

OPUNTIA 449



The Stampede midway was jammed solid, so Nik Wallenda took a short cut.

Stampede Rodeo 2019

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.

YAHOOING AROUND COWTOWN

photos by Dale Speirs

Each morning on my way to the Stampede grounds, which opened at 11h00, I went down the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall in the downtown core and had a half-dozen flapjacks, one at a time from the free pancake breakfasts that have been a tradition in Calgary for a century.

It is considered bad form to go back for seconds but perfectly acceptable to visit several different breakfasts in a row, which is what I do. These were all on the mall or the Olympic Plaza, the eastern terminus of the mall.



*Flapjack with
embedded bacon.
Bet you can't eat
just one!*



Having had my carbs for the morning, I meandered southeast to the Stampede grounds, which are a few blocks from City Hall. Beef, as you might expect, is king. Barbecue fandom is very serious, and all the concessions in BBQ Alley advertised their credentials and showed off their trophies on tables.

Top right: Beef brisket sandwich from Prairie Smoke & Spice. Delicious.
Lower right: Bison burger from the Ag Grill. Ditto.



But I didn't spend all my time stuffing my face. While digesting one meal and waiting for the next, I took in a few events. Seen here are the draft horse dressage show and the vintage tractor pull, both in the Nutrien Arena.

The Stampede grounds have two hockey arenas (Saddledome and Corral), three agricultural arenas (Nutrien, Northern Lights, and Victoria Pavilion), plus the chuckwagon racetrack and rodeo infield.





The Calgary Stampede hosted the Heavy Horse World Championship. The most spectacular event was the 6-horse hitch. The arena was filled, plus two rows of SRO.

Prior to the event, the waiting audience was kept amused by passing a Yahoo banner around the arena.

In the cutting horse competition, the rider has to take a cow out of a herd and keep it nearby for eight seconds before letting it rejoin the herd. Not as easy as it might seem, for cattle are intensely social animals and do not like to be kept apart from the others.



In the team penning competition, three riders have to cut out three numbered cattle at one end of the arena and move them into a pen at the other end while keeping all the others back at the start. The announcer calls out the number as the riders approach the herd. Not easy, although some did it in thirty seconds, while others had no time recorded because the wrong numbered animals got past them. Just before the competition began, the entire herd was routed around the arena and through the pen so that they understood where they were going.



I took the last shot from a different angle as you can see. I was late getting to the event and had to stand in the SRO marks, so I moved around for views.

And away they go!





The mini-chuckwagon races are always a crowd pleaser. The miniature horses, like their full-size counterparts, love to race.



