



OPUNTIA 414

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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.

OTAFEST 2018
photos by Dale Speirs



Calgary’s annual anime convention was held on the Victoria Day weekend, with about 8,000 paid memberships.

It was in the Telus Convention Centre downtown on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall (8 Avenue South).

All weekend long there were hordes of cosplayers roaming up and down the mall posing for passersby.

I don’t attend media cons, but the show out on the street was free.







CONVENTIONAL FICTION: PART 8

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 7 appeared in OPUNTIA's #70.1A, 270, 285, 313, 364, 385, and 398.]

Mundane Conventions.

GROUNDS FOR MURDER (2007) by Sandra Balzo is part of a cozy mystery series about Maggy Thorsen, who owns a Milwaukee coffee shop called Uncommon Grounds. The city is hosting a specialty convention and trade show for coffee retailers called Java Ho. Thorsen was talked into running the barista competition.

The convention chairman Marvin LaRoche is murdered and Thorsen finds his body, all on the first page of the novel. Off to a quick start. His skull had been fractured by a blunt instrument, the trophy that was to be awarded to the winner of the barista competition.

Thorsen has her hands full. Besides being on the convention committee, she still has to be running her coffee shop and dealing with competing shops moving in on her territory. To all these duties, she adds her amateur sleuthing.

LaRoche was a man of many sins, so his murder wasn't a complete surprise. Besides sharp practice, there were so many romantic entanglements that Thorsen remarks: *This wasn't a love triangle, it was a hexagon.* After several twists and turns, the murderer is found out. It takes a couple of chapters to sort out who was diddling whom, and who was the father of an illegitimate child. The novel doesn't so much end as it trickles to a close.

Anyone who has ever been on a convention committee will be nodding their head at the familiar troubles of Java Ho. At the setup for the banquet, Thorsen learns the sound system isn't right and sets off a last-minute chase for a portable sound system. The competition judges are not entirely clear about what they are doing. As with every group of people, there is always one prima dona who thinks she is the star of the show. Some of the exhibitors in the dealer bourse want to sneak out early on Sunday.

KNIT FAST, DIE YOUNG (2007) by Mary Kruger takes place at the Freeport Wool and Yarn Festival in Massachusetts. It is the second novel in a cozy mystery series about Ariadne Evans, proprietor of Ariadne's Web craft shop. In

other words, she had already seen and investigated murder in the previous installment, and after this one will no doubt be put on a watch list by police.

The festival isn't doing well. Too specialized for the rural Freeport area, and too much rain. The dealer bourse will lose money for them all, including Evan's table.

The murder victim is Felicia Barr, editor of KNIT IT UP!, a magazine which often runs KTF reviews of dealers. Her progress around the bourse is marked by scowls and angry looks from the dealers. She is a boss from Hell, and has a high turnover of staff. She is accompanied by her latest assistant. Her previous assistant also shows up, now working for KNIT KNACKS magazine in darkest New Jersey.

A few moments later, Evans meets Barr again outside the building, who collapses into her arms with a knitting needle deep in her back. The state police are called in. Not an easy investigation because the rain washed away any clues that weren't already trampled into the mud. They have only a day to interview dozens, if not hundreds, of people before the festival ends and the out-of-towners, the majority, leave Freeport.

A second murder increases the pressure. Evans does her own investigation with the blessing of the police because she knows knitting fandom and can speak their lingo. The festival is filled with strange aliens from the troopers' point of view, and they don't understand how fanatic knitters think.

A wide variety of motives are turned up, including the fact that Barr had twins as a teenager and gave them up for adoption. One of them found out years later and is very angry. The murderer blabs all to the troopers, which helps fill a chapter in the epilogue with the back story. Then to the appendix, a knitting pattern for coat hanger woolies. I am not making that up. Why anyone needs to put woolies on their coat hangers is beyond me.

DEATH IN FOUR COURSES (2012) by Lucy Burdette (pseudonym of Roberta Isleib) is part of a cozy mystery series about Hayley Snow, a restaurant reviewer for a magazine in Key West, Florida. She is a tropical Miss Marple who can be relied to find at least one body per novel, perhaps more.

The island is hosting a convention of food critics, and Snow is covering it. The keynote speaker is Jonah Barrows, a loudmouth national food critic who told all

in a recent memoir, and has promised to expose the secrets of other critics at the convention. He was, of course, signing his death warrant. Few are surprised when his body is found floating in the hotel pool, and even fewer that Snow was the one who found it. She is, as the saying goes, known to police.

The convention carries on, opening with a panel “Food Writing As A Funhouse Mirror”, a vague title that allows the panelists to wander off topic. Much like many SF convention panels I’ve been to. I’ll skip over the food poet’s reading of his latest opus, an ode to meat and digestive proteins. That is why I never go to author readings at SF cons.

Barrow’s death is subsequently determined to be a two-part murder. First he was hit on the head and fell into the water, then someone else came along and made sure he didn’t get out of the pool under his own power. They and many others had something to hide that Barrow threatened to expose. It takes Snow and the police a while to sort out who did what to whom.

An interesting read, especially if you attend a lot of SF conventions and would like to see how others do it. The epilogue is recipes, the first being rhubarb cake with streusel topping. At an SF convention it would be no-name potato chips.

NEVER LAUGH AS A HEARSE GOES BY (2013) by Elizabeth J. Duncan comes from a series about Penny Brannigan, an amateur sleuth who roams North Wales solving crimes in between running her spa. The novel at hand takes place at a clerical conference at Gladstone’s Library in northeast Wales. Unfortunately it is not all brotherly love in the service of God.

Brannigan’s boyfriend is Detective Chief Inspector Gareth Davies, stationed at Llandudno. He is one of the guest speakers at the conference, talking about how churches could reduce lead and copper thefts. It soon becomes obvious that better topics might have been “Dealing With Financial Irregularities In Church Accounts”, “Adultery Among The Clergy Leads To Blackmail”, and “Murder Will Out”.

The Bishop’s secretary Minty Russell is the first to pass on to the next life, ostensibly from accidental food poisoning. She dies right at the banquet table, apparently from seafood allergy, even though she had the chicken korma and rice. She always had an EpiPen with her, yet it was missing from her purse, stolen by the murderer before he mixed some seafood paste into the spicy chicken sauce.

Davies is the senior police officer on the spot, and Brannigan the senior Miss Marple. Her friend Florence Semple is called in to decipher Russell’s shorthand notes and becomes the backup Miss Marple. The Bishop is most displeased. His round table discussion on ordaining women was a flop because everyone at the conference was gossiping about the murder.

Brannigan was sitting next to Victim #1 at the banquet table, and while roaming the library afterwards finds Victim #2, a rural vicar who was one of the delegates. It’s a wonder the conference managed to stick to the agenda.

The murders turn out to be unrelated, done by different culprits for different reasons. They and the victims were all delegates, busily blackmailing each other in private life. In the case of two of them, the blackmailers pushed just a little too hard.

And so the conference concludes, with fewer delegates than it started with. A good read by cozy standards.

POISONED PROSE (2013) by Ellery Adams is part of a cozy series about the Bayside Book Writers of Oyster Bay, North Carolina. A dangerous club to belong to or even go near, as one or two bodies will show up every time they have an outing. Olivia Limoges is the Miss Marple of the series.

In conjunction with the annual Cardboard Regatta, a weekend writers festival is being held, the theme being storytelling. The novel takes a while to get going as all the back stories are filled in, but once the characterizations are completed, the writers festival gets underway.

The Guest of Honour is Violetta Devereaux, whose author readings are cut short permanently after she is strangled in the library. Limoges, of course, finds the body. The investigations begin, both police and amateur sleuth.

Limoges learns that Devereaux had her problems stemming from childhood poverty. There are others in the background who are just plain nutty, and a connection is found to a previous death in Devereaux’s home town. The plot gradually complicates itself, as several characters had motives for the murder. Just for nice, Devereaux had some diamonds that were stolen after her death.

The murderer turns out to have been a sibling of Devereaux, and the motive was revenge for perceived childhood abuse. Limoges isn’t in much better emotional

condition herself. She has father issues, and the final pages set that problem up, to be continued in the next book. An average read for a cozy but worth reading once.

The citizens of Oyster Bay are lax in public vigilance, which leads to a later novel by Ellery Adams titled *WRITING ALL WRONGS* (2015). The Bayside Book Writers, not having been listed by the Dept. of Homeland Security, are at it again, this time attending the Legends of Coastal Carolina Festival.

The keynote speaker is Silas Black, famous screenwriter, novelist, and television producer. Surprisingly, he isn't a murder victim despite his multitude of sins. Limoges has married the local police chief, which certainly gives her an edge in amateur sleuthing. Their honeymoon is at the festival.

As the back stories are filled in, we learn that Black's girlfriend is Leigh Whitlow. She is in her 40s and has to work hard to keep his attention, as he has a wandering eye. He is afraid to leave her, however, because she is just psychotic enough to kill him and/or any woman friends. Conveniently for him, Whitlow exits the story in Chapter 7, having been murdered on a beach. Limoges finds the body, as the reader will not be surprised to learn.

Black is a collector of antiquities and relics when he isn't skirt chasing. The local museum's curator has it in for him, as Black has been known to sneak stuff out of museums. Black is also invested in a real estate development project that will destroy a natural area on the island, so the local conservationists are also against him. The fight is carried into one of the festival lectures, ending with fisticuffs when someone announces that Black finalized the redevelopment deal. The riot spreads into the residential district.

The subplots tangle themselves in the middle section of the novel. Everyone is on their worst behaviour, and suspicion is scattered about like sand on the beach. The threads are eventually tied together. Black is innocent of murder but is run in by the FBI for possession of stolen relics. Whitlow is dead, so she couldn't be arrested for her part in a separate scam. She was silenced by some locals angry about changes to the island in general, and in a rage about Black in particular.

The good news is that the book sale, the final event of the festival, was a success.

GRACE CRIES UNCLE (2015) by Julie Hyzy is a novel in a cozy mystery series about Grace Wheaton, manager of Marshfield Manor, near Emberstowne, North Carolina. Her family do not have the best character references, particularly her black sheep sister Liza.

In this installment, Wheaton has to deal with a DNA test that may get her a fortune, with her greedy sister one step behind. A man claiming to be an FBI agent shows up, wanting to snoop around. He isn't a problem for too long, as he is found murdered in Chapter 5. In death, he is exposed as a con man with prior convictions.

The annual Fine Art and Antiquity Collectors convention is taking place in Emberstowne, wisely avoiding the blood-soaked Marshfield Manor for most of its activities. Wheaton's boss and possible uncle (pending the DNA test) is Bennett Marshfield, who is hosting a reception at the big house for the convention.

Things get bad and things get worse; I think you know the tune. Liza was never careful in picking boyfriends, husbands, or just plain friends. Some of them are either after her or something in the manor. Then the real FBI shows up.

Bennett is on the hunt for a MacGuffin, an item that will lead to a treasure trove. Besides the con man's allies, who appear to be Liza's allies as well, at least one convention delegate heard the rumours and begins sniffing around.

The convention banquet is overflowing with delegates, FBI agents, local police, and private security guards. Someone, possibly Liza's ex-husband, may try to make a deal for the MacGuffin at the banquet. Whoever is selling it doesn't have legal title, so there'll be a hot time in the old manor tonight.

A couple more twists, and some fancy explaining in the epilogue, bring the novel to a messy conclusion. That was a convention few will forget.

TWELVE ANGRY LIBRARIANS (2017) by Miranda James (pseudonym of Dean James) is a novel in the *A Cat In The Stacks* cozy mystery series. The protagonist is Charlie Harris, Acting Library Director at Athena College, Mississippi, assisted by his Maine Coon cat Diesel.

The college is hosting the annual convention of the Southern Academic Libraries Association. Harris gives the welcome speech. What bothers him is

Gavin Fong, the keynote speaker. They are old enemies from decades ago, and in the interval Fong has made many new enemies as well. He doesn't endear himself to the convention delegates when he uses his speech to say that libraries do not need staff with university degrees. He never finishes the speech though. Live on stage, he pauses to sip some bottled water, and dies from cyanide poisoning in front of the audience.

The convention carries on, at least after the crime scene techies have come and gone. Police are hampered by a list of suspects that is much the same as the list of convention delegates. Motive will be of no use in investigating the murder. Harris becomes a suspect and goes into sleuthing mode to protect himself.

A second murder is committed in the hotel, also by bottled water spiced with cyanide. The hotel manager is not happy. He never had this sort of trouble with the Freemasons.

The police aren't happy either, particularly since they have dealt with Harris in previous novels and would like to know how it is he happens to be in at every kill. Like they say in the army, once is random chance, twice is coincidence, and three times is enemy action.

After some very loose assumptions and enough hypothesizing, the epilogue evolves the solution. Fong had prepared two poisoned bottles for use against two of his enemies attending the convention. He gave them the poisoned chalices at a room party the night before. Target #1 was suspicious and switched the bottle the next day to take out Fong with his own medicine. Target #2 wasn't thirsty at the time and waited to drink the water the next day.

The final seminar of the convention concluded with a thank-you from the organizer and a cheerful message from her advising that the police said everyone was free to go. That's a closing ceremony to be remembered.

Skiffy Conventions.

“And Then There Were (N-One)” by Sarah Pinsker (2017 Mar/Apr, UNCANNY MAGAZINE) is about SarahCon, a convention in Nova Scotia of about 200 alternative timeline Sarah Pinskers. As one could imagine, Registration was a nightmare. All the Sarahs are sorted out first by address, then birth date, then occupation, since they are not identical in all the multiverses. The theme of the convention is “Be Yourself”.

Why have a convention of alternative selves? To talk to each other and compare timelines. Find out the differences and what might be useful to change back home. But things get ugly. One of the Sarahs is murdered, slugged with the proverbial blunt instrument. The Sarah who is narrating the story is asked to help investigate.

Obviously Sarah the defunct was murdered by another Sarah. Sarah the investigator eventually determines why. The murderer was dissatisfied with her timeline and wanted to switch over and take a different Sarah's place. Weird logic, but the story works.

“The Girl Who Loved Cthulhu” by Rick Mamatas appeared in the 2018 anthology THE CACKLE OF CTHULHU, edited by Alex Shvartsman. It is set at Yuggoth Days, where Colleen Danzig is a Guest of Honour. As you might guess, the convention is for Lovecraft fans. As Danzig circulates among the crowd, she runs into problems trying to sort out the cosplayers from real Mythos characters who slipped into town from another dimension. After all, if you're an Elder God, what better place to hide than a masquerade.

The Play's The Thing.

A popular type of get-together for mystery fans is the murder mystery weekend. The guests, limited in number, assemble at a hotel or resort and are given role-playing characters. The plot is initiated, and throughout the weekend they seek or are given clues and must deduce whodunit by Sunday afternoon. There are often a few seminars with guest forensic experts or mystery authors.

HOW TO CRASH A KILLER BASH (2010) by Penny Warner is a novel in a cozy series about Presley Parker, who operates an event-planning business in the San Francisco Bay area. Considering that every event she hosts includes at least one corpse, it is a wonder that anyone would hire her. Certainly the SFPD must have her on a watch list.

Philanthropist Mary Lee Miller is hosting a murder mystery party in aid of an art museum. She hires Parker to stage it. Talk about asking for trouble. Miller pays for it by becoming the victim in real life, or, more correctly, in death, instead of just acting the part.

Each chapter begins with a brief piece of advice about staging murder dinners. Chapter 1 starts off the novel with the sage advice: *When planning a murder*

mystery party, make sure you don't use real weapons as props. They may be too tempting for some of the guests.

The suspects are trotted out. Miller's son Corbin had an argument with her. She did not approve of his girlfriend Delicia Jackson, whom the police favour as the main suspect. Miller's ex-husband becomes the second victim. His body is found after the party is over, in a goldfish pond out on the museum grounds.

Then someone targets Parker, cutting the brake line on her car. San Francisco is, of course, well known for its steep hills. More drama carries the plot forward. Corbin learns he was an illegitimate child who was adopted by Miller. The third victim is a museum security guard. Clues are churned out like sausage from a meat grinder.

The killer turns out to be a supporting character who had a throwaway line at the beginning of the book that alerts the perceptive reader. Parker often supplies the idiot in the idiot plots but muddles through. She is, after all, the heroine and must survive to the next book in the series.

MURDER MOST HOWL (2015) by Krista Davis (pseudonym of Cristina Ryplansky) is part of a cozy series about Holly Miller, an innkeeper in Wagtail, Virginia. The Sugar Maple Inn's main attraction is that it is a pet-friendly resort hotel; dogs and cats welcome.

This novel is about a murder mystery game staged by the hotel in January, part of an attempt to offset the slow season. A blizzard blows in, isolating the hotel and knocking out the electricity, and a genuine corpse is discovered. With that, the plot goes into gear.

The novel opens with details of the mystery game: a realistic handgun carved from wood, a fake bottle of poison with a skull-and-crossbones label, and assorted blunt instruments. The players are to be themselves but given fake histories, followed by envelopes with rhyming riddles as clues. The village merchants have been briefed to give guests background information, the idea being to get pedestrian traffic into the stores.

The first body is fake, as intended, but the second is an unliked sharp-practice man named Norm Wilson. His passing was not mourned except by the game organizers, whose event was now fouled up by a real murder. The local police are much vexed because not only are they being swarmed by a cloud of Miss

Marples but said guests keep snatching up evidence thinking they are clues for the game. The defence attorney will have a field day with contamination of the crime scene and failed chain of custody.

Matters aren't helped when the murderer scatters fake clues about to muddy the waters. Miller does her Miss Marple routine and finds the killer the hard way. She survives, as she must if the series is to continue. The motive for the murderer was revenge for something Wilson did years ago, which takes a full chapter to explain. And so we bid adieu to beautiful rural Virginia.

MYSTERY OF THE DINNER PLAYHOUSE (2015) by Mike Befeller has as its main protagonists Angie Tremont and her husband Gabe, a recently retired police detective. She convinces him to attend the Bearcrest Mystery Dinner Playhouse for one of those staged mysteries. Gabe is reluctant because to him it is a busman's holiday. Before they head out, he predicts that the butler did it.

He's wrong. The dinner party is just sitting down to the meal when Peter Ranchard, an actor playing the part of the butler, takes ill, staggers out of the room, and dies from poison. For real, not as part of the game.

The local police are overstretched that night. Since Gabe was one of them a week before, the chief hires him as a consulting detective, to be assisted by a couple of uniforms. Many suspects abound. There was a spy from a competing mystery dinner theatre. The cast were on poor terms with the deceased for various personal reasons. Ranchard was a womanizer who left a trail of angry women behind him.

Lots of clues are unearthed but fitting them together into a coherent narrative is difficult. Gabe calls together everyone from the dinner that night and summarizes the data, which could fit anyone attending the meeting. He concludes that Ranchard's death was suicide but planned by him to take down as many of his enemies as he could. A steady page-turner and a good read. And yes, the butler really did it.

Murder Conventions.

THE CHOCOLATE FALCON FRAUD (2015) by JoAnna Carl (pseudonym of Eve Sandstrom) is a novel in a cozy mystery series about Lee McKinny Woodyard and her aunt Nettie. They operate a chocolate shop in Warner Pier,

a village that is Michigan's answer to Cabot Cove. Woodyard had fled a bad marriage in Texas and remarried in Warner Pier.

The local tourism board is sponsoring the Tough Guys and Private Eyes Film Festival. The shop hopes to make a good profit with dark chocolate Maltese Falcons, which are something I'd buy if I saw them in Purdy's or Laura Secord. Woodyard's ex-stepson arrives in the village, claiming he just came in for the film festival. A few pages later, still in Chapter 1, he disappears in mysterious circumstances. He re-appears in Chapter 2 under equally mysterious circumstances, suffering from amnesia.

Another character is introduced, a Peter Lorre impersonator named Noel Kayro, who is more suspicious looking than Lorre ever was in any of his films. Godfrey, after his return and despite his amnesia, admits to wheeling and dealing with an equally suspicious Michigan company that claimed to have a genuine Maltese Falcon prop from the movie. A stranger then dies on the doorstep of the Woodyards, which triggers assorted alarums and excursions.

As explained at length in the epilogue, it was all a plot to kidnap Godfrey and get a ransom from his rich father. Two of the culprits were film noir fans, as was Godfrey. The Falcon was intended to lure him into the clutches of the kidnappers but events didn't work out the way they expected. It had been a perfect opportunity to kill two birds with one stone, pardon the expression. That is, kidnap one of the Sam Spade fans and enjoy the convention in between.

Turning to other types of gatherings of mystery fiction aficionados brings us to MONSIEUR PAMPLEMOUSSE RESTS HIS CASE (1991) by Michael Bond. This novel is part of a long series of humorous novels about Aristide Pamplemousse, ex-Surete and now a restaurant inspector for the gastronomic directory LE GUIDE. He is like Inspector Clouseau from the Pink Panther movies, always getting into ridiculous situations and perpetually under a cloud because of his past transgressions. Pamplemousse is accompanied on his restaurant tours by his bloodhound Pommes Frites, also ex-Surete.

The story at hand opens with the Director of LE GUIDE assigning Pamplemousse to escort an American publisher Mrs Van Drman to a crime writers' gathering in Vichy. Among other events, they will have a banquet which will recreate one given by Alexandre Dumas, of The Three Musketeers fame. Le Cercle de Six, the crime writers group, wanted Pamplemousse to enter the gathering dressed as d'Artagnan and riding a horse.

Everyone else will also be in costume, minus the horses. One of the members doesn't make it to the table, having died from poisoning while enjoying the local spa waters. The menu was duplicated from the original banquet with one important change. Someone spiked the wine with cyanide. Pamplemousse manages to prevent anyone from drinking it.

In doing so, he sets off a concatenation of events that would be farcical were it not for the deadly threat underlying them. Whodunit? Somebody has it in for at least one attendee. Pamplemousse has his suspicions but can't prove anything.

After many alarums and excursions, the novel fizzles out to nothing. There is no evidence to hold the group members, who disperse back to their home countries. A disappointing finish.

Festivals.

Humans like to gather for a big party. It is an instinct that dates back to the beginning of civilization. If not a formal convention, then fetes and fairs, which kind of fiction I will include in this review column.

THE CHOCOLATE SNOWMAN MURDERS (2008) by JoAnna Carl has Lee Woodyard and her husband Joe involved in the Warner Pier Winter Arts Festival. She is treasurer on the festival committee, and does other odd jobs such as greeting an out-of-town guest at the Grand Rapids airport. He is a juror for the festival but shows up drunk, hardly able to see the paintings on the wall, much less judge them.

Not a problem, because the next morning Joe finds him dead in his motel room, his head bashed in with a blunt instrument. Suspicion swirls about like a snow flurry. The victim had a past and was not without sin. Someone planted the dead man's cellphone in Woodyard's coat pocket. Given her past record of always being connected with any murder in the village, it appears the murderer wants to pin the blame on her, not a difficult task.

Woodyard finds the second victim, just to keep in practice, one supposes. This time the blunt instrument was planted in her van. Her investigation, trying to keep ahead of the police, gets her trapped with the murderer. The motive was revenge against the deceased for events that happened decades ago. The past is never truly dead, unlike the victims.

The Winter Festival committee finds its ranks depleted by murders and arrests, although it manages to keep a quorum. The events proceeds, and the chocolate snowmen made by Woodyard's shop are a success.

GRACE INTERRUPTED (2011) by Julie Hyzy is another installment about Grace Wheaton and Marshfield Manor. This time, a mob of cosplayers have booked the grounds of the big house, for they are Civil War re-enactors. They are not staying in the manor itself but living under canvas as part of the event.

Two very noisy young women barge into the manor, seeking the blood of Zachary Kincade, who is playing one of the generals in the event. He is none too popular with his compatriots, whether the blue, the grey, or civilians. A womanizer, he had the previous weekend texted an entire wedding party fifteen minutes before the ceremony was to begin and told the bride (one of the two women) that he had changed his mind.

On arriving at the manor, he had accosted the groundskeeper and accused him of murdering Kincade's brother thirteen years ago. Kincade doesn't make it past Chapter 4. When the police arrive to investigate his murder, they find the woods crawling with men carrying guns, and react as might be expected.

The re-enactors aren't any happier. None of them mourn for Kincade, and the investigation disrupts their event. They want an 1860s feel to the cosplaying, but the illusion can't be maintained when troopers carrying forensic kits are barging around the tents and into the staged battle areas.

The death of Kincade also set off infighting between wanna-be successors to his position. Better to be a general than a private.

It's no fun for Wheaton either, who has to run the big house, which has paying guests unconnected to the re-enactors. She does her own investigating in between separating feuds and dealing with the usual sort of staff problems. The final re-enactment of the weekend is more realistic than most. As per usual with Miss Marples around the world, Wheaton is trapped in a tight spot with the murderer.

He tells her: "*This is my battlefield but your blood.*", and pulls a knife. His mistake was that she had a revolver. The case wraps up much faster than usual for a cozy. An interesting read.

THE HEN OF THE BASKERVILLES (2013) by Donna Andrews caught my eye for obvious reasons. This novel is part of an animal-themed cozy mystery series about Meg Langslow, who lives in Caerphilly, Virginia, a village that might be in Maine because of its murder rate.

This installment deals with the village's attempt to organize the Virginia Un-Fair, a possible replacement for the Virginia State Fair, which went bankrupt in 2012. That sent me to the Internet and yes, the VSF really did go under. It has since been revived under new ownership. This surprised me because in Canada, fairs and rodeos are municipal or provincial, not private businesses.

Langslow is a volunteer for the Un-Fair. Problems arise though. Someone stole a pair of prize Bantam Russian Orloff chickens, and follows through with assorted acts of vandalism. Langslow not only begins sleuthing into that mess but becomes involved in a murder investigation. Her friend Molly Riordon is going through a nasty divorce. Riordon sells artisan cheeses from her goat farm, but may lose it because of the divorce. When her about-to-be ex-husband Brett is murdered, Molly is arrested.

The sabotage continues. Prize pumpkins are smashed, and a quilt is stolen from the Arts and Crafts competition. The Deppity Dawg puts out an APB on the stolen chickens, the owner of which suffered a heart attack on hearing the news. Langslow, as if she didn't have enough to do, is also a volunteer supervisor at the Un-Fair, and runs about dealing with all the petty crises and ego clashes that every show or convention has.

The murderer is someone from left field, acting for unrelated reasons. The adjacent county to Caerphilly was in competition for the state fair replacement. Some of its loyal citizens were entirely too loyal, and felt the ends justified the means. Brett's girlfriend, who was not the murderer, was also up to dirty tricks, including chicken theft and selling vineyard wine under false pretenses. I'm glad we don't have those problems at the Calgary Stampede.

KILT AT THE HIGHLAND GAMES (2016) by Kaitlin Dunnett (pseudonym of Kathy Lynn Emerson) is about one of those events where like-minded fans dress up in funny costumes and live in a fantasy world for the weekend. No, not a comic con, but the Western Maine Highland Games at Moosetookalook, the home village of Liss MacCrimmon Ruskin and her husband Dan. Wha's lak us?

Disclaimer: The Speirs family are descended from lowlanders. No illiterate oatmeal savages in our bloodlines. My father's ancestors came from the village of Houston, just west of Paisley. They arrived in Canada in the early 1830s. No tartan tamfoolery here.

Getting back to the novel, it opens with the local bookstore being torched. The owner Angie Hogencamp and her two children lived above the shop and disappeared. Their remains were not found in the ruins.

Liss might have investigated, but the Games were about to open, and she and Dan were busy. There is a parade, fireworks, and the village selectman Jason Graye is shot dead. No prizes for guessing who found the body. Someone also broke the window of the post office, but Liss wasn't involved.

Investigation by the police, not Liss, reveals no record of Hogencamp on the computer databases. She was using an assumed name. Graye was trying to confiscate the burned store by eminent domain and turn it into a parking lot. He was known for corrupt real estate deals, although nothing was ever proven in court.

Notwithstanding all that excitement, the Games open and away they go. The pipers, the dancers, the vendors, the athletes, the sheepdog trials, and the local llama drill team, who somehow convinced the organizers to let them in. Probably just to keep the Sassenachs amused.

There is an annoying Highland fan lecturing people about the correct pronunciation of 'scone' and getting it wrong, and complaining fireworks don't belong in a Highland Games, again wrong. As Liss points out, if fireworks are good enough for the Edinburgh Tattoo, then they're good enough for Maine. Obsessive-compulsives such as him are familiar features at science fiction conventions.

In between enjoying the events, Liss manages to get in some sleuthing. The crazed ex-husband of Hogencamp shows up, accompanied by an unlicensed private investigator, for whom the word 'greasy' was invented.

She, of course, gets herself trapped with him and has a narrow escape. He, of course, blabs all, saving the Deppity Dawg the trouble of beating a confession out of him. Scots wha hae, and all that.

DRESSED TO CONFESS (2017) by Diane Vallere is a novel in a cozy mystery series about Margo Tamblyn, owner of a costume shop called Disguise DeLimit. She lives in Proper City, Nevada, whose founder, a prospector named Proper, established a since-failed gold mine there. If a body is found anywhere within town limits, she either discovered it or just prior had publicly argued with the defunct, making her a suspect.

The Sagebrush Festival is underway. The theme this year is board games, which seems a strange choice. Whether you play Clue, Monopoly, or Scrabble, come on out to Proper City and have fun, fun, fun! It is billed as a family event, but it seems to me the majority of people who would show up would be gamers.

Tamblyn supplied costumes for the Domino Divas, a dance troupe headlining the festival's stage show. The Divas are re-uniting after a scandal decades ago broke them apart. A gold robbery took place and the culprit was wearing a Domino costume and mask. Without identification, nothing could be proved, and others had access to the costumes, but the suspicion remained.

Ronnie Cass, one of the divas, is found dead and, in her manner of departing, gets the plot rolling. Lots of suspects, such as her illegitimate and unacknowledged daughter, fellow Divas with whom she was feuding, an ex-boyfriend, and Tamblyn herself, whose amateur sleuthing not only contaminates the evidence but points the finger of suspicion at herself.

The current Mayor was Cass's boyfriend at the time the gold was stolen. As an inducement for the Divas to re-unite, he told Cass, but not the rest of the group, that she would get half the profits. What she didn't know was that the festival was run on a volunteer basis at a deliberate loss to attract tourists.

Because the Divas won't go on without their leader, they are replaced by a group calling themselves Clue: The Musical, the star of which was an enemy of Cass. Someone is ripping heads off teddy bears supplied to the festival as free giveaways. The culprit isn't a vandal, but is obviously searching for something hidden inside one of the toys.

It all comes together in the usual showdown, where Tamblyn traps herself with the murderer and is saved by a last-minute fluke. An average read, worth reading once. The book concludes with a recipe for Spicy Acorn, which was mentioned in the text as an anagram for a certain group of people. (Hint: they were theorists. That should make it an easy anagram for you to solve.)

FUN WITH GUTENBERG

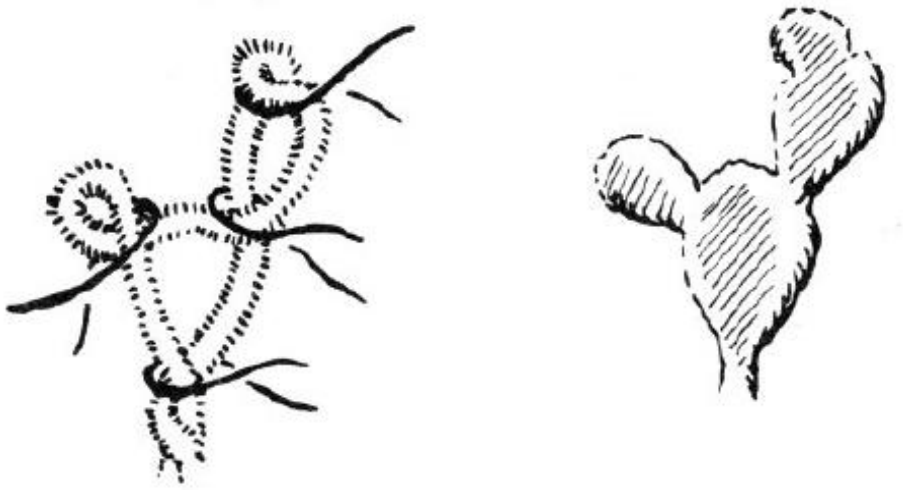
by Dale Speirs

I regularly check www.gutenberg.org for newly digitized books and also use their random selection list. Serendipity isn't just something found in bookstore or library stacks, it can also be found online. The free downloads are available in a variety of formats. I download books as html in Firefox Mozilla, then use the "Page/Save as pdf" to convert them into fixed form.

One such book at Project Gutenberg was CIGAR BOX DIORAMAS (1958) by Arminta Neal, exactly what it seems like. Cigar boxes are scarcer than they used to be, and certainly we never had any in our home, my parents and us kids all being non-smokers. Nor am I likely to take up dioramas as a hobby at this late stage in my life when I am trying to get rid of stuff, not accumulate more.

As I paged through the book, I came across this item on page 12. Nuff said.

Prickly pear cactus can be made with pipe cleaners bent into correct outline, tied with thread, then the outlines filled in with the paper mache mix.



See Jane Run.

Language is the greatest invention of humans. In written form, it enables us to communicate with generations yet unborn, something no other species can do. We have to learn writing with each generation; it is not something that is instinctive.

While browsing www.gutenberg.org, I stumbled across THE ALBERTA PUBLIC SCHOOL SPELLER, published in 1910 under the authority of the Minister of Education. The book was intended for teachers of all grades, and consists of hundreds of exemplars in the following style.

back Jack see they cry
pack crack whip bring were
black track give horse ducks

SEAT WORK: Put h, l, s, t, r, sm, st, sl, wh, qu, with -ack

DICTATION:

See Jack on a black hack.
Crack the whip, Jack, and give the horse a whack.
Bring back a sack of bran.
Ducks cry quack.
A pack of dogs ran to the hay stack.
They were on the track of a black fox.
Give me a tack to fix the rack.
Bring back the ducks.
See Jack whip the black horse.
The dogs track the fox.

That example was for Grade 1 students, and obviously reflects the fact that in 1910, Alberta was still an agrarian province. The province was only five years old, and the homesteaders were still colonizing the land.

I am a pure-laine descendent of homesteaders. My mother's family had only been in Alberta since 1903 and my father's family would not arrive in southern Saskatchewan until 1912. My maternal grandmother and her ten brothers and sisters were being born about then, and would have been taught from this book.

As I paged through this book, it seemed to me that I had read similar stuff passed off as literary work. Yes, this was why the extreme forms of the New Wave in science fiction ultimately failed. They read exactly like this.

I won't copy all the word lists that the students were learning, but the paragraphs are fascinating and almost make sense. Each of the following paragraphs illustrated a different group of words. If you put this through a university writing course, where pretension overrules clarity of thought, you could probably get an A+ grade.

Here are some bits of Canadian history:

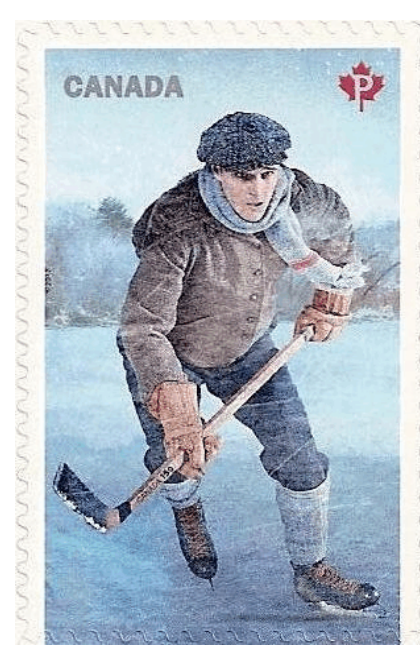
Health is better than wealth. Horses sweat. He read tales by stealth. A steady breath. As heavy as lead. Ready to spread the news. Thread the needle. Does he dread such threats? For many years there were no horses in Canada. Travel was mostly by boat in summer. The solid log houses were built along the rivers. There were no post-offices; letters were sent by friends. Newspapers were not known, books were few. A few schools were kept for white or Indian children.

The Indians were friendly at first, but later they thought it right to fight the French. But these settlers fought bravely. The guns they had brought frightened the natives, who sought safety in flight. The settlers built rude log houses, now a strange sight. Often oiled paper was used for glass. Tallow candles gave light at night. Instead of an iron stove a huge fireplace might be found. Over the bright blazing fire hung iron kettles for cooking.

The paragraphs were also used to teach children how to behave:

I had as lief have a banjo as a fiddle. Do riddles amuse you? He ate gruel and griddle cakes. Shinny is our chief game. Silent grief is often deep. Always be polite to callers in your home. Should your parents be absent or unable to see the visitors at once, offer them chairs. Stand until they are seated. Try your best to entertain them until some older person relieves you. Then leave the room quietly, closing the door without noise. Be sure to pass behind, not in front of persons.

This one is more surrealistic: *The count's coach hurried to the office. I know what the visitor sought in the bundle. A fiddle was lying on the garret lounge. Good men are the nation's chief wealth. Plough the pumpkin field. Shinny is healthy sport. It was that naughty boy's fault. His daughter's banjo. I fancy a bowl of gruel. Fetch the thread from my lady's chamber. I ought always to relieve my friends.*



Shinny is informal ice hockey, played on ponds in rural areas and in streets in town. I remember both. Street hockey wasn't as much fun because we had to keep pulling the nets aside every time a car came through. Shinny on ponds used regular pucks but on streets we had to use tennis balls so as not to dent any parked vehicles. They bounce every which way, which is why the puck was invented. But I digress.

This one, aimed for Grade 3, seems to tell a moral:

Does Grace skate? Place the wood in the grate. Brace up for a race. Keep a space for my school mate. Buy a

pair of shoe laces. Little Jack Frog once spied a huge ox in a field. He told what a strange beast he had seen, larger than any frog in the stream. His mother became quite angry. She tried to puff herself out to as great a size. But she only burst and died.

One of the paragraphs for Grade 4 classes seems rather depressing for animal lovers:

The sparrow, woodpecker, and chickadee remain. But few others of the feathered people can obtain enough to eat. The squirrels are busy hiding away food in their narrow houses for the rough winter weather. They pick to pieces the tough pine cones to obtain the seeds between the scales. Borrow a neighbour's wheelbarrow. Plough deeper furrows to-morrow. Our leather shoes. The widow's sorrow. I'll not detain you long.

Death is always with us, and in those days, children saw more of it:

An acre of land for a burying ground. The soul never dies. A sieve to sift flour. A cloak of blue serge. The choir march up the aisle. Indians whoop. Apply the brakes. Don't touch poison-ivy. A thin gauze covers the glass hearse. We accuse the plumber of using bogus coin. Tobacco injures the health. Drive the calves from the trough. We rode the elephant. For some minutes we were nervous. The breadth of the field. I loitered to view the marriage.

Suddenly, apropos of nothing, there is an inspirational verse, attributed to someone named Reade:

*Canada, Canada, land of the Maple,
Queen of the forest, and river, and lake;
Open thy soul to the voice of thy people,
Close not thine heart to the music they make.*

It is always good for Grade 6 students to know how the court system works. You never know when you might end up before a judge:

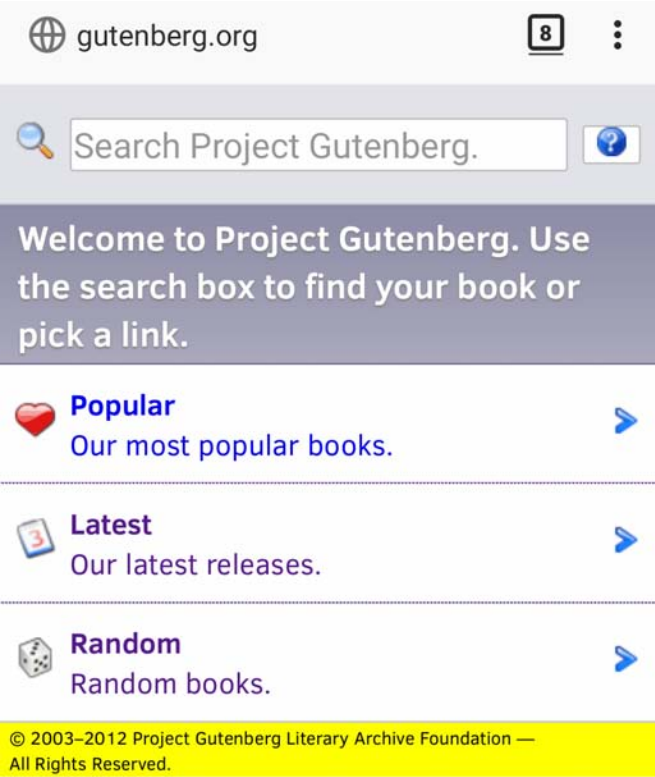
That witness, wearing the ruff or collar, declined to commit perjury. A refined physician reported verbally. Evidently the judge confides in the jurymen. The counsel is confident that the penitent prisoner will be released on bail. The club comprises a president, the necessary officers, and nineteen members. Revise the old proverb.

Where’s Lovecraft When You Really Need Him?

The next paragraph was a Grade 8 exercise. I doubt if many Grade 12 students today could define most of the Latinate words in this paragraph. They’d probably text a LOL to their friends if you showed them this paragraph, then warn AITR.

A sanctimonious hypocrite evinced great propensity to deceit. Part beast, part bird, the creature was a monstrosity. The pomposity of the speaker aroused the animosity of his audience. The immensity of the amphitheatre was revealed by the intensity of the light. Conciseness of style is preferable to verbosity. A diversity of opinion exists as to the utility of disinfectants. A suite of exquisitely fitted rooms is a perquisite of the viceroy's. Explain the requisite qualifications for a voter in the plebiscite on local option. A stubborn perversity of will may accompany impetuosity of action.

When I was in Grade 1 in 1961, the fad was to teach children to recognize whole words instead of learning phonetics and syllables. It was a disaster, and I was smart enough, even at that tender age, to recognize that Teacher didn’t know what she was talking about. I basically learned to read on my own. Throughout my school years, I learned more in the library than in the classroom, and was an honours student throughout.



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 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.

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, have a party, or do a mail art project for the WWP. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

TWENTY RULES FOR WRITING DETECTIVE STORIES

by S.S. Van Dine

Originally published in THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE, 1928 September.
Original text in italics, Editor's remarks in regular font.

The detective story is a game. It is more, it is a sporting event. And the author must play fair with the reader. He can no more resort to trickeries and deceptions and still retain his honesty than if he cheated in a bridge game. He must outwit the reader, and hold the reader's interest, through sheer ingenuity. For the writing of detective stories there are very definite laws, unwritten perhaps but none the less binding, and every respectable and self-respecting concocter of literary mysteries lives up to them. Herewith, then, is a sort of Credo, based partly on the practice of all the great writers of stories, and partly on the promptings of the honest author's inner conscience.

To wit:

- 1. The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described.*
- 2. No wilful tricks or deceptions may be played on the reader other than those played legitimately by the criminal on the detective himself.*
- 3. There must be no love interest in the story. To introduce amour is to clutter up a purely intellectual experience with irrelevant sentiment. The business in hand is to bring a criminal to the bar of justice, not to bring a lovelorn couple to the hymeneal altar.*

Commonly violated of course, as snobbish critics refuse to admit that mysteries and science fiction are literatures of ideas. Insecure authors therefore pad out the story with romance, family feuds, and other verbal diarrhea. The advent of word processors has made the problem much worse since the late 1980s.

- 4. The detective himself, or one of the official investigators, should never turn out to be the culprit. This is bald trickery, on a par with offering some one a bright penny for a five-dollar gold piece. It's false pretenses.*
- 5. The culprit must be determined by logical deductions, not by accident or coincidence or unmotivated confession. To solve a criminal problem in this latter fashion is like sending the reader on a deliberate wild-goose chase, and*

then telling him, after he has failed, that you had the object of his search up your sleeve all the time. Such an author is no better than a practical joker.

Even Sherlock Holmes violated this adage. I agree that random chance is a bad method of solving crimes, although I have to admit that it happens in real life.

- 6. The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects. His function is to gather clues that will eventually lead to the person who did the dirty work in the first chapter; and if the detective does not reach his conclusions through an analysis of those clues, he has no more solved his problem than the schoolboy who gets his answer out of the back of the arithmetic.*
- 7. There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice. Three hundred pages is far too much pother for a crime other than murder. After all, the reader's trouble and expenditure of energy must be rewarded. Americans are essentially humane, and therefore a tiptop murder arouses their sense of vengeance and horror. They wish to bring the perpetrator to justice; and when "murder most foul, as in the best it is," has been committed, the chase is on with all the righteous enthusiasm of which the thrice gentle reader is capable.*

I disagree. Granted that 99% of mystery novels involve murders, I'd like to see more big-crime novels that aren't littered with bodies. Large-scale fraud or other types of non-violent crimes can be just as interesting as Miss Marple finding yet another body at the back of her garden.

- 8. The problem of the crime must be solved by strictly naturalistic means. Such methods for learning the truth as slate-writing, ouija-boards, mind-reading, spiritualistic seances, crystal-gazing, and the like, are taboo. A reader has a chance when matching his wits with a rationalistic detective, but if he must compete with the world of spirits and go chasing about the fourth dimension of metaphysics, he is defeated ab initio.*

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a spiritualist and desperately wanted to believe, but he made certain the reader understood that Sherlock Holmes was a rationalist.

- 9. There must be but one detective, that is, but one protagonist of deduction, one deus ex machine. To bring the minds of three or four, or sometimes a gang of detectives to bear on a problem is not only to disperse the interest and break the*

direct thread of logic, but to take an unfair advantage of the reader, who, at the outset, pits his mind against that of the detective and proceeds to do mental battle. If there is more than one detective the reader doesn't know who his co-deductor is. It's like making the reader run a race with a relay team.

Not necessarily. Police procedurals are about teamwork and can be just as interesting.

10. The culprit must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story, that is, a person with whom the reader is familiar and in whom he takes an interest. For a writer to fasten the crime, in the final chapter, on a stranger or person who has played a wholly unimportant part in the tale, is to confess to his inability to match wits with the reader.

Commonly violated in today's novels, especially cozies, where an inconspicuous supporting character was the culprit, for reasons not divulged until the penultimate chapter.

11. Servants, such as butlers, footmen, valets, gamekeepers, cooks, and the like, must not be chosen by the author as the culprit. This is begging a noble question. It is a too easy solution. It is unsatisfactory, and makes the reader feel that his time has been wasted. The culprit must be a decidedly worthwhile person, one that wouldn't ordinarily come under suspicion; for if the crime was the sordid work of a menial, the author would have had no business to embalm it in book-form.

In the real world though, it is the employee who embezzles or steals from the warehouse.

12. There must be but one culprit, no matter how many murders are committed. The culprit may, of course, have a minor helper or co-plotter; but the entire onus must rest on one pair of shoulders: the entire indignation of the reader must be permitted to concentrate on a single black nature.

13. Secret societies, camorras, mafias, et al., have no place in a detective story. Here the author gets into adventure fiction and secret-service romance. A fascinating and truly beautiful murder is irremediably spoiled by any such wholesale culpability. To be sure, the murderer in a detective novel should be given a sporting chance, but it is going too far to grant him a secret society (with its ubiquitous havens, mass protection, etc.) to fall back on. No

high-class, self-respecting murderer would want such odds in his jousting-bout with the police.

I disagree. Criminal organizations are a fact of life, whether street gangs or the Mafia.

14. The method of murder, and the means of detecting it, must be rational and scientific. That is to say, pseudo-science and purely imaginative and speculative devices are not to be tolerated in the roman policier.

For instance, the murder of a victim by a newly found element, a super-radium, let us say, is not a legitimate problem. Nor may a rare and unknown drug, which has its existence only in the author's imagination, be administered. A detective-story writer must limit himself, toxicologically speaking, to the pharmacopoeia. Once an author soars into the realm of fantasy, in the Jules Verne manner, he is outside the bounds of detective fiction, cavorting in the uncharted reaches of adventure.

If the substance is mentioned early on and is integral to the plot, it should be legitimate. It is rather tiresome to read all those cyanide poisonings in cozies.

15. The truth of the problem must at all times be apparent, provided the reader is shrewd enough to see it. By this I mean that if the reader, after learning the explanation for the crime, should reread the book, he would see that the solution had, in a sense, been staring him in the face, that all the clues really pointed to the culprit, and that, if he had been as clever as the detective, he could have solved the mystery himself without going on to the final chapter. That the clever reader does often thus solve the problem goes without saying. And one of my basic theories of detective fiction is that, if a detective story is fairly and legitimately constructed, it is impossible to keep the solution from all readers.

There will inevitably be a certain number of them just as shrewd as the author; and if the author has shown the proper sportsmanship and honesty in his statement and projection of the crime and its clues, these perspicacious readers will be able, by analysis, elimination and logic, to put their finger on the culprit as soon as the detective does. And herein lies the zest of the game. Herein we have an explanation for the fact that readers who would spurn the ordinary popular novel will read detective stories unblushingly.

16. *A detective novel should contain no long descriptive passages, no literary dallying with side-issues, no subtly worked-out character analyses, no atmospheric preoccupations. Such matters have no vital place in a record of crime and deduction. They hold up the action, and introduce issues irrelevant to the main purpose, which is to state a problem, analyze it, and bring it to a successful conclusion.*

To be sure, there must be a sufficient descriptiveness and character delineation to give the novel verisimilitude; but when an author of a detective story has reached that literary point where he has created a gripping sense of reality and enlisted the reader's interest and sympathy in the characters and the problem, he has gone as far in the purely "literary" technique as is legitimate and compatible with the needs of a criminal-problem document.

A detective story is a grim business, and the reader goes to it, not for literary furbelows and style and beautiful descriptions and the projection of moods, but for mental stimulation and intellectual activity, just as he goes to a ball game or to a cross-word puzzle.

Lectures between innings at the Polo Grounds on the beauties of nature would scarcely enhance the interest in the struggle between two contesting baseball nines; and dissertations on etymology and orthography interspersed in the definitions of a crossword puzzle would tend only to irritate the solver bent on making the words interlock correctly.

As mentioned before, this problem has worsened since the advent of the word processor.

17. *A professional criminal must never be shouldered with the guilt of a crime in a detective story. Crimes by house-breakers and bandits are the province of the police department, not of authors and brilliant amateur detectives. Such crimes belong to the routine work of the Homicide Bureaus. A really fascinating crime is one committed by a pillar of a church, or a spinster noted for her charities.*

Fair enough for cozies, but not so for police procedurals.

18. *A crime in a detective story must never turn out to be an accident or a suicide. To end an odyssey of sleuthing with such an anti-climax is to play an unpardonable trick on the reader. If a book-buyer should demand his two*

dollars back on the ground that the crime was a fake, any court with a sense of justice would decide in his favor and add a stinging reprimand to the author who thus hoodwinked a trusting and kind-hearted reader.

19. *The motives for all crimes in detective stories should be personal. International plottings and war politics belong in a different category of fiction, in secret service tales, for instance. But a murder story must be kept gemütlich, so to speak. It must reflect the reader's everyday experiences, and give him a certain outlet for his own repressed desires and emotions.*

20. *And (to give my Credo an even score of items) I herewith list a few of the devices which no self-respecting detective-story writer will now avail himself of. They have been employed too often, and are familiar to all true lovers of literary crime. To use them is a confession of the author's ineptitude and lack of originality.*

a. *Determining the identity of the culprit by comparing the butt of a cigarette left at the scene of the crime with the brand smoked by a suspect. Sherlock Holmes did it validly, but any subsequent use is imitation.*

b. *The bogus spiritualistic seance to frighten the culprit into giving himself away.*

c. *Forged finger-prints.*

d. *The dummy-figure alibi.*

e. *The dog that does not bark and thereby reveals the fact that the intruder is familiar.*

Again, Sherlock Holmes.

f. *The final pinning of the crime on a twin, or a relative who looks exactly like the suspected, but innocent, person.*

Soap operas relied on this as a standard method.

g. *The hypodermic syringe and the knockout drops.*

h. *The commission of the murder in a locked room after the police have actually broken in.*

i. *The word-association test for guilt.*

j. *The cipher, or code letter, which is eventually unravelled by the sleuth.*

This is why the world can never go back onto the gold standard. If it did, gold would have to be revalued to about \$13,000 per Troy ounce to balance the debt column. The general public does not want fiscal discipline. They want easy credit to buy all the things they think they need.

Politicians want to be re-elected, so they pander to the public. They do it with inflation, which is cumulative and destroys debt. In every country, the federal government is the largest debtor, so you can see the incentive. It is also why lenders charge interest, to compensate for the depreciating currency.



ALL GOLD MINED IN HUMAN HISTORY
AS A SOLID GOLD CUBE

Compared to the Statue of Liberty – Liberty Island, New York

Cube Dollar Value
\$6.8 Trillion

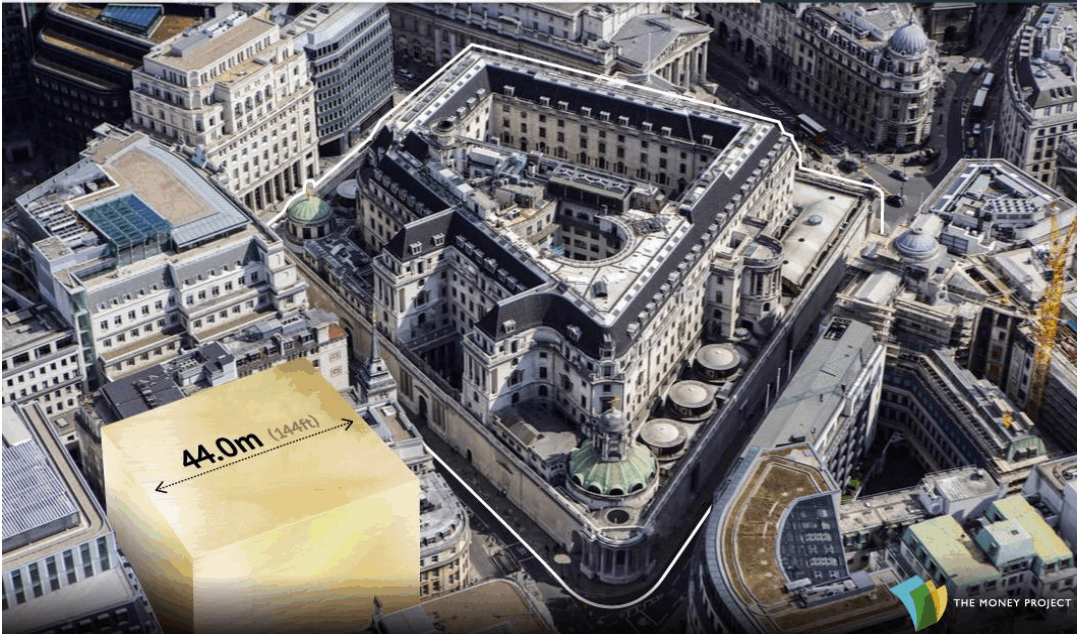
Contains 5.6 billion oz. of gold



WORLD SOVEREIGN DEBT
AS A SOLID GOLD CUBE

Compared to the Bank of England – London, UK

Cube Dollar Value
\$63.3 Trillion
Contains 52.8 billion oz. of gold



The Rochester Telephone Muffler

It not only makes it possible to carry on a conversation without being overheard by other persons in your office, but it also excludes all foreign sound, thereby improving the talking qualities of your telephone. And it is thoroughly sanitary, being made of glass with a detachable rubber mask.

If you desire privacy in the many matters transacted over your telephone, ask about the Rochester Telephone Muffler at your stationer's or write to us for one.

Price, \$5.00, C. O. D.

Rochester Telephone Muffler Co.,
Wilder Building, Rochester, N. Y.

SYSTEM, 1910 June, no pagination



In the first decade of the 1900s, telephones were cutting-edge in business office technology.

Some problems were noticed, such as privacy of conversations.

The display ads shown here were an attempt at a solution.

In 2018, a proposal appeared on Kickstarter for BloxVox. Candlestick telephones have vanished but cellphones haven't eliminated the privacy problem.



A Private Booth on Your Desk

You can insure absolute privacy and secrecy with

Scher's Improved Telephone Muffler

You need not leave your desk or go to a private booth to talk freely and confidentially over the 'phone this invention gives the equivalent of a telephone booth.

It is instantly attached and detached on the telephone transmitter. No complicated parts. Occupies 3½ inches of space on the mouthpiece of 'phone and is at your elbow when in need. It is unquestionably the most useful telephone accessory of today. Made of Aluminum, lasts a lifetime.

"Old Style"
Used by U. S. Dept. of Agriculture, First National Bank, Guarantee Trust Co., and thousands of others over the world.

If dealers can't supply you, we will forward one prepaid on receipt of \$3.50.
AGENTS wanted in U. S. and Foreign Countries. Write for territory.

The Amalgamated Sales Corp., Mfrs., 1478 Broadway, Dept. B. S., New York City

SYSTEM 1914, unpaginated display ad



SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Huber, B.T., et al (2018) **The rise and fall of the Cretaceous Hot Greenhouse climate.** GLOBAL AND PLANETARY CHANGE 167:1-23

Authors’ abstract: *A compilation of foraminiferal stable isotope measurements from southern high latitude (SHL) deep-sea sites provides a novel perspective important for understanding Earth's paleotemperature and paleoceanographic changes across the rise and fall of the Cretaceous Hot Greenhouse climate and the subsequent Paleogene climatic optimum.*

Both new and previously published results are placed within an improved chronostratigraphic framework for southern South Atlantic and southern Indian Ocean sites. Sites studied were located between 58° and 65°S paleolatitude and were deposited at middle to upper bathyal paleodepths.

Oxygen isotope records suggest similar trends in both bottom and surface water temperatures in the southern sectors of the South Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean basins. Warm conditions were present throughout the Albian, extreme warmth existed during the Cretaceous Thermal Maximum (early-mid-Turonian) through late Santonian, and long-term cooling began in the Campanian and culminated in Cretaceous temperature minima during the Maastrichtian.

Gradients between surface and seafloor d18O and d13C values were unusually high throughout the 11.5 m.y. of extreme warmth during the Turonian-early Campanian, but these vertical gradients nearly disappeared by the early Maastrichtian.

It is likely that warm oceans surrounding and penetrating interior Antarctica (given higher relative sea level) prevented growth of Antarctic ice sheets at all but the highest elevations from the late Aptian through late Campanian. However, Maastrichtian temperatures may have been cool enough to allow growth of small, ephemeral ice sheets.

The standard explanation for the sustained warmth during Cretaceous Hot Greenhouse climate invokes higher atmospheric CO2 levels from volcanic outgassing, but correlation among temperature estimates, proxy estimates of pCO2, and intervals of high fluxes of both mafic and silicic volcanism are mostly poor. This comparison demonstrates that the relative timing between

events and their putative consequences need to be better constrained to test and more fully understand relationships among volcanism, pCO2, temperature ocean circulation, Earth's biota and the carbon cycle.

Speirs: During the Cretaceous, dinosaurs roamed the Arctic who never saw a glacier.

Schmidt, G.A., and A. Frank (2018) **The Silurian hypothesis: would it be possible to detect an industrial civilization in the geological record?** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 1-9:doi.org/10.1017/S1473550418000095

Authors’ abstract and extracts: *If an industrial civilization had existed on Earth many millions of years prior to our own era, what traces would it have left and would they be detectable today? We summarize the likely geological fingerprint of the Anthropocene, and demonstrate that while clear, it will not differ greatly in many respects from other known events in the geological record. We then propose tests that could plausibly distinguish an industrial cause from an otherwise naturally occurring climate event.*

One of the key questions in assessing the likelihood of finding such a civilization is an understanding of how often, given that life has arisen and that some species are intelligent, does an industrial civilization develop? Humans are the only example we know of, and our industrial civilization has lasted (so far) roughly 300 years (since, for example, the beginning of mass production methods).

This is a small fraction of the time we have existed as a species, and a tiny fraction of the time that complex life has existed on the Earth's land surface (~400 million years ago, Ma). This short time period raises the obvious question as to whether this could have happened before. We term this the ‘Silurian hypothesis’.

We name the hypothesis after a 1970 episode of the British science fiction TV series Doctor Who where a long-buried race of intelligent reptiles ‘Silurians’ are awakened by an experimental nuclear reactor. We are not however suggesting that intelligent reptiles actually existed in the Silurian age, nor that experimental nuclear physics is liable to wake them from hibernation.

Note that even for early human technology, complex objects are very rarely found. For instance, the Antikythera Mechanism (ca. 205 BCE) is a unique object until the Renaissance. Despite impressive recent gains in the ability to detect the wider impacts of civilization on landscapes and ecosystems, we conclude that for potential civilizations older than about 4 Ma, the chances of finding direct evidence of their existence via objects or fossilized examples of their population is small.

Speirs: This article is available as a free open-source pdf from www.cambridge.org/core. Well worth reading and highly recommended for science fiction writers.

González-Forero, M., and A. Gardner (2018) **Inference of ecological and social drivers of human brain-size evolution.** NATURE 557:554-557

Authors' abstract: *The human brain is unusually large. It has tripled in size from Australopithecines to modern humans and has become almost six times larger than expected for a placental mammal of human size. Brains incur high metabolic costs and accordingly a longstanding question is why the large human brain has evolved.*

The leading hypotheses propose benefits of improved cognition for overcoming ecological, social or cultural challenges. However, these hypotheses are typically assessed using correlative analyses, and establishing causes for brain-size evolution remains difficult.

Here we introduce a metabolic approach that enables causal assessment of social hypotheses for brain-size evolution. Our approach yields quantitative predictions for brain and body size from formalized social hypotheses given empirical estimates of the metabolic costs of the brain.

Our model predicts the evolution of adult Homo sapiens-sized brains and bodies when individuals face a combination of 60% ecological, 30% cooperative and 10% between-group competitive challenges, and suggests that between-individual competition has been unimportant for driving human brain-size evolution. Moreover, our model indicates that brain expansion in Homo was driven by ecological rather than social challenges, and was perhaps strongly promoted by culture.

Bauer, M., et al (2018) **Social contagion of ethnic hostility.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:4881-4886

[Roma are the European gypsies.]

Authors' abstract: *We provide experimental evidence on peer effects and show that behavior that harms members of a different ethnic group is twice as contagious as behavior that harms co-ethnics. The findings may help to explain why ethnic hostilities can spread quickly (even in societies with few visible signs of inter-ethnic hatred) and why many countries have adopted hate crime laws, and illustrate the need to study not only the existence of discrimination, but also the stability of attitudes and behaviors toward outgroup members.*

Inter-ethnic conflicts often escalate rapidly. Why does the behavior of masses easily change from cooperation to aggression? This paper provides an experimental test of whether ethnic hostility is contagious.

Using incentivized tasks, we measured willingness to sacrifice one's own resources to harm others among adolescents from a region with a history of animosities toward the Roma people, the largest ethnic minority in Europe. To identify the influence of peers, subjects made choices after observing either destructive or peaceful behavior of peers in the same task.

We found that susceptibility to follow destructive behavior more than doubled when harm was targeted against Roma rather than against co-ethnics. When peers were peaceful, subjects did not discriminate. We observed very similar patterns in a norms-elicitation experiment: destructive behavior toward Roma was not generally rated as more socially appropriate than when directed at co-ethnics, but the ratings were more sensitive to social contexts.

Sims, C.R. (2018) **Efficient coding explains the universal law of generalization in human perception.** SCIENCE 360:652-656

Author's abstract: *Deciding whether a novel object is another instance of something already known or an example of something different is an easily solved problem. Empirical mapping of human performance across a wide range of domains has established an exponential relationship between the generalization gradient and interstimuli distance.*

Perceptual generalization and discrimination are fundamental cognitive abilities. For example, if a bird eats a poisonous butterfly, it will learn to avoid preying on that species again by generalizing its past experience to new perceptual stimuli. In cognitive science, the “universal law of generalization” seeks to explain this ability and states that generalization between stimuli will follow an exponential function of their distance in psychological space.

Here, I challenge existing theoretical explanations for the universal law and offer an alternative account based on the principle of efficient coding. I show that the universal law emerges inevitably from any information processing system (whether biological or artificial) that minimizes the cost of perceptual error subject to constraints on the ability to process or transmit information.

Speirs: Animals have learned or instinctive responses to any given situation they have had previous experience of or the species has developed an instinctive response. For example, if you touch something hot, you will instinctively jerk back your hand to avoid burning it.

Learned responses are those taught or discovering from personal experience to avoid certain things or situations. Young black men learn from personal experience to be on guard when confronted by middle-aged white men wearing blue uniforms.

Each situation has a programmed response. The evolutionary advantage therefore, is that when confronted by a thing or situation, one does not have to waste time and calculate a response; one simply reacts with whatever response you learned or instinctively know.

Mutz, D.C. (2018) **Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:E4330-E4339

Author’s abstract: This study evaluates evidence pertaining to popular narratives explaining the American public’s support for Donald J. Trump in the 2016 presidential election. First, using unique representative probability samples of the American public, tracking the same individuals from 2012 to 2016, I examine the “left behind” thesis (that is, the theory that those who lost jobs or experienced stagnant wages due to the loss of manufacturing jobs punished the incumbent party for their economic misfortunes).

Second, I consider the possibility that status threat felt by the dwindling proportion of traditionally high-status Americans (i.e., whites, Christians, and men) as well as by those who perceive America’s global dominance as threatened combined to increase support for the candidate who emphasized reestablishing status hierarchies of the past.

Results do not support an interpretation of the election based on pocketbook economic concerns. Instead, the shorter relative distance of people’s own views from the Republican candidate on trade and China corresponded to greater mass support for Trump in 2016 relative to Mitt Romney in 2012. Candidate preferences in 2016 reflected increasing anxiety among high-status groups rather than complaints about past treatment among low-status groups. Both growing domestic racial diversity and globalization contributed to a sense that white Americans are under siege by these engines of change.

Sun, J., et al (2018) **Importing food damages domestic environment: Evidence from global soybean trade.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:5415-5419

Authors’ abstract: Protecting the environment and enhancing food security are among the world’s Sustainable Development Goals and greatest challenges. International food trade is an important mechanism to enhance food security worldwide. Nonetheless, it is widely concluded that in international food trade importing countries gain environmental benefits, while exporting countries suffer environmental problems by using land and other resources to produce food for exports.

Our study shows that international food trade can also lead to environmental pollution in importing countries. At the global level, our metaanalysis indicates that there was increased nitrogen (N) pollution after much farmland for domestically cultivated N-fixing soybeans in importing countries was converted to grow high N-demanding crops (wheat, corn, rice, and vegetables).

The findings were further verified by an intensive study at the regional level in China, the largest soybean-importing country, where the conversion of soybean lands to corn fields and rice paddies has also led to N pollution. Our study provides a sharp contrast to the conventional wisdom that only exports contribute substantially to environmental woes.

AROUND COWTOWN
photos by Dale Speirs

At right: Spring is when snowshoe hares change to brown. Seen in my neighbour's yard.

Below: Calgary firefighters on the Bow River downtown. We've had a late spring but a very warm and dry one. June is the height of the rainy season, which is when Calgarians are nervous, after the experience of the great flood on June 21, 2013, when we had 250 mm of rain in one day.

