

OPUNTIA 384



Stampede 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.

COWTOWN PARTIES HEARTY

2017-07-07 to 16

photos by Dale Speirs

Bigger than the Christmas shopping season. Bigger than Canada 150. Almost as big as the great flood of 2013, but we're all still trying to forget that one. Off we go to the world's largest rodeo, the Calgary Stampede.

This year the Stampede offered a SuperPass. Daily admission is \$18, but for \$40 one could get a smartphone pass via Ticketmaster good for the entire ten days. Since I go several times, depending on the weather, I bought one. Fast service each time; I and other SmartPass holders walked up to the kid holding the wand, held out our smartphones, and were beeped in without having to wait in line.

Last year the Stampede suffered from rain showers throughout the ten days, but now we are having a heat wave. This year I went nearly every day, excepting that I occasionally had to do some business and skip a day.

Daily admission covers everything except the infield events and chuckwagon races. They require separate tickets but those tickets allow admission, so no one has to pay twice. Other than food, I spend nothing beyond the admission, since I haven't been on midway rides in fifty years, don't gamble in the casino, buy junk in the trade show, or play the arcade games.

General admission covers hundreds of events, from music to non-infield rodeo events to show riders to livestock exhibits to art shows. With the ability to attend ten days, I was thus enabled to see everything I wanted.

Below: The Outriders entertain the crowds with contemporary country swing music. No oom-pah-bah music here, pardner.



Team Penning.

People associate rodeo with bronco riding and chuckwagon races, but most events are actually quite different. The majority test the ability of cowhands and horses to deal with realistic situations on ranches, such as handling cattle or riding across broken terrain (which is why there are still millions of working horses in North America because 4WDs can't go everywhere).

Team penning involves three cowhands (cowboys or cowgirls; most such events are mixed gender) who have sixty seconds to separate three cattle from a herd of thirty and move them across the arena into a pen. All the cattle are numbered from 0 to 9, so there will be three with each number.

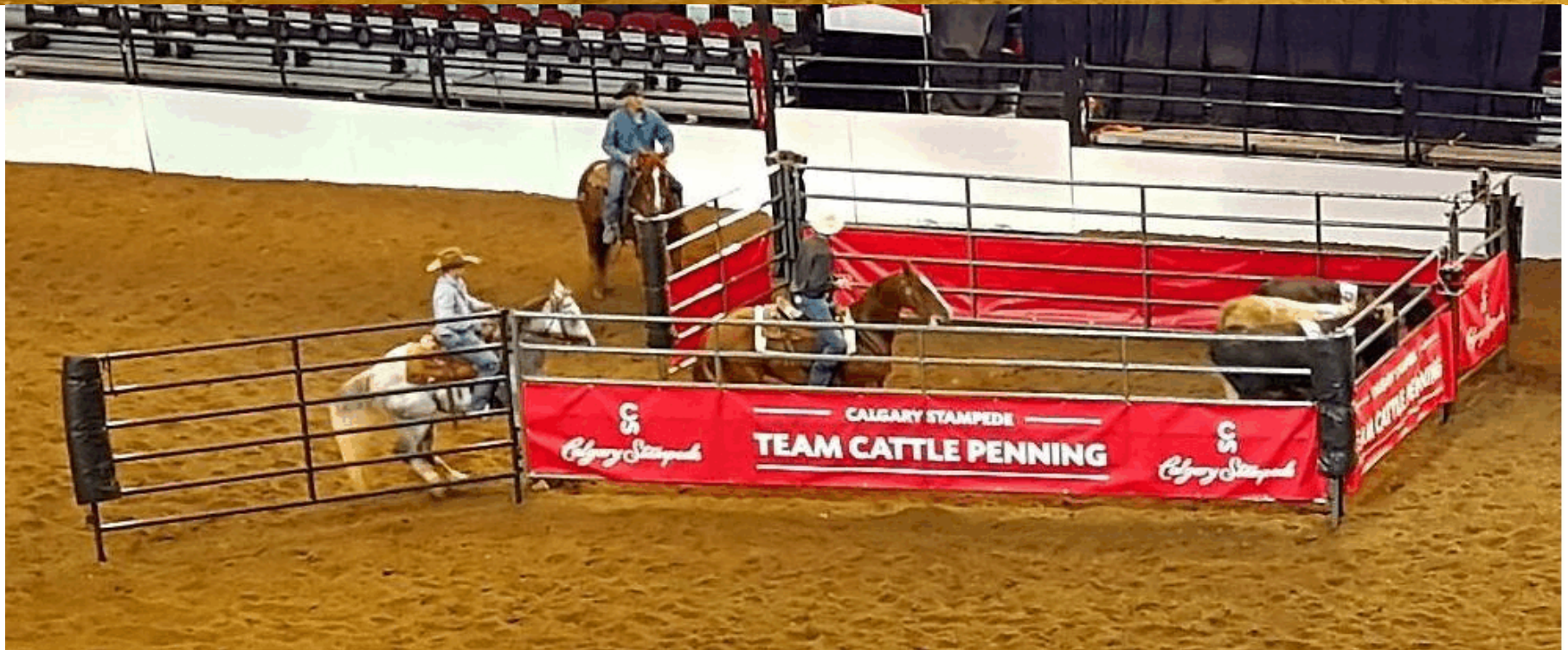
The cowhands start at the far side of the arena and trot toward the herd. When they cross the centre line, the announcer will call out a number at random, and they must then cut those cattle out of the herd and move them across the arena into the pen. If any other cattle escape and cross the centre line, the team loses and gets "no time". So you see, they not only have to concentrate on moving three animals across the arena but also watch their backs so none of the remaining herd gets across the line.

This is an invitational event and only the best teams from North America were there. Some Canadian teams, of course, but the majority were actually from the USA. Not just obvious cattle states like Texas, Oklahoma, or the Great Plains, but there were two separate teams from Missouri and one from Pennsylvania. Because it is invitational, the teams get expense money. The day I watched them, they were competing for \$63,000 in prize money. Each team gets three rounds, their best score counting.

On average, it took about 35 seconds to pen three cattle. About half the teams were called out for no time at least once because while they were trying to pick out their numbered cattle, another with the wrong number bolted across the centre line. On one occasion, the three riders were bunched on one side of the herd cutting out their numbers when the entire herd bolted, giving them, and the audience, a big scare. The cowhands just barely managed to stop them before the centre line, and went on to get their three cattle into the pen.

I herded cattle back on the ranch (see OPUNTIA #60.5) so I can really respect how difficult the competition is.

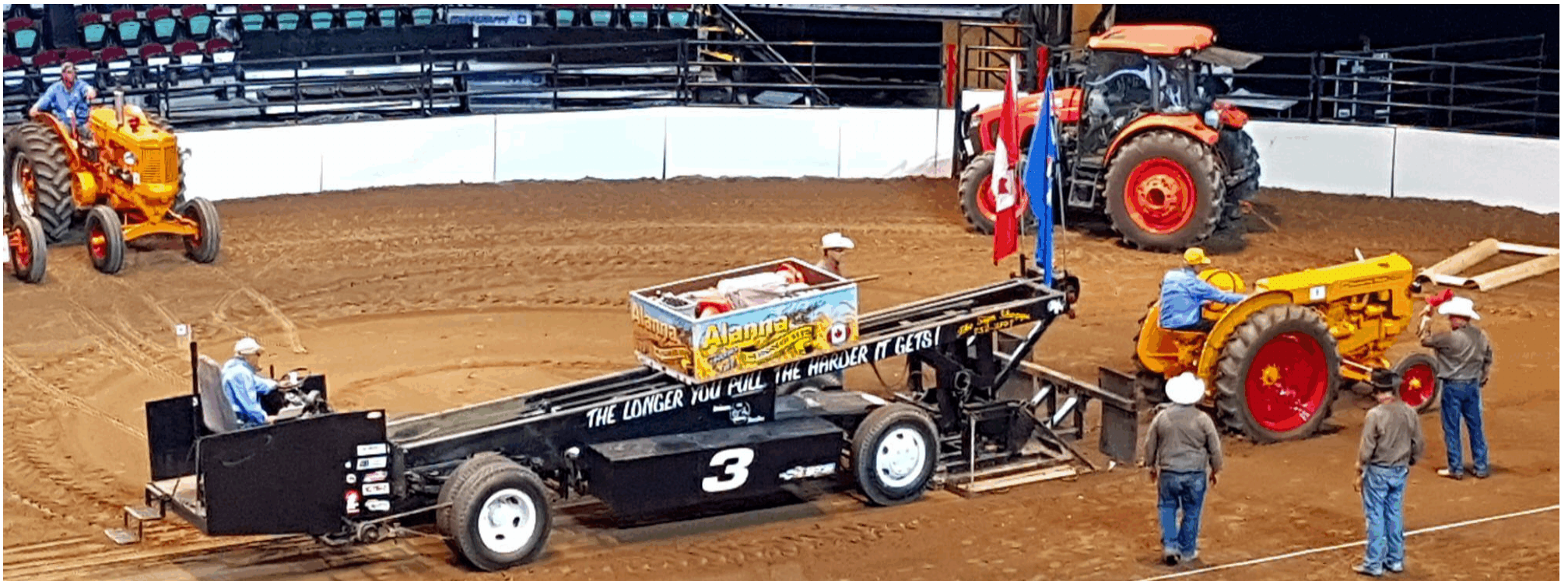




Vintage Tractor Pull.

This event was for tractors built in 1960 or earlier. The tractor pulls the sled behind it. The box of boulders slowly moves forward and leverages its weight onto the skid ahead of the front wheels. This multiplies the force and eventually stalls the tractor. The competitor with the longest haul over four tries wins.

At left, the tractor is just beginning its pull. The box is at the back. Below: The box has moved about halfway up. The tractor has just stalled; notice how its wheels have dug into the sand.



Obstacle Racing.

The Cowboy Up competition pays big money, enough to bring in competitors from across North America. The obstacles are not random; they are designed to simulate situations a horse might encounter on a ranch Out West.

This cowgirl is from Eckville, Alberta, which made me sit up when the announcer mentioned it. That village is my birthplace.

In the top photo, she is taking her horse up a ramp and through a tunnel. At bottom, the horse has to turn clockwise twice and then counterclockwise twice on the sand box.

In the photo below, can you spot the stuffed bears? The idea is to test how calm the horse is when it sees wildlife. You don't want to be riding a skittish horse on the ranch that shies every time it sees a coyote or bear in the distance.



Show Riders.

The Canadian Cowgirls go through their paces.





Horses Large.

The draft horse competitions are dressage and performance.

Alas, one of the teams suffered a broken hitch and jack-knifed directly in front of where I was sitting. Disqualified of course, since the standard is perfection.

The rig was from British Columbia. They had a long drive to Calgary, ending in bitter disappointment.

Horses Miniature.

Then there is the category that makes everyone in the audience go: “Aw, aren’t they cute?” At bottom, the rig is backed in against a pipe lying on the ground to show the driver and team can make a right-angle turn into a loading dock



Hockey rinks have Zambonis to smooth the ice in between periods, and rodeo arenas have harrows to level the sand.

Horses Regular.

The working horse competition requires the rider and horse guide a cow around the arena in a certain pattern.



Horses Unbroken.

Competitive bronco riding, whether saddle or bareback, starts with the bronco in a squeeze chute, the contender climbing on its back, and the gate swung open. The horse jumps sideways into the infield and then tries to get rid of the irritant on its back. The sport grew from the method of training horses to the saddle on ranches.



These photos are from a demonstration of how it was done on the ranch, where the purpose is not to stay on the horse's back for eight seconds but to break it to the saddle. The procedure was to saddle the bronco, then squeeze it between two tamed horses to keep it in place.



A rider would then crawl up behind one of the outriders onto the horse. When he was ready, the outriders moved away and the saddle busting commenced. It would normally take a couple of hours on the ranch.

For this demonstration, the rider dismounted after eight seconds, sometimes involuntarily.



Steers And Cows.

If you're not sure of the difference, you can look it up on Wikipedia.





I went to watch the steer judging, which was preceded by the Calgary Stampede Showband. Imagine my surprise when the band leader came up into the bleachers and stood next to me to conduct the band. It was an unnerving feeling having the entire band staring at me, although of course they were actual looking at their conductor.

Ten days of great fun finally came to an end. Monday morning the city resumes its dull grinding plod of earning a living. See you next year in Cowtown!



LET MARS DIVIDE ETERNITY IN TWAIN: PART 10

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 9 appeared in OPUNTIA #310, 321, 328, 332, 337, 354, 357, 369, and 372. Reviews of the WAR OF THE WORLDS movies appeared in #289.]

Invasions.

H.G. Wells started something with Mars, although his literary successors generally didn't come close to his abilities. Edmond Hamilton, a space opera pulp writer at the dawn of SF, wrote "Monsters Of Mars" (1931 April, ASTOUNDING) which serves as an example of lesser writers trying to fill shoes too big for them.

A backyard scientist in Maine, with the help of two of his chums, has established radio contact with Martians. After a couple of years of hard work, they were able to communicate with them and received instructions on how to build a matter transmitter to allow travel between the two worlds. Since someone has to stay behind to operate the machinery, they invite Randall, an outsider, along on the trip, which provides the advantage of explaining everything to the reader via the third man.

Off they go into the wild red yonder. The Martians turn out to be crocodile men, standing erect balanced on a tail and with a long flat head. Randall immediately gasps: *"They're not like anything we know, they're reptilian!"* The logical fallacy in that statement doesn't need to be pointed out, but it serves as a useful demonstration that Randall's brain cells aren't well synchronized.

They get a quick tour of a Martian city by the canal, and are taken to meet the supreme ruler. He informs them that they are dupes. *"For it is not you three Earth-beings who will flash back to earth when that moment comes! It will be Martians, the first of our Martian masses who have waited for ages for that moment and who will begin then our conquest of the Earth!"*

"Yes, Earth-beings, our great plan comes to its end now at last! At last! Age on age, imprisoned on this dying, arid world, we have desired the Earth that by right of power shall be ours, have sought for ages to communicate with its beings. You finally heard us, you hearkened to us, you built the matter-transmitting and receiving station on earth that was the one thing needed for our plan. For when the matter-receiver of that station is turned on in

twenty-four of your hours, and ready to receive matter flashes from here, it will be the first of our millions who will flash at last to Earth!"

All sorts of adventures follow. The three men are taken prisoner, escape, flee into the red jungle that surrounds the city, are captured by giant tentacled worms, and pulled underground. They are almost sacrificed to the worm god, escape, wind up prisoners of the crocodile men again, and etcetera until the author reaches his word count.

They escape back to Earth with seconds to spare, destroy their end of the matter transmitter, and sit back in exhaustion and satisfaction of a job well done. Nothing about bacteria, but one wonders what they left behind in the way of measles or the common cold.

It is assumed that Martians would invade in the era of humans, even though fiction writers were generally agreed that Mars was a world that had been dying long, long ago. A story that makes use of the idea that they didn't wait for humans is "One Prehistoric Night" by Philip Barshofsky (pseudonym of M.M. Kaplan) from the 1934 November issue of WONDER STORIES.

Martian scouts land on Earth, pathfinders whose home world awaits their report before sending on the main force. It is, however, the Jurassic era, and they have landed in a jungle filled with creatures whose scientific names end mostly in 'saurus'. The Martians set up a perimeter with electrical fences after they discover the critters, and use their heat rays to keep them back initially. But technology requires maintenance and repairs, especially against flying insects that short out power sources. Nor can the ray guns wipe out every single saurid charging through the fence. The Martians are wiped out, and the silence of the scout ship tells the home planet to look elsewhere.

Exploration.

Stanley G. Weinbaum is best remembered for his story "A Martian Odyssey" (1934 July, WONDER STORIES, available at www.gutenberg.org). He was a rising star who was suddenly cut down by cancer in 1935 when he was only 33. Even in his time, he was considered to have revolutionized science fiction. His aliens were not the stereotypical slaving monsters that plagued SF, but well thought out creatures who had their own logic. Had he lived, he would have been one of the great names of SF.

Dick Jarvis is the main protagonist of the story, the human one that is, and was part of the first expedition to Mars. He was on a scouting trip when his flyer crashed, leaving him with a long walk back to the mother ship before it took off for Earth with or without him. As he trudged along, he met a variety of aliens like none described before by the pulpsters. One annoying aspect of the story is that Jarvis tells it in flashback form to fellow astronauts. Weinbaum was great at original ideas but his dialogue is clunky.

The checklist of Martians encountered by Jarvis is quite fascinating. SF is a literature of ideas, and this story exemplifies that theme.

- Mobile grass-like plants living along the canals. Each blade of grass had two tiny legs. As Jarvis walked through the turf, the grass moved out of his way.

- Tweel, the main Martian protagonist, who looked something like an ostrich. Jarvis found Tweel struggling to escape from the clutches of a giant tentacled worm that had snagged it. He would have let them fight it out until he noticed that Tweel had a bag slung around his neck, indicating civilized intelligence. Jarvis kills the worm and becomes friends with Tweel, who accompanies him along the way.

- A silicon-based creature that slowly eats rocks, excretes bricks, and lays the bricks around it to form a pyramid. When the pyramid is capped, the creature breaks through the top, moves forward a short distance, and begins again. Jarvis followed a line of pyramids, the first a tiny one the size of a fist, the most recent taller than a human. The creature was brainless and sightless, a biological automaton eating sand. It reproduced by emitting glass balls that floated away, eventually broke open on the sand somewhere downwind, and spewed its gaseous contents into the ground to form another pyramid beast.

- Dream beasts which lure victims into their tentacles by creating fantasies from the victim's thoughts. Jarvis is almost snared by one but is saved by Tweel.

- Barrel-shaped creatures with four legs and eyes all the way around the circumference of the top of the barrel. Hard workers inside mounds like giant ants. Jarvis and Tweel get lost in the labyrinth of one mound.

An excellent story of ideas, albeit awkwardly told, but well worth reading.

Colonial Troubles.

“A Thousand Dollars A Plate”, written by Jack McKenty, is a 1956 episode of the old-time radio (OTR) science fiction series X MINUS ONE. (This and thousands of other OTR shows are available as free downloads at www.archive.org) The story is set on a Mars that has been colonized well enough to support numerous private enterprises, including casinos.

Each night the casinos stage fireworks, which unfortunately fog up the photographic plates a nearby astronomy observatory uses. It costs \$1,000 to ship each plate from Earth, not to mention that astronomers are photographing events that won't re-occur. Their appeals to City Council fall on deaf ears because all the councillors are casino employees.

Next up, the astronomers try to use computer game theory to break the casinos. They lose every penny, because computers don't take into account that the games are rigged, not based on mathematical theory. Observing that gamblers are a superstitious lot, the astronomers then go into astrology, and issue horoscopes to warn gamblers away from one specific casino. The idea is that they will rotate the name of the casino and hurt all of them. It doesn't stop the fireworks because the other casinos get the extra business.

Fighting fire with fire, the astronomers decide to launch sounding rockets into the middle of the fireworks display. Their payloads will be water, enough to drench the gamblers and tourists watching the display and cause them to avoid the spectacle. One rocket goes off course and hits a casino owner's mansion, starting a fire from its unburned fuel and destroying the house. That finally gets results. The casino owners, not realizing what really happened, ban fireworks as a public hazard.

An amusing episode. Light pollution affecting observatories wasn't a topic of discussion back then, so it was a refreshing change from the usual plots about Martian natives, independence wars against Earth, or some unsuspected natural catastrophe hitting the colonists.

SHAKING ALL OVER: PART 5

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #259, 326, 341, and 360.]

AFTERSHOCK (1991) by Chuck Scarborough is a novel that posits a major earthquake bring New York City to its knees. The Eastern Seaboard is not a tectonic zone but earthquakes occasionally occur due to post-glacial isostatic rebound. That is the delayed slow-motion rebound as bedrock lifts back up after the disappearance of the continental ice sheets that had pressed it down. The famous New Madrid earthquake is an example.

Scarborough, however, postulates a deep underground fault in upstate New York which runs south through the state and out into the ocean. The novel begins in the traditional manner of disaster fiction. There is the man-of-the-hour geologist predicting an earthquake near New York City. City officials don't want to cause a panic by issuing a warning.

But first, all the subplots. Even the biggest earthquake only lasts a few minutes, so the pages have to be filled somehow. Pets and zoo animals are acting strangely. There are the usual romantic entanglements and family feuds. Other characters have their backgrounds filled in even though they won't be front stage until after the big shake. The forebodings build up, and up, and up, until the reader wonders if the earthquake will actually arrive.

Finally though, the Big One shakes down Manhattan. Surprisingly, the Twin Towers remain standing. (This novel was written a decade before 9/11.) For most of the city, the walls, they came atumbling down. The Statue of Liberty flops over onto its island. Battery City Park, a complex of skyscrapers adjacent to the World Trade Centre, was built on landfill, which liquified during the earthquake. Whatever wasn't shaken down was eradicated by the tsunami that came in from the offshore portion of the fault.

And so to the big cleanup. Two-thirds of the novel is a litany of anguish and grim heroism as the supporting characters strut their stuff. People are dug out of the ruins, everyone seems to be searching for loved ones. The Mafia and other criminals take advantage. This novel follows the standard disaster plot you've seen in movies and read elsewhere. An afternoon's reading when there is nothing else to do.

Ripped And Torn (With Apologies To The Actor).

What if an earthquake was so big that a piece of Earth was torn away and went flying off into space? It can't happen, because the mass of rock would be held in place by gravity, which trumps centrifugal force. This idea was used in the deservedly obscure movie CRACK IN THE WORLD, reviewed in issue #259 of this zine.

I stumbled across the 1913 novel ON A TORN-AWAY WORLD by Roy Rockwood. The author's name was a house name used by the Stratemeyer Syndicate, which churned out hundreds of action-adventure novels for juveniles. W. Bert Foster was the name of the real author. The book is available as a free download at www.gutenberg.org.

As the novel begins, Jack Darrow and Mark Sampson are college chums who have just finished building their own airship in the commodious laboratory of Prof. Amos Henderson, who has a place in remote Maine. Maybe they did it with their student loans.

Dey is also dat ole retainer Washington White, who talks like the South won the War Between The States: *"I don't fo' suah know wedder he does or not," returned the darkey, scratching his head "Ye see, it's a suah 'nuff longitudinal name, an' I dunno wedder he remembers it all, or not."*

"He's got a bad memory; has he?" said Mark, turning to smile at Washington White, too, for Professor Henderson's old servant usually afforded the boys much amusement.

Lawdy, lawdy. In any event, dey, pardon me, they, get the plot started by going off to Coldfoot, Alaska, to find a rare plant that will, if I read correctly, cure strokes and brain damage from its extracts. En route they have various exciting alarums and excursions but finally make it to northern Alaska. The airship is wrecked and the party have to take shelter with some Aleuts and oil prospectors.

Just as they sit down to a meal, earthquakes and volcanic ash stir up the plot. The Big One hits: *There was no preliminary trembling of the earth or the air. There was an unheralded clap of sound, a sharp detonation that almost burst their ear-drums. They did not fall to the ground; the earth, instead, seemed actually to rise and smite them!*

A cataract of sound followed, that completely overwhelmed them. They realized that the huge trees were swaying and writhing as though a sudden storm-breeze had blown upon them. Had a tornado swept through this wood no greater danger could have menaced them. Trees about them were uprooted; many bent to the earth; some snapped off short at the ground, great boles two and three feet through!

The group are rendered unconscious. When they recover a few minutes later, they find themselves in darkness and experiencing microgravity. At first they do not realize their situation, but when a strange sunrise turns out to be Earthrise, everything becomes clear. They have been thrown off Earth by a cataclysm and are now orbiting it on a second moon.

“You are quite right, my boy,” said the professor, cheerfully. “The volcanic disturbance brought about great earthquakes. These, however, were merely warning symptoms. We did not know it, however. Finally the great mass of gas formed beneath the earth’s crust somewhere about the Alaskan coast of the Arctic Ocean, we will say, exploded and forced an enormous portion of the crust into the air.”

“No wonder we lost consciousness,” he continued, with enthusiasm. “We were probably traveling faster than human beings ever traveled before. The entire nature of the portion of the earth we stood upon was changing. Our atmosphere was changing. We were shot into the sky and in a flash were beyond the common influence of what we call the law of gravitation.”

The group is not alone. Assorted wildlife was carried along with the breakaway world, not to mention Aleuts, trappers, and a whaling ship that had the misfortune to be in the Arctic Ocean in the wrong place at the wrong time. Much to-ing and fro-ing with assorted adventures. Every few paragraphs the Professor stops to explain some new fact about the torn-away world.

All the main characters are on board the whaling ship when it floats off the chunk. The supporting characters, as in any disaster movie, have the hard luck to die spectacular deaths. The ship re-enters Earth’s atmosphere without incident, the concept of frictional heat of re-entry not being known in 1913. The fragment splashes down into the North Pacific and forms a new island, sans tsunamis, which were also unknown to New York City hack writers. And so to home, one and all.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Milt Stevens 2017-07-10
Simi Valley, California

Wow, those are some really majestic mountains in OPUNTIA #376 to #379. We have mountains down here also, but they aren’t particularly majestic. Or at least, they don’t look very majestic on those days we can see them at all.

OPUNTIA #376: Your article on Lord Dunsany reminds me I should read more of his work. I’ve very much enjoyed the Dunsany stories I have read. It’s sort of embarrassing to admit I learned something fundamental about Lord Dunsany from this article. I had always thought he was a Scot. It seems like I should have come across the fact that he was Irish at some point, but I didn’t.

OPUNTIA #377: Speaking of the impact of radio, my mother (born 1905) remembered her first encounter with radio. A friend of her mother’s had built a crystal set. The first thing she heard was a broadcast of birds singing. She thought that was wonderful. She still remembered it as being wonderful even after she had watched men walk on the moon on television.

OPUNTIA #378: The Little Free Library movement presumes a particular sort of reading. It presumes you are just looking for ‘something’ to read. I had to do some thinking to remember the last time I was in such a situation. It was when I was in the Navy in the late sixties. There were a couple of times when I didn’t have any books with me and wanted to read something. I once read a book on gestalt psychology just because I wanted to read something. I should have probably found some wet paint and watched it dry.

In more settled times, I haven’t done any random reading in decades. I know what I’m going to read next and after that and after that. If something isn’t in my reading queue, I’ll never get around to reading it. That’s undoubtedly why I haven’t read more of Lord Dunsany’s works.

I hadn’t thought of it, but I skipped a generation of typewriter technology. I never owned an electric typewriter and only occasionally used them at work. I went from a manual portable typewriter to a computer in the late eighties. I

guess I was never an early adopter. By now, I have reached the point where there is some technology I can't use and other technology I must use. However, I still think it's unnatural to type with your thumbs.

[I do so much typing on a computer keyboard that I simply cannot adjust to thumb typing on my smartphone. I tap with two fingers of my right hand, while holding the smartphone with my left.]

ZINE LISTINGS

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

THE FOSSIL #372 (US\$10 per year from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) This is a zine history group, which should be required reading for those who think zines were invented by punks in the 1970s or comics fans in the 1960s.

The issue at hand looks at what was going on in zinedom in the late 1920s, a nadir occurring after a fan feud in the earlier part of the decade laid waste to the hobby. The main emphasis of apa (amateur press association) executives at the time was simply to survive. It was so bad that the national convention of an apa, held in Niagara Falls, had only four attendees. H.P. Lovecraft was dragged in, trying to maintain the semblance of civility at a time when most members were more interested in cutting each other's throats.

CANDY 150



Canada 150 goes all year long. I'm still finding assorted items. The candy apples were on sale at the Stampede rodeo. I didn't buy one for fear of losing my teeth fillings. The chocolate bar I got at the general store in the hamlet at Castle Mountain, Banff National Park. I have never seen it in Calgary.