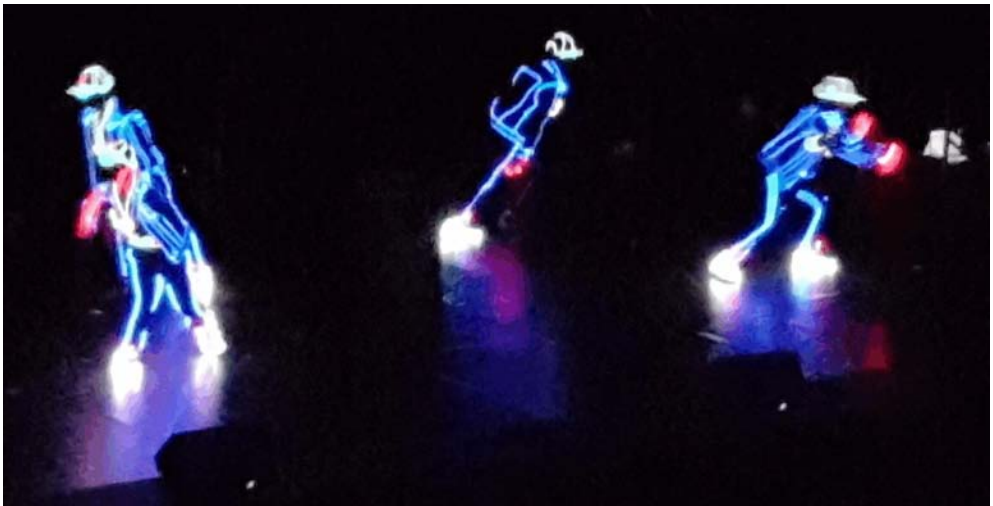
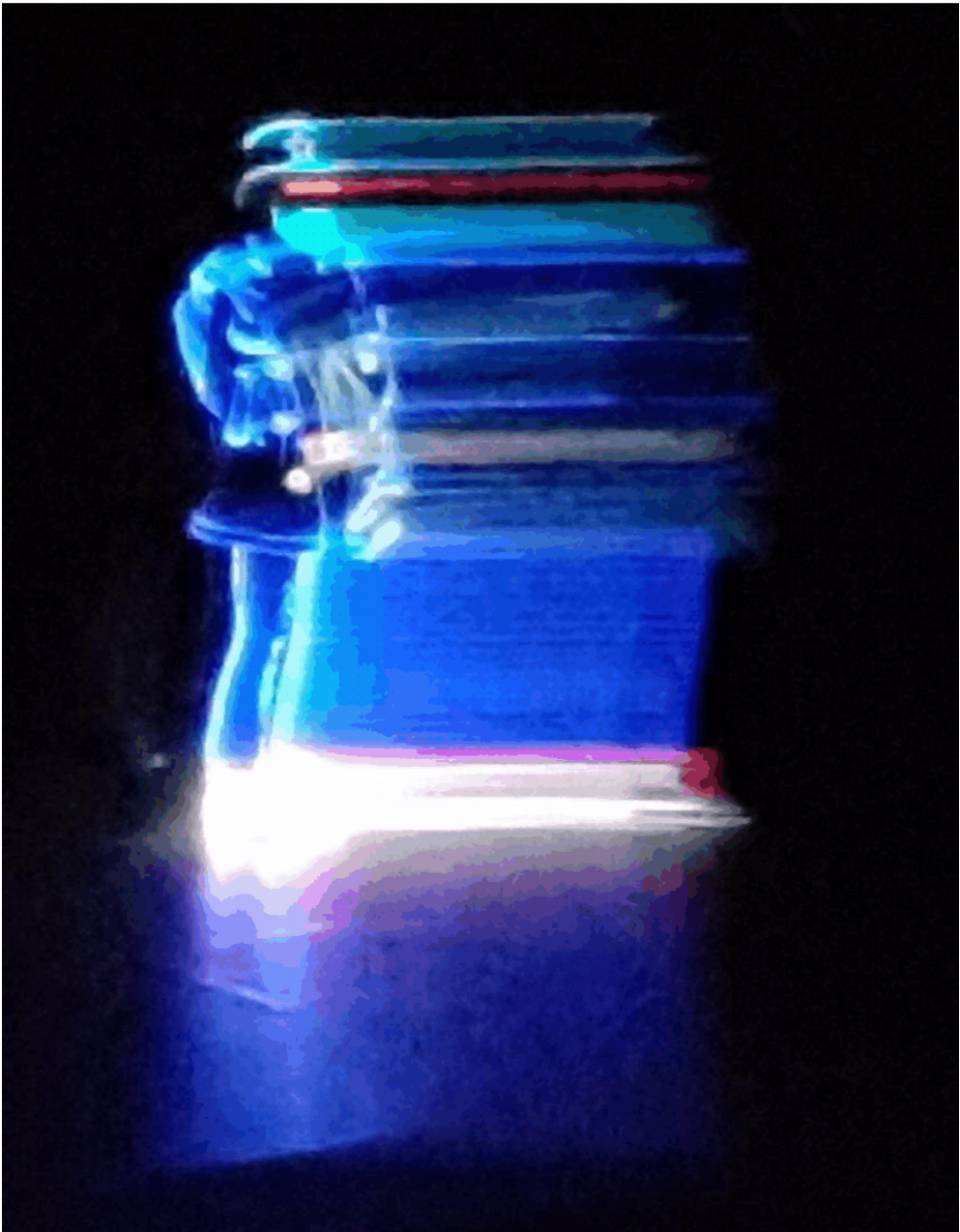
At left: The Window On The West stage is for up-and-coming country music groups. Not an amateur hour. These are semi-pros or will-be pros who were auditioned by the Stampede, and were paid as professionals.

I spend a lot of time here during Stampedes listening to music far beyond the yer-cheatin'-heart Nashville clichés. This group was Blend Vocal, who are eleven women singing in harmony or call-and-response. They are mostly farm wives in Alberta and do two concerts a year plus rodeos.

Below: About 20,000 of us packed the south side of the Saddledome arena to watch the Stampede Show Band. They have won the world championship for marching bands six times, including this year.



The Light Balance dance troupe from Ukraine was a fabulous show. On a pitch-black stage, the dancers wore LED suits that turned on and off as they moved, creating a stroboscopic effect. One of them stepped sideways just as the shutter clicked on my camera, giving a neat effect.



Later in the week they were succeeded by a German troupe of puppeteers called Dundu (pronounced “doo und doo”, or in English translation, “you and you”).



Nik Wallenda brought his family along, two younger members of which performed on sway poles. No safety lanyards and only solid asphalt below.

They did a mid-air transfer and changed poles.





At left: From a second-floor walkway looking southeast down the midway toward the Nutrien arena. Average daily attendance was about 130,000 paid.

Below: A different location on the walkway looking due south.
Bottom: Music was everywhere, including the lobby of the Nutrien arena.



Below: This mechanical bull was in BBQ Alley. I held the camera shutter down to get an action sequence. In the time it took to click the next photo, the woman was thrown.

At right: At last, someone who speaks my language.



COZY MYSTERIES: PART 10

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 9 appeared in OPUNTIA's #361, 379, 395, 398, 400, 420, 423, 443, and 445.]

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. If there is a Website for a particular hobby or interest group, then there is probably a cozy mystery series for it.

Shop Keeping: Antiques.

Barbara Allan is the pseudonym of husband and wife Barbara and Max Allan Collins. They write a cozy series about Brandy Borne and her mother Vivian, who have an antiques shop in the village of Serenity, Iowa. Life is anything but serene when the duo are involved. Vivian is on lithium and Brandy on Prozac.

The novels are annoyingly self-referential, mentioning previous novels in the series by name in a manner that broke the flow of the narrative. The narrator was mostly Brandy, but sometimes Vivian, which was jarring, especially when the reader was addressed directly.

The series is not a food cozy, but recipes were inserted into chapters whenever a particular food was mentioned. If it were once or twice, it might be parody, assuming cozies can be parodied, since, like television news readers, they are parodies of themselves.

ANTIQUES DISPOSAL (2012) began with mother and daughter as the successful bidders on an abandoned storage unit. They were tipped off by the owner of the storage company, Big Jim Bob McRoberts, who was an old boyfriend of Vivian.

Not owning a truck, they weren't able to empty the container on the first trip. They did find an old cornet on their first run. Coming back for the second trip, they found the container had been cleaned out. The thief left only one thing behind, the body of McRoberts.

Worse yet, after the police had dealt with them and the body, they returned home and discovered Brandy's sister Peggy Sue and their dog Sushi had both been severely beaten by a masked intruder. One was rushed to the veterinary clinic and the other to the hospital. A cornet had been stolen from the shop, but it wasn't the one from the storage unit, which Brandy had placed elsewhere.

The Borne family, a semi-dysfunctional group at best, began investigating. The local police had to deal with three Miss Marples, once Peggy Sue was out of the hospital. The back stories gradually came out. McRoberts had a shady past in the big city. In the present, he often tried to sell antiques with no proof of provenance, the euphemism the collectibles trade uses for stolen goods.

The renter of the storage unit who let it go into arrears may have been mixed up in something. There was also a rival antiques dealer, Waldo Hendricks, who had a personal collection of jazz instruments of uncertain provenance.

Mother and daughter staged a J'accuse! meeting in their house, which they specifically styled after Nero Wolfe. They rearranged the chairs in their living room to match Wolfe's office, and called together the suspects.

Reasoning logically, the murderer was the one who attacked both Peggy Sue and the dog Sushi. A masked man can hide his face but not his scent, so when Sushi was brought in, she attacked the one person she had no liking for.

The results proved more complicated than that though. There had been several thieves working at cross purposes. Subsequent investigation produced a lot of finger pointing, which made the job of the police easier. The epilogue was messily written.

ANTIQUES FATE (2016) moved the venue to the neighbouring village of Old York, perhaps to avoid depopulating Serenity completely. Vivian and Brandy were attending Old York's annual fete. Someone mentioned cheesecake on page 4, so the narrative stopped for a cheesecake recipe and why it should never be made with low-fat alternatives.

Vivian was to give a one-woman interpretation of Shakespeare's play MACBETH, doing all the parts by changing hats for each character. As Lady MacBeth she would be typecast, but the audience rightfully interpreted the rest as comedy.

Vivian, Brandy, and dog Sushi were staying at the Horse and Groom Inn, known to the locals as the Rotten Rooms and Gin, an Iowa version of Fawlty Towers. Off they went to the theatre where Vivian was to perform.

The owner Millicent Marlowe collapsed dead on the stage while showing Vivian around. Old York would soon learn what happens when the Borne came to town. Marlowe was an elderly woman on medications. Her death may have been a heart attack or an overdose of prescription pills.

The village of Old York was divided into two factions. The progressive group who wanted new real estate developments were stymied by the old guard, led by Marlowe. She had been a wealthy dowager, whose money generally overruled democracy.

Notwithstanding that, the play and the recipes went on. After a pause for Mother's Shepherd Pie, the Bournes did some sleuthing and also took in the fete. The tombola had more than the usual excitement when another old guard member fell dead to the ground. The sheriff found it difficult to believe that two deaths in a row from the same group was coincidence.

The third murder was a stagehand pushed off scaffolding as the Borne effect took hold of Old York. The fourth victim was Marlowe's son Chad, stabbed to death backstage. The two Borne women got themselves trapped with the killer but escaped when her gun misfired.

The rest was wrapping up all the details. The main motivation of those involved was the struggle between the progressives and the old guard, a struggle that some committee members decided to resolve with murder. Fortunately for Old York, the Borne returned to Serenity.

ANTIQUES WANTED (2018) resumed the bloodshed in Serenity. Vivian had decided to turn professional and run for county sheriff, on the grounds that she had solved enough murders to qualify for the job. Brandy was roped in as the campaign manager. Vivian was hoping for the seniors vote. She got most of the signatures for her nomination papers from the Alzheimer Unit at the local nursing home.

The competition was Deputy Daryl Dugan. His Aunt Harriet gave Vivian a gift, a signed photo of cowboy actor Gabby Hayes. It originally belonged in Dugan's collection of Western memorabilia, so Vivian was sworn to secrecy. A short

time later, Brandy visited Harriet's apartment on a small errand. As she knocked on the door, a bomb went off inside, killing Harriet and putting Brandy in hospital.

The sleuthing of the two women was hampered by the need to continue campaigning, plus running their store. There was time, however, to pause for a recipe in Chapter 4 (tortes). Some back stories were filled in, such as the murder several years prior of a Western memorabilia collector in Chicago, and the method of proving provenance by handwritten letters of authenticity.

The nursing home had a higher than average rate of deaths because someone was using it to test new drugs on behalf of a pharmaceuticals company. Various alarms and excursions came and went. The body count climbed, including Dugan, whose sins caught up with him, not to mention an angry wife. The ending was muddled, and segued into a recipe for chocolate babka.

X MARKS THE SCOT (2017) by Kaitlyn Dunnett (pseudonym of Kathy Lynn Emerson) is a novel in a long-running series about Liss MacCrimmon, proprietor of a Highland knickknacks shop in the village of Moosetookalook, Maine.

Like Jessica Fletcher, the spike in homicides forced MacCrimmon to go traveling and thus spread the murders out over several jurisdictions. Otherwise the village would be depopulated.

This time around it was a village in Nova Scotia that suffered. The novel began in Moosetookalook when MacCrimmon bought a painting of a bagpiper at an estate sale of the Chadwick family mansion. "*She was now the proud owner of an authentic copy of a truly ghastