

OPUNTIA 378



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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.

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY;
VIEWS FROM THE TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY**
photos by Dale Speirs

Okay, this is the last set of photos from my May 4th excursion into Banff National Park. (But more expeditions to come.) The cover photo and the one below were taken along the Bow Valley Parkway. The rest of the photos were taken from the Trans-Canada Highway roadside or scenic turnouts.

Below is part of the Sawtooth Range. No prizes for guessing how it got its name.



Castle Mountain is a U-shaped mountain on the east side of the Bow River valley. Again, no prizes for figuring out why it was given that name. This view was taken from the Trans-Canada Highway along the bottomlands.





Both these photos were taken from a turnout on the Trans-Canada Highway at Banff. The top photo looks due east at the Fairholme Range, and the bottom photo looks due west at Mount Bourgeau.



From that same turnout, the above photo looks southwest at Eagle Mountain. At left, looking southeast at Mount Rundle.

LITTLE FREE LIBRARY IN CALGARY

by Dale Speirs

In 2009, Todd Bol of Hudson, Wisconsin, built a model of a one-room schoolhouse with the front as a glass door. He mounted it on a post, set it in his yard, filled it with books, and encouraged his neighbours to use it as a book exchange. The concept of “take a book, leave a book” caught on, and there are at least 50,000 recorded Little Free Library boxes worldwide today. Inevitably there is a Website, at www.littlefreelibrary.org

The spread of the boxes has met with opposition in some places where residents are touchy about zoning laws, or where over-enthusiastic volunteers placed them on public parks without permission. In Calgary there are several hundred of them. I photograph them with my smartphone camera if I pass any in my daily travels around the city, but have only seen a fraction.

One objection recently raised is that the book exchanges are elitist. Jane Schmidt and Jordan Hale are two Toronto librarians who made that charge in a recent issue of JOURNAL OF RADICAL LIBRARIANSHIP. Yes, there really is an academic journal by that name.

The reference is:

Schmidt, Jane and Jordan Hale (2017) Little Free Libraries®: Interrogating the impact of the branded book exchange. JOURNAL OF RADICAL LIBRARIANSHIP 3:14-41

This is an Open Access article and can be read for free as a pdf at:

<https://journal.radical librarianship.org/index.php/journal/article/view/17>

The author’s abstract reads in part: *“Through our engagement with the discourses, narratives and geographies of the LFL® movement, we argue that the organization represents the corporatization of literary philanthropy, and is an active participant in the civic crowdfunding activities of the non-profit industrial complex. The visible positioning of these book exchanges, particularly on private property in gentrified urban landscapes, offers a materialization of these neoliberal politics at street level. Drawing primarily upon one of the author’s experiences as an LFL® steward, as well as critical discourse and GIS analysis, we offer constructive critiques of the organization and their mission, and suggest that the principles of community-led library practice can be more effectively employed to harness the enthusiasm of these self-described “literacy warriors”.”*

The paper reports on the distribution of LFL boxes in Toronto and Calgary. The vast majority are in middle-class neighbourhoods well served by regular libraries, and few in “book deserts” of poor neighbourhoods without easy library access.

I don’t know Toronto geography at all, but in looking at their map for Calgary, it is immediately obvious that the areas where LFLs are scarce are in fact industrial or commercial areas. Also, since the term Little Free Library is trademarked by the parent organization, many people put up unregistered boxes on their own initiative, whose positions are not recorded.



Here are a few of the photographs that I have taken over past years of some of the Calgary boxes. I could compile a 50-megabyte issue of OPUNTIA showing all the boxes, but I don’t want to impose on the Websites kindly hosting this zine.

You will see that while many of them are registered as LFLs and have a sign on them to that effect, there are also many that are not.

Altadore Baptist Church. Notice the official LFL sign just above the door.



At left:
Unregistered
box in the
Beltline area
of inner-city
Calgary.

At top right:
Unregistered
box a few
blocks away
in front of a
walk-up
apartment.

At bottom
right is a
registered
LFL box at
Banff Trail
Community
Association in
northwest
Calgary. A
middle-class
suburb.



An elaborate site in the mezzanine of the Chevron building downtown.



Hillhurst United Church in inner-city Calgary.



Another inner-city box in the Inglewood district.



In the Calgary Transit colours, by a bus stop in the Mount Pleasant district.



Adjacent to Sunnyside LRT station in the inner city, decorated for Christmas.



Chinatown, and yes, the books inside were all in Chinese.



BWAH HA! HA!: PART 3

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #371 and 372.]

Getting Ahead In The Mad Scientist Business.

Dr Victor Frankenstein is the founding father of the re-animation trade, and who knows how many hundreds of stories and movies there are about his successors. To take but a few:

THE HEAD (1959) is a German movie, written by Victor Trivas, that has a plethora of decapitated heads. Dr Abel has developed a Serum Z that allows him to keep a decapitated dog's head alive. His assistant, Dr Walter Burke, has a cousin, Irene Sanders, who is a crippled hunchback and wants Abel and Burke to try a new operation to correct her spine.

The plot goes sideways when a new man, Dr Ood, shows up and insinuates himself into the surgical team. Abel has a bad heart condition and needs a transplant. Ood and Burke agree to do it, but the operation is a failure. Ood extemporizes and decapitates Abel's head and keeps it alive. When Burke objects, he is killed by Ood.

