

OPUNTIA

369

Early March 2017

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.

CENTRAL COWTOWN
photos by Dale Speirs

Lent began this year on March 1, in case you missed it. This gentle reminder was seen at Knox United Church in the downtown core of Calgary.



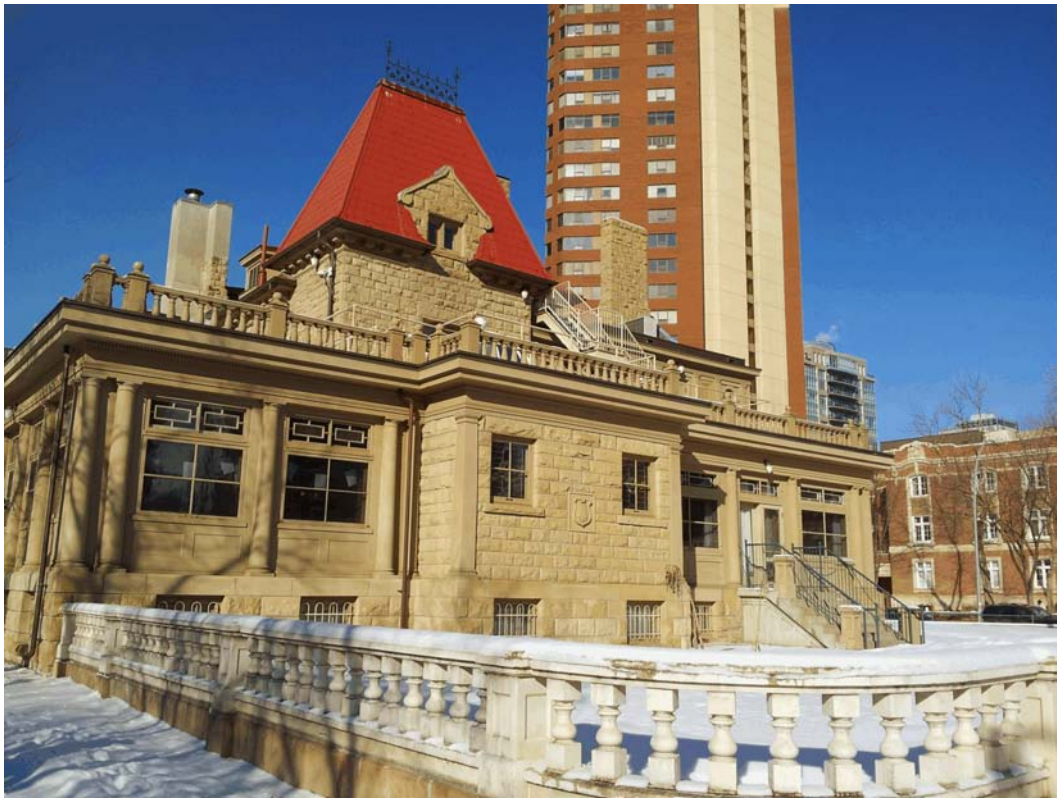
Yarnbombed trees in the Inglewood district east of the core, on the opposite side of the Elbow River. The distant boulevard elm is also wrapped.



Hockey and curling are Calgary’s two most popular winter sports. Unlike most of Canada, we have few outdoor rinks because of the frequent chinooks that melt away the ice. (The Olympic Plaza rink, which I have shown in previous issues, has refrigeration coils underneath it.)

Lougheed House is a museum and restaurant in the Beltline district on the south side of the downtown core (see OPUNTIA #348). It is one of the few remaining sandstone manor houses in Calgary. On February 25, they hosted the first outdoor bonspiel in Calgary in more than a century. The last outdoor curling rink was in the 1890s, and ever since then covered rinks have been used.

This winter has been a cold and snowy one, so the Lougheed House staff took a chance and staged a bonspiel on the lower lawns. The stately pile was once on a ranch but now only comprises two city blocks. It is surrounded by skyscrapers. Below, this page, is the House on the upper lawn. On the next page is one sheet of the bonspiel rink. The ice was so rough that the players had trouble getting the rocks down the sheet to the rings. That makes it obvious why Cowtowners have curled indoors for the past century.



Only one rock in the rings! Toughest ice in Canada.



WHEN SOMETIME LOFTY TOWERS I SEE: PART 3.

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #284 and 343.]

Lofty Towers Not Seen.

“Kingston And The Disappearing Office Building” is a 1948 episode of the old-time radio series BOSTON BLACKIE, written by Frederick Ziv. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.archive.org.) A man named Kingston buys a 15-story building but finds only a vacant lot the next day. He was an out-of-towner who came in to do the deal quickly but instead found himself done quickly by two con men. The building they showed him was four blocks away but the address on the papers was the vacant lot. Because he didn't know the city, he failed to notice the different address on the papers.

Kingston calls for help from his old friend Boston Blackie. He tracks down the con men but the money has already been converted. They deny knowing Kingston and since the paperwork was destroyed and the money gone, the police can't do anything.

The two con men and one of their wives have a falling out, and the body count begins to rise. There is no honour among thieves and their cover-up begins to crumble quickly. Blackie barges about helping Kingston, but surprisingly doesn't have much repartee with Inspector Faraday, his nemesis over at the Homicide Squad.

The wife is the last one standing among the thieves. She arranges for her dead husband's body to be dumped in the river. A mistake is made. He was dressed up in a suit that turns out to have been at the dry cleaners at the time of his death, and wasn't returned until after he was reported dead. It's those little details that get you every time.

Looking west along 5 Avenue South in the downtown core. The brick and sandstone building in the foreground is the Calgary Chamber of Commerce.



Fearful Things.

“The Elevator” is a 1965 episode of the drama radio series THEATER FIVE, a show with which the American Broadcasting Network unsuccessfully attempted to revive OTR. Written by Jim Magin, it is about a newly-opened residential skyscraper that still has some teething problems, such as a constant whining noise from the wind blowing down into the elevator shafts.

A woman residing in the tower returns home from a date, who sees her off in the lobby. She gets on an elevator with a man masquerading as the doorman. Between the 27th and 28th floors, the elevator stalls out and they are trapped there. The man is a psycho who begins tormenting her. Because those two floors haven’t yet been rented, and because of the wailing of the wind, no one can hear her agonies.

Eventually her boyfriend and a police officer come to investigate. They discover the trapped car and force their way into it, arresting the psycho. Not a happy ending though, as the car breaks loose from the shaft. It plunges 27 stories into the basement, killing the four occupants. A bizarre story with a twist ending and no happy conclusion.

The Fallen Towers.

“Twilight Of The Superheroes” by Deborah Eisenberg (2006, in her collection of short stories of the same title) is about a group of friends who sublet a Manhattan penthouse terrace apartment in 2000, just after the Y2K scare is over. It has a spectacular view of the city, including the Twin Towers.

The story is mostly about the background and motivations of the characters in order to set up their reactions to that terrible day. Some of them were sitting on the terrace when the passenger jets flew into the towers. For months afterwards, they had a view of the smouldering stumps of the towers. The sublet eventually expires and the tenants move out. They can’t leave behind the memories though, nor ignore the undeclared war against Islam.

Other Things Not Seen.

“The Word” (1943, LIGHTS OUT) is an OTR show written by Arch Oboler. It was first aired during the middle of World War Two when the outcome was not yet certain. The story begins with a young honeymooning couple visiting

the Empire State Building, trying to forget the ominous war headlines in all the newspapers. Much is made of the trip up to the observation deck. First, a high-speed elevator to the 80th floor, then another elevator to the 86th floor, and finally a third one direct to the 102nd floor observatory.

The couple are the only ones on the glassed-in deck. While there, a fast-moving and strange storm suddenly envelopes the building and worries them, but nothing happens and they relax. On going back down, they press the button for the elevator operator (this was in the days before self-serve elevators) but do not get a response. They walk down the stairs to the 86th floor. No one is there. Down to the 80th floor. Everyone seems to have vanished. They then make the arduous trip to the ground floor. The building is empty all the way down.

Stepping outside, the couple find the inhabitants of the city have vanished. Cars and buses are abandoned in the street. There is no electrical power. They find a battery-operated radio, but all frequencies are silent. Now they begin to wonder.

It might be the Rapture. Perhaps God got tired and wiped out humans, leaving one couple to start over as a new Adam and Eve. There is excessive sentimentalization and moralizing about the wrath of God. Oboler was pandering to his audience in this story. On that note, the final gong sounds. (Scene changes in LIGHTS OUT were announced with a loud gong, very annoying but presumably cheaper than an orchestra.)

“Sap And Blood” by Martin Rose (2013, in the anthology URBAN GREEN MAN) is about some tree seeds that take root on a skyscraper roof and eventually develop into a forest. No one from Building Maintenance ever went up onto the roof, so it wasn’t until the roots began penetrating inside the skyscraper that anyone noticed.

Those who go up on the roof to check out the problem never return. No, not that old standby, the carnivorous tree, but instead a faerie world that entices humans and turns them into Druids. The forest keeps drilling down and eventually takes over the entire skyscraper, turning it into a magical self-contained kingdom.

On the next page: Foxtail barley flowering on the roof of the University LRT station. I took this last summer.



TRANSIT FANNING IN CALGARY: PART 17
photos by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 16 appeared in OPUNTIA's #256, 258, 260, 264, 269, 275, 283, 298, 302, 327, 333, 341, 348, 357, 359, and 365.]

On The Buses.

I use my smartphone camera to photograph Calgary Transit buses about town. I am not a fanatic bus spotter, but I like accumulating photos of buses by their unit numbers. Below is a regular-size bus with a nifty ad.

The less-used suburban routes have always been a headache to Calgary Transit because they have to try and match bus size to capacity. For decades, CT has been using shuttle buses that are basically modified 1-ton RVs, an example of which is seen at right.

The problem with these is that they only have one door for passengers to enter and exit. Because that door also has a folding wheelchair ramp (as all buses of all sizes do) this can really slow down passenger transfers at a stop.



Calgary Transit introduced a new style of shuttle in 2017, which they call a midi. It has a rear passenger door. I've only ridden it once so far, but I can see one disadvantage.

Other buses with rear passenger exits have doors that open by pushing on them, but the midis require the driver to flip them open. Very slow response time. In fact, some passengers shouted to the driver to open it, and when nothing happened, walked forward to the front door. Not the driver's fault, just a very slow response time by the hydraulics. A glitch to be fixed sooner than later.



Calgary Transit can't seem to make up its mind about what colour scheme and logo it uses to brand the buses. Some are white with stripes, and others are red, white, and grey.



It's not a real bus until it's articulated. These ones are only used on the major crosstown routes. It's a loooooong walk to the rear seats. Bring a backpack with 72-hour survival rations.



Natural Selection In Action.

A few years ago, the Calgary Police Service had to add a new category to their accident statistics, one for distracted pedestrians killed or injured while walking with their heads down over a smartphone or listening to music on earplugs. The latest, but not the last, such incident happened on February 20 when a young man walked out in front of an LRT train at the Whitehorn station. Security cameras showed that the lights and bells were working at the pedestrian crossing over the tracks, but he had his head down and was too absorbed in whatever he was doing on his smartphone to notice.

I drive by this bus stop on 20 Street SW and 48 Avenue occasionally and see it decorated for holidays such as Christmas and Valentine's Day.



BOTANICAL FICTION: PART 7

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 6 appeared in OPUNTIA's #316, 317, 320, 323, 325, and 334.]

You Are What You Eat.

The most popular type of botanical fiction is about carnivorous plants, always good for action and adventure as the dashing hero fights against a tentacled green horror intent on using humans as sushi.

“Man-Eater Of Surrey Green” is a 1965 episode of THE AVENGERS, the British television series about government agents John Steed and Emma Peel, and written by Philip Levene. There is much ado about alien space plants intent on spreading over Earth and consuming humans because they have an enzyme that the aliens can’t synthesize but only get from fresh meat. Something is taking over the minds of Surrey’s best horticultural scientists and using it for nefarious purposes.

Steed and Peel are sent to find out what. They first discover a secret military space capsule that apparently collided with a giant alien seed while in orbit, killing it and both plunging into a Surrey manure pile. There was, however, a second giant seed that survived landfall nearby. It has psychic powers that enable it to control human minds, except those who have hearing aids.

Supposedly the transistors of the deaf-aids (as the Brits call them) filter out the frequency the alien plant is using. The fallacy is that all those wearing the aids are clearly shown as having them only in one ear. One would think that the alien can still use the other ear, but this gaping plot hole is completely ignored.

The controlled horticulturists are put to work helping to provide fertilizer, warmth, and moisture for the seed so that it can germinate into a humongous plant with tentacles that will cover the world. Steed and Peel quickly identify the obvious counterattack, a jug of herbicide. Before they can reach the centre of the plant, the usual sort of alarms and excursions are encountered, Mrs Peel does her martial arts routine, and numerous supporting actors and extras are gobbled up for those all-important enzymes.

When Peel is captured by a tentacle before they can reach the alien’s centre, Steed pours herbicide all over her. She is wearing her usual black leather

jumpsuit, so that would protect her from poisoning. The alien plant expires from the poison while slurping on her and Earth is saved for humanity.

“What’s It All About, Algie?” (1970), written by Arne Sultan and Chris Hayward, is a Season 5 episode of GET SMART, the television parody that killed off spy stories. Algernon De Grasse operates a greenhouse nursery as a front for KAOS, evil is as evil does. His slogan is “De Grasse Is Always Greener”. CONTROL infiltrated an agent into the place but the man mysteriously disappeared.

We see how it happened; he was eaten by a giant carnivorophyte. As SFX go, the plant ranks nears the bottom, being made out of piles of dried sphagnum moss with philodendron leaves stuck in at random. The victim pretends to struggle against the plant’s arms while in actuality manipulating them to make it look animated.

Maxwell Smart infiltrates De Grasse’s operation as a greenhouse worker, which gives him the usual slapstick opportunities to spray people with water and break things. De Grasse sends potted plants out to various Capitol Hill offices (CONTROL is headquartered in Washington, D.C.) with listening devices embedded in them. They record the secret conversations of top politicians, bureaucrats, and military officers.

The denouement is a gun battle in the greenhouse. De Grasse stumbles backward into the arms of the carnivorous plant and meets his end. He should have grown roses instead.

THE REVENGE OF DOCTOR X (1970) is based on a 1950s script by Ed Wood. (Yes, that one.) A NASA rocket scientist named Bragan suffers a nervous breakdown from overwork. His Japanese colleague suggests a vacation in Japan to restore his health. One would think that the nearest international airport to Cape Canaveral with connections to Japan would be in Miami, but instead Bragan drives north.

He stops off in North Carolina, where the Venus flytrap is native, and illegally collects a plant out of the swamp preserve. He carefully puts it in inside a cardboard box with its soil, then takes it with him to Japan. Somehow he gets it through Customs and Agricultural Quarantine, which is surprising because few countries allow plants to be imported without an inspection for diseases or pests, and none allow raw soil to be brought in.

Once in Japan, he carries the cardboard box, the kind Chinese takeout food comes in, around with him. The cardboard never becomes soggy and the bottom doesn't fall out, nor does the plant die from lack of light. He takes it everywhere, including restaurants. He makes arrangements to use a greenhouse which comes with a curvaceous young woman to help him, and a Japanese Igor who lurches about in the best Frankensteinian tradition.

His assistant Noriko is a botanist, but when he finally takes the Venus flytrap out of the box, she says she's never seen anything like it. Really doubtful. He tells her Darwin named it. No he didn't; it was known long before his time, although Darwin did write an entire book on the evolution of carnivorous plants. Nonetheless it gives Bragan an opportunity for a long infodump, explaining to Noriko in great detail how Venus flytraps live.

Bragan decides to cross the flytrap with a sea anemone. Ridiculous, but what can you expect from a rocket scientist. Off they go to the seashore to collect one from a reef. Noriko complains the water is cold, but since she's wearing a microscopic bikini instead of a wetsuit to show off her spectacular body, that could be the problem. Just to spice up the movie a bit, they hire a bevy of topless pearl divers to help locate a sea anemone.

Once they get it back in the greenhouse, Bragan refers to the sea anemone as a plant, but it is an animal, a stationary filter feeder. Nonetheless, he crosses it with the flytrap by injecting the plant with blood and tissues from the anemone, then dosing it with a burst of high-voltage electricity from a lightning storm that conveniently passes overhead just then. Saved money on the power bill, if nothing else.

It lives, master! A man-shaped, mobile creature, which seems strange for a cross between a Venus flytrap and a sea anemone. After snacking on puppies, cats, and chickens, it develops a taste for human blood. It also has the ability to emit an anaesthetic gas, the better to catch its prey.

Off it goes to terrorize the village. The simple country folk quickly organize a lynch mob complete with torches and pitchforks. Bragan tracks down the monster at the edge of an active volcano. They struggle on the precipice of the cone and fall into the lava. The villagers seem to have given up the chase. Noriko had followed Bragan from a distance, and weeps to see his death. And so to the end credits, there not being anything more to say on the subject.

If A Tree Eats You In A Forest, Does It Make A Sound?

The OTR series DARK FANTASY had a 1941 episode "The Demon Tree", written by Scott Bishop. Some bored tourists looking for something to do decide to take a stroll through a forest near their hotel. The desk clerk warns them against it, as pedestrians have a habit of disappearing and later being found strangled and entwined in the branches of a tree.

The ominous forebodings begin in earnest as soon as the group walk into the forest. The sky darkens, they lose the path, and the screaming follows not long after. The tree doesn't seem to be carnivorous; it kills for some reason unknown. Two survivors manage to stumble back out of the forest, but it turns out that the tree is mobile and follows them back to the hotel, then sends a branch inside to their room. More screaming, then cue the organ music. A cliched plot and even a cliched twist ending.

MANEATER OF HYDRA (1967) is about carnivorous trees, written by Stephen Schmidt. It is a Spanish-German-Italian television movie, with all the production values that can be expected of such international enterprises, with the usual English-language dubbing in harsh monotones. My copy was on one of those fifty movies for \$15 boxed sets. The transfer to DVD is the worst I have ever seen, with severe jaggies on moving objects and people all the way through and drop-outs where the original show broke off for commercials.

Be that as it may, the plot begins with a group of tourists visiting an unnamed island off Europe. Baron Von Weser owns the island and has made it over into a private botanical garden where he can conduct his mad-scientist experiments. What with taxes and expenses, he is forced to let in tourists to help pay the bills.

One of the tourists is a botanist from the University of Michigan who notices carnivorous plants growing freely on the island, which indicates to him that there is low nitrogen in the soil. The screenwriter must have done some basic research because that is in fact a common character trait of carnivorophytes around the world. That is why they trap critters.

The Baron serves his guests a vegetarian dinner out of his own garden, but not like any vegetables grown elsewhere. They have meat flavour, such as cucumbers that taste like steak. The Baron shows off some hilarious (and impossible) crosses such as an agave century plant combined with a Venus flytrap. Its traps are the size of dinner plates, and it snacks on mice, not flies.

The tourists are picked off by something unknown, one by one. Each is found dead with a hole through a cheek. The telephone line is dead and the ferry won't return until tomorrow. That leaves the Baron and the tourist group to hunt for the murderer. Much hysteria, running through the woods for no apparent reason, and other alarms and excursions.

The Michigan botanist determines that one of the Baron's experiments escaped the laboratory. The Baron takes umbrage at this, and knifes him. To be fair about it, the Baron's henchmen don't have a better survival rate.

It is difficult to become worked up over some of the deaths. One of the tourists discovers a carnivorous tree and wanders up to it, standing directly underneath its branches. The tree branches and obvious predatory organs slowly move against her, as she stands there slack-jawed watching them. She only had to briskly step five paces away to be free and clear of the tree. Instead, she remains rooted to the spot (pardon the pun) and screams as the branches slowly, slowly, slowly creak down and grab her. Natural selection in action, I call it.

The Baron runs amok when his secret is discovered. There is a fight to the death and the handsome young hero prevails to no one's surprise. The Baron is eaten by his own tree, which, however, was fatally wounded in the fight and dies also. And so to the closing credits as the tree digests its meal and then dies.

The Word For Forest Is Ursula.

"Process" by A.E. Van Vogt (1950 December, MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION) takes place on a planet covered by sentient forests. Where they touch each other, they fight to a standstill and establish borders of solid wood. The trees are interlinked and each forest can grow roots or trunks in hours or days as it needs them.

A spacecraft lands in the midst of one such forest, which tries to destroy it by growing trees and lianas over the ship. The hull of the ship heats up red-hot, burning away the wood, and stymies the forest. The next step of the forest is to send roots down into bedrock, dissolve out Uranium 235 and translocate it back to the ship. The forest tries to kill the ship with radioactive dust. It doesn't work, and not only that, bipeds come out of the ship, vacuum up the dust, and then take off into space before critical mass is reached.

The forest takes this as a victory, unaware that the bipeds were using it as a fast

and easy method of mining fissionables. It stores the rest of the U235 in one spot for use against future invasions, but isn't aware of what critical mass is, and blows a big hole in itself. That doesn't kill the forest, but does get it thinking. It begins concentrating U235 along its border with an adjacent forest, and initiates full-scale atomic war against it, eventually killing its competitor and grabbing the extra land for itself.

Unfortunately its other neighbours observe the battle and initiate the same plan. The planet is wracked by global war, but the end result is there are a few victors who get to expand their territory. An interesting concept, and a twist on most sentient forest stories (there are more of those than you think). Van Vogt was one of those great SF writers who realized, correctly, that SF is a literature of ideas, not characterization.

How Does Your Garden Grow.

"Back For Christmas" is a 1943 episode of the old-time radio (OTR) series SUSPENSE, written by John Collier. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.archive.org.) The story opens in England where Peter Lorre plays a botany professor, a henpecked husband who has suffered two decades of marriage to a bossy wife and can't take it anymore. They are planning a three-month visit to America, where he will be a visiting lecturer at a New York university, and will return to England in time for Christmas.

Before they leave, he prepares a garden plot in the basement of their house where some rare orchids will be grown under lights. The wife thinks it a waste of time and, unknown to the professor, hires a contractor to re-finish the basement while they are away. Unknown to her, the professor has an affair with a shopgirl and will meet her in America where they will marry. He does not intend to return to England but will start a new life in the USA. He strangles his wife and buries her in the basement as fertilizer for the plants, then goes overseas, unaware of the contractors.

In New York City at the hotel, he gets a letter from the contractors addressed to his dead wife, reassuring her that they will be starting on the job in the next few days to excavate the basement. As the professor reads the letter, his new and younger wife by his side, he realizes that he will indeed be back for Christmas.

A standard twist plot, with the biter bit. Lorre tends to overact but as a great horror icon, his fans undoubtedly would not cavil at him.

LET MARS DIVIDE ETERNITY IN TWAIN: PART 8.
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 7 appeared in OPUNTIA's #310, 321, 328, 332, 337, 354, and 357. Reviews of the WAR OF THE WORLDS movies appeared in #289.]

The Explorers.

“Under Martian Ice” by Stephen Baxter (2005-02-09, NATURE) is a short-short about the initial exploration of Mars. While drilling test cores, Marsnauts found the buried remains of an ancient settlement. Not Martians, for there was no Martian life, but obviously aliens who came by possibly a billion years ago. They then moved on while the Earth was still being born. The Fermi Paradox has thus been resolved. The aliens were here, but they came at the wrong time for us and Dr Fermi. A good and logical idea.

The Colonists.

“The Martian Death March” by Ernest Kinoy illustrates one of the advantages of science fiction, in that by moving stories of human politics to another planet and alien races, a moral point can be made without offending the people who should hear it the most. This radio play was done several times, in 1951 on DIMENSION X and in 1955 on the related successor show X MINUS ONE. (These and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.archive.org.)

There was an intelligent race of Martians when humans first arrived but chickenpox did to them what smallpox did to aboriginals in North America. Most of the survivors were rounded up and put into a reservation in the desert, even though they were adapted to and native to the mountains. In the far off year of 1997, they desperately break out of the reservation and begin a long trek to the mountains where they hope to find sanctuary. They have less luck than the Cherokee did on the Trail of Tears.

The story is told from the point of view of a young boy who watches as the human settlers attack the Martians moving across the homestead lands. The bigotry and wilful misunderstandings are obvious analogues to what happened on Earth. No listener, then or now, could miss the comparison.

Another OTR show was STARR OF SPACE, a short-lived children’s science fiction series that ran in 1953 and 1954. “Citizens Of Mars”, written by Tom

Hubbard and Fred Egger, is about the problems in Polar City, where Martian colonists are disappearing without explanation.

Captain Starr is briefed to investigate. The farmers are panicky and ready to abandon the Polar City area. Some folk blame the Martians, while Starr thinks it may be a plot to buy up farmland cheap. In his investigation, he learns that the missing farmers had been walking their fields when they noticed curious purple rocks and picked them up.

On contact with the purple rocks, the missing men came under the influence of the Pool of Intelligence and walked over to where it was hidden. The rocks were actually dried portions of the Pool. The details of how the Pool fed are glossed over since this was a kiddie show. Starr busted up the operation and made Mars safe for farm folk once again.

GHOSTS OF MARS is a 2001 movie written by Larry Sulkis and John Carpenter, and set in the year 2176. Mars has been 84% terraformed according to the opening narration. The atmosphere is almost breathable, although humans still have to sniff from an oxygen supply every so often. There are 640,000 colonists in various towns, connected by railroad lines of ultramodern trains capable of functioning in the constant dust storms.

The plot is the standard horror movie transplanted to the red planet. Mining colonies have begun disturbing the spirits of Martians, who take over humans and wreak havoc. The rest of the story follows the predictable plot. It begins with unawareness, then growing realization, denial, and the acceptance of the horrible truth. There are battles against the possessed, blood splattering everywhere, and all that screaming and yelling.

The SFX are quite good. The actors know how to carry the show. Pam Grier stands out as a tough police commander, even if she is decapitated by the Martians halfway through the movie. The spirits are destroyed when the mining camp is blown up. Or at least until the epilogue, when they return, no doubt with a sequel in mind. This movie is much better than the average horror film.

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

2017-02-24

OPUNTIA #366: Re: birds in food courts. South of me is the bigger of the nearby shopping malls, Sherway Gardens. That mall is finishing up massive renovations, including tearing down and moving their food court. The old food court looked like it was set inside circus tents, but the only animals inside those tents, besides the ravenous humans, were sparrows. These little guys kept the place relative clean as far as food scraps on the ground goes. They were extremely brave; some would land on tables, or even on your shoulder.

Re: Pedestrian malls: Part of Yonge Street was made into a pedestrian mall for a few years, but it truly stalled car traffic, and the mall was given back to the cars. People demand wide sidewalks, car lanes, curb parking and bicycle lanes, but the road is only so wide.

[You should have heard the crying and whining when Calgary city council began introducing bike lanes downtown a few years ago. The City has a specific policy to favour public transit everywhere and bikes in the central city. It seems to be working; vehicle counts on inner-city roads have declined over the past three decades as citizens use buses and trains instead.]

Toronto is very poor at keeping its heritage buildings, and some are torn down in spite of historic designations. The façade of Toronto's old central post office makes up part of the outside of the Air Canada Centre, where the Leafs and Raptors play.

Interesting article about THE COLOPHON, which I had heard of, but had never seen before. May there come a time when most men could call themselves bookmen. I am sure it won't happen until I am gone.

My previous letter of comment: You're right, newspapers will go away, and suddenly, there are so many sources of misinformation, or fake news, as is the common, modern name. There will be good news sources, but right-wing sources will tear them down.

[As will the leftists, who are even worse when it comes to unsubstantiated predictions of gloom and doom. It is why I gave up on the mass media decades ago; they deserve to die. It isn't so much that they lie, but they are very good at editing and omitting. Justin Trudeau campaigns against the 1% and is aggressively taxing small businesses and seniors, but the mass media never ask where the Trudeau family trust fund has hidden its wealth. Rachel Notley has crippled Alberta's economy with a carbon tax and a \$15 minimum wage but the mass media don't mention that before entering politics she never met a payroll or balanced accounts payable against receivables in a business.]

I mentioned David McCallum in that loc, and recently, I saw that he is now the author of a crime novel, and is enjoying book signings at bookstores.

We have this year's World Wide Party on our calendar, and we will let you know how we celebrated. Seeing that June 21 is on a Wednesday this year, it probably won't be much, but we will be observant.

OPUNTIA #367: National Flag Day reminded me that with the horrors happening in Washington these days, our flag is quickly becoming a symbol of freedom around the world. Banners downtown aren't used because buildings are so close to sidewalks, there is the fear that banners might fall, hit someone, and cause a lawsuit, one the city can ill afford.

[I've never heard of a banner tearing loose in Calgary, and we regularly get chinook winds up to 120 km/hr. The banners are firmly attached to streetlights with good solid hardware. Of course, us Westerners know how to deal with lawyers (sound of shell clicking into a pump-action shotgun).]

If the Cubs can win the World Series for the first time in over 100 years, the Flames and Leafs have at least a little hope that they can win the Stanley Cup.

HMV's eastern head office was in an industrial mall almost on the Toronto-Mississauga border. I'd sent them my resume several times, without luck, so in some ways, I have my revenge. The only place close by where I could buy DVDs, CDs or even vinyl, is the Sunrise Records store in the nearby Cloverdale Mall.

[Calgary has one record store left, a tiny independent operation called Sloth Records, but they carry just CDs and vinyl. If you want DVDs in Cowtown, Walmart has only bargain bins and Best Buy only carries the top 100 sellers.]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Lin, W., et al (2017) **Origin of microbial biomineralization and magnetotaxis during the Archean.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 114:2171-2176

Authors’ abstract: “A wide range of organisms sense Earth’s magnetic field for navigation. For some organisms, like magnetotactic bacteria, magnetic particles form inside cells and act like a compass. However, the origin of magnetotactic behavior remains a mystery. We report that magnetotaxis evolved in bacteria during the Archean, before or near the divergence between the Nitrospirae and Proteobacteria phyla, suggesting that magnetotactic bacteria are one of the earliest magnetic-sensing and biomineralizing organisms on Earth. The early origin for magnetotaxis would have provided evolutionary advantages in coping with environmental challenges faced by microorganisms on early Earth. The persistence of magnetotaxis in separate lineages implies the temporal continuity of geomagnetic field, and this biological evidence provides a constraint on the evolution of the geodynamo.”

Speirs: Earth’s magnetic field has fluctuated constantly since life began about 4 gigayears ago, yet evolution continued on. The magnetic field sometimes drops down to zero, but this has not created mass extinctions. Good for bad SF movies though, who never let the facts get in the way of the plot.

Ferrari, T.E. (2017) **Cetacean beachings correlate with geomagnetic disturbances in Earth's magnetosphere: an example of how astronomical changes impact the future of life.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 16:163-175

Author’s abstract: “The beaching and stranding of whales and dolphins around the world has been mystifying scientists for centuries. Although many theories have been proposed, few are substantiated by unequivocal statistical evidence. Advances in the field of animal magnetoreception have established that many organisms, including cetaceans, have an internal ‘compass,’ which they use for orientation when traveling long distances. Astrobiology involves not only the origin and distribution of life in the universe, but also the scientific study of how extraterrestrial conditions affect evolution of life on planet Earth. The focus of this study is how cetacean life is influenced by disturbances in its environment

that originate from an astrological phenomenon – in the present study that involves solar flares and cetacean beachings. Solar storms are caused by major coronal eruptions on the Sun. Upon reaching Earth, they cause disturbances in Earth's normally stable magnetosphere.”

“Unable to follow an accurate magnetic bearing under such circumstances, cetaceans lose their compass reading while travelling and, depending on their juxtaposition and nearness to land, eventually beach themselves. (1) This hypothesis was supported by six separate, independent surveys of beachings: (A) in the Mediterranean Sea, (B) the northern Gulf of Mexico, (C) the east and (D) west coasts of the USA and two surveys (E and F) from around the world. When the six surveys were pooled (1614 strandings), a highly significant correlation ($R = 0.981$) of when strandings occurred with when major geomagnetic disturbances in Earth's magnetosphere occurred was consistent with this hypothesis. (2) Whale and dolphin strandings in the northern Gulf of Mexico and the east coast of the USA were correlated ($R = 0.919$, $R = 0.924$) with the number of days before and after a geomagnetic storm. (3) Yearly strandings were correlated with annual geomagnetic storm days. (4) Annual beachings of cetaceans from 1998 to 2012 were linearly correlated ($R = 0.751$) with frequency of annual sunspot numbers. Thus, consistently strong statistical correlation evidence indicates that an astronomical phenomenon, solar flares, can cause cetaceans to change their behaviour and become disoriented, which eventually causes them to swim onto a shore and beach themselves.”

