in the wrong hands will be used to summon Cthulhu.

The Cult of Cthulhu has its own ideas of what to do with the relic, and are pursuing the nerds. The blood and gore soon begin splattering about, and the death toll rises. Phillips finds himself pitched into the middle of the battle with little ability to fight it. The movie has its lighter moments, as Asperger syndrome nerds clash with bloody-minded Mythos creatures who do not yield to the stubbornness of the fanboys.

The movie has good production values other than the lead villains, or creatures rather, wearing inflexible rubber masks that don't come across as natural. Some of the actors are stiff, as if they were performing amateur dramatics in the town hall. Having said that, the movie was generally well done. There is an hilarious explanation of the Cthulhu Mythos done as comic book animation.

The pronunciation of the word "Cthulhu" has always vexed me. The characters in this movie pronounce it "kuh-tull-hoo". I pronounce it "stool-hoo", with a long sibilant, taking my cue from the word "czar". I have heard others say "see-tool-hoo". Not a problem for literary fiction, but annoying for audiovisual versions. HPL isn't any help. He offered several versions, with the excuse that humans couldn't render the alien word because it was meant for a different vocal apparatus.

THE HORROR OF H.P. LOVECRAFT is a 2015 DVD anthology of short films, both colour and black-and-white, very loosely based on the stories of HPL. They were done by film students, with about the quality that one expects. The camera setups are often artsy and the SFX are risible. The ones that at least try to be good are some stop-motion SFX that Ray Harryhausen would have done in the 1940s.

The movie opens with a hapless presenter lecturing the audience about HPL and getting it wrong. It wasn't as if viewers didn't already know about Lovecraft. The presenter re-appears throughout the movie, sometimes introducing the next short piece but often just wandering in front of the camera for no apparent reason.

The short films have all the range that one associates with amateur dramatics, from wooden acting to monotonous tones of voice, and veering to the other end of the spectrum into overacting. Most came across as sophomoric. I did a lot of fast-forwarding. I don't drink alcohol but if you do, I advise you to have several beers before watching this movie.



**LITERA SCRIPTA MANET AND MAGAZINES OF YORE: PART 1**  
by Dale Speirs

Humans are the only species that can communicate through generations as yet unborn, through the wonder of writing. I like reading old magazines from way back when, to see a world long vanished.

It is enlightening how the squabbles of yesterday, documented in old magazines, are nothing important today. Future generations will no more care about Trump than we do about Lloyd George. Magazines are livelier than books, because most of them have editorials and letters to the editor, which sets up conversations that bring to life the issues of the times.

**Fadazines.**

In the early 1900s, there was a flurry of small-press magazines run at a loss by literary-minded editors with printing ink flowing in their veins. These were known as fadazines, about which I wrote on in OPUNTIA #67.1C.

One such fadazine was THE PHILISTINE, published and mostly written by Elbert Hubbard from 1895 until his death in 1915. He was a passenger on the Lusitania when it was torpedoed by Germany during World War One, an ironic death given that he was a pacifist.\*\*

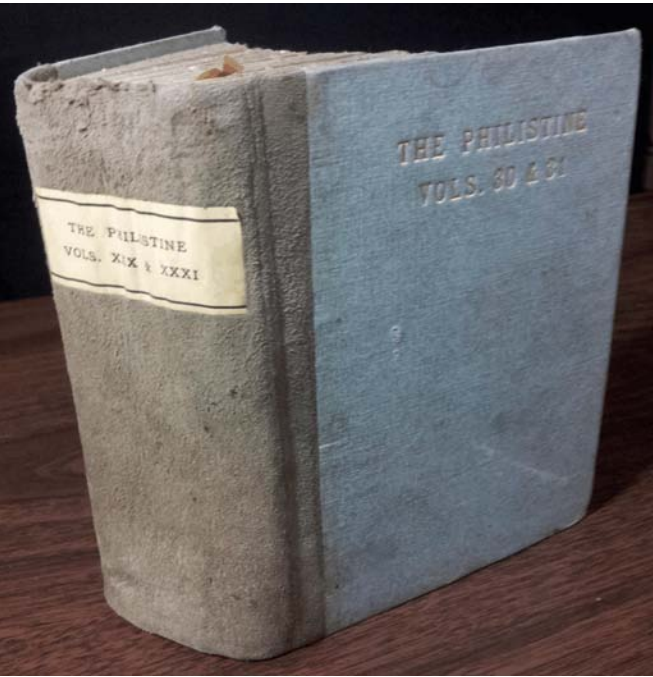
A former soap salesman, he headed a craft workers colony at East Aurora, New York, east-southeast of Buffalo. He was a capitalist who preached social reform, the vote for women, and the like, yet ran ads from AT&T and manufacturers in his fadazine. The colony, known as Roycrofters, sold furniture, books, leather goods, and preserved foods by mail order.

THE PHILISTINE was a pocket-sized magazine, 4.5" by 6" from a letterpress, with ornate typefaces. It was printed on cheap paper which has browned significantly even in the dry air of Calgary, the best place in the world to preserve books because of our dry cool climate.

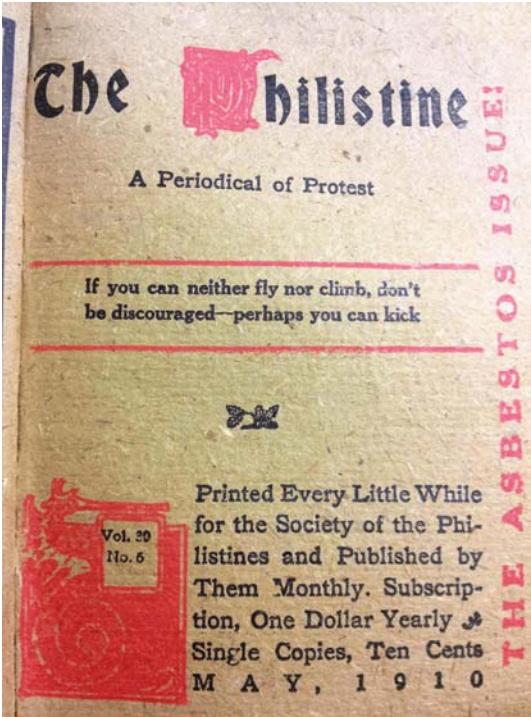
The essays were mostly by Hubbard, with lots of epigrams and quips scattered throughout as fillers. The topics were such things as pure food laws, suffrage,

\*\* White, Bruce A. (1986) Elbert Hubbard and "The Philistine: A Periodical of Protest" (1895-1915): The Muscular Journalism of an American Freethinker. VICTORIAN PERIODICALS REVIEW 19:83-89

poverty, and religion. Like most topical writing, they may have been interesting at the time but are now tedious. I found nothing worthwhile quoting, although an historian might find some of the essays useful.



I have a bound volume of the 1910 issues, which were Volumes 30 and 31, bought back when Calgary still had secondhand bookstores. I paid \$25 for it in 1980s currency.



## Au Courant Magazines.

THE SMART SET is a long-forgotten slick magazine that was a predecessor to THE NEW YORKER and the like. Its glory days were from 1900 to 1924, when it was subtitled “A Magazine Of Cleverness”. It was subsequently sold to the Hearst newspaper chain, who altered its editorial policy to more like PEOPLE magazine and then ran it into the ground. It was finally put out of its misery in June 1930.



I don't have any issues of this magazine, but long ago in a secondhand bookstore I bought a copy of THE SMART SET: A HISTORY AND ANTHOLOGY (1966) by Carl R. Dolmetsch. As the title of this coffee-table book suggests, it is partly a history of the magazine and partly an anthology of short stories and articles never seen since their original appearance.

TSS first appeared in March 1900 as a sister magazine to TOWN TOPICS, a high-society gossip magazine published by Col. William D'Alton Mann. TSS was meant to fictionalize material that could not be safely published as news items in TOWN TOPICS for fear of libel suits or the Comstock laws.

It was intended, as Mann wrote, to be clever. That word in 1900 meant being au courant, one-up in high society, and always ready with a bon mot. In short, pretentious and gossipy.

Many of the stories and poems were by new authors breaking into print. The majority are forgotten today. O. Henry was a rare exception. TSS's circulation rose steadily until 1906, which was the year of a black swan.

Mann had foolishly allowed himself to be dragged into a libel suit. He had antagonized rival publishers and got into a slanging match, much like the Sad Puppies versus the Social Justice Warriors on the Internet in 2015. It got worse and lawsuits were filed. Mann was a sharp-practice operator with much in his past to hide.

In libel suits, the plaintiff must testify and his past can be brought up as part of character and credibility. Mann messed up his testimony badly. The public exposure of his sins, which was front-page news in New York City, contaminated TSS. Advertisers and subscribers fled. Finances went from bad to worse the following year when the Panic of 1907 hit.

Two significant staff changes occurred as the Panic blew over. H.L. Mencken was hired as a book reviewer in 1908, and George Jean Nathan as the drama critic in 1909. Both went on to become literary giants in their future careers. In the near future though, they would make a further mark as co-editors of TSS, about which more later.

Col. Mann was in his 70s by now, living on the edge financially, and tired of life. He sold his magazines in 1911 to John Adams Thayer, a businessman turned publisher. Thayer re-organized the magazine but concentrated on selling



ads, a thing he did well. The readership didn't increase much but the advertisers returned in droves.

Having repaired its finances, Thayer then tried to get the readership back up. He hired Willard Huntington Wright as editor, with the task to make TSS distinctive and talked about. Wright did that in spades, but in the process nearly bankrupted Thayer. Wright only lasted a year in the editor's chair. TSS swerved into avant garde better suited for small-press magazines, and began bleeding subscribers and advertisers all over again.

Wright was fired and in his subsequent life went through some tumultuous times. At first he prospered in various editorships. His downfall came in 1917, when his pro-German editorial work not only cost him his job but had him blacklisted in the New York City publishing industry. He went out west, where he subsisted on menial copyediting jobs. Medical problems resulted in him becoming addicted to narcotics.

Wright's life finally turned around when he went into a European asylum where his habit was cured. He began writing again as S.S. Van Dine. His detective mysteries about Philo Vance made him a bestselling author. He returned to America with honours and his sins forgiven. He died in New York City in early 1939. It is one of the most remarkable comebacks in literary history.

Meanwhile, back at TSS, various editors came and went as Thayer thrashed about trying to save his publishing company. He might have made it but for the outbreak of World War One, which had calamitous effects on the markets and brought down Thayer's companies. He sold out to Eugene Crowe and Eltinge Warner. They then hired Mencken and Nathan as co-editors.

TSS was stabilized, both editorially and financially, when it made yet another right-angle turn under the new editors. It became a mixture of light humour, weird fantasy from regular contributor Lord Dunsany, and the first American publication of James Joyce.

Mencken was the first reader of incoming manuscripts. He gave authors one paragraph to catch his interest, otherwise the submission was rejected. Those that survived the cut were then passed to Nathan, who made the final disposition. It resulted in very fast turnaround of manuscripts. TSS paid one cent per word, which even then wasn't much, but they paid on acceptance and just for first serial rights, leaving all other rights to the author.

For comparison, most magazines at that time habitually dithered over their slush pile and paid on publication, which might be two years. Some, as the expression went, paid promptly on lawsuit. They also bought all rights and then resold the stories to anthology publishers. Radio, television, and movie rights did not exist during the lifetime of TSS, for the obvious reason that the first two media did not exist as mass broadcasters, and movies were silents.

Nathan and Mencken had a large slush pile of fiction that they couldn't use in TSS, so they started three "louse magazines" to take the overflow of what they considered to be lousy material. Mencken and Nathan are remembered as literary figures, but they were also practical men who knew the printer's bill had to be paid somehow.

There was great interest among the American public about France in the early part of the war. General fiction from the slush pile was recast with French characters and place names, then appeared in *PARISIENNE* to take advantage of this. Spicy fiction with daring themes and s-e-x, such as Wright had published, went into *SAUCY STORIES*, which soon sold 120,000 copies per month, outselling its parent magazine. The most successful was the mystery magazine *BLACK MASK*, which had a circulation of 250,000.

At TSS, which limped along well below 80,000 circulation and sometimes down to 40,000, Nathan and Mencken settled into a pattern of short fiction by new authors, drama criticism by Nathan, book reviews by Mencken, and social commentary by both under pseudonyms, usually as Owen Hatteras. That particular pseudonym was so prolific that readers wondered how he could write so much on so many different subjects. (Let me hastily add that Dale Speirs is not a pseudonym and is real.)

Nathan and Mencken enjoyed lampooning organizations in particular. They noted, in 1921, that the National Symphony Orchestra was made up almost entirely of Italian and German musicians. "Vox Populi, Vox Dei" was a column of asinine pronouncements by small-town mayors or preachers. The Custard Pie Award went to the most pretentious and meaningless platitude uttered by some bishop or state governor.

Circulation problems continued and TSS floundered. Listing heavily to port and seeking a safe harbour, it was put up for sale in 1924. Economies were made. Advertisers had abandoned it en masse, so Warner combined TSS advertising sales with his pulp magazines as part of a package.

This was a common practice among pulp publishers. Advertisers didn't buy an ad for a single magazine, but had it run in several magazines at once. The magazines were all printed simultaneously on one press, what is known as gang printing, which spread the set-up and distribution costs over several titles. The combined circulation of all the magazines allowed the publisher to get a higher ad rate as well.

Nathan and Mencken left TSS to found their own magazine AMERICAN MERCURY, nominating Morris Gilbert to take over as editor. They didn't tell him that TSS was up for sale. He only found out about it in July 1924 when a new manager arrived from William Randolph Hearst's subsidiary Magus Magazine Corporation. George D'Utassey showed up and told Gilbert "Meetcha new boss".

TSS had always been for sophisticated urbane and urban people. D'Utassey changed it to a popular general magazine aimed at farm folk and suburbanites, the very people the previous editors had always scorned. Gilbert left a month later, and TSS became a travesty. Circulation did go up now that it was pandering to the masses, which was all that Hearst cared about. The magazine carried on for six years with nothing in common with the old one except the title.

The end was ugly. The Panic of 1929 killed off many magazines as subscribers economized. TSS had lost its old audience, the well-to-do who could continue subscribing. The new audience were lumpenproletariat who had to save money every way they could. TSS died an inglorious death in 1930.

From there to the anthology, selected pieces from TSS that make up the second half of the book. The quality is high among the prose pieces. An example is Lord Dunsany's "The Three Infernal Jokes", about a man whose jokes kill everyone who hears them. The poetry of TSS has not survived the test of time.

## THE MAN FROM MONTENEGRO: PART 16

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 15 appeared in OPUNTIA's #252, 253, 275, 278, 279, 289, 304, 307, 319, 332, 335, 337, 344, 355, and 364.]

### Pastiches.

Rex Stout didn't die until 1975 and his estate still has control over his literary rights, so pastiches of Nero Wolfe are rare. Robert Goldsborough has been authorized to write pastiche novels, of which I reviewed a number of them in OPUNTIA #279. The latest is at hand, STOP THE PRESSES! (2016). It begins with a longtime recurring character named Lon Cohen coming to Wolfe and Goodwin for help. He is an editor with the NEW YORK GAZETTE newspaper, whose controversial gossip columnist Cameron Clay is getting some recent death threats that seem more serious than the usual kind. Clay is libelous, uses ad hominem insults, and a reckless accuser. He sells papers though, so the owners keep him on.

Cohen arranges for Clay to visit Wolfe to discuss the problem. The threats he is worried about are non-specific, whereas normally the threats he get will mention some topic he wrote about. The regular threats are by mail, often in crayon, but the serious threats are a disguised male voice who calls Clay on his direct line or at his home. Clay has five main suspects; an egomaniac developer he criticized for ugly buildings, a police captain just released from prison for corruption, a Harlem councillor who takes bribes, a defence lawyer who gets scum off in court, and an ex-wife with a violent temper.

A few weeks later, Clay, to no one's surprise, suddenly departs this world for the next one as a result of high-velocity lead poisoning. His body is found in his house and the police decide it was suicide. Less paperwork, presumably, plus no need to waste time and taxpayers' money on an investigation. The GAZETTE's owner and publisher hire Wolfe to find a murderer.

Most of the novel is taken up by Wolfe interviewing suspects, which doesn't seem to go anywhere. Everyone admits they're happy Clay's dead, but of course they won't admit murdering him. There is then the obligatory J'accuse! meeting in Wolfe's brownstone office, with all the suspects gathered, along with Inspector Cramer and Sergeant Stebbins. He then announces that the murderer is ... no one. It really was a suicide and the police were correct.



Such an anti-climax causes the narrative not just to fizzle but to flop onto the ground like a half-full bag of water. Goldsborough seems to have realized he had just written 221 pages that were much ado about nothing, no real sound and fury. He then tacks on a pathetic twist ending that the reader can instantly guess how it will turn out. Although the novel reads well and nicely outlines the world of Wolfe and Goodwin, it doesn't really signify anything. This novel is for the devout Wolfe fan who appreciates the ambience, but is not one for a newcomer wanting to sample the series.

**Peripheral Matters.**

But first, a digression. The Jeeves series of humourous novels and short stories was written over many decades by P.G. Wodehouse. They are usually narrated by Bertram Wooster, a young bachelor who inherited a steady income from his deceased parents, enough to live in a nice apartment in London, pay his membership dues in the Drones Club, and mix with genteel society out in the manor houses of the countryside. He also has a valet named Jeeves, who often has to sort him out and extricate him from his troubles.

Most of the manor houses were those of his aunts, who regularly dragged him into impossible situations. He was forever becoming engaged to young women who were incipient battleaxes, and undoubtedly would spend their lives terrorizing the village when they reached middle age.

As Wodehouse was the first to admit, the plots of all the stories were alike. If you've read one, then you've read them all. Rex Stout was never adverse to recycling plots but he at least tried to make them slightly different. Wodehouse only changed the names of the characters and sometimes the manor houses.

Bertie would be a guest at a manor house, trying to help a young couple reach matrimony but accidentally become engaged to the woman, raising the ire of the boyfriend. A subplot would have him unfairly accused of theft or some other scheme when all he meant to do was a favour for an uncle or the local vicar. Sometimes there were two different couples, who would mix and match in combinations, often with Bertie engaged to two women at once.

After various excursions and alarums, Jeeves would set matters straight, the young couple(s) would be reunited with no hard feelings for Bertie, and the accusations against him resolved as just a silly misunderstanding. Bertie would return to London safe if not entirely sound.

I told you all that so I could tell you this. MUCH OBLIGED, JEEVES (1971) has Bertie visiting his Aunt Dahlia at her manor house. Both are Rex Stout fans and keep taking a newly-published Nero Wolfe book away from each other as they vie to read it in between all the various troubles and excitements.

It becomes a running gag in the novel. Says Bertie: *“I left him then, ... and headed for the drawing room, hoping for another quiet go at the Rex Stout which the swirling rush of events had forced me to abandon. I was, however, too late. The old ancestor was on the chaise longue with it in her grasp, and I knew that I had small chance of wresting it from her. No one who has got his or her hooks on a Rex Stout lightly lets it go.”* The book goes back and forth, but Bertie never does get to finish it.

AUNTS AREN'T GENTLEMEN (1974) has Bertie being harangued by an angry father who thinks his daughter has eloped with Bertie, when in fact, for once, she eloped with a different man. Bertie's response to Papa is: *“Pfui”, I said. It is an expression I don't often use, but Nero Wolfe is always saying it with excellent results, and it seemed to fit in rather well here.*” Wolfe did use that word when responding to a feeble argument not worth his contempt.



# WE'LL ALL GO TOGETHER WHEN WE GO: PART 8

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 7 appeared in OPUNTIA's #249, 276, 283, 301, 312, 327, and 343.]

## Palaeofiction.

THE STAR (1897) is a short story by H.G. Wells and is considered the first modern bolide impact story based on a reasonable scientific foundation. It begins with astronomers observing a star entering the Solar System. It collides head on with Neptune, swallowing it whole, and then falls into the system.

As the star approaches Earth, it is first an object of wonder, turning night into day, then one of terror as the populace realize what is about to happen. The close passage triggers earthquakes, re-activates volcanos, and causes giant tsunamis that wash across continents and scour clean the coastal lowlands. The polar ice caps melt away and the planet warms up, allowing survivors to colonize new lands.

The story ends with a twist. Martian astronomers watched the close passage, which did not affect Mars. From what they could see of Earth, it looked much the same, so it didn't look like much damage was done. (And a year later, a war of the worlds began.)

## Doomsday Is A Personal Thing.

THE MYSTERIOUS TRAVELER was an old-time radio (OTR) series with a common format, a traveler on a train who tells a story of mystery or science fiction. "Fire In The Sky" was a 1951 episode written by Robert A. Arthur and David Kogan about a newlywed couple who are facing the final days as a comet approaches Earth. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).)

They are driving on their honeymoon trip and listening to the radio news about the comet. Much garbled science; the comet is repeatedly referred to as a ball of gases. Even back then it was known they were ice and rock. It dominates the sky but astronomers assure the public that it will miss Earth. It is called Comet X, but again, under astronomical policy it would have been named after its discoverer.

The couple are flagged down on a lonely road by an old man who says his partner has been injured in a mine accident a short distance off the road. They go with him to help (who would do that today?) and find out that they shouldn't have. He is a doomsday bug and wants to save them from the comet, so he herds them down into the bottom of the mine at gunpoint. He locks them into a fully-stocked survival shelter and goes back up to look for more people to "rescue".

The comet suddenly swerves into a head-on collision course with Earth. The authorities advise the population to take shelter and above all, remain calm. Naturally the radio news has reports of mass panic, jammed highways, and people dying as they flee hither and yon.

The old man comes back with two infant children he stole from parents who had stopped to watch the comet. He tells the couple that the comet is radioactive and will envelope the world and kill off humanity. The radio news confirms the disaster. The couple are left to raise the children underground and rebuild the world once the radiation has decayed. For those familiar with all the apocalyptic SF stories of the 1950s, this is nothing new. At least the couple didn't name the kids Adam and Eve.

## Doom From The Outer System.

"In The Days Of The Comet" by John M. Ford (2000-06-22, NATURE) is a short-short that considers what happens if amino acids in the Oort Cloud build up into prions. These are a type of sub-protein known to cause brain degenerative diseases in humans. The obvious risk of chasing comets in the Oort Cloud then becomes one of avoiding bringing back pandemics to Earth.

Amino acids, the building blocks of proteins, are known to exist in interstellar space. The intense radiation prevents them from building up into proteins or prions because any large molecules are soon fried and broken back down. However it is not an unreasonable extrapolation that proteins could form inside a comet where they are protected.

ON TO THE ASTEROID (2016) by Travis S. Taylor and Les Johnson is a clunky title for a clunky novel, but if read as literature of ideas, it is a reasonably good book. It is about the first attempt to mine an asteroid. The best method to do so is to move it closer to Earth for easier and more economical extraction of minerals. Regretfully there is an oops! moment when the orbital dynamics of the asteroid go horribly wrong. Thereby hangs a tale.

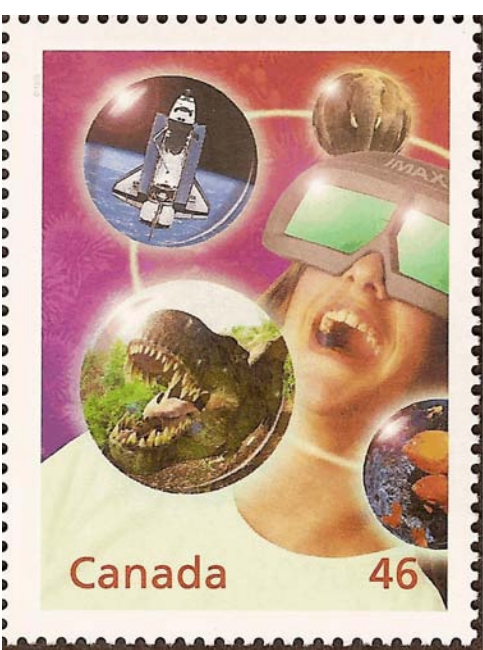


The novel takes a few chapters to come up to speed, filling in the background and establishing a few subplots along the way. There is a Coonts/Cussler style of action-adventure subplot that could have been dispensed with because the rest of the story is more than sufficient by itself without adding in enemy saboteurs. As it is, quite a lot is going on. A hotel is being built on the Moon, and a Mars expedition is prepping and will soon depart. And, of course, the asteroid mining project.

Asteroid Ores Inc has successfully attached a robot spaceship to an asteroid they call Sutter's Mill. How they knew the asteroid has valuable ores and isn't just ordinary rock is not specified in detail. The spaceship will push the asteroid into lunar orbit, after which the mining will begin. The economics of asteroid mining are doubtful but let that pass.

Shortly after thrust began, the engine fails, putting the asteroid on a collision course with Earth in 271 days. It weighs two gigatons. It may not cause an extinction-level event but millions will die and society will crash back down to the village stage.

The plan is to divert the Mars mission to the asteroid and either fix the engines or divert it enough to miss Earth. The novel alternates between infodumps on the technology and assorted alarums and excursions.



With duct tape and magnets, the rescue spaceship crew cuts the margin of error down to a perigee of 50 to 100 km above Earth, that is to say, just skimming the upper atmosphere. We'll get our hair mussed from fragments and debris, but all will be well, except for people with weak hearts or who happen to be standing in the wrong place when a fragment arrives.

The final line of the novel is, I think, an instant classic: *"Remember, the dinosaurs did not have a space program."*

**SHERLOCKIANA: PART 23**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 22 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, 356, and 359.]

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: Short Stories.**

"The Red Leech" by Maryam Wade (1985 July, MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE) begins with a visit to 221B from Jeffery Rand, owner of a shipping company. His problem is that his ships have begun arriving in port with dead bodies found in the holds. Rand soon exits the story himself, suffering from high-velocity lead poisoning.

Holmes, Watson, and Inspector Lestrade inspect the cargo of the latest ship and find crates filled with giant red leeches, ostensibly imported for medical purposes. After various adventures, they identify Mrs Rand as the guilty party. She was part of an emerald-smuggling ring which was hiding the stones inside the leeches.

Terence Faherty has been writing a series of parodies, allegedly first drafts by Watson, taking the canon stories and rewriting them under the original titles. "The Man With The Twisted Lip" (2015 February, ELLERY QUEEN) revises the tale of the man who was a professional beggar but was at pains to keep it from his wife, who thought he was something respectable in the city. In this version, it turns into a bedroom farce, with husbands and wives spying on each other, hence the beggar costume of one of them. There are people hiding in closets to escape angry spouses, implausibly mistaken identities, and much to-ing and fro-ing. Not laughing out loud funny but reasonably humorous.

**Pastiches: Anthologies.**

SONS OF MORIARTY (2013) is edited by Loren D. Estleman. Some of the stories are traditional pastiches and others are alternative fiction placing Holmes and Watson out of context into a different culture.

The first story is “The Infernal Machine” by John Lutz, which begins as many Sherlockians often wish such stories would. Countless pastiches, as indeed many of the canon stories, begin with Holmes and Watson receiving a visitor at 221B. Before getting on with the plot, Holmes amazes his visitor by deducing something based on visual clues.

In this story, Wilson Edgewick attends the chambers. Holmes deduces that Edgewick is a single man from Northwood who is concerned about a young woman most probably his fiancée. Edgewick is in fact married, not from Northwood, and the problem is not about a young woman. Holmes is thrown off his stride but after stumbling about, finally gets one deduction correct.

Then the real story begins. Edgewick and his brother Landen are trying to sell Richard Gatling’s new gun to Oldsbolt Munitions. Landen is engaged to Millicent Oldsbolt, daughter of the manor. Her father Sir Clive has been murdered, apparently by a Gatling gun because villagers out of sight of the scene heard the rattling sound of rapid-fire bullets. The Edgewick brothers had the only such gun in Britain. Since Wilson had an alibi, the constable arrested Landen, despite no motive.

Another man had been trying to sell the idea of horseless carriages for use in combat, but Sir Clive scorned him because he couldn’t visualize cavalry soldiers charging into battle waving a sword in one hand and steering with the other. Holmes finds the culprit and re-explains the facts with a different interpretation. Justice is served, albeit with a bit of handwaving.

“The Adventure Of The Double-Bogey Man” by Robert L. Fish is a parody with Schlock Homes and Watney, circa 1942. It is overloaded with puns and mugging. Mildly amusing.

“The Case Of The Bloodless Sock” by Anne Perry is set in the modern era in Seattle and Wyoming. Sherlock Holmes’s companion is Jane Watson. A child has been kidnapped. The story is routine and boring. If the characters had ordinary names, it wouldn’t have sold anywhere.

“Sherlocks” by Al Sarrantonio is set in a future where scanning machines called sherlocks collect forensic data faster and more efficiently than any CSI crew could. Private detectives and police inspectors alike are slowly becoming obsolete. A case goes wrong when a police officer sabotages a murder investigation to prove that detectives are still needed. The story is not a pastiche

and doesn’t belong here just because the gimmick is called a sherlock. It would fit into a science fiction anthology.

“The Field Bazaar” by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle is a short-short written for the student newspaper of his alma mater, the University of Edinburgh. It is the stereotypical opening of a typical Holmes story, where he deduces assorted clues and receives the applause of Watson. In this case, Watson has received a letter, and without reading it, Holmes deduces the contents just by glancing at the envelope and letterhead. A vignette for completist Sherlockians only.

“The Deptford Horror” made me think this was going to be a crossover with H.P. Lovecraft but it is not. The pastiche is by Sir Arthur’s son, Adrian Conan Doyle, attempting to follow in his father’s footsteps. It is about the unfortunate Wilson family, who are dying off like mayflies, supposedly from natural causes.

There are canaries being raised in the house on a large scale. This is a nod to the canon, where Watson mentions the case of Wilson the notorious canary trainer, but never wrote it up. An evil uncle wants to inherit the family fortune, and the rest of the plot follows a predictable course.

“Before The Adventures” by Lenore Carroll is an alternative fictional explanation of how Sir Arthur came to invent Holmes. In real life, he based Holmes on one of his professors at the University of Edinburgh, but in this story the prototype was really a cockney bloke who had the gift of detection by intuition.

“Sons Of Moriarty” by Loren Estlemen is set in 1903 when Holmes and Watson become entangled in a case against the Mafia in New York City. Col. Sebastian Moran, the second most dangerous man in Europe, and other names from the canon and real life are trotted out. The damsel in distress is not who she appears to be.

An average anthology. Unless you’re a completist Sherlockian, read it at the library instead of buying the book.

## **Pastiches: Novels.**

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE QUEEN OF DIAMONDS (2012) by Steve Hayes and David Whitehead is the first novel in a series. A Missouri stranger named Thomas Howard is visiting London to search for a lost brother. He saves



Countess Elaina Montague from hooligans who were trying to rape her and steal her jewels. In gratitude, she has Holmes help Howard in his search.

There is a spate of jewel thefts at the moment, so Holmes is concentrating his attention on them. They are being carried out by a second-story man, and in his search for the culprit Holmes visits numerous music halls to check out acrobats and aerialists. It comes to nothing.

No one is as they seem. Howard turns out to be the outlaw Jesse James, in search of a Pinkerton agent for revenge. The agent is no better than the outlaws he harasses. The Countess turns out to be Ms. Big of the jewel thieves. Honest folk are a distinct minority in this novel.

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE KNAVE OF HEARTS (2013) is the second installment in the series. It ties the great detective in with Jules Verne and a true incident in 1886 when his insane nephew Gaston tried to assassinate his famous uncle. Watson inveigles Holmes into visiting France, staying at the home of Henri Gillet. Holmes agrees on the condition they can stop off along the way and visit Verne, with whom he has been corresponding. Of course they arrive just in time to witness the shooting.

The Verne family want to hush the whole thing up. They, Holmes, and Watson are unaware that there are sinister forces at work for evil ends, a secret society called the Knaves. They are bribing and blackmailing their way to wealth and behind-the-scenes power in France, and will stop at nothing. Gaston was brainwashed by them and programmed to kill his uncle because Jules was a famous man of influence.

Holmes and Watson eventually work their way through a trail of bodies and assorted adventures to break the Knaves. The honour of France is saved, even if it took two Anglais to do it.

THE ALBINO'S TREASURE (2015) by Stuart Douglas takes place in 1896, when the Irish were making trouble as usual. An anarchist slashes a painting of the Prime Minister in the National Portrait Gallery, and there is a new supervillain named The Albino who is setting up an organization in London. The trouble at the NPG leads to the discovery that someone is hunting for certain portraits which used to belong in a manor house but were sold off to pay its expenses.

Holmes crosses path with the Lord Of Strange Deaths, a Chinaman who leads the criminal organization in the Chinese community of London. Eventually Holmes finds The Albino and discovers that he and the Lord were both chasing after the treasure. The problem is that no one knows exactly what the treasure is. Probably not jewels, but what else?

A three-way race develops to decipher all the clues, and the body count steadily increases as henchmen and innocent art collectors depart this vale of tears unexpectedly. It all converges back at the manor house, when the three hunters meet up for the denouement. The treasure turns out to be an ancient document which would shake the very foundations of the British monarchy were it to be made public. Nowadays it would be lucky to be a paragraph in the news, but back in 1896, the British throne was still revered.

The novel is a reasonably good read. The various threads are tied up near the end, but there is consider meandering in the narrative en route. The novel shares one common failing with the vast majority of pastiches, that of making Watson a man who is easily shocked by gore and strange customs. That is nonsense, of course, since Watson was an army surgeon who was inured to blood and guts, and had seen many strange sights while serving in Afghanistan. I do wish that writers would realize that doctors and nurses are not the fainting types when they see splatter and gore.

**Pastiches: The Retirement Years.**

By World War One, Holmes and Watson were in their sixties. On retirement, they went their separate ways, although they kept in touch with each other. Holmes retired to a cottage in the Sussex Downs where he kept bees, while Watson stayed in London.

SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE LADY IN BLACK (2015) by June Thomson is set in 1908, by which time Holmes is out in the country with his bees. Watson comes down for a week's vacation. If it were as simple as that, there wouldn't be a story, so of course a mystery develops.

Holmes and Watson pay a call on the local squire Harold Stackhurst, then explore what was made to look like an abandoned church crypt but was being used by persons unknown. There is also a mysterious lady in black who visits the seashore in the small hours of the morning, then sits on a boulder and stares out at the sea for hours. Assorted other puzzles are enumerated, until the reader

begins to wonder which of them will tie together at the end of the book and which are red herrings.

Eventually everything does wrap up in one package. It is a story of a sharp-practice man marrying a wealthy widow, stealing her blind, abandoning her, and leaving her destitute. Not the typical murder mystery, but rather a genealogical investigation by Holmes and Watson to discover who did what to whom in the manor house fifty years ago.



Copyright, 1921, H. T. Webster.

THE TITANIC TRAGEDY (2012) by William Seil is set in 1912. Holmes and Watson are called out of retirement, dragooned into a secret government mission by Mycroft Holmes. The trip will be to America in the newly commissioned RMS Titanic. Accompanying them is Miss Christine Norton, a courier for the Ministry of Defence, who is taking some secret submarine plans to the U.S. Navy. Another familiar name is Moriarty, not the Professor, who is long dead, but his brother, Col. James Moriarty. To salt additional suspicion into the plot, there is a German baron skulking about who is almost certainly a spy for the Kaiser.

The plans are stolen, as you knew they would be, and the usual alarms and excursions begin. However, knowing as we do that the Titanic was bound for disaster, the reader's interest is distracted by how Holmes and Watson will escape the sinking. Watson, as a doctor, is put aboard a lifeboat to assist injured passengers.

Holmes, meanwhile, stays on board trying to hunt down Moriarty. There is a fight to the death atop the wheelhouse as the ship sinks, and Moriarty falls to his death in the same manner as his brother. Holmes is wearing a lifejacket and manages to stay alive in the ice-cold water long enough to swim to a lifeboat. The stolen plans are recovered and all is well. Except, of course, for the 1,517 people who died in the shipwreck.

Holmes and Watson could have lived to the 1940s, by which time they would have been very elderly men. Some pastiches are built on this point, such as "The Adventure Of The Extraterrestrial" by Mack Reynolds (1965 July, ANALOG). This pastiche brings in Peter Norwood, son of Sir Alexander, who wants to prevent his father from spending the family fortune looking for aliens. Holmes takes the case but determines that Sir Alexander is of sound mind and there is no reason why he shouldn't spend his money as he sees fit. Peter, on the other hand, overspends his allowance on wine, women, and song, and whatever his father didn't spend, he would. Holmes actually does locate aliens, and makes a deal to provide his deductive services to them in exchange for an extended life in good health.

*At left: a 1921 cartoon by H.T. Webster*



# ZINE LISTINGS

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

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

FOR THE CLERISY #87 (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) A review of older or obscure books. We shouldn't read only the current bestsellers. Time winnows out those not worthy of survival, but also brings to us renewed attention for novels that deserve to be read again.

FLAG #18 (The Usual from Andy Hooper, 11032 - 30 Avenue NE, Seattle, Washington 98125) Hooper is auctioning off a selection of SF toy collectibles from the estate of a fan for the benefit of the widow. If it weren't for the fact that I'm at the stage of life where I'm trying to get rid of things, not accumulate them, I'd bid on those in-mint-package toy Batmobiles.

THE FOSSIL #370 (US\$10 per year from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) This zine and its publisher are devoted to the history of zinedom from its beginnings in the late 1800s. The issue at hand begins with a tribute to a zinester who started as a printer's apprentice in the era of handset type and finished up by blogging on the Internet.

There are several more histories and articles about zinedom back in the days, including the history of the Young Blood movement in the National Amateur Press Association from 1944 to 1953. Its intent can be guessed from its name. The issue concludes with club news and notes, convention reportage, and the ongoing project preserving zines at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Library, where last July a conference on amateur journalism was held.

# 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](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com)]

From: Murray Moore  
Mississauga, Ontario

2017-01-19

Starting last January [2016], I became the Secretary of the Canadian Science Fiction and Fantasy Association. The non-profit, volunteer, CSFFA exists to administer nominating of the Aurora Awards, and voting for, each year, of the year's best in Canadian science fiction and fantasy, in multiple categories.

Members of the board geographically live in Quebec (1), Ontario (2), Alberta (2), and B.C. (3). Meetings are the last Monday of the month (except December), for an hour on the Internet. Easy for me as Secretary because everyone types, so I need not take notes.

## WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2017

Calgary's annual readercon When Words Collide will be held this year on the weekend of August 11 to 13, at the Delta Calgary South Hotel on Southland Drive SE and Fairmount Drive. Details from [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org)

WWC has a membership cap of 750 and usually sells out by June. The hotel is fully booked by then as well. The January progress report says that membership registration passed 350 at Christmas.

I've been to all of the WWCs since the first one in 2011 and enjoyed all of them. The reports are in OPUNTIA's #71, 253, 266, 282, 318, and 350. The conventions are strictly literary stuff, with panels by authors, editors, publishers, and screenwriters. The dealer bourse is books only, with lots of small-press publishers hawking their wares.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Iliev, R., et al (2016) **Linguistic positivity in historical texts reflects dynamic environmental and psychological factors.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:E7871-E7879

Authors’ abstract: “For nearly 50 years social scientists have observed that across cultures and languages people use more positive words than negative words, a phenomenon referred to as linguistic positivity bias (LPB). Although scientists have proposed multiple explanations for this phenomenon, explanations that hinge on mechanisms ranging from cognitive biases to environmental factors, no consensus on the origins of LPB has been reached. In this research, we derive and test, via natural language processing and data aggregation, divergent predictions from dominant explanations of LPB by examining it across time. We find that LPB varies across time and therefore cannot be explained simply as the product of cognitive biases and, further, that these variations correspond to fluctuations in objective circumstances and subjective mood.”

“In this work we propose that LPB has remained unresolved because previous research has neglected an essential dimension of language: time. In four studies conducted with two independent, time-stamped text corpora (Google books Ngrams and the New York Times), we found that LPB in American English has decreased during the last two centuries. We also observed dynamic fluctuations in LPB that were predicted by changes in objective environment, i.e., war and economic hardships, and by changes in national subjective happiness.”

“In addition to providing evidence that LPB is a dynamic phenomenon, these results suggest that cognitive mechanisms alone cannot account for the observed dynamic fluctuations in LPB. At the least, LPB likely arises from multiple interacting mechanisms involving subjective, objective, and societal factors.”

Speirs: This study mentions using Google Ngrams (books.google.com/ngrams), which counts the number of times a word or phrase has been used over the past two centuries in millions of books and charts it on a year-by-year basis. I’ve used this for my own research and find it a wonderful adjunct for historical investigations.

Enemark, D., et al (2016) **Effect of holding office on the behavior of politicians.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:13690-13695

Authors’ abstract: “Reciprocity is central to our understanding of politics. Most political exchanges, whether they involve legislative vote trading, interbranch bargaining, constituent service, or even the corrupt exchange of public resources for private wealth, require reciprocity. But how does reciprocity arise? Do government officials learn reciprocity while holding office, or do recruitment and selection practices favor those who already adhere to a norm of reciprocity? We recruit Zambian politicians who narrowly won or lost a previous election to play behavioral games that provide a measure of reciprocity. This combination of regression discontinuity and experimental designs allows us to estimate the effect of holding office on behavior. We find that holding office increases adherence to the norm of reciprocity.”

“More specifically, our findings show that office-holding politicians exhibit more reciprocity than those who ran for office but lost the election. This finding and the null findings for trust and generosity align with the political science literature that claims that adherence to the norm of reciprocity is critical for success in politics and that the failure to reciprocate trust is a greater transgression than the failure to trust. As in gambling, the penalty for welching is greater than the penalty for refusing to play.”

Speirs: An excellent reason for term limits in politics.

WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. 2017 will be the 24th year of the WWP.

At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world. It is important to have it exactly at 21h00 your time. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet.