

OPUNTIA 423



September 11, 2018

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.

ABOUT THE COVER: Fort Calgary Park in July. Maybe someone forgot to send the email about the meeting. I took this photo looking west across the park to the downtown core. Where the tent is, was once the fort. The pioneer hamlet that grew up to the west is now the downtown core.

WHEN SOMETIME LOFTY TOWERS I SEE: PART 4

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA #284, 343, and 369.]

I have a collection of covers and stamps related to the Twin Towers, which I illustrated in OPUNTIA #62. The collection has been exhibited at a couple of stamp shows, winning a vermeil medal (halfway between silver and gold). I keep an eye out for possible additions to the exhibit. Recently I saw a dealer auction listing a batch of Twin Tower covers and was the successful bidder. These are first day of issue for the stamps, to which the artist added cachets.

In philately, ‘cover’ means the combination of envelope, stamp, and postmark. A cachet was originally and still often is artwork on the left half of the cover, although during the past couple of decades the trend is for all-over artwork. When stamps are issued by a post office, there is usually a special postmark for the first day, although many collectors just go to their local branch and get the regular postmark. Modern first-day covers are inexpensive. I paid about \$4 for each of these covers.

These covers are dual first-day covers, with both the United We Stand stamp issued October 24, 2001, and the Heroes stamp on June 7, 2002.





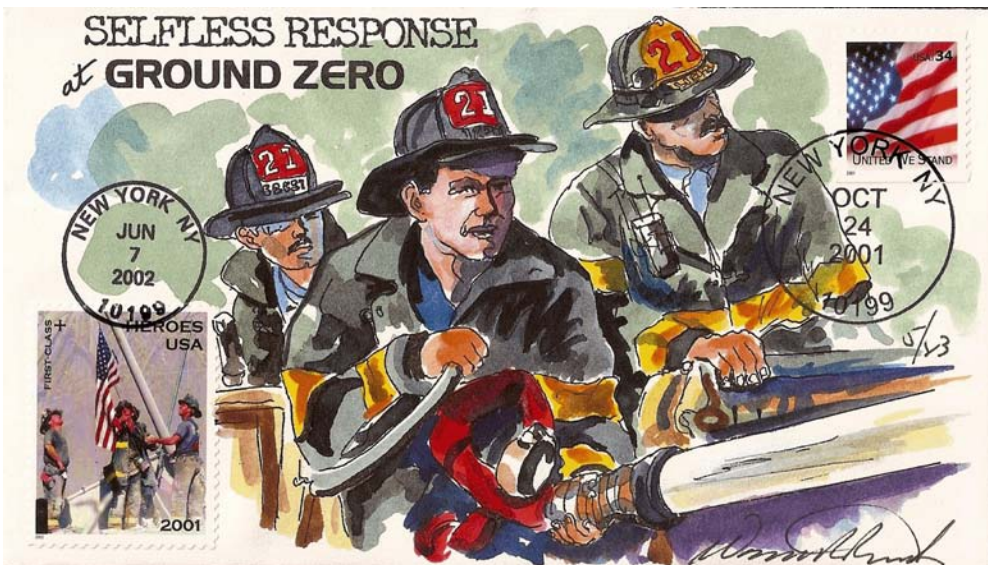
Fallen Towers.

GROUND ZERO (2009) by F. Paul Wilson is one of his Repairman Jack novels, a series which takes popular conspiracy theories and runs with them to the fullest extrapolation. This book assumes that the fall of the Twin Towers really was an implosion carried out by The Powers That Be under false flags, rather than a bunch of Arabs.

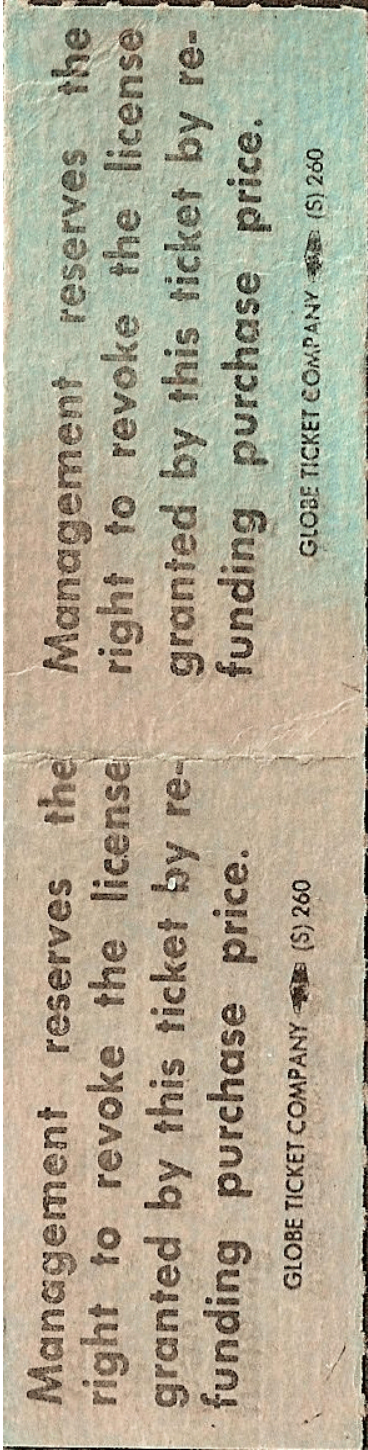
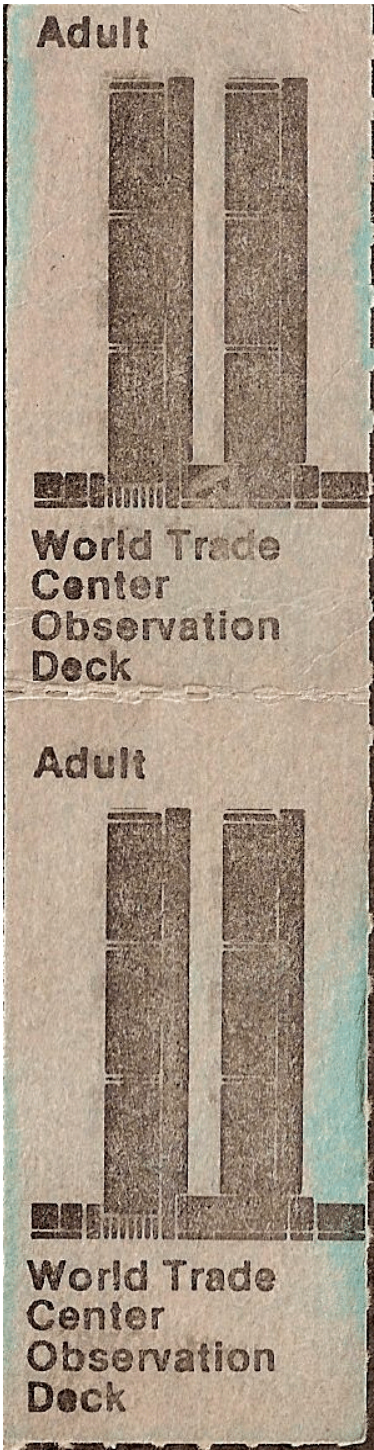
Repairman Jack becomes involved years after 9/11 when one of his childhood friends gets into trouble with mysterious agents because of her probing into the fallen towers. She has confirmed that there actually was such a conspiracy. The conspirators naturally want to silence her.

The investigation proceeds, and Repairman Jack discovers a millennia-old conspiracy, the Opus Omega, is behind the plot. The Twin Towers had been built on the nexus of three ley lines. The towers were there to help bring on their Judgement Day and the New World Order. An apostate interferes, collapsing the towers to cover up his plan.

The plot then tangles itself into the messiest ball of wool you ever saw. There are aliens with a master plan, interdimensional beings as the aliens' overlords, and their End Times, not ours but their version, coming soon. You may have to draw a chart to keep track of who is doing what to whom. To be continued in a future novel with a different conspiracy.



Front and reverse views of a pair of tickets to the observation deck of the Twin Towers. These were thrown in as part of a philatelic lot I bought.



Looking back to a different era, there is the late 1960s spy spoof GET SMART, a comedy series about a bumbling agent Maxwell Smart, who worked for an agency called CONTROL. The Season 2 episode “Smart Fit The Battle Of Jericho” (1967), written by Arne Sultan, was about fallen towers. Smart and his partner, the beautiful Agent 99, are assigned to find out why new skyscrapers are collapsing shortly after completion and occupation by security and space agencies.

Jericho Construction, owned by Frank Lloyd Joshua (subtlety was not common in this series), built all of them, but since the skyscrapers were blown down by explosives, no fault can be attributed to the builders or architects. CONTROL suspects Joshua is a KAOS agent. He is tracked to Las Vegas for a meeting with a German explosives manufacturer. Smart is sent to investigate, and bumbles his way through with his usual slapstick and physical comedy.

From there, Smart is sent to infiltrate a Jericho building site, posing as a riveter. He learns that the explosives are implanted into the building superstructure as it is constructed, then detonated later. Joshua recognizes Smart, and there is a fight on the high girders which Smart wins by a happenstance.

Could such an episode be filmed today after the fall of the Twin Towers? Well, only twenty years after World War Two ended, Hollywood managed to produce a television comedy series set in a Nazi prison camp, a series accepted by the general public. I suppose that a comedy episode about blowing down skyscrapers could be done today. It would have to be politically correct, but that is another debate for someone’s blog.

Resonance.

Structural engineers must take into account a phenomenon called resonance, which occurs when a bridge or skyscraper begins swaying in time with wind gusts, traffic motion, or earthquakes. If the sway becomes too large, the structure swings too far off its centre of gravity and topples. Even a lesser sway can topple it if the beams or cables supporting the structure are over-stressed and fail.

An early example is “Mad Music” by Anthony Pelcher (1930 February, ASTOUNDING). It opens snappily with the collapse of the 60-story Colossus Building, which suddenly falls into rubble onto the streets of Manhattan. Hundreds are dead.

The night watchman explains: *“I saw the floor heaving in waves. Glass was crashing and falling into the street. All windows in the arcade buckled, either in or out. I ran into the street and looked up. God, what a sight! The building from sidewalk to towers was rocking and waving and twisting and buckling and I saw it was bound to crumple, so I lit out and ran. I heard a roar like all Hell broke loose and then something nicked me and my light went out.”*

Great consternation at Muller Construction, which erected the skyscraper. If the collapse was their fault, they are ruined, and their engineers will be lucky to avoid a jail cell. One of their brilliant young engineers, Teddy Jenks, goes to work on the case.

Jenks notices that a violinist named Munsterbergen, who bills himself as the Mad Musician, was a tenant in the collapsed skyscraper. One of the musician’s favourite stunts was to shatter glass by hitting the correct notes on his violin. Faster than you can add two and two, Jenks realizes that Munsterbergen had something to do with using resonance to bring down the building, for what motive as yet unknown.

The violinist has disappeared, but Jenks tracks him to the 30-story Acme Building. He isn’t around, but with the aid of the building superintendent, Munsterbergen’s suite is searched. What they find is unsettling.

In an inner room they found a diabolical machine, a single string stretched across two bridges, one of brass and one of wood. A big horsehair bow attached to a shaft operated by a motor was automatically sawing across the string. The note resulting was evidently higher than the range of the human ear, because no audible sound resulted. It was later estimated that the destructive note was several octaves higher than the highest note on a piano.

The entire machine was enclosed in a heavy wire-net cage, securely bolted to the floor. Neither the string or bow could be reached. It was evidently the Mad Musician’s idea that the devilish contrivance should not be reached by hands other than his own.

How long the infernal machine had been operating no one knew, but the visitors were startled when the building suddenly began to sway perceptibly. Jenks jumped forward to stop the machine but could not find a switch.

“See if the machine plugs in anywhere in a wall socket!” he shouted to Linane, who promptly began examining the walls. Jenks shouted to the building manager to phone the police to clear the streets around the big building.

Just then Munsterbergen returns and gets into a fight to the death with Jenks. The machine is unplugged just in time, and Munsterbergen is killed in the fight. The main problem of this story is that no motive is given for the Mad Musician’s behaviour. Maybe the critics were hard on him, but that is hardly a reason to randomly destroy buildings by resonance.

TOWER DOWN (2017) by David Hagberg is a near-future action-adventure novel in a series about CIA agent Kirk McGarvey. The premise is that the Saudi Arabia government is faced with declining oil revenues but increasing costs defending against Islamic extremists. They want the Americans to foot a bigger part of the bill in the fight against ISIS, if not all of it.

The plan is to bring down a couple of skyscrapers in Manhattan, the type known as pencil towers. Flying aircraft into them would do damage but not drop them into the streets like the Twin Towers, because of the difference in construction. Instead, the idea is to destroy them using resonance.

Pencil towers are relatively new. They are skinny, sometimes only 15 metres wide, but extremely tall, 100 or more stories. They have counterweight systems near the top to prevent swaying in the wind. Otherwise they would sway so much in the wind that the occupants would suffer motion sickness and the swaying would actually be noticeable from a distance. Most skyscrapers do sway a few centimetres and many have counterweights, but pencil towers are far more susceptible because of their thinness.

The novel takes a while to get going, as all the characters, subplots, and back stories are introduced. The Saudis realize they can’t use aircraft, truck bombs, or explosives, so they sabotage the counterweight systems. The first attack on a pencil tower is a success. Their agent reprogrammed the computer-controlled system so that the counterweights worked in reverse, magnifying the resonance of the tower as the wind blew against it.

The building sways out of control, stressing the lower floor structure beyond the metal beam strength. The beams on the fourth floor crack, and the tower topples over onto Carnegie Hall.

McGarvey is on the case. As others clean up the physical mess, he deduces that a second pencil tower will be attacked. The Saudi government backs out of the planning for that attack after it realizes the unintended consequences from the first one. Others carry on though. McGarvey and his cohort begin the chase, visiting exotic destinations such as Cannes, and tracking billionaires who have rivers of cash and nowhere to put it.

The next target is a pencil tower overlooking the United Nations General Assembly building. A terrorist manages to jimmy the counterweights and begin the process of catastrophic failure. Computers or not, mechanical engineering is still needed for the counterweights. McGarvey does a bit of rough and ready engineering by shooting to pieces the electric motors that moved the counterweights. That stops them and saves the tower.

The epilogue is the mop-up operation. Since this is part of a series, some threads are deliberately left loose and a few new set-ups are arranged. Crisp action, and yet another reason not to live in Manhattan.

Fire.

Skyscrapers have concrete and steel skeletons, but they can burn as easily as wood frame houses, as the tragedy in 2017 in London, England, demonstrated. One might think that it would be difficult to do a humourous show about skyscraper fires, but the television series RADIO NEWS, which aired from 1995 to 1998, managed.

“Led Zeppelin II” was a 1996 episode from the second season, written by Drake Sather. (The titles were usually nonsensical, with no connection to the content of the episode.) The complete series is available on DVD, and is well recommended as an excellent situation comedy.

The series was about New York City radio station WNYX, located on the 14th floor of a Manhattan skyscraper. The News Director was Dave Nelson, who presided over a wacky cast of characters and wasn’t always a straight man himself, even though he was specifically identified on the show as a Canadian.

The episode begins with Dave announcing that new security cameras had been installed, which sets off staff electrician Joe Garelli, a paranoid UFO nut who believes just about every conspiracy theory going around. It then jumps away to subplot set-ups.

Dave and his ex-lover and co-worker Lisa Miller are squabbling about romantic matters. The station owner Jimmy James is searching for a wife and thinks he may have found Mrs Right. The staff are notified that there is a fire on the third floor of their building. They are to remain on the 14th floor as the firefighters don’t consider the fire a major blaze.

News reader Bill McNeil, a blowhard with delusions of grandeur, panics and refuses to accept any reassurances, shouting “*Suddenly the Fire Marshal is the big authority!*” McNeil decides to lead a party down the stairs, but is stymied by the smoke billowing up the staircase. While he runs about the office like a headless chicken, the rest of the staff are too wrapped up in their personal lives to worry about the fire.

Dave and Lisa are trying to reconcile by having sex in his office but are constantly interrupted by others. Joe comes in and confesses that he accidentally started the fire while trying to sabotage the new security cameras. Dave, anxious to get it on with Lisa, throws him out of the office without any disciplinary action. The boss barges in, worrying that his choice for wife may be the wrong one. Dave, unfortunately, can’t treat the boss like Joe, and has to suffer a bit more.

The fire recedes into the background as the characters fuss and fret about small matters. Just as Dave and Lisa are finally about to succeed with their lovemaking, the firefighters arrive and inform everyone that the fire is out. “*Well that’s just dandy!*”, snaps Dave, frustrated once again.

In the epilogue, the staff are sitting around a table discussing the fire. The building suddenly groans as the steel beams on the third floor cool off. Joe suggests that the pilings might have been damaged and the building could collapse at any minute. Dave and Lisa look at each other with wild surmise and dash into his office.

The Original Burj.

“Tower Of Babylon” by Ted Chiang (1990 November, OMNI) is about the ultimate burj. It begins with the Tower of Babylon finally touching the vault of heaven. It is not the same as the Tower of Babel, because that one is mentioned as having been an earlier unsuccessful effort. The protagonist is Hillaalum, one of a group of miners from Elam, hired to tunnel up into the vault and reach into Heaven on the other side.

The tower took centuries to build, and now its purpose is about to be fulfilled. It takes months to climb the tower. It has two ramps circling around the outside in opposite spirals, one for those going up and one for those going down. No draft animals are used because they would take up space and require feed to be hauled up as well. Everyone going up must help pull carts laden with food and supplies. The core of the tower has tunnels and chambers for shelter and rest. A continuous stream of carts and humans comes and goes.

The miners eventually pass the level of the sun, and now its light shines upward on them. Further on, they pass through the stars, small and bright objects zipping past the tower. Finally they reach the apex and prepare to cut into the vault of Heaven.

The tunneling methods described are ingenious. It takes decades to cut the tunnel, and mining communities grow up at the top of the tower. The tunnel is not straight up but a zigzag staircase, with chambers along the way for workers to rest or store tools. The tunnel breaks into a reservoir and many die in the flooding. Rain falls from the sky, so logically water must be stored above it.

Hillalum survives the flooding of the staircase by a slim margin. The downward way is blocked, so he climbs upward through the now-empty reservoir. He sees a bright light above, an exit. He finds himself in the desert near Babylon. The vault of Heaven and the bedrock are one and the same, twisted back on each other by an unknown geometry.

The story flows nicely. Chiang has the knack of explaining things without blatant infodumps or “As you know, Professor” lectures. Well recommended.

Fantasy Towers.

“The Tallest Doll In New York City” (2013) by Maria Dahvana Headley (reprinted in the anthology THE NEW VOICES OF FANTASY, edited by Peter S. Beagle and Jacob Weisman) takes place on February 14, 1938, the day the Chrysler Building goes for a walk.

She just shakes off the snow and pigeons, steps off the foundations, and moves down the street. The story is narrated by a waiter who works in a restaurant in the building. The staff are kept busy stifling any panic and dealing with customers suffering from motion sickness.

The destination is the Empire State Building, apparently masculine, where she convinces him to join her in a stroll to the East River, where they go paddling. Other skyscrapers come alive and begin celebrating Valentine Day, some more amorously than others. Manhattan is a sea of waltzing buildings. A delightful story.

Building Made Easy.

“Growing Skyscrapers” by Adam Marek is from the 2014 anthology BETA LIFE, edited by Martyn Amos and Ra Pace. It uses an idea, biobuildings that grow themselves, that has been around previously but carries it forward and considers follow-on concepts.

Not too far fetched. A skyscraper is basically a trellis with floors and a curtain wall. Many tall plants arrange themselves similarly even if not as visibly. It is not unbelievable that they could be bred to form skyscrapers, with a little help from recombinant genetic engineering.

That is usually as far as science fiction writers go, but Marek considers other problems. Weed buildings, for example, sown around an existing bioskyscraper such that eventually a forest of them grow up. A mutant that grows horizontally like mangroves, out into the ocean and becoming a giant jetty.

There are pest control problems. Human squatters occupying the rooms (empty cells) of a bioskyscraper. With such buildings will come insect pests. One does not want to live in a skyscraper that has bugs chewing away the insides of walls.



BELTLINE MURALS
photos by Dale Speirs

The Beltline district of inner-city Calgary is on the south side of the railroad tracks opposite the downtown core. Originally the warehouse district, it is now a mix of warehouses converted to luxury loft apartments and trendy restaurants, and condominium towers sprouting like weeds. The Beltline got its name from a streetcar loop that traveled its length and back again.

In September 2018, the Beltline community and merchant associations had artists painting a dozen or so permanent murals on blank building walls. It was partly an art project and partly for graffiti control. I meandered about with my trusty smartphone camera and photographed them. Herewith are a few.

Below: There’s a joke that it isn’t Canadian art unless there’s a wolf in it. This one is in the back alley at 802 - 11 Avenue SW.
At right: The artist was still working on this one at 7 Street SW and 11 Avenue.



The aboriginal woman is at 4 Street and 10 Avenue. The cowboy boots are at 1126 - 17 Avenue SW.



The bees are at 10 Avenue SW and 12 Street.



The flying cougar is at 14 Street SW and 11 Avenue.



SHERLOCKIANA: PART 29

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 28 appeared in OPUNTIA's #63.1B, 63.1C, 63.1D, 67.1D, 68.1C, 69.1E, 70.1A, 71.1B, 251, 253, 256, 261, 269, 270, 276, 288, 309, 333, 340, 348, 356, 359, 365, 370, 383, 397, 410, and 416.]

The original Sherlock Holmes stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle are known as the canon. Later stories written by other authors are called pastiches.

Pastiches: Anthologies.

GASLIGHT GOTHIC (2018) is an anthology edited by J.R. Campbell and Charles Prepolec. It is the fourth in a series, and I'll review two stories from it which stood out for me. A third story will be mentioned in my column "Edgar Galloping Poe". The previous volumes, GASLIGHT GRIMOIRE (2008), GASLIGHT GROTESQUE (2009), and GASLIGHT ARCANUM (2011), were mentioned previously in this zine, in issues #69.1E and the latter two in #270.

I bought GASLIGHT GOTHIC from the dealer bourse at When Words Collide 2018, which was written up in OPUNTIA #421. As detailed in that report, the Friday of that convention, August 10, was the culmination of a heat wave when the temperature hit 36.4°C, the all-time record for the hottest day ever recorded in Calgary since records were first kept in 1881.

I told you that so I could tell you this. The first story in the anthology is "The Cuckoo's Hour" by Mark A. Latham. The opening sentence of that story is "*It was a wretchedly hot day in August, the hottest of the year so far.*" Well, I thought it was synchronous. The heat actually does play a part in the pastiche.

The case is what first appears to be the standard plot of a young country woman distressed over an inheritance from her uncle. Holmes and Watson visit the estate, a manor house built 25 years ago by a pair of eccentric brothers, one of whom, the father of the young woman, vanished immediately after construction was completed.

Her uncle, who paid the cost of building, designed a house with an octagonal tower, secret passages galore, and an ingenious system of periscopes that allowed a hidden observer to see into many of the rooms unnoticed. The ground is littered with bronze statues made by the missing brother, all of figures from Greek mythology.

Holmes and Watson gradually uncover the strange history of the house and its bizarre technology. The family history was not a pleasant one. There is a haunting by a Green Man, whose secret is uncovered. He is real, but only a human with a terrible origin, the fault of the uncle.

The case is closed with only one detail left hanging, that one of the murders was committed by someone who weighed enough to crack the floorboards and had a giant stride. No one fit the description. Holmes notes that one of the bronze statues was of Talos, the automaton set by the gods to act as a guardian. In the hot August weather that England was experiencing then, bronze becomes slightly more malleable. Possibly enough to let the statue move its limbs and walk.

"The Strange Case Of Dr Sacker And Mr Hope" by James Lovegrove is a crossover with the Jekyll and Hyde story, a pastiche of both, yet running parallel to the original texts. Holmes is frustrated at the free reign the criminal element have in London. He meets up with Dr Jekyll, who has something that may help. It splits the great detective into two personalities, his logical self, and his emotional half Sherrinford Hope.

The latter name will be familiar with Sherlockians who know the history of how Doyle came to write the canon. Hope goes on a murderous spree, acting as judge and jury to destroy the criminal element without the fuss and bother of evidence gathering and court trials. Holmes's personality is suppressed.

Watson finds out but is overcome by Hope, who forces some of Jekyll's chemical into him, creating Dr Ormond Sacker. From there, the two angry men begin their mission to purify London.

These are two of the ten pastiches in this anthology, all using some degree of dark fantasy. The stories generally read well. Worth buying.

Adaptations: The Hound.

The most popular Holmes story is the novel THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES. It has many times been adapted for movies, television, and radio but seldom accurately so. I don't think I need to provide a plot summary, other than to mention that Holmes was missing from much of the novel while Watson did the investigating in Dartmoor, unusual for a canon story.

The old-time radio comedian Jack Benny did a parody of THOTB in a 1939 episode of his show. At the time he was sponsored by Jello, and as per standard practice of OTR, the commercials were worked into the dialogue of the show. The first half of Benny's show was general gags and set-ups, a song from the tenor, and an instrumental from the band. The second half was a parody of some recent movie or, more rarely, a book. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.otrrlibrary.org.)

In the introduction to Benny's parody of THOTB, it is specifically stated that it is a take-off of Darryl Zanuck's movie version of THOTB, recently released. Nothing is said of Doyle, and the ignorant listener (granted there were many of them) might assume that the story was a Zanuck creation.

Benny plays Holmes. Kenny Baker, a tenor crooner, was Watson. He sang a song in each episode and during the rest of the show joined in the comedy routines as the village idiot. Benny's wife Mary Livingstone (real name Sadie Marks and a cousin of the Marx Brothers) played Lady Barrow, the fiancée of Sir Philip Baskerville. (No sign of Henry.) Band leader Phil Harris played Sir Philip.

Andy Devine, a recurring character in the series under his own name, played the hound. He worked steadily in cowboy movies and kiddie shows, almost always as a sidekick. His distinguishing feature was his voice, difficult to describe in print but basically a high-pitched hoarse sound, very scratchy due to a childhood accident in which his vocal cords were torn.

His only part in the parody was to howl as the Hound. With his voice it came off as an asthmatic poodle, and always got a laugh from the audience. Benny had him test his voice several times before the parody began, but then forgot to use him in it. After the parody wraps up, an indignant Devine complains and Benny apologizes as the closing credits come up.

The story opens with Holmes and Watson in Baker Street, spouting a string of mild gags which get mild chuckles from the audience. Lady Barrow arrives and hires Holmes to investigate the murder of her would-have-been father-in-law Sir Hugo Baskerville. So it's heigh-ho and off to the moors and Baskerville Castle. In the original story, Sir Hugo lived two centuries prior, and his misdeeds in the 1600s brought down upon the Baskerville heirs the curse of the Hound. Sir Charles Baskerville was the one who died in the canon, and his heir Sir Henry was at risk.

Holmes and Watson are introduced to the residents of the castle. One of them is the family physician Dr Wilson, played by the show's announcer Don Wilson, who quickly works Jello into his lines. Holmes asks him if he could give any information about Sir Hugo. Wilson replies: *Yes, he was very fond of Jello*. Holmes tells Watson to make a note of it, who says: *Okay, commercial taken care of*. That gets the only big laugh from the audience.

For some reason a medium is present, so a seance is held. They contact the spirit of Sir Hugo but he keeps wandering off topic when asked who murdered him. Every time he gets to the exposure he begins talking in rapid fire doubletalk. Sir Philip suddenly breaks down from the tension and confesses before Sir Hugo names anyone or is likely to. On that note, the parody abruptly ends.

It wasn't one of the better efforts from Benny's stable of writers. Mostly hearty chuckles, with only a few outright laughs from the audience. Trying to condense a novel into a movie is bad enough, but jamming it into a 15-minute comedy sketch is nigh impossible.



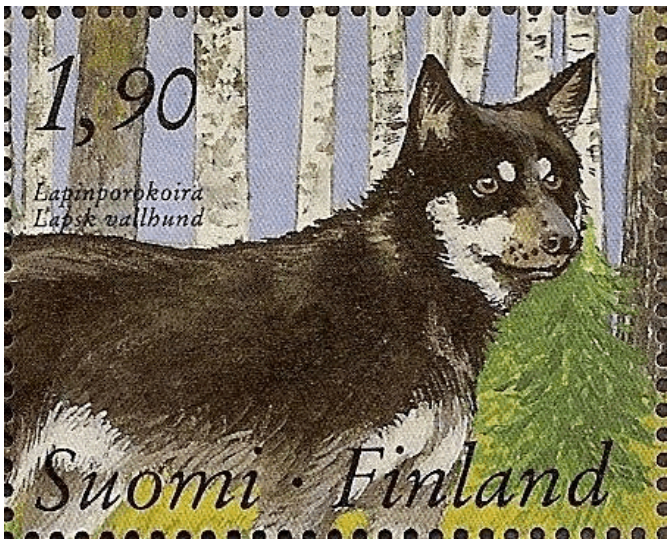
The British studio Hammer Films made a movie of THOTB in 1959. It was in colour, had some location shooting although not Dartmoor, and stayed reasonably close to the canon.

As per usual in movie studios, some changes were made for no apparent reason. Sir Henry arrives from South Africa instead of Canada. Stapleton has a daughter living with him, not a sister posing as his wife. She seems to have been added to provide a romantic interest for Sir Henry, and they couldn't fit her in anywhere else.

Watson was played by Andre Morell, who succeeded in overcoming the image that Nigel Bruce had created. In this movie, and indeed the original novel, Holmes is off stage for the first half, and Watson does a creditable job as a detective. Watson was never the blithering old fool as Bruce portrayed him, but all the other actors combined who played the role were never able to overcome that image.

The greatest difficulty in making a movie of the novel is that the Hound is given such a big buildup that its arrival is a letdown. This movie used a Great Dane with a rabbit-skin mask instead of phosphorescent jaws. It simply couldn't live up to its billing. It shows up in the last few minutes to attack Sir Henry in quick jump cuts so the audience couldn't see it clearly. After Holmes shoots it dead, there is a longer view of the corpse, a poorly stuffed Great Dane. Risible.

Save for the weak ending, the movie is reasonably good, especially for a Hammer production. Any modern movie version would have to use computer graphics to make a genuinely formidable Hound.



THOTB was done again in 2000 as a television movie with Matt Frewer as Holmes. He played Holmes quite distinctly as a rather fey man. He has a remarkable face, with square jaws and high cheekbones, making him look like an 8-bit CGI rendering of himself. Indeed, that is exactly what was done in the television series MAX HEADROOM, where he starred as a CGI rendering.

The movie was one of four Holmes stories filmed. After syndication on television, they were released as a boxed set of four DVDs from Anchor Bay Entertainment, titled "Sherlock Holmes Collection".

The movie was filmed in Québec. Old Montreal was used for the Victorian London scenes and looked reasonably authentic, but the Québec countryside cannot pass as a moor by any stretch of the imagination.

The film editing was susceptible to jerky fast-forwards so as to blur the scene and make it SFXish, which didn't work. On the whole though, the photography was excellent and portrayed both Victorian London and the country scenery in well-framed shots.

The movie stays closer to the canon than the Hammer film. Sir Henry, for one thing, is indeed just returned from the Canadian Rockies. As a parenthetical note, this means he must have passed through Calgary on the transcontinental railway en route to England.

The Hound is slightly more hellish than previous versions, although smaller than the canon. In lieu of phosphorescent jaws, the Hound had glowing red eyes, like every horror film you've ever seen where someone is possessed by a demon. Instead of being a giant hellhound, it looks a bit smaller than a German shepherd. Just a little smaller and it would be the beagle from Hell.

"The Hell-Hound Of The Baskervilles" (2017) by Gabriel S. Denning is from his collection of the same title, with stories about Warlock Holmes in a humorous pastiche series. The stories are written in what might be called music hall comedy style. Holmes is a sorcerer. Watson is actually the one who makes the deductions.

This version of the malicious doggie begins with Holmes and Watson receiving visitors at 221B. The first is John Mortimer and the second is Sir Henry Baskerville, just returned from the colonies. Sir Henry spent too much time in Canada, and Watson notes:

He wore a flannel shirt, dungarees, boots and braces; absolutely no single article of clothing fit for civilized company. The stumpy cigar he clenched in his teeth gave forth an aromatic bouquet, which declared that it was of a lordly quality and no small cost. This did little to dispel the impression that a wayward lumberjack had just been dumped upon my threshold and that I was expected to allow the filthy fellow into my house. "By God!" I cried, staggering back. "A Canadian!"

Laugh, I thought I'd die. But perhaps this is funnier to Canadian readers.

The story then jumps back to 1643 and the ugly tale of Sir Hugo Baskerville and what happened to him out on the wilds of Dartmoor. Since then, each heir to Baskerville Hall has died a bloody death at the jaws of the Hound. Now Sir Henry has just come into his patrimony. Needless to say, he is fearful of his chances of living long enough to collect a pension. He and Watson begin making deductions based on the evidence, miffing Holmes, who thinks it should be his show.

The case is in hand. Holmes notes that Baskerville Hall is at the intersection of five ley lines. Because of this, he doesn't want to go out to Dartmoor, since his powers would break the ley lines open and let slip the dogs of Hell. As in the original story, Watson goes off to Baskerville Hall by himself, while Holmes remains in London.

Other events transpire. Selden, the escaped Notting Hill murderer, is also out and about on the moors. The neighbours Jack Stapleton and his sister Beryl add to the plot, but not quite the way as in the canon. The story roughly follows the original but with funnier dialogue and a number of zigzags.

The Stapletons are not as they seem. Jack is actually Sir Hugo himself, who squeezed through a ley line and is now trying to restore himself with the energy of the five ley lines under Baskerville Hall.

Holmes shows up finally, but the magic radiating from the ley lines is turning him into a horned devil with cloven hoofs. Sir Hugo makes his grab for Baskerville Hall, resulting in many alarms and excursions. The end result is more favourable than the good side had hoped for or anticipated. A funny story, well written and worth reading.

Adaptations: The Engineer's Thumb.

The canon story of "The Engineer's Thumb" has been adapted for television and movies several times. In the original basic story, a mechanical engineer named Victor Hatherley comes to Watson for medical assistance. His thumb was amputated, and not in an industrial accident.

Hatherley had been hired for a contract job out in the country to repair an hydraulic press at a payment of 50 guineas. (A guinea is £1.05.) The owners supposedly were using it to process into bricks a substance known as fuller's earth, which is bentonite clay that decolourizes oils or other liquids without chemical reactions.

The owners were up to no good, and after the job was done tried to kill him by crushing him in the press. The villains had been using the press to produce counterfeit coins. The sides of the press were wooden and he managed to kick his way out. In the escape, he lost his thumb.

Watson takes Hatherley to Holmes and the investigation proceeds. They visit the country residence where it happened, whereupon assorted alarms and excursions occur. The counterfeiters torch the place and escape.

The earliest television adaptation I have is from a boxed DVD set of SHERLOCK HOLMES, the 1954-55 series by Sheldon Reynolds. He wrote, directed, and produced a series of new adventures, but was not shy about using the source material.

"The Case Of The Shoeless Engineer" was a 1955 episode, credited as an original story by Harold Jack Bloom. That took a lot of gall considering how close it was to Doyle's story. The names were the same or slightly changed, an example being the engineer, who lost the second 'h' in his name and was now Haterley.

Amputated thumbs being too gory for television back then, it was a shoe torn loose. He was also paid £50, not 50 guineas, which isn't much of a difference these days (which is why the guinea is obsolete) but did matter back before double-digit inflation. Professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers usually quoted their fees in guineas, as opposed to common tradesmen who quoted in pounds sterling. It was one of those class things the British had.

A romantic interest was introduced into the plot. When Haterley was trapped in the press, it was the heroine who bashed in the wooden side with an axe and pulled him out. It was a close call, and the press snagged one of his shoes just as he was pulled free. The rescue detracted from the story because instead of using his wits to kick his way out, it was a random event of his girlfriend showing up in the nick of time. A minute later and he would have been pulped.

On the big screen, the 1970 movie THE PRIVATE LIFE OF SHERLOCK HOLMES was a mashup of several stories, both pastiches and canon. The overall plot was about a German female spy using her wiles on Holmes to track down a submersible the British government was building on Loch Ness.

The actor who played Holmes had makeup better suited for the stage; the close-ups in the movie made him look like a poofter. This makes sense in a way because the writers and producers were Billy Wilder and Izzy Diamond, who were more used to Broadway than movie techniques.

The spy was masquerading as Gabrielle Vallodon, the wife of an engineer who had disappeared on a contract job supposedly near Inverness. She hired Holmes to find him, knowing, as he did not, that the engineer was working on the supersecret submersible. Eventually the trio, her, Holmes, and Watson, fetch up in Loch Ness where they find the body of the engineer. This time he didn't lose a thumb or a shoe, he lost his life.

The movie is quite humorous. For once, Watson is played as the younger man full of vitality as he was in the canon, especially in the opening segment where he dances with a bevy of Russian ballerinas at a cast party.



COZY MYSTERIES: PART 7
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 6 appeared in OPUNTIA's #361, 379, 395, 398, 400, and 420.]

Cozy mysteries have evolved into a standard format from their distant origin in the Miss Marple series. The book titles usually are puns. The main protagonist is an amateur sleuth who busily snoops about contaminating evidence, indirectly obstructing police, and getting into the line of fire from the murderer.

Cozy mysteries have developed a number of subgenres. There are several series involving cats, dogs, or birds. Food is popular, whether a restaurant or bakery. If there is a Website for a particular hobby or interest group, then there is probably a cozy mystery series for it.

Canine Delinquents.

The detective Philo Vance, created by novelist S.S. Van Dine, is forgotten these days but was a very popular series detective in the middle 1900s, in print, on radio, and in the movies. Van Dine was the pseudonym of Willard Huntington Wright, who had to use it because during World War One he was vilified for being a supporter of Germany. (See OPUNTIA #365, page 11, for a brief account of his life.)

To take an example of Philo Vance, I will mention THE KENNEL MURDER CASE, a 1933 movie adapted for screen by Robert N. Lee and Peter Milne. This movie is in the Mill Creek DVD pack of 50 Mystery Classics.

Vance lived among the upper crust of Long Island society. The movie opens at the annual show of the Long Island Kennel Club, where the competition is so vicious that someone kills a competitor's prize dog. That is the last we see of the Kennel Club, for thereafter the bodies are all human and in a manor house. There is a significant clue, however, that comes to the fore near the end of the movie. In the mansion, a Doberman dog is slugged with a poker by an intruder but survives.

Every character walking across the screen has some sort of motive or grudge. It isn't long before the human corpses begin appearing. Vance, a dilettante with plenty of time on his hands, barges into the police investigation. Things start with a locked room, an apparent suicide, and the police already writing up

the final report before the body has cooled off completely. That can't last, of course, otherwise the movie would have been a 15-minute short.

The police are annoyed by the Medical Examiner, who disputes their idea of suicide. He points out that the initial victim had first been slugged on the back of the head hard enough to fracture his skull, then stabbed in the back through the heart, and finally shot in the temple. As the parade of corpses increases, the Examiner is forced to continually return to the house. He is greatly irritated because the police keep calling him back just as he sits down to eat at home. After the third call, he says: *"I'd like to rent a room here."*

In keeping with the time-honoured traditions of murder mysteries, the most obvious suspect became the second victim. A plethora of clues clutter the case but do not point to anyone. Vance stages the most elaborate J'accuse! meeting ever seen. It includes detailed dollhouse-size models of the mansion and an adjacent building, with stacking floors that are lifted off to show the floor plan of each story of the buildings. Since the meeting was held hours after the first murder, the obvious question is who built them so fast and so accurately.

That meeting doesn't produce any results, since Vance only narrows the list of suspects down to seven. He knows how it was done but not who did it. That is resolved in the final scene when the Doberman dog is released into the room and goes after the man who had previously hit it with the poker.

Vance lived in a world of well-to-do people who were surviving the Great Depression very nicely. He provided escapism, but as the world changed, his society became tiresome to the general public and faded away.

Switching over to dog cozy novels, there is a series by Lauren Berenson, about dog breeder Melanie Travis and her husband Sam. She is a supermom with two sons, a job at the Howard Academy private school, and a half-dozen show poodles.

BEST IN SHOW (2003) opens with many infodumps about how a national dog show is operated, in this case a specialized event for poodles. Something that SF fans can relate to is that although dog fanciers are generally middle-class respectable people, the dog shows still have problems finding hotels that will take them, what with all the barking, carpet soiling, and odour problems they bring. The shows are held in arenas, but the competitors have to stay somewhere.

A wide variety of contestants and dog handlers are introduced, some of whom should have been put down years ago. Competition can be vicious, and sabotage is not unknown. Melanie is showing a Standard Poodle pup, but was also talked into volunteering for the Raffle Committee, going about selling tickets in between primping her dog for the show ring. This gives an excuse for her to be out and about meeting the other characters.

The Raffle Committee is run by two elderly sisters, Betty Jean and Edith Jean, who are eleven months apart in age but commonly mistaken for twins. One of them becomes a murder victim, but the astute reader will realize that there may have been a switch.

Most of the novel is taken up by cataloguing all the sins and evil behaviours of a crowd of suspects. As is too common in cozies, the real motive turns out to be something completely different, held back from the reader until the denouement. The complications of the plot are explained in the epilogue but are a bit of a cheat.

THE BARK BEFORE CHRISTMAS is a 2015 installment in the series. Melanie is talked into chairing the annual Christmas Bazaar fundraiser for the school. As one of her friends says: *"Right. Because that's what every mother wants before Christmas. More stuff to do."*

The novel begins with Melanie and Sam competing in a dog show, which gives the author a chance to insert some infodumps about the politics of judging dogs, undoubtedly based on her personal experience. If you thought Olympics figure skating judges were corrupt, they're novices compared to the dog show judges.

Like all qualitative competitions, the choice of a judge can doom a dog's chances before it even trots into the show ring. It matters in this novel because there is a new judge whose inconsistent results leave competitors muttering words like 'gun', 'hanging', and 'knife'.

That out of the way, Travis returns to mundane life and teaching, where school politics are just as bad as dog shows. The Christmas Bazaar takes two turns for the worse. A prize dog in the pets display goes missing. Santa Claus steps outside for a smoke and never comes back, murdered by a person unknown. The dog mystery takes up most of the novel since Santa was only hired for the day and was a stranger.

After much to-ing and fro-ing, Travis partially solves the dognapping and ties it into Santa’s murder. The merry old soul was paid to help snatch the dog from the Christmas Bazaar, then wound up dead in a double-cross. The murderer is sort of brought to justice. He is a wealthy man and while a trial will make him sweat, he may get off.

It may shock some readers to learn that justice and the court system are not synonymous. The novel is an average read, with an average Miss Marple.

DEATH IN SHOW (2010) by Judi McCoy is an installment in a cozy series about professional dog walker Ellie Engleman. It is set in New York City, a quiet town whose murder rate is nowhere near that of a rural Maine village. Her boyfriend Sam Ryder is an NYPD detective, whom she ‘assists’ on cases.

The plot begins at the Mid-Atlantic Canine Challenge, a preliminary to the famous Westminster dog show. Engleman is a guest of one of her clients, Flora Steinman, who has entered a furball called Lulu. In the show ring, the handler parading her before the judges suddenly collapses in mid-stride from poisoning. Ryder is called in, and is annoyed to find Engleman mixed up in it as usual.

While the police go about their investigation, Steinman hires Engleman as Lulu’s new handler, even before the body of the previous handler has cooled off. The show must go on, and the police know enough not to enrage several hundred dog lovers by closing it for investigation. Engleman has never worked as a show ring handler, but it is, after all, basically a fancy form of dog walking.

Lulu, and other dogs, talk to Engleman in italics, but only when no one else can eavesdrop. We had dogs back on the ranch, but all they ever said to me was ‘Woof!’. I guess they do things differently in Manhattan. The dog conversations, however, help fill in the back story.

The Medical Examiner eventually advises the toxicology report identifies the poison as batrachotoxin, found only in poison dart frogs from South America. You can’t buy it from a pharmacist, so that immediately shortens the list of suspects in a hurry. A rival handler and his wife are the only ones in the neighbourhood who both show dogs and raise dart frogs.

Engleman comes close to getting a teacup full of toxic tea but escapes in the nick of time. The original plan of the bad guys was to poison Lulu, but there was a mixup, so the couple had to tie off loose ends. They didn’t quite make it.

The novel is a steady read, although the part about the frogs is implausible for being just too convenient.



from ASTOUNDING, 1937 April

THE SCOTTIE BARKED AT MIDNIGHT (2015) by Kaitlyn Dunnett (pseudonym of Kathy Lynn Emerson) is a novel in a cozy series about Liss MacCrimmon. She runs a Scottish knickknacks shop in the remote village of Moosetookalook, Maine, the very place to set up such a specialized business. To be fair, the more recent novels in this series mention that the shop does a lot of Internet business, which would sustain it.

The story begins when MacCrimmon is out driving in a winter storm and almost runs over a Scottish terrier lost on the side of the road. She saves it and manages to find its owner, Deidre Amendole, of Deidre and Her Dancing Doggies, soon to be on a reality show. The dog had been stolen, but that pales in comparison to Deidre’s subsequent murder.

Deidre’s daughter Desdemona asks MacCrimmon to help, and soon she is ensnared not only in the murder investigation but also helping the dog act for the television show. The dognapping must have been done by a competitor on the show. Other dirty tricks are played between competitors, and the producer is not without sin himself.

MacCrimmon does her sleuthing, stirring up the mulm on the bottom of the aquarium tank, so to speak. The next murder attempt is of a television

cameraman who is pushed off a roof but survives the fall, albeit is in a coma. He was investigating how the show was produced, so it appears there are two separate murderers with different motives and targets, which serves to muddy the waters. Further excitement comes when MacCrimmon is kidnapped and taken to a remote location in the Maine forest.

The epilogue reveals the fix was in for the reality show (shock, horror) but most of the crimes were carried out by a competitor who really, really wanted to win. The explanation of who did what to whom and why takes up a full chapter. In the end, MacCrimmon and the Scotties trot off into the sunset at Moosetookalook, ready for the next round of murders.

Apiary Cozies.

As an example of how specialized sub-genres can be within cozies, there are several series about beekeeper sleuths. They have an honourable precedent, for if beekeeping was good enough for Sherlock Holmes, then it is good enough for Miss Marple.

BUZZ OFF (2010) by Hannah Reed (pseudonym of Deb Baker) is the first novel in a cozy series about Story Fischer of Moraine, Wisconsin. As the scene opens, she has just been through a rough divorce but is now learning beekeeping. She just harvested a good crop of honey in time for National Honey Month (September). Fischer operates a general store and her ex-husband lives two doors down the street (it is a village, after all). Her real name is Melissa but goes by Story because she liked to tell them when she was a girl.

Manny Chapman had taught her the basics of beekeeping and gave her two hives to be going on with. His wife Grace never liked the little critters. He exits the story when he is found fallen in his apiary, covered with honey and presumed stung to death by the bees crawling all over him. Problem is, there are no dead bees around him, and the live ones are just slurping up the honey. Bees die after stinging humans.

While waiting for the Medical Examiner’s report, the Chapman’s business Queen Bee Honey is afflicted by dirty tricks from Kenny’s Bees, whose proprietor is Kenneth Langley, of the white trash Langleys. Another body soon shows up, that of Fischer’s ex-husband’s girlfriend, who was wearing a coat borrowed from Fischer. The two women looked a bit like each other since their mutual man preferred their type.

Someone is feeding fake evidence to the Deppity Dawg that implicates Fischer, so she has to sleuth to protect herself. Other townsfolk want to get rid of the bees. The widow Chapman is dating Fischer’s ex-husband. Then the plot starts to become complicated.

It all ends in gunfire and attack dogs, but Fischer lives to see another novel, pardon me, another day. It was a scheme by a delivery man who wanted to take over both the Chapman and Langley apiaries. It ends well for Fischer though. She gets the Queen Bee Honey business from the widow, which will be prominent in future novels. From there to the recipes in the appendix, such as honey frozen custard, honey candy bites, and apple gingersnaps with honey.

MIND YOUR OWN BEESWAX (2011) is the second installment in the series. Fischer is busier than a, well, you know what, running both a grocery store and her newly acquired Queen Bee Honey apiary, plus courting a new boyfriend.

Elsewhere in the village of Moraine, a search is on for a missing woman named Lauren Kerrigan, who had a past. Fischer is involved in a different search, as one of her hives swarmed and flew off looking for a new home. The two searches intersect in nearby woods.

Fischer finds two bodies, the missing Kerrigan and a crotchety old woman named Hetty Cross, both within a stone’s throw of her missing swarm. The swarm had settled on a dead birch tree. The two women were murdered by gunshots.

The village Deppity Dawg tries to arrest Fischer on general principles, but his attention is diverted by county sheriffs claiming they have jurisdiction. Fischer recovers her bees, and the county wins the dispute, but that doesn’t calm matters.

With two businesses, her own investigation, and her nosy mother butting into her affairs, Fischer is a busy woman. The back story about Kerrigan’s murder goes back to teenaged days when a drinking party in the woods got out of hand. Kerrigan got behind the wheel drunk and ran over a man who was the Deppity Dawg’s father.

The past comes back to haunt a lot of villagers. There is a last-minute twist as to who did the shooting. Cross was an unfortunate bystander who saw Kerrigan’s murder and had to be silenced. From there, it’s back to Fischer’s

regular everyday hassles. Recipes in the back, starting with chocolate honey cake.

PLAN BEE (2012) takes place during Moraine’s annual Harmony Festival which to Fischer is anything but. Her dysfunctional family to begin with: a domineering mother, a cousin with addictions to just about everything, and a sister who married into money and now thinks she’s the queen bee.

Speaking of which, Fischer is staging a glassed-in beehive at the Festival as an educational exhibit, which her mother, on the Show Committee, opposes. Fischer also has a table in the bourse, selling honey and beeswax candles. Unfortunately she lost the Honey Queen crown to one of her enemies, a piece of white trash. Life in a village isn’t always as placid as it is made out to be.

The murder, and there is one, was a man whose body was found in a cemetery by Fischer. Nothing unusual about a body in a cemetery except this one hadn’t been buried and was carelessly left lying on the turf. When she returns with the police, the corpse has vanished. Not to worry, as it later reappears in someone else’s house, stuffed into the fireplace.

Most of this novel is taken up with people being nasty to each other, a little too much so. It left a sour taste that a full jar of honey couldn’t eradicate. Fischer runs about sleuthing in between looking after her bees and feuding with most of the village, including her own kin. She should move to Chicago or New York City where life is simpler and less stressful.

The dead man was part of a safe-cracking gang who planned on raiding a local homeowner who didn’t trust banks and was known to have lots of cash. That all ends with a bang, and not just figuratively. After the epilogue ties up all the loose threads with an infodump, then on to the recipes. The blueberry scones with honey glaze seems delicious, even if the book overall left a bad taste.



Another apicultural cozy series begins with A BEELINE TO MURDER (2015) by Meera Lester, the first novel about Abigail Mackenzie. She left her job as a police officer to take up a market garden and apiary near Las Flores, California. She is a licensed private investigator on the side and does occasional contract work. Each chapter in the book ends with a recipe or helpful tips on beekeeping. If you’ve ever thought of keeping a hive in your backyard, here is the info.

Mackenzie made a wholesale delivery of honey to a local pastry shop and found the chef dead. His brother hired her as an investigator after the Medical Examiner says it was suicide. There are a number of suspects, from the landlord to sharp-practice financiers. The chef didn’t choose his friends too carefully either.

At the chef’s funeral, Mackenzie views the dearly departed in his coffin and becomes very maudlin indeed: *“Chef Lean-Louis”, Abby whispered, leaning in. “Just so you know, I was on time for the last honey delivery.” Unexpectedly, a shiver shot up her spine. Abby tensed as she stared at the corpse. His features, once so expressive, seemed intensely somber now, as if holding a secret.*

She swallowed hard against the lump forming in her throat. “I hated finding you like that.” The back of her eyes burned as she stifled the cry building within. “I haven’t been able to tell the bees about your passing. I’ll have to tell them, although I guess I’m more of a bee whisperer than a talker.”

The epilogue needs a full chapter to sort out who was where when they did whatever they did. In the end, all is well. The final chapter closes out with a recipe for Old World honey cake. It has 17 ingredients, so I’ll skip it in my kitchen.

Amy Flowers is the protagonist of HONEY-BAKED HOMICIDE (2017) by Gayle Leeson. She operates the Down South Café in Winter Garden, Virginia. A local beekeeper, Stuart Landon, supplies her with wholesale honey in jars, kept next to the cash register to encourage impulse sales. The supply abruptly stops when she finds his body outside the café one morning.

Landon had been feuding with Chad Thomas, a neighbour farmer whose insecticide spray drift hit his hives badly. Landon had a past in Oklahoma and was living in Virginia under an assumed name. His employer was a pesticide

manufacturer named Callicorp, whose owner had been caught selling an unsafe insecticide and then lying about it.

Walter Jackson was sent up for eighteen years as a result of whistleblowing by Landon, but had done his time and then moved out to Winter Garden. Now he is protesting that it was all in the past and he held no grudge.

Flowers moves into sleuthing mode, with lots of Google searches. In Miss Marple's day, she had to go around the village and talk to people, or page through reference books and old newspapers in the library. Those days are gone, and no one misses them. Nonetheless, Flowers does get in some face-to-face conversations, although most of them are in her café or house.

One of the conversations becomes a melee when the killer arrives, but Flowers has a baseball bat. The motive turned out to be a farm feud, just not about the bees. From there to the recipes, none of which require honey.



SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Shih, J.Y., et al (2018) **Analysis of resonance effect for a railway track on a layered ground.** TRANSPORTATION GEOTECHNICS 16:51-62

Authors' abstract: *When a train runs on soft ground it can approach or even exceed the speed of surface waves in the ground. Under such conditions the amplitudes of the track response increase considerably. Moreover, a resonance-like phenomenon can occur in which a clear oscillation trail can be observed behind the moving axle loads.*

An investigation is presented of this resonance frequency and the critical speed effect for a track on a layered half-space subject to a moving load. Three different methods are used to investigate this resonance frequency: (i) the spectrum of the response to a moving load, (ii) analysis of the dispersion curves of the ground, and (iii) frequency analysis of the response to a stationary load. A parameter study is presented of a layered halfspace ground with different P-wave speeds, S-wave speeds, and depth of the upper layer.

The critical speeds are found in each case; in such a layered ground, the critical speed is greater than the Rayleigh wave speed of the soft upper layer due to the influence of the underlying half-space. The oscillating frequencies are shown to vary with the speed of the moving load, tending to reduce when the load speed increases. The P-wave speeds of both the upper layer and the underlying half-space are found to have negligible influence on the critical velocity and on the oscillating frequency; the S-wave speed of the half-space has only a small influence. Larger differences are found when the depth of the layer is varied.

Roffet-Salque, M., et al (2018) **Evidence for the impact of the 8.2-ky BP climate event on Near Eastern early farmers.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:8705-8709

Speirs: This paper refers to an abrupt climate change event that happened 8,200 years ago as the North American continental ice sheets were slowly melting away. A huge inland lake had formed in the middle of the continent, dammed by ice. When the ice gave way, a massive flood of cold fresh water roared out into the North Atlantic ocean, cooling the climate temporarily worldwide.

Authors' abstract: *The abrupt climatic event that occurred at ca. 8,200 y B.P. in the Early Holocene was triggered by the glacial drainage of fresh water into the North Atlantic and is recorded in multiple climatic archives across the globe.*

The 8.2-thousand years B.P. event is evident in multiple proxy records across the globe, showing generally dry and cold conditions for ca. 160 years. Environmental changes around the event are mainly detected using geochemical or palynological analyses of ice cores, lacustrine, marine, and other sediments often distant from human settlements.

The Late Neolithic excavated area of the archaeological site of Çatalhöyük East [Team Poznan (TP) area] was occupied for four centuries in the ninth and eighth millennia B.P., thus encompassing the 8.2-thousand years B.P. climatic event.

A Bayesian analysis of 56 radiocarbon dates yielded a high resolution chronological model comprising six building phases, with dates ranging from before 8325-8205 to 7925-7815 calibrated years (cal) B.P.

Here, we correlate an onsite paleoclimate record constructed from δH values of lipid biomarkers preserved in pottery vessels recovered from these buildings with changes in architectural, archaeozoological, and consumption records from well-documented archaeological contexts.

The overall sequence shows major changes in husbandry and consumption practices at ca. 8.2 thousand years B.P., synchronous with variations in the δH values of the animal fat residues. Changes in paleoclimate and archaeological records seem connected with the patterns of atmospheric precipitation during the occupation of the TP area predicted by climate modeling.

Our multiproxy approach uses records derived directly from documented archaeological contexts. Through this, we provide compelling evidence for the specific impacts of the 8.2-thousand years B.P. climatic event on the economic and domestic activities of pioneer Neolithic farmers, influencing decisions relating to settlement planning and food procurement strategies.

Daly, K.G., et al (2018) **Ancient goat genomes reveal mosaic domestication in the Fertile Crescent.** SCIENCE 361:85-88

Authors' abstract: *Multiple wild populations contributed to the origin of modern goats during the Neolithic. Over time, one mitochondrial type spread and became dominant worldwide.*

However, at the whole-genome level, modern goat populations are a mix of goats from different sources and provide evidence for a multilocus process of domestication in the Near East. Furthermore, the patterns described support the idea of multiple dispersal routes out of the Fertile Crescent region by domesticated animals and their human counterparts.

Current genetic data are equivocal as to whether goat domestication occurred multiple times or was a singular process. We generated genomic data from 83 ancient goats (51 with genome-wide coverage) from Paleolithic to Medieval contexts throughout the Near East.

Our findings demonstrate that multiple divergent ancient wild goat sources were domesticated in a dispersed process that resulted in genetically and geographically distinct Neolithic goat populations, echoing contemporaneous human divergence across the region.

These early goat populations contributed differently to modern goats in Asia, Africa, and Europe. We also detect early selection for pigmentation, stature, reproduction, milking, and response to dietary change, providing 8000-year-old evidence for human agency in molding genome variation within a partner species.

George, R.J., et al (2018) **Archaeogenomic evidence from the southwestern US points to a pre-Hispanic scarlet macaw breeding colony.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:8740-8745

Authors' abstract: *Hundreds of scarlet macaw (*Ara macao cyanoptera*) skeletons have been recovered from archaeological contexts in the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico (SW/NW). The location of these skeletons, >1,000 km outside their Neotropical endemic range, has suggested a far reaching pre-Hispanic acquisition network. Clear evidence for scarlet*

macaw breeding within this network is only known from the settlement of Paquimé in NW dating between 1250 and 1450 CE.

Although some scholars have speculated on the probable existence of earlier breeding centers in the SW/NW region, there has been no supporting evidence. In this study, we performed an ancient DNA analysis of scarlet macaws recovered from archaeological sites in Chaco Canyon and the contemporaneous Mimbres area of New Mexico.

All samples were directly radiocarbon dated between 900 and 1200 CE. We reconstructed complete or near-complete mitochondrial genome sequences of 14 scarlet macaws from five different sites. We observed remarkably low genetic diversity in this sample, consistent with breeding of a small founder population translocated outside their natural range.

Phylogeographic comparisons of our ancient DNA mitogenomes with mitochondrial sequences from macaws collected during the last 200 years from their endemic Neotropical range identified genetic affinity between the ancient macaws and a single rare haplogroup (Haplo6) observed only among wild macaws in Mexico and northern Guatemala.

Our results suggest that people at an undiscovered pre-Hispanic settlement dating between 900 and 1200 CE managed a macaw breeding colony outside their endemic range and distributed these symbolically important birds through the SW.

Hodgson, W.C., et al (2018) **Hohokam lost crop found: A new Agave (Agavaceae) species only known from large scale pre-Columbian agricultural fields in southern Arizona.** SYSTEMATIC BOTANY 43:734-740

Authors' abstract: For over thirty years archaeologists have provided evidence that southern Arizona pre-Columbian Native Americans, the Hohokam, extensively cultivated agave. However, no archeologists reported finding living agaves growing in the rock piled or gridded Hohokam fields, therefore researchers could only speculate about the species cultivated.

Our work expands upon a recent publication noting several agaves growing in prehistoric dry-farmed fields on terraces overlooking the San Pedro River.

These agaves have affinities to A. phillipsiana W. C. Hodgs. and A. palmeri Engelm. based on flower color but differ by their gray-green leaves with thick bases and conspicuous bud imprinting. They are extremely rare, reproduce asexually via rhizomatous offsets with no apparent fruit set, have relatively uniform intra- and inter-population morphology, grow only with archaeological features and are unknown from natural settings: all characteristics expected in a domesticated crop.

Here we describe Agave sanpedroensis, provide a key to distinguish it from other agaves in south-central Arizona and propose that it is a clonal, relictual crop grown from ca. A.D. 800-1450 by the Hohokam, and thus represents a 'lost crop' as sought by archaeologists.

The extensive size and wide distribution of Hohokam agave fields that transformed the landscape and are still visible today indicates the crop's importance in the Hohokam economy. The question of where and when this agave originated has implications for North American domestication centers.

Berger, Thor (2018) **Adopting a new technology: potatoes and population growth in the periphery.** ECONOMIC HISTORY REVIEW doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12743

Author's abstract: Sweden's population doubled in size between 1750 and 1850 despite a century of stagnating per capita incomes and real wages, which has led many historians to attribute the population explosion to the introduction of the potato. This article provides the first systematic evidence on the potato's contribution to Swedish living standards and population growth.

Potatoes at least doubled output per acre, and welfare ratios that account for potato consumption imply that they raised living standards significantly for labourers. Estimates that exploit regional mainly driven by relative increases in fertility and, consistent with Malthusian predictions, there was no long-run impact on per capita incomes.

According to these estimates, the introduction and spread of the potato can account for one-tenth of population growth between 1800 and 1850, thus suggesting that it was an important catalyst for the Swedish population explosion.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2018-09-03

OPUNTIA #418: Re: cover photo. There is a typical Stampede breakfast. I imagine you could fill up on pancakes and sausages and maple until you burst. Oh, well, whatever gets the tourists in.

[It isn't just the tourists. Since the free Stampede breakfasts are advertised in advance, experienced Calgarians can plan how to eat free for two weeks.]

As a steampunk vendor, I deal with a lot of people who stage the various events with as much tourist attraction as they can jam into it. Coincidentally, all the people I deal with are women, and they do a great job of staging the various events. We're happy to help out and publicize like crazy.

Re: Stampede parade: I certainly appreciate the Peruvian costumes. I am glad the Nigerian Association of Calgary felt enough of a part of things to produce their own float. That is a marvelous stagecoach on page 13.

The Weird West is a part of steampunk events, too. As you say, not an unnatural mix. There are some steampunk westerns, and the combination of familiar characters and unfamiliar settings can make for interesting reading.

Mike Resnick has written a series of Weird West Tale novels. The first is THE BUNTLIN SPECIAL, published in 2010, followed by THE DOCTOR AND THE KID in 2011. Those are the two I have, and I have uncorrected advance reading copies of each of those. They were followed by THE DOCTOR AND THE ROUGH RIDER in 2012, and THE DOCTOR AND THE DINOSAURS in 2013. All were originally published by Pyr Books.

My previous letter: After our success at Anime North, we had successful shows in Bradford, Mississauga, and Coldwater, Ontario. Next weekend, we will be vending at a festival in St. Jacobs, Ontario. The other shows for the rest of the year are all local and semi-local. 2019 may prove to be one of our busiest years.

We recently discovered that the head office of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada has moved to an office a short drive or bus ride away from me.

OPUNTIA #419: The Stampede continues. The Canadian National Exhibition wraps up today, and it usually has the newest and most ridiculous when it comes to food combinations. We haven't been to the Ex in more than 25 years or so, and I can't say I miss it. Looks like you got full value out of your SuperPass.

[The advantage the Stampede has is its direct link to the history of southern Alberta and the thematic nature of the event. Everyone in Calgary dresses western, even if they don't actually go to the parade or the grounds. The CNE doesn't have a theme.]

The local police have a paddock full of horses, and our mounted police are often seen on the street and at special events. We know enough to blow back when the horse blows breath at you (they are social animals), and they don't like being petted on the nose. What few horses we see, we get along fine with them.

[I grew up on a farm and we learned the basic rules as children. Never walk directly behind a horse or cow. Never get between a cow and her calf. Never run straight at an animal. If inside a small corral or pen, never get more than two seconds from the fence.]

OPUNTIA #420: Sometimes I think the seasons are shifting forward on the calendar, or perhaps they are just lengthening because of global warming/climate change. I remember cool Septembers in the past. Right now, as I type, it is 32°C and quite humid.

[As I type this on Labour Day, Calgary weather has reverted to cooler temperatures. We had a good run though. Checking my calendar, I last mowed my lawn on July 5. I never water it, and let the grass go into hibernation during the summer. My neighbours with irrigated lawns were out there mowing them once a week all summer. It's amazing how people create work for themselves.]

The Elbow River looks great, a place I am sure some have retired to.

[The mountain areas are provincial parks, so it isn't until just before the Elbow River reaches the floodplains outside city that there are any residential areas.]

We've just had our Fan eXpo here, so we had our share of amazing costumes. We haven't been there in close to 10 years, but friends on Facebook provide all kinds of photos to admire. For us, too busy, too crowded and as usual, too expensive.

[That's why I only go to our local readercon When Words Collide. \$45 for the weekend and well worth it. There is an entire generation of SF fans who think a convention is a mob scene costing \$300, plus a four-hour lineup for each panel.]

Vancouver and Calgary have community radio stations. I sure wish Toronto did. However, the airwaves here are just too valuable to give it away to a community station. I was a journalism student at Ryerson, and such, I guess they decided that even with my applications, I just wasn't good enough to get onto the local Ryerson radio station. Just as well; the university lost its license and station some years ago.

There's a ton of food trucks in Toronto, but because I don't work downtown, I never see them. I gather there is now a food truck festival somewhere and sometime in this city; I am sure either Google or Facebook could tell me when and where.

[There must be street or ethnic festivals in Etobicoke where they would congregate.]

OPUNTIA #421: As always, amazing mountain pictures.

Looks like When Words Collide was fun, but I guess I need more at my convention. I feel that I am encouraged to be a passive audience, and just another member of the buying public. I have looked into becoming an audiobook narrator, but few are willing to divulge any secrets.

[I wouldn't consider WWC audiences passive. I didn't mention all the workshops and meet-and-greets because I'm not trying to sell a novel to a publisher. The competition to be an audio book narrator is like all the wannabe actors who flock to Hollywood. You're fighting a massive crowd.]

DOWNTOWN COWTOWN

I took this photo earlier this year on the Stephen Avenue Mall in downtown Calgary. Since part of this issue is canine themed, I'll use it as a filler here. Just somebody's pet hanging out.

