

OPUNTIA 407

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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.

SIC TRANSIT GLORIA COWTOWN

photos by Dale Speirs

Boomers like myself are just old enough to remember when every residential suburb had two or three service stations. The automobile was king. You could have your car maintained or repaired locally. When you drove in for fuel, an attendant ran out and fueled the car. While the pump was running, he would clean the windshields. You popped the hood, and he pulled out the dipstick and showed the oil level to you.

Then self-serve stations came in. As automobiles became more complex, the service stations faded away and were replaced by large repair shops out on the main drags. Here is the story of the final days of a service station.



In the Marda Loop district of southwest Calgary, the bungalows and single-floor businesses are almost completely gone, replaced by low-rise condominiums with retail pedestals. At the corner of 20 Street SW and 34 Avenue there was for many years a brake repair shop.

It had begun life in the early 1950s as a service station, which faded away long before I moved to Calgary in 1978. I only knew it as a brake shop, which I drove past frequently. Suddenly it closed, and the shop stood vacant for several years. During elections, it was often rented for a couple of months by some candidate.

Then it blossomed out in early 2016 as seen on the front cover above. An artists' collective had been given the space pending its demolition. A developer owned it and a house behind it. (You can just see a bit of the house in the photo below, peeking over the roof where the words "IS What" are.)

The mural on the previous page became very popular among graduating high school and post-secondary students. It was common for them to pose for selfies or group portraits.

In August 2017, that design was replaced by the one below. The little girl was the daughter of one of the artists.

A month later, notice to vacate was given. The collective then gave the building a final coat as seen on the next page. In October, site clearance was finished, and it became a vacant lot until construction began on the new condos in the winter.





Only a few blocks away on 14 Street SW was a similar service station that had been an auto repair shop until the owner recently retired.

This street is a major secondary road and I have driven past it thousands of times. The shop owners had as their advertising sign the shell of an old Volkswagen Beetle mounted on pipes to look like a spider.

On Boxing Day 2017, I drove past it and discovered the lot was surrounded by hoarding, obviously preparatory to demolition and redevelopment. I thought for sure I had a photo on file but when I checked my computer, there was nothing.

On New Year's Day I stopped and took the photo at right. The next day the spider beetle was gone.



It later occurred to me to check Google Street View. Their most recent image, shown at left, is dated 2015-06-30, when the shop was still in business.

This mural is on the side of a homeless shelter downtown at 7 Avenue SE and 1 Street. The distorted angle was because I had to hold my smartphone above my head at full reach due to the parking lot having a very high security fence. The drivers who park in the lot didn't appreciate the street people hanging out and drinking in the lot.



THE GAMES ARE OVER
photo by Dale Speirs

I don't follow sports, but the Olympics are always good for parties in Calgary, not to mention good for business. The display below was at the Hudson's Bay Company department store.



Rk	Country	G	S	B	TOT
1	NOR	14	14	11	39
2	GER	14	10	7	31
3	CAN	11	8	10	29
4	USA	9	8	6	23
5	NED	8	6	6	20
6	KOR	5	8	4	17
7	OAR	2	6	9	17
8	SUI	5	6	4	15
9	FRA	5	4	6	15
10	SWE	7	6	1	14
11	AUT	5	3	6	14
12	JPN	4	5	4	13
13	ITA	3	2	5	10
14	CHN	1	6	2	9
15	CZE	2	2	3	7
16	FIN	1	1	4	6
17	GBR	1	0	4	5
18	BLR	2	1	0	3
19	SVK	1	2	0	3
20	AUS	0	2	1	3
21	POL	1	0	1	2
22	SLO	0	1	1	2

Canada finished third in the Olympics, its hockey and curling teams having choked badly.

ALIEN INVASIONS

by Dale Speirs

A Kernel Of Good.

BATTLE OF THE WORLDS is a 1961 Italian SF movie, dubbed into English from the original version IL PIANETA DEGLI UOMINI SPENTI, which translates as “The Planet Of The Extinct Men”, a more accurate description of the movie. It is available on the Sci-Fi Fever 20-Film Collection DVD put out by Mill Creek Entertainment. The original movie was in colour but the disk version is partially faded out due to it being an n-th generation tape transfer.

Claude Rains was the leading man, playing the resident mad scientist Professor Benson. He was slumming here but was the only actor in the film who could put emotion into his dialogue, while the rest moved woodenly as if they were in an amateur dramatics society. The SFX of the film are acceptable for the early 1950s, but for a 1961 movie are behind the times.

In particular, as was a common error in other movies at the time, spacecraft are shown with their rocket engines in continual full throttle as they move through space. This by itself was bad enough, but instead of filming the models upside-down so the flames would be straight, with the camera tilted 90° to produce a horizontal scene, the models were filmed in horizontal position, as a result of which the rocket exhausts curved up upon leaving the nozzle.

The script, by Ennio De Conci, was average, not as bad as often found in early European SF films. Rains did the heavy lifting in transforming it into a better version than what it might have been a no-name actor had been used.

The plot is about a rogue planet, called The Outsider, which enters the Solar System on an apparent collision course with Earth. Benson, alone against all the other scientists, says it will not collide but swing past Earth., but everyone else is running about like headless chickens.

He joins the general astonishment when it takes up standard orbit around Earth in a controlled manner. Since a regular planet would warp Earth’s orbit and destroy the surface from tidal effects, it must be hollow and therefore a giant spacecraft. Earth spacecraft approaching The Outsider are attacked by flying saucers.

Benson determines the saucers are under automatic control and finds a method to bypass them. He and several astronauts land on The Outsider and make their way inside it. They discover the desiccated remains of aliens and find that The Outsider is running under automatic computer control. Various alarms and excursions result, not because of the aliens but because the decision was made on Earth to nuke The Outsider. Benson and others don’t make it back to the spacecraft in time.

Setting aside the technical faults such as the harsh dubbing, poor SFX, and mostly bad acting, the movie does have a kernel of good writing and a non-standard plot. Had it been made by an American studio, for example, Benson and the pretty women would have survived after a last-second rescue. Worth watching once while ignoring the technical quality.

No Kernel.

THE SECRET OF THE NINTH PLANET (1959) is a novel by Donald Wollheim, available as a free download from www.gutenberg.org. It is about that much doubted and abused planet Pluto. Those of us who are Boomers grew up with it as the ninth planet of the Solar System, but that wasn’t true for most of our lives. From 1969 to 2009, Pluto was inside the orbit of Neptune. It has since suffered the indignity of demotion to dwarf planet, much like Ceres and other assorted objects.

Be that as it may, at the dawn of the Space Age, when this novel was published, it was still a respectable planet. The story begins with an ominous foreboding, sunlight dimming suddenly one day around Earth, although space stations and lunar bases report unchanged sunlight outside Earth. The air temperature on Earth drops a degree or two, and bids fair to become worse.

A private archaeological expedition in the Andes of Peru notices the dimming. Led by Mark Denning and his son Burl, they find a mysterious giant black cube on a high plateau. Their radio is jammed, although elsewhere in the world radios are operating normally. The cube has a couple of dishes on masts, which seem to be the source of the problem. The U.S. Air Force sends a messenger rocket to the Dennings, since they seem to be at the epicentre, and asks them to investigate.

The cube has no visible entry, so the Dennings open it with a couple of cans of explosives. And why do they have explosives? Because that’s how

archaeology was done in those days. The walls are discovered to be nothing more than thick plastic. Inside is a control room, but they can't get the mechanisms to respond to them until Burl touches a glowing ball and is almost electrocuted. He is somehow given the ability to adjust the controls, and therefore shuts down the sunlight stealing device.

Six USAF rocket-propelled helicopters suddenly show up, with blatant disregard for Peruvian sovereignty. No new thing there, then. The commanding officer tells the Dennings he has come to take them to California for a briefing. They acquiesce without bothering to tell him about the cube. It seems to me that perhaps the USAF captain would have appreciated a brief mention.

At the briefing it is learned that the cube is stealing sunlight, as are duplicates on other planets. The dishes are relatively small. One immediately wonders why a spacefaring civilization with such technology would do that instead just putting the sunlight stealers in orbit around the Sun.

Unfortunately the premise is too unbelievable for the suspension of disbelief. A small dish would only intercept a tiny fraction of a percentage of the sunlight, hardly enough to cool off a planet. If sunlight is needed to power a civilization, one would need Dyson spheres or Niven ringworlds, not a few small dishes such as you might have on your rooftop for satellite television.

A grizzled old astronomer explains: "*Measurements of the amount of Sun power being piped away, and of the effect of the magnetic disturbances used to create and maintain these stations, have shown that they will have a definite effect on the structure of the Sun itself. We have not yet completed all our calculations, but preliminary studies indicate that if this type of solar interference is not stopped, it may cause our Sun to nova in somewhere between two and three years time.*"

The devices must be destroyed but, at the dawn of the Space Age, chemical rockets could not reach the other planets in time. Fortunately for the plot there is an experimental spaceship called A-G 17, powered by antigravity. Don't ask what happened to the first sixteen ships. Burl is volunteered to go along with the crew and help save the Solar System. Pretty heady stuff for a young man, but it beats working on a loading dock.

It's off to a secret spaceport in Wyoming, where the spaceship is renamed the Magellan in view of the fact that it will be taking the grand tour of the Solar

System. As to why Wyoming, the C.O. explains that the mountains will screen the view of the launch: *We are going to make our take-off from here because we are still too experimental to know what might happen if something kicked up or if the engines failed. We'd hate to splatter all over a highly populated industrial area.*

But it's nevermind and heigh-ho, and off they go. Burl is told that the ship has to fall toward the Sun first before taking an orbit to Venus. The excuse is that they couldn't see Venus from Earth to plot an orbit. As even the ancient Babylonians could plot planetary orbits without actually seeing the planet at every given instance, this is disquieting news for Burl.

"It was too hard to get a fix on Venus from so near the Earth. Instead, we latched on to the Sun to pull us inward. When we are near to Venus' orbit, we'll reverse and pull in on Venus", was the astronomer's answer.

"Isn't that rather risky?" asked Burl, remembering some of the quick briefings he had been given. "That's a departure from your plans." Lockhart looked up quickly. "Yes, you're right", he admitted. "But on a trip like this we've got to learn to improvise and do it fast. We made that decision at take-off."

For an instant Burl felt a chill. He realized then what all the other men on the ship had known all along, that in this flight they were all amateurs, that everything they did was to be improvisation in one way or another, that they must always run the risk of a terrible mistake.

If the aliens stealing sunlight built stations on every planet, why go to Venus first? The thought won't go away from the reader's mind: why build the Sun-tap stations on planets instead of in orbit close to the Sun?

Seen to one side, surprisingly close to the Sun, was a tiny half moon. "That's Mercury", said Russ, pointing it out. "The smallest planet and the closest to the Sun. After we leave Venus, we'll have to visit it. We know there's a Sun-tap station there, and because it's so close to the Sun, its orbit ranges between twenty-eight million miles and under forty-four million miles, the station must be a most important and large one."

Burl gazed at the point of light that was the innermost planet. "Those Sun-tap stations ... The more I think about it, the more I wonder what we're up against. It seems to me that it ought to be easy for the kind of people who can build such

things to catch us and stop us. In fact, I wonder why they haven't already gone after us for stopping the one on Earth?"

The military has done some thinking about that, and Burl hears their conclusions. The Andes station had been built about three decades ago and not activated until recently. It could easily have remained hidden because of the remote location. The aliens built it from prefabricated components and in a hurry with a small crew, otherwise it would have been fortified with concrete or stone walls.

The fact that the Earth Sun-tapping station was built by the aliens in the late 1920s indicates how they got away with it. They would have seen a pre-space civilization still struggling to learn how to fly aircraft, with no radar networks to detect intruders from space. The stations were started up by remote control because the aliens didn't have enough personnel to do a proper job.

Burl's chill about the amateur nature of the voyage is justified. Someone, not a Babylonian, miscalculated the orbit. The Magellan will miss Venus because it has too much delta vector and will dive down to the Sun. Plan B is therefore to aim for Mercury and pretend the whole thing was just a minor glitch. Sort of like flying from Toronto to Calgary for mountain skiing and landing in Cancun, pretending that you wanted to hit the beaches first.

They do manage to arrive at Mercury and soon spot the alien Sun-tap station, again a remote-control operation: *They could see, as soon as the telescopic sight had been adjusted, that it was a large station. It was encircled by a featureless wall. It had no roof. Rising on masts above it was a whole forest of gleaming discs pointing at the Sun low in the sky.*

On the tops of the mountain peaks, a half mile from the station, was another series of masts. These were aimed away from the Sun into the dark airless sky and toward the other planets. "The accumulators and the transmitters", said Burl. "We'll have to get them both."

"Getting the transmitters will be easy", said Haines. "After we shut off the station, we'll just bomb the mountain masts out of action."

They can't just go ahead and bomb the station. They have to search and analyze it in order to find out something about the aliens. This makes the reader wonder who is doing that with the Andes station back on Earth.

That question is soon answered when the novel's point of view shifts to the aliens. They are somewhere else in the Solar System, and had assumed the Andes station failed because of weather or tectonic activity. Mercury, on the other hand, was airless and weatherless. Burl shuts down the Mercury station, but in doing so, triggers an alarm. A self-destruct mechanism is engaged but the humans get away.

The cat is out of the bag, and both sides are now on guard. The Magellan heads for Venus, and this time everyone makes certain that a correct Hohmann transfer orbit has been plotted. Venus turns out to be a water world. The alien Sun-tap station is set on a mud bar, with giant dishes floating out in water. The men sabotage the station but not before a blob creeps out of the water and tries to absorb one of them. A close call. Again, Wollheim is sloppy with the plot. Stealing sunlight from the top of the Andes is one thing, but from underneath the cloud deck of Venus is ridiculous.

Next stop Mars. En route the Magellan gets a message from Earth. They have been tracking the stolen sunlight to Pluto, so that will be the ultimate destination. A telescope view of Mars shows that both polar ice caps are expanding, the vegetation is changing colour, and the canals are freezing.

On landing, the Magellan crew find the Martians are a hive civilization. Each individual is stupid, programmed for only one task. They ignore the Sun-tap devices in the midst of their city because they have no instinct that tells how to deal with them. The devices are therefore cooling off Mars to the point where its civilization will die.

The crew plant a tactical nuke to destroy the devices and then run from the disturbed hive. Off Mars by a hairs breadth. No mention of whether the bomb detonated but it is presumed to have done so. Next stop is Jupiter, but en route the crew have to refinish the outer hull, which is being eroded by micrometeorites. This requires space walks to slap liquid plastic over the eroded areas.

That being a dull job, the author spices up the plot by having one of the crew go berserk and take the ship off course. No fail-safes or bypasses. The crazed crewman is taken care of with a wrench to the head, which snaps him out of it.

At Jupiter, the next Sun-tap station is found on the moon Callisto. Even the aliens couldn't set it up on Jupiter itself. By now, the aliens have realized what

the Earthlings are doing. Instead of waiting for the automatic alarms to sound, they activated a booby trap that detonates just after the Sun-tap is disabled. The Magellan crew barely make it out, and realize that they will be expected on Saturn. No more just sneaking in and taking out the stations one by one.

Their expectations are met at Saturn. An alien ship is waiting for them, and there is a short battle that the Magellan wins. The aliens have energy beams, while the Earthlings have shrapnel and nuclear bombs. After the first exchange of fire, the Magellan crew realize that the aliens need a few moments to recharge their weapons. In that interval, the Magellan fires shrapnel to distract the alien ship, then in the recharge moment follow on with a tactical nuke. It works.

... from that point on, a different spirit seemed to animate everyone aboard the Magellan. There was the feeling that they had closed with the enemy and found themselves not wanting. There was the feeling that they possessed powers not inferior to those of their unknown enemies.

The thought had been haunting them all along that they were in the position of a backward people facing an advanced invader, something like the problem of the Aztecs when faced with the gunpowder and armor of the conquistadors.

Now they knew that though the Sun-tappers' weapons were different and indeed advanced beyond Earthly technology, they themselves were not without resources equally deadly to the foe.

The Sun-tap station at Saturn is found on Iapetus. No more fooling around; it is disposed of with a megatonnage H-bomb. There was no need to inspect the station, and there was no doubt that booby traps had been set.

The chase is closing in on the quarry. Neptune is too far around the Solar System to make a long detour, so the Magellan heads to Uranus prior to the final confrontation at Pluto. The Sun-tap is on the moon Oberon but before they nuke it, they notice a strange glassy sort of moving material. Landing to reconnoiter, they find life.

Clustered along the side of the ridge, in the faint light of the distant and tiny Sun, was a series of thin, blue stalks, about half a foot in height. On each stalk was a flat scalloped top like a little umbrella. It was sometimes bright blue, and sometimes violet. As they drew nearer, these little stalks began to sway, and turned their tops toward them.

"They look like plants", said Burl. "Plants made of something glassy and plastic." As Russ studied the strange growths, something moved across the dusty tract behind them. It was long and thin and wiggly, with a ridge of tiny crystalline hairs along its back. It was like a snake perhaps, but one made of some unbelievably delicate glasswork.

It slid among the plants and wrapped itself around one. The growth snapped suddenly, and then was absorbed by the creature. Russ shook his head in amazement. "This is a great discovery", he said incredulously. "This is life! It's life of a chemical type utterly different from the protoplasm of Earth and Mars and Venus. It's life designed to exist among liquid gases and frozen air, life which can't have anything in common with protoplasm. Apparently it couldn't exist even on Saturn's moons, they were too hot for it!"

Nonetheless, they nuke the station, albeit with a tactical weapon, not a megatonne H-bomb. From there, they head to the final confrontation at Pluto. It is a long haul, given the vast distances, and even for an anti-gravity ship.

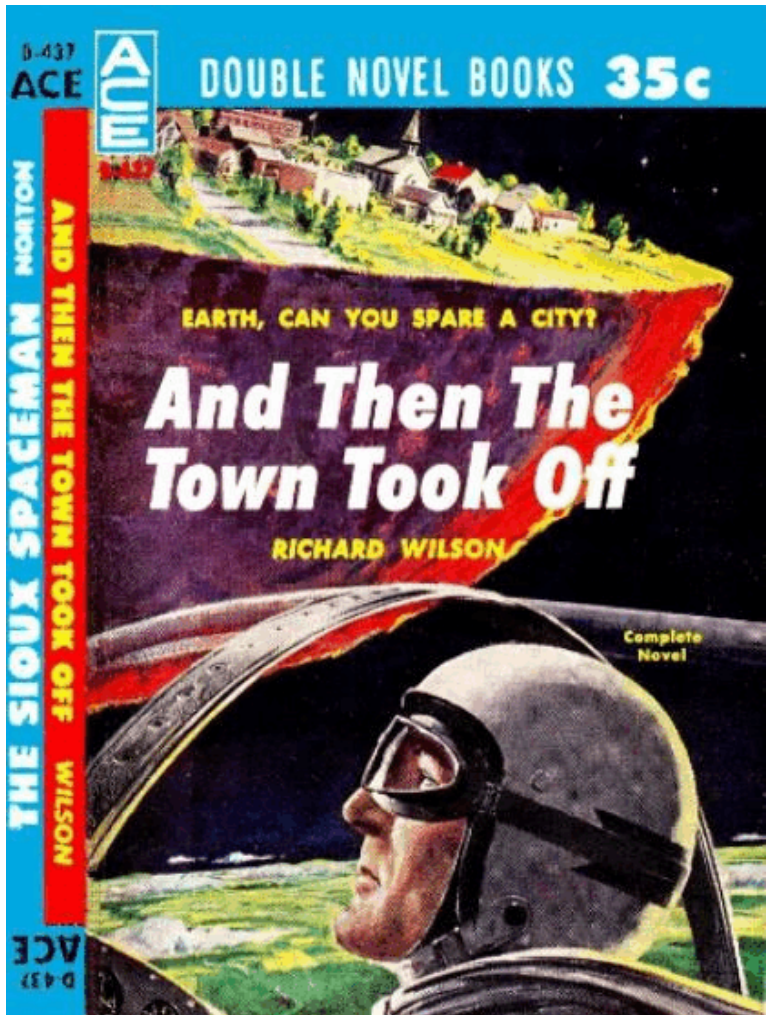
The initial battle does not go well and the Magellan is damaged. The Plutonians have a fortress at the north pole, and the rest of the planet is covered with ruins of an ancient civilization. The Earthlings do some exploring before the final engagement. They conclude that Pluto originated elsewhere in the galaxy and wandered into the Solar System. This would explain its eccentric orbit.

Once beyond the gravitational grip of its parent sun, the planet wandered through the darkness of interstellar space until it came within the influence of our own Sun. How long this took would again be a guess. Possibly not more than a few thousand years, I'd say, since somehow a remnant of the population managed to survive. This suggests that they had some warning. Enough time passed for them to build the big structure we noticed at the north pole, probably to store food, build underground greenhouses and make sealed homes for a few families. Inside this giant building the last of the Plutonian people kept going.

Then came the moment when their planet fell into an orbit around our Sun. I'd guess they emerged to find that the new Sun was too far away ever to heat up Pluto again, or to permit the rebuilding of an atmosphere. So they worked out a new scheme. This was to blow up the Sun into a nova, make it a giant and thereby bring its heat all the way out to Pluto, warming this world again, lighting it again, unfreezing its gases and waters. So they set up the Sun-tap stations.

The plot then makes a couple of right-angle turns. Triton was a inhabited moon of Pluto before both came too close to Neptune, one to become its satellite and the other thrown out into the far reaches of the Solar System. The Sun-taps are not being used to warm Pluto as first thought, but Neptune, where the existing civilization is about to be wiped out by the Plutonians. The Earthlings save the day, and it's huzzah! and hurrah! all around.

Wollheim was an experienced SF author and editor. It is a shame that he couldn't have done a little more work on the Sun-tapping business. He knew better, or at the very least, he could have phoned his friend Isaac Asimov for advice. He used the idea of a Grand Tour of the Solar System to work in all the infodumps he had researched about the planets, according to the knowledge of the times, but the basic premise was unbelievable. It takes just as much time to write good SF as it does bad SF.



AND THEN THE TOWN TOOK OFF (1960) by Richard Wilson is an Ace Double paperback novel, available as a free download in several different formats from www.gutenberg.org. It begins with the town of Superior, Ohio, (pop. 3,000) tearing loose from Earth and floating two miles up into the air, leaving behind a gigantic pit. (I instantly thought of James Blish's classic series CITIES IN FLIGHT, which I reviewed in OPUNTIA #279.)

The authorities are flummoxed, as well they might be. The hero of the story is Don Cort, an unfortunate traveler who happened to be passing through the town just as it took off. He is a military courier who has a briefcase handcuffed to his left wrist but uses the disguise that he is a bank messenger. He has a hidden wearable radio that allows him to communicate back and forth with the Pentagon. Another traveler is Geneva Jervis, a Senator's secretary.

The resident mad scientist is Professor Osbert Garet, from the local college, an unaccredited institute. The other scientists laughed at his theories of magnetism and gravity, and now has his vindication. He has, of course, the obligatory beautiful daughter, named Alis.

Mayor Hector Civek has taken the opportunity to declare the town's secession from Earth, he being as mad as the Professor albeit not a scientist. The townfolk seem rather complacent about the whole thing, which more than can be said for the people in Washington, D.C., and the news media down below.

Cort and Jervis do some snooping around and find an underground control platform with a scenic view of Earth. There seems to be more to the technology than what the Professor could have come up with though. One question is how long the water, food, and supplies are going to last. Sanitation is not a problem; the citizens just dump waste over the edge and let the Earthlings below suffer.

The town is drifting eastward. It is too small for fixed-wing aircraft to land and too high for helicopters. The problem is what will happen when it drifts over another country. The townsfolk begin catching glimpses of strange creatures here and there, and it seems the Professor is not the one in control of Superior's fate.

The town only has one Deppity Dawg who can't enforce the law by himself, so a crime wave breaks out. It is stifled after the aliens emerge and assist the Mayor in proclaiming himself King Hector the First and imposing arbitrary law. The aliens provide synthesized food and other supplies to alleviate the crisis.

A new one develops when Senator Robert Theobold manages to land a blimp on Superior; he is Jervis's boss. A three-sided war breaks out between Theobold's guards, Hector's minutemen, and the Professor's technicians. It is rudely interrupted when, far below from the Atlantic Ocean, a Soviet boomer submarine begins firing nuclear missiles at Superior. The aliens take evasive action, but when a giant rock with a town on it zigzags, the humans are still subject to the laws of inertia, turning them into tumblers.

Cort manages to negotiate a peace, and the Pentagon promotes him from Sergeant to General in one day. It turns out the aliens are refugees from a dying world and have settled under several cities. They are divided into two factions, the militant tendency having started the problem because they wanted to head back into space. The novel meanders around a bit until a happy ending can be synthesized over tea and cakes. Mildly amusing and worth reading once.



TRANSIT FANNING IN CALGARY: PART 22
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 21 appeared in OPUNTIA's #256, 258, 260, 264, 269, 275, 283, 298, 302, 327, 333, 341, 348, 357, 359, 365, 369, 371, 392, 394, and 396.]

Fiction.

HANCOCK'S HALF HOUR was a BBC radio show of the 1950s and 1960s. The episodes were often about nothing, little trivialities reworked a dozen ways to fill a half hour, much like Jerry Seinfeld did with his television show decades later. The actors used their real names as the characters. Tony Hancock, a fat little man, was a stand-up comedian who seldom worked. Sidney James was a spiv, and Bill Kerr was the village idiot.

"The Last Bus Home" was a 1959 episode written by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson. Tony, Sid, and Bill have just been to a movie house out of town and are waiting for a bus to take them home. There is a frequent one that stops in front of the theatre but Tony objects because the fare is 10d and there is another route several blocks away that only charges 8d.

He convinces the others to walk to it. As they wait, they squabble over petty matters, such as the movies they've seen or hope to see, and how Sid dresses. Tony and Sid become angry with each and bluff about fighting but never come to actual blows.

The bus finally arrives but is full up and won't take them. They argue with the driver because it is the last one of the night, but he takes off and strands them. They will have a very long walk of hours to get home. Then the rain begins.

As they trudge along, the squabbling continues. They try to wait out the rain under a tree but then begin worrying that lightning may hit it. They double back to the High Street in hopes of waiting under a shop awning, but a constable doesn't like the look of them and rousts them.

Nothing for it but to walk. En route, they short cut across a field but get lost. The good news is the rain stopped and the skies cleared. Tony decides he knows how to navigate by the stars but ends up leading them back to the bus stop. There they wait until the 06h30 bus arrives. The driver refuses to let them on because they are soaking wet and will dampen the seats.

“The Bus” by Gregory Frost (1991, from COLD SHOCKS, edited by Tim Sullivan) accounts for the final days of Driskel, an alcoholic living on the street. He notices a strange bus idling across from the steam grate he lives on, its windows fogged but apparently with people inside, but no bus driver. It is a cold winter night and the bus looks warm.

Taking a chance, he boards it and discovers that there is a party in progress, with well-dressed people who welcome him instead of calling Security. The bus is larger on the inside than it appears from outside, with enough room for a buffet table, a bar, an en-suite bathroom with a shower, and private booths at the back.

The party goes on and everyone looks happy, but it is a forced gaiety, as if laughing loud and getting drunk will blot out an impending horror. It isn’t impending for him. Driskel cleans himself up in the bathroom and rejoins the party. Everyone is delighted to see him. Without realizing it at first, he is gradually moved to the back of the bus and can’t turn around.

Finally his hosts help him into a steel chute above the idling engine, a chute with a shredder at the bottom. The bus runs on biofuel. The celebrants know that if not passersby, then it will be them.

Riding Around Cowtown.

I took the photo below last September while waiting for a bus on the other side of the street. A neat pair of buses, dressed in the two different liveries of the Calgary Transit system but with the same advertisement.

With my smartphone, pretending to text something, I took this photo of the driver’s cabin of the new black-mask LRT trains now coming on-stream.





Top: A new black-mask train.

At left: The older style of train, which will be phased out over the next several years.

I was riding the LRT down to Deep South Calgary when I spotted some new trains on a siding between the Heritage and Southland stations. I didn't have time to get a photo then, but on the return trip I got a snap. I'm sure the message on the cars startled a few motorists driving past the siding.

What it refers to is the method of assembling trains in a rail yard, where individual cars are pushed over a hump in the tracks and left to coast on their own into the switch. They hit the next car or stop with a bang, which doesn't matter for a freight car, but would be hard on a new passenger car.



SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Micheluz, A., et al (2018) **The effects of book disinfection to the airborne microbiological community in a library environment.** AEROBIOLOGIA 34:29-44

Authors’ abstract: *The management of fungal contaminants inside libraries and archives has become a big challenge for librarians, restorers and scientists. Several disinfection treatments have been developed in recent years, using both chemical and physical approaches on book collections and indoor environments. However, there is a lack of knowledge about the temporal efficiency of these cleanings, especially in relation with the preservation environments.*

The aim of this study was to determine the long-term effect of a chemical disinfection that interested a previous-contaminated book collection inside a University library. The monitoring after 6 months and 1 year from the cleaning confirmed any fungal growth on the disinfected books and the reduction of 90% of the airborne fungal load, highlighting anyway the presence of high fungal diversity.

Sixty-eight different airborne fungal entities were isolated, in particular Aspergillus vitricola, Bulleromyces albus, Cladosporium cladosporioides, Cladosporium pseudocladosporioides, Cladosporium sphaerospermum, Penicillium brevicompactum, Rodothorula mugillaginoso and Sporodiobolus pararoseus.

Several fungal species were sampled from the disinfected books, in particular Aspergillus penicillioides and Penicillium chrysogenum. The presence of these fungi both as airborne and as settled particles highlights the importance to maintain clean the preservation environments in order to prevent further microbial contaminations.

Liu, J., et al (2018) **Phytoremediation of contaminated soils using ornamental plants.** ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS 26:43-54

Authors’ abstract: *Phytoremediation has attracted increasing attention and is a promising technology for addressing soil contamination problems. Unlike other kinds of remediation plants, ornamental plants grown for decorative*

purposes in gardens and landscape design projects have been an important source of remediation plants in recent years.

In addition to beautifying the environment, some ornamental plants can not only grow well but also accumulate or degrade contaminants when growing in soil contaminated with heavy metals or organic pollutants. Especially in contaminated urban areas, it is comparatively rare and commendable when remediation plants with ornamental value are applied.

In this review, we summarized the current research on the phytoremediation of contaminated soils using ornamental plants, evaluated the phytoremediation capacity of ornamental plants in heavy-metal and organic pollutant contaminated soils, and highlighted specific ornamental plants with a strong accumulation ability and tolerance to pollutants.

Speirs: I worked 31 years for the Calgary Parks Dept., during which we often publicized the fact that trees and shrubs filtered the urban air and buffered noise. It never helped us at budget time though.

Chuan, A., J.B. Kessler, and K.L. Milkman (2018) **Field study of charitable giving reveals that reciprocity decays over time.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:1766-1771

Authors’ abstract: *Reciprocity motivates a wide range of cooperative behaviors (e.g., tipping, exchange of favors, customer loyalty, etc.). It is typically assumed that, after a reciprocal relationship is triggered, reciprocal motives remain stable over time.*

Using a large-scale field study, we show that this is not the case. Instead, we find that reciprocity decays rapidly over time. We analyze donation solicitations sent from a university hospital system to its patients and show that patients are less likely to donate when more time has elapsed since they were treated.

In addition to informing our understanding of reciprocity, our results have considerable practical importance, as many charitable organizations raise funds from those who they previously served (e.g., schools, hospitals, religious organizations, humane societies, etc.).

We examine how reciprocity changes over time by studying a large quasiexperiment in the field. Specifically, we analyze administrative data from a university hospital system. The data include information about over 18,000 donation requests made by the hospital system via mail to a set of its former patients in the 4 months after their first hospital visit.

We exploit quasiexperimental variation in the timing of solicitation mailings relative to patient hospital visits and find that an extra 30-day delay between the provision of medical care and a donation solicitation decreases the likelihood of a donation by 30%.

Our findings have important implications for models of economic behavior, which currently fail to incorporate reciprocity’s sensitivity to time. The fact that reciprocal behavior decays rapidly as time passes also suggests the importance of capitalizing quickly on opportunities to benefit from a quid pro quo.

de Oliveira, S., and R.E. Nisbett (2018) **Demographically diverse crowds are typically not much wiser than homogeneous crowds.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:2066-2071

Authors’ abstract: *Averaging independent numerical judgments can be more accurate than the average individual judgment. This “wisdom of crowds” effect has been shown with large, diverse samples, but the layperson wishing to take advantage of this may only have access to the opinions of a small, more demographically homogeneous convenience sample. How wise are homogeneous crowds relative to diverse crowds?*

In simulations and survey studies, we demonstrate three necessary conditions under which small socially diverse crowds can outperform socially homogeneous crowds: Social identity must predict judgment, the effect of social identity on judgment must be at least moderate in size, and the average estimates of the social groups in question must bracket the truth being judged.

Seven survey studies suggest that these conditions are rarely met in real judgment tasks. Comparisons between the performances of diverse and homogeneous crowds further confirm that social diversity can make crowds wiser but typically by a very small margin.

Results suggest that demographic diversity does not boost crowds’ cognitive diversity to the extent necessary to make diverse crowds much wiser than homogeneous ones. A strong implication is that a decision to seek diverse opinion on matters of fact should be based on a cost/benefit analysis: Will a search for diversity likely pay off in increased accuracy? Payoffs can be maximized by using stronger correlates of cognitive diversity than demographic variables.

25TH ANNUAL 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. 2018 will be the 25th year of the WWP.

At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of zinedom 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.

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. 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.