Irene has a pretty face and a kind soul, and Ood takes pity on her, falling in love. He finds a stripper in a nightclub who is rapidly declining from booze but still has a spectacular body. Ood convinces Irene to let him operate on her to correct her spine. She doesn't know that Abel is still alive, albeit not the man he once was, and forced to tell Ood how to use Serum Z.

Once Irene is under anaesthesia, Ood decapitates both her and the stripper. Irene's crippled body and the stripper's head are disposed of, and Irene's head transplanted onto the stripper's body. The operation is a success. It doesn't take Irene long to realize that she has a different body, and to figure out what must have happened.

For all the guilt she has, Irene is going to keep her new body. Her new boyfriend was the stripper's boyfriend. In snooping around the laboratory, he finds Abel, who tells him what happened, and asks him to do the merciful thing. The police are called in, there is a violent confrontation, and Ood departs this world without the benefit of a head transplant.

THE BRAIN THAT WOULDN'T DIE is a 1962 movie written by Joseph Green and Rex Carlton. The movie is about re-animator Dr Bill Cortner, whose fiancée Jan Compton is decapitated in an auto accident. He rushes her head into his basement laboratory, attaches it to nutrient solutions, and revives her.

She isn't too happy about sitting helplessly on a lab bench while he goes out searching for a young woman to serve as a new body. She wants to die and be done with it, and hates Cortner for keeping her alive. The actress who played Compton, Virginia Leith, does a remarkable job considering she spent almost all the movie sitting under a lab bench with only her head sticking out from a tray of nutrient solutions. She had to emote using only her voice and facial expressions, and did it well.

Compton is horrified at her situation, and wants to die, but Cortner is obsessed with her and wants to restore her with a new body. He sweet-talks a beautiful woman into coming back to his place, drugs her, and then is about to commence decapitating her and replacing her head with Compton's.

Cortner has a creature he previously stitched together a la Frankenstein and which he keeps locked up in a cell in the lab. He was careless enough to walk too close and be grabbed by the rubber-mask monster. A fight begins, with the door broken off its hinges, the monster's arm through it, and the two struggling to get at each other from opposite sides of the loose door.

The monster wins, kills Cortner, and inadvertently starts a fire. It scoops up the woman and carries her out of the lab to safety, leaving Compton's head behind. As the flames spread around the bench, she makes one of the more famous final lines: "*I told you to let me die.*" The camera fades to black as she cackles insanely in her death throes.

The film is a respectable B-movie that tries to do a good job. Leith's acting carries the mood quite well. The end title says "The Head That Wouldn't Die", which is slightly more accurate, since it was a head, not a brain only, that was preserved. However, it still isn't right either way. The correct title needs the word "couldn't", since "wouldn't" implies that Compton stubbornly wanted to live, when in fact it was the opposite.

"The Great Man by James S. Dorr (1999, STRAND MAGAZINE #2) is narrated by an old French soldier who lost an arm in the Napoleonic Wars. The discussion is about the survival of heads after decapitation by guillotine. There

have been reports of heads surviving up to 15 seconds after the chop, making grimaces, responding to questions, or blinking the eyes.

The narrator relates a story about a man who was sentenced to death during the Reign of Terror after the French Revolution. He bribed an attendant to replace the traditional basket with a container filled with fresh blood and packed with ice. His assistants rushed the head to a laboratory and hooked the head up to life support machinery.

The man then begins a search for a healthy young soldier with a good body. He interviewed the narrator but when he saw the man was missing an arm, he sent him away. The narrator's friend, a fellow soldier in perfect condition, doesn't realize what is about to happen when the talking head asks him to stay for a moment.

Brains In Glass Jars.

Do decapitated heads need haircuts or shaves? Just wondering. Many mad scientists ditch the skull and put the brain into an electrolyte solution. Cleaner in one sense, but the end results are always very messy.

DONOVAN'S BRAIN was a 1942 horror novel by Curt Siodmak that was released in 1953 as a movie. The lead actress was Nancy Davis, better remembered today as First Lady Nancy Reagan. The mad scientist of the movie is Dr Patrick Cory, who, like so many of his ilk, has the wherewithal to run a private laboratory in a remote location. He experiments with keeping monkey brains alive in electrolytes. When a millionaire named William Donovan is fatally injured in a car crash, Cory takes his brain and keeps it alive.

The story veers into fantasy, as the isolated brain becomes telepathic and able to control the minds of others. Donovan runs amok, figuratively of course, and is on his way to building a world empire. It all ends in flames and dead bodies strewn about.

THE OUTER LIMITS was an early 1960s anthology television SF series. Filmed in black-and-white on a budget of next to nothing, with constant interference from philistine network executives, it nonetheless managed to produce a few good episodes. The quality varied wildly from one episode to the next, and its final season went rapidly downhill.

"The Brain Of Colonel Barham" (1965) was an imitation of DONOVAN'S BRAIN, written by Robert C. Dennis. A space project needs a cyborg mechanism for a new spacecraft. Col. Barham, who will be dead in a few days from cancer, volunteers to have his brain used for cybernetic control of a spaceship. The operation is a technical success, but detaching his brain from a body leads to problems.

Barham becomes a messianic megalomaniac with delusions of godhood. He develops the power to control minds, and kill at a distance with electrical discharges. He forgets, though, that he is a brain in a laboratory jar. While he can control people inside the laboratory, he can't reach past the door. His run-amok propensities are soon dealt with. A general goes across the street out of telepathic range and fires a rifle shot through the window, blowing apart the jar.

The episode could have been better. Its theme is that there are some things man was not meant to know, which doesn't wash. People agonize about what is done to Barham, but as he repeatedly reminds them, he volunteered and it was better than dying in a hospital bed.

There is constant philosophizing in the episode about how the whole idea is horrible, horrible, and just plain horrible. No, it isn't. Many people, myself included, would love to see the future without a diseased or elderly body if the alternative was death.

Brain Fluids.

For that matter, why bother with the hassle of keeping a brain alive? "Stolen Brains" by Capt. S.P. Meek (1930 October, ASTOUNDING) is about a mad scientist named Slavatsky who extracts fluids from brains for additional intellectual powers. He named this cerebral fluid "menthium" and will use it to rule the world and all that. The fluid is sucked out of the brain, leaving the victim with amnesia if only a small amount is taken and a gibbering idiot if all of it is extracted.

Dr Slavatsky is a typical mad scientist with the usual meglomania. *"Speak respectfully to me; I am the Master of the World!" he roared in an angry voice.* His plan is foiled, as you knew it would be. He gets a taste of his own medicine when the hero extracts all the menthium out of Slavatsky's brain.

THRILLING TYPEWRITER TALES: PART 3
by Dale Speirs

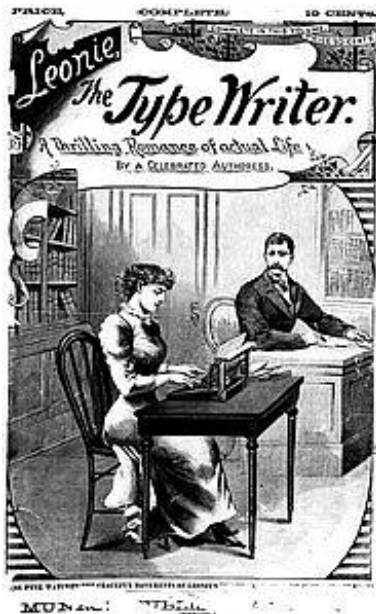
[Parts 1 and 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #287 and 345.]

Palaeofiction: The Type Writer.

Typewriters were a holy grail to many basement inventors and manufacturers, but required complicated mechanisms that stymied mass production for a couple of centuries after the Industrial Revolution began. The first reliable mass-market machine wasn't produced until 1875, when Remington finally solved the problems of building such devices.

For the next couple of decades, the typewriter was to business economies what the personal computer would be in the 1990s. Everybody had to have them, because if they didn't, they would be left behind. It also revolutionized women's rights, because typewriting provided a clean, respectable job for millions of young women.

Originally the terminology was that a type writer (two words) was the person who operated a typewriting machine. In later years, the operator became known as a typist, and the word "typewriter" transferred to the machine. The same sort of thing happened a few decades later with the word "computer", which was originally applied to clerks who counted money and added up columns of figures in ledgers.



LEONIE, THE TYPE WRITER was an 1890 dime novel of romance by Wenona Gilman (available at www.gutenberg.org). In the first few paragraphs we are introduced to Lynde Pyne, a young businessman. The author immediately informs us that he was cheated out of an inheritance by dastardly tricks with the will. Following instantly on that, a young woman named Leonie Cuyler applies for a job as his type writer. Pyne is smitten, and the three main plot elements having been thus introduced, the rest follows.

The melodrama is poured over the pages thicker than maple syrup. The actual business of being a type writer is put aside to allow the blossoming of young love, the misunderstandings, and what in later years would become known as soap opera.

The villainess is suitably dastardly but gets her just desserts. The characters all go chasing after various wills, real and fake, that determine who will inherit a fortune. The plot twists and turns, and you may have to compile a chart to keep track of who did what, and who is related to whom by blood or secret marriage.

Palaeofiction: Elementary Typing.

As I do about once a decade, I was rereading the original canon of Sherlock Holmes stories, when I came across what must be one of the earliest pieces of typewriter fiction in which the machine played a significant part. "A Case Of Identity" was published in 1891, when typewriters were still cutting-edge office machines. Today we think of Holmes as nostalgic gaslight fiction, but Doyle wrote the stories as contemporary fiction, not period pieces.

The plot is about a young woman having trouble with both a disappearing swain and a stepfather only a few years older than herself. She had received unsigned typewritten notes from her absent beau. Holmes then got a sample of the stepfather's business correspondence and determined that both were typed on the same machine. Even then it was recognized that individual typewriters could be identified by the pattern of wear of their letters and their alignment on the paper. As far as I can tell, this is the earliest piece of fiction in which typewriters play a major role in the plot.

The 1903 story "The Solitary Cyclist" begins in the traditional manner with Holmes and Watson receiving a client in their rooms. Holmes does his usual parlor trick of deducing facts about the client to amaze one and all. In this case, it is Miss Violet Smith who is distressed about something or other.

Holmes tells her: *"I nearly fell into the error of supposing that you were typewriting. Of course, it is obvious that it is music. You observe the spatulate finger end, Watson, which is common to both professions? There is a spirituality about the face, however, ... which the typewriter does not generate. This lady is a musician."* Smith admits she teaches music. Meanwhile, millions of women typists who read the story took umbrage at Doyle.

Palaeofiction: Ghostly Typing.

“The Enchanted Typewriter” is an 1899 novella by John Kendrick Bangs (available at www.gutenberg.org). The narrator finds an old typewriter in the attic and restores it. One night he returns home to find the typewriter operating by itself. At first he thinks it is the machine itself, but is soon informed by a ghost named Jim Boswell that the machine is ordinary. Only the typist is extraordinary.

Boswell has gone down below into the next life where he is editor of the STYGIAN GAZETTE. (He is also Samuel Johnson’s caddy at the golf course.) Napoleon Bonaparte has started a revolution, backed by other dictators and all their soldiers, who want to depose Old Nick. Boswell intends to report it; the bulwark of freedom is free information and all that.

The narrator gets to talking, via the typewriter, with Boswell about this, that, and the other things. *“I haven’t written anything that has lasted a hundred years yet,” said I. “Oh, yes, I think you have,” replied Boswell, and the machine seemed to laugh as he wrote out his answer. “I saw a joke of yours the other day that’s two hundred centuries old. Diogenes showed it to me and said that it was a great favorite with his grandfather, who had inherited it from one of his remote ancestors.”*

Most of the novella is used as an excuse to get in brief vignettes and anecdotes that the author wouldn’t have been able to publish elsewhere except as fillers. Boswell encourages the narrator to publish the items under his own name. Eventually the revolution is sidetracked by the golf craze, as all the denizens become more interested in it than social reform. The typewriter falls silent, and the narrator has to go back to thinking up his own stories.

Another ghost typewriter appears in David H. Keller’s story “The Typewriter” (1936 Fall, FANCIFUL TALES). An author named John Hunting has achieved success with a book THE PERPETUAL HONEYMOON, whose romantic heroine is Angela Lamereaux. His wife Amy complains he spends too much time at his typewriter, thinks more of Angela than her, and is obsessed with his particular typewriting machine.

He points out that he makes more as an author than his previous job as a bond salesman, and that his machine is special. Amy’s anger gets the best of her. One night when John is sleeping, she gets an axe out of the basement and begins

hacking at the typewriter. As she does, the typewriter screams in a woman’s voice. Simultaneously, her husband, still in bed, begins bleeding from a head wound. He staggers over to the typewriter and collapses on top of it.

Legal Typing.

The Rumpole of the Bailey stories began life in the 1970s as a humour series on British television, written by John Mortimer. He later converted each script into a short story, and in the fullness of time all these stories were compiled into doorstep size omnibuses. I have all three omnibuses. As I do with my Holmes canon, I like to reread the Rumpole stories once a decade or so.

Horace Rumpole was an middle-aged barrister who earned his living as a defence lawyer at the Old Bailey court in London, England. He narrated the stories in a humourous style that has held up well over time. Rumpole shares chambers with several other lawyers, mostly barristers but some solicitors who handle the more lucrative civil conveyances and torts. He himself relies on the Legal Aid people to bring him his clients.

From the first omnibus is the 1978 story “Rumpole And The Married Lady”. It is a divorce case, a rarity for Rumpole, who, like many lawyers, avoids such cases because of the emotional behaviour of the clients.

In this one, he represents Mrs Thripp, who alleges cruel behaviour from her husband. He has been leaving nasty typewritten notes around the house, nitpicking about her minor faults in a vicious way. Mr Thripp counters with the same complaint about her leaving unkind typewritten notes for him.

Rumpole became an expert on typewriters years ago when he defended the Great Brighton Benefit Club forgery case. He observes that both sets of Thripp notes were produced on the same typewriter, an Olivetti portable the Thripps owned. There is a nasty battle brewing over custody of their son Norman. He accompanies his mother to Rumpole’s law chambers where he makes a nuisance of himself with the secretary.

The case starts out in court but after a while the Thripps agree to an attempt at reconciliation. This was sabotaged by a typed note to Mrs Thripp claiming that Rumpole will lose the case for certain because he is past it. As a result, Mrs Thripp decides to hire a new barrister.

Rumpole notices that the note was typed on a standard Imperial like the one his secretary uses. In fact, the identical machine. Norman had been seen fooling about with it, but everyone had assumed that boys will be boys. He wasn't just playing on the office machine, he was typing that last note.

Rumpole takes the lad aside for a quiet word, and learns Norman had typed all the notes. He had discovered that when his parents were first feuding, he was showered with presents and attention from them, each of whom wanted custody. Norman wanted to keep the divorce proceedings going, so he used the fake notes to keep trouble on the boil, and typed them all up himself. This is why lions eat their young.

Modern Typing.

TO HELVETICA AND BACK (2016) by Paige Shelton is a cozy mystery set in the ski resort of Star City, Utah. Chester Henry and his adult granddaughter Clare operate The Rescued Word, a shop that repairs old typewriters and restores old books. Next door to them is a school that teaches Latin.



This is the typical village economy of cozy mysteries. Businesses that would struggle in New York City or London because of their esoteric nature seem able to earn a reasonable living out in the boonies where the population is a few hundred people and twice as many cows. Suspension of disbelief indeed.

A customer named Mirabelle Montgomery brings in an Underwood #5 for

repairs. Shortly after she leaves, a stranger enters and demands to buy that specific machine. He is threatening enough that Clare calls the police and he runs for it. Later, she looks over the typewriter to find out why it was wanted so desperately. On it, she discovers a series of numbers and letters engraved in secret locations. A code of some kind, evidently.

The stranger leaves the plot the next day when his body is found in the back alley behind the typewriter shop. This continues another cozy mystery tradition, villages with murder rates that would frighten away gang members and Mafioso, and women shopkeepers who investigate crimes a la Miss Marple.

Suspects multiply like polygamists (who are mentioned in the story, it being Utah). The code identifies the location of a hoard of silver from an old mine. The local cop is a friend of Clare's and regularly fails to follow proper police procedure, also standard cozy mystery practice. The history of Montgomery's typewriter is traced back to its source. At each step, a fresh revelation appears. The original owner knew about the silver, and his grandsons want to cash in.

The epilogue ties off the loose threads and Clare returns to her mundane life. Unless, of course, this novel sells well and justifies sequels. If so, take pity on the inhabitants of Star City, whose murder rate will soar. There will be blood.

Non-Fiction.

THE TYPEWRITER (2015) by Janine Vangool is a sumptuous coffee table book illustrating the rise and fall of the typewriter. Although inventors had been tinkering with typewriting machines since the early 1700s, Christopher Latham Sholes is considered the father of the typewriter.

The Sholes & Glidden typewriter of 1874, manufactured by Remington, was the first mass-produced commercially successful typewriter. A flood of imitators followed and by the 1890s had revolutionized offices as much as the desktop computer would a century later.

This book is lavishly illustrated with photos of typewriters and period advertising, both the conventional machines and the bizarre. The earliest models did not allow the typist to see the paper, but soon visible-writing machines were on the market. World War One gave a boost to lightweight portable typewriters, in great demand by armies everywhere.

The QWERTY keyboard became standard because it reduced jamming of the keys. It still carries on with computer keyboards. Some people were dissatisfied with this keyboard, and the Dvorak keyboard, named after its inventor was touted as the better one for touch typing.

That claim was later demolished by studies showing that experienced typists couldn't use a Dvorak keyboard any faster than the QWERTY style. The initial studies claiming the Dvorak keyboard was better were done under the aegis of the U.S. Navy. It wasn't until years later that someone noticed the studies were carried out by Dvorak himself, who was a contract worker for the Navy.

Touch typing became widespread by the late 1880s, and business schools taught typing as a matter of course. The first World Champion Typist was Rose Fritz in 1906, who also won the Blindfold Typewriting contest that year. Social changes were triggered by the typewriter. Initially the majority of typists were men but soon women came to dominate because it was a clean, respectable job from which they could earn a living.

The technology continued to improve. Silent typewriters, or at least not as noisy, came in by the 1930s. Carbon paper existed before typewriters but afterwards the demand for it soared. Erasers came with whisk brooms to keep the mechanisms clean. In the 1950s, typewriters were marketed in colours other than black as hard plastics became common.

Electric typewriters soon followed. The IBM Selectric, with interchangeable fonts on a golf ball, represented the zenith of the typewriter. Introduced in 1961, it eventually held 75% of the typewriter market. But in 1981, IBM introduced its Personal Computer, and we all know the story since.

Previous page: Advertising label from an Austrian typewriter repair business, sometime from the first decade of the 1900s. From my collection of typewriter philately.

At right: From PUNCH magazine, 1951. Or should I type EUNCH?



“Pvpry timp I strikp thp lpttpr ‘p’ I gpt an ‘e’.”

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

2017-05-22

Yvonne and I are relaxing during our last day of the Victoria Day weekend, so I have a little time before this upcoming busy week to do a little writing. So, here are comments on OPUNTIA issues #374 to #376.

OPUNTIA #374: I know people who would participate in the Comic Expo Parade, but I don't think there's such a thing here. If I had a great costume to show off, I would do it at the Expo, but not in a parade outside. To me, those great costumes present a target to the usual thugs on the street, and I have seen that happen. Those in the parade where you are, they are definitely braver than I am.

[Thugs on the street? I'm astonished that Toronto would be that dangerous. Parades are popular in Calgary, but I've never even heard tell of any problems like that. The police escort all parades but that is for traffic control.]

I am very glad to see that Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi would be a part of things, and add some support. Perhaps the re-enactors could be included the same way the steampunks usually are. You are right about the cosplay soldiers marching in the parade; thy shoes shall match thy costume. Talk to the SKA people, they know all about that. Good to see the Otafest people, for they remind me that Anime North is on at the Toronto Congress Centre and four surrounding hotels next weekend.

Indeed, the Net killed the video stores, and now the record stores. Sunrise only survives because they sell DVDs, CD, retro vinyl, and merchandise connected to popular anime, gaming and SF/fantasy, plus some nostalgia here and there.

My comments on Jonathan Kay and THE WALRUS might predate Kay's sudden departure from the magazine, based on comments on cultural appropriation. As much as I like THE WALRUS, I expect it to fade the same way FRANK MAGAZINE did. Again, the Net...

[For the benefit of my non-Canadian readers, recently the social justice warriors in Canada have been harassing writers and publishers for cultural appropriation. Specifically, it is now unsafe for any non-aboriginal writer to produce a short story, novel, or film involving aboriginals. When I say unsafe, I'm not exaggerating. The aboriginals have successfully shut down authors and publishers for daring to have an aboriginal character written by a white person.]

OPUNTIA #375: I have seen one Canada Post Star Trek van here. I gather a second set of stamps has been released. I have to say, excellent artwork on the Trek collectors' stamps. In a past decade, I might have added them to my own stamp collection, but I simply don't have that kind of money or interest any more. The Canadian Mint has been busy with coins that, according to a CBC report, are no longer worth the value stamped on them because of the plunging value of silver.

[Those are numismatic coins, limited-edition non-circulating coins which always have a face value far below the bullion value. The reason for this is a quirk in Canadian law. Anyone copying a coin with a denomination on it is guilty of counterfeiting, but any coin or medal produced without a denomination can be copied and sold as "replicas".]

HISTORY #1 looks quite interesting. Alternative history stories way back then...they certainly wouldn't have been called SF back then, but they are always interesting exercises in creative thought and what if.

[Re: Lake Louise photos of tourists on ice] Danger, Thin Ice...all children in adult bodies, with no common sense. No police or other authorities there to get people off the ice? (more of this in the next issue, too, I see.)

[Alberta law presumes assumption of risk as long as warning signs are posted in a conspicuous place. People who ignore warning signs then take all responsibility for their own actions. When I worked for the Calgary Parks Dept., we often put up warning signs even if there was no real risk, so that citizens could not sue.]

OPUNTIA #376: More marvelous mountain photos. I hope this summer has enough opportunities for us to go to some of the local national parks (there are a couple) or even provincial conservation areas.

I'd love to go to Château Lake Louise some time, but as you say, if you have to ask, you can't afford it. Same goes for the Royal York Hotel here in Toronto, and the Château Laurier in Ottawa. Wonderful buildings you can go through, but except for special occasions (the last Toronto Worldcon), we certainly wouldn't be able to afford the rack rate.

[From curiosity, I checked the Château Lake Louise Website. Rooms start at \$495 per night, plus taxes. A few years ago, I stopped inside to buy a sandwich from their kiosk. It was \$15. Mind you, it was the best sandwich I've ever eaten, made with the freshest ingredients and real roast turkey sliced from an actual bird, not the processed meat everyone else uses. A can of pop was \$5. It was ice cold, but even allowing for the fact that it had to be trucked up into the mountains, I think they could have shaved the price a little. I've never eaten in their sit-down restaurants. I suspect that one couldn't get away from the table for less than \$100 per person.]

I have some Dunsany on the shelves here. Dark fantasy is interesting for the ideas expressed, but I have never sought to read more and more of it. Too dark for me, usually. What did interest me was the fact that the gods were real, but were not especially god-like. They had all-too-human egos. The Yann stories might have formed some inspiration for some of C.S. Lewis' writings on Narnia. Also, I believe in Dickens' A CHRISTMAS CAROL, a character named Jorkens is mentioned. I wonder if Dunsany took the name from Dickens, or if simply Jorkens was a common surname at the time.

We do intend to celebrate the World Wide Party about a month from now. We are looking forward to it.

All done for now, and still mid-afternoon as Yvonne cooks lunches for work this coming week. I have a day-long assignment at one of the buildings at the Canadian National Exhibition grounds on Wednesday, and Friday is the first day of Anime North, usually our best convention of the year for sales. A crazy week indeed.

[Have a good time and don't get mugged watching the parade.]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Sweatman, M.B., and D. Tsikritsis (2017) **Decoding Göbekli Tepe with archaeoastronomy: What does the Fox say?** MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY 17:233-250

Authors' abstract and introduction: *Göbekli Tepe, often called 'the world's first temple', is an ancient megalithic site in present-day southern Turkey, not far from the border with Syria.*

We have interpreted much of the symbolism of Göbekli Tepe in terms of astronomical events. By matching low-relief carvings on some of the pillars at Göbekli Tepe to star asterisms we find compelling evidence that the famous 'Vulture Stone' is a date stamp for 10950 BC ± 250 yrs, which corresponds closely to the proposed Younger Dryas event, estimated at 10890 BC.

We also find evidence that a key function of Göbekli Tepe was to observe meteor showers and record cometary encounters. Indeed, the people of Göbekli Tepe appear to have had a special interest in the Taurid meteor stream, the same meteor stream that is proposed as responsible for the Younger-Dryas event. Is Göbekli Tepe the 'smoking gun' for the Younger-Dryas cometary encounter, and hence for coherent catastrophism?

It concerns evidence for an abrupt and cataclysmic event at the boundary of the Younger Dryas period (circa 10,900 to 9,600 BC). We will only describe the evidence briefly here, which is apparently coeval and reported to include;

- *Analysis of the geology of the Scablands and similar features across North America indicating sudden melting of the Laurentide ice sheet and immense flooding across large areas of North America.*
- *An abrupt change in climate to much colder and drier conditions for over 1,000 years.*
- *Analysis of Greenland ice-cores and archaeological sites across North America, which reveal unusual 'spikes' in the concentration of particular substances, especially platinum, signalling a major event potentially of cosmic origin.*
- *The apparent, near simultaneous extinction of many megafauna across the North American continent.*
- *An apparent sudden change in human culture in North America, i.e. the end of Clovis culture.*

- A distinct layer of black or grey deposits across large areas of the North American continent and Northern Europe called the 'black mats'.
- Widely dispersed indicators of an immense event, e.g. nanodiamonds, magnetic spherules and high-temperature melt glass.

The evidence and proposed mechanisms for this event are keenly debated right now. Recent publications in highly regarded academic journals can be found arguing in favour or against the published evidence and a leading candidate mechanism; a major cometary encounter around 10,890 BC that primarily affected northern latitudes, especially the Laurentide glacial ice sheet that covered Canada at the time, and Northern Europe.

The proposed theory of a sufficiently large-scale cometary encounter does appear to be able to explain much of this evidence. However, a major problem with this theory is a lack of understanding of the details of such an encounter, especially the various physical signals it would create. Of course, if there was an archaeological record of this event, especially a written record, then it might be able to confirm the hypothesis. But archaeological evidence from that period or before is very rare, and it is also generally thought that any form of writing, even proto-writing, did not appear until around 7000 BC in central Europe, far too late.

Hujeirat, A.A. (2017-05-18) **Is there a hidden connection between massive neutron stars and dark matter in cosmology?** arXiv:1705.06608v1 [astro-ph.HE] Preprint posted at www.arXiv.org

Author's abstract and introduction: *Astronomical observations reveal a gap in the mass spectrum of relativistic objects: neither black holes nor neutron stars with 2 - 5 solar masses have ever been observed. In this article I proceed in presenting the scenario which discloses a possible hidden connection between massive neutron stars (MANs), dark matter and dark energy in cosmology.*

Accordingly, when the curved spacetime embedding MANs compresses the nuclear matter to beyond a critical supranuclear density ρ_c ; mesons, generally transmitting the residual nuclear forces between neutrons, could gain energy by frequently interacting with a scalar field at the background. When the effective energy of mesons becomes comparable to the bag energy enclosing the quarks, the neutrons merge together and form a super-baryon (SB), whose interior is made of incompressible gluon-quark superfluid.

It turns out that the process has a runaway-character: it enables the super-baryon to grow in mass and volume from inside-to-outside to finally metamorphose the entire object into a completely invisible dark gluon-quark object, practically indistinguishable from isolated stellar black holes. The inability of these objects to merge with other objects whilst agglomerating in clusters makes them excellent candidates both for black holes and for dark matter halos in cosmology.

Unlike luminous stars, whose energies are generated through nuclear fusion, neutron stars emit the rest energy stored in their interiors from old evolutionary epochs. As in the case of luminous normal stars, the total energy emitted by neutron stars is proportional to their masses, implying therefore that massive neutron stars must be short-living objects also.

Similar to the natural selection scenario of primates, most massive astrophysical objects must have disappeared relatively quickly, but only solar-like objects are able to shine for billion of years and to be observable until the present universe: thanks to the parameters characterizing our universe.

Just for illustration: a 10-solar masses star has a lifetime 1,000 shorter than that of the Sun. On the other hand, cosmological simulations reveal that the first stars must have been 100 to 10,000 solar masses and that they should have formed from primordial clouds made solely of hydrogen.

In the absence of heavy elements, it is believed that these massive stars must have collapsed directly into stellar black holes, but whose masses have been growing continuously through accretion of matter from their surroundings and/or through repeated mergers with other objects to become the monstrous black holes that reside in the centers of almost all observable galaxies.

However, an evolutionary track in which the first stars, or at least a part of them, may have collapsed to form pulsars and/or neutron stars statistically cannot be excluded. Moreover, if the parameters characterizing our universe indeed do not allow matter-density to grow indefinitely, then the abundance of massive neutron stars at that epoch must have been rich. Under these circumstances, the first generation of NSs must have emitted their energies long time ago to become invisible and disappear from our today observational windows.

Black, B.A., et al (2017) **Global drainage patterns and the origins of topographic relief on Earth, Mars, and Titan.** SCIENCE 356:727-731

Authors' abstract: *Earth, Mars, and Titan have all hosted rivers at some point in their histories. Rivers erode the landscape, leaving behind signatures that depend on whether the surface topography was in place before, during, or after the period of liquid flow. Black et al developed two metrics to measure how well river channels align with the surrounding large-scale topography. Earth's plate tectonics introduce features such as mountain ranges that cause rivers to divert, processes that clearly differ from those found on Mars and Titan.*

Rivers have eroded the topography of Mars, Titan, and Earth, creating diverse landscapes. We analyzed drainage patterns on all three bodies and found that large drainages, which record interactions between deformation and erosional modification, conform much better to long-wavelength topography on Titan and Mars than on Earth. We use a numerical landscape evolution model to demonstrate that short-wavelength deformation causes drainage directions to diverge from long-wavelength topography, as observed on Earth. We attribute the observed differences to ancient long-wavelength topography on Mars, recent or ongoing generation of long-wavelength relief on Titan, and the creation of short-wavelength relief by plate tectonics on Earth.

Oehler, D.Z., et al (2017) **Large and robust lenticular microorganisms on the young Earth.** PRECAMBRIAN RESEARCH
doi:10.1016/j.precamres.2017.04.031

Authors' abstract: *In recent years, remarkable organic microfossils have been reported from Archean deposits in the Pilbara craton of Australia. The structures are set apart from other ancient microfossils by their complex lenticular morphology combined with their large size and robust, unusually thick walls. Potentially similar forms were reported in 1992 from the ~ 3.4 Ga [Ga = gigayears or billions of years old] Kromberg Formation (KF) of the Kaapvaal craton, South Africa, but their origin has remained uncertain.*

Here we report the first determination of in situ carbon isotopic composition ($d^{13}C$) of the lenticular structures in the KF (obtained with Secondary Ion Mass Spectrometry [SIMS]) as well as the first comparison of these structures to those from the Pilbara, using morphological, isotopic, and sedimentological criteria.

Our results support interpretations that the KF forms are bona fide, organic Archean microfossils and represent some of the oldest morphologically preserved organisms on Earth. The combination of morphology, occurrence, and $d^{13}C$ values argues that the lenticular forms represent microbes that had planktonic stages to their life cycles. The similarity in morphology, $d^{13}C$, and facies associations among specimens from Australia and South Africa suggests that the lenticular microfossils on the two continents represent related organisms.

The biological success these organisms is demonstrated by their abundance, widespread distribution, and the fact that, as a group, they appear to have been present at least 400 million years. This success may be due in part to their robust structure and planktonic habit, features that may have contributed to survival on a young planet. Isotopic results further suggest that the lenticular organisms were autotrophs [photosynthetic or chemosynthetic], an interpretation supporting the view that autotrophic metabolisms developed early on the young Earth.

Vinn, Olev (2017) **Early symbiotic interactions in the Cambrian.** PALAIOS 32(4):231-237

Author's abstract: *Fourteen types of symbiotic associations have been recognized in the Cambrian. Cambrian symbiotic associations are dominated by suspension feeding sessile benthic animals with brachiopods being the most important group. The major difference between Cambrian and Ordovician-Silurian symbiotic associations is the small number of colonial organisms among host taxa of Cambrian symbionts. Endobionts that are common in the Ordovician and Silurian are almost absent in Cambrian symbiotic associations. Most of the symbiotic associations in the Cambrian are restricted to a single paleocontinent with the highest number reported from tropical Laurentia.*

Speirs: Symbiotic life dates back very early in the history of life on Earth. From this paper, it appears to have begun during the Cambrian era (542 to 488 megayears ago) and then spread rapidly in the Ordovician (488 to 443 megayears) and Silurian (443 to 416 megayears). Laurentia was a continent that is today Canada and Kalaallit, but back then located on the equator and rotated 90° to the east.

Bond, D.P.G., and S.E. Grasby (2017) **On the causes of mass extinctions.** PALAEOGEOGRAPHY, PALAEOCLIMATOLOGY, PALAEOECOLOGY 478:3-29

Authors’ abstract: *The temporal link between large igneous province (LIP) eruptions and at least half of the major extinctions of the Phanerozoic implies that large scale volcanism is the main driver of mass extinction.*

Here we review almost twenty biotic crises between the early Cambrian and end Cretaceous and explore potential causal mechanisms. Most extinctions are associated with global warming and proximal killers such as marine anoxia (including the Early/Middle Cambrian, the Late Ordovician, the intra-Silurian, intra-Devonian, end-Permian, and Early Jurassic crises).

Many, but not all of these are accompanied by large negative carbon isotope excursions, supporting a volcanogenic origin. Most post-Silurian biocrises affected both terrestrial and marine biospheres, suggesting that atmospheric processes were crucial in driving global extinctions. Volcanogenic-atmospheric kill mechanisms include ocean acidification, toxic metal poisoning, acid rain, and ozone damage and consequent increased UV-B radiation, volcanic darkness, cooling and photosynthetic shutdown, each of which has been implicated in numerous events.

Intriguingly, some of the most voluminous LIPs such as the oceanic plateaus of the Cretaceous were emplaced with minimal faunal losses and so volume of magma is not the only factor governing LIP lethality. The missing link might be continental configuration because the best examples of the LIP/extinction relationship occurred during the time of Pangaea.

Many of the proximal kill mechanisms in LIP/extinction scenarios are also potential effects of bolide impact, including cooling, warming, acidification and ozone destruction. However, the absence of convincing temporal links between impacts and extinctions other than the Chicxulub-Cretaceous example, suggests that impacts are not the main driver of extinctions.

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

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. The Website has podcasts of some of the panels from previous years, free to download.

The convention has a membership cap of 750. As of May 23, only 43 were left for sale, so WWC will once more be a sellout a couple of months before it opens. The banquet sold out months ago.

I’ve been to all of the WWCs since the first one in 2011 and enjoyed all of them. The reports are in OPUNTIA #71, 253, 266, 282, 318, and 350.

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. Rescheduling it to a club meeting or more convenient time negates the idea of a wave of celebration by SF fans and zinesters circling the globe. Raise a glass, publish a one-shot zine, have a party, or do a mail art project for the WWP. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

At 21h00, face to the east and salute those who have already celebrated. Then face north, then south, and toast those in your time zone who are celebrating as you do. Finally, face west and raise a glass to those who will celebrate WWP in the next hour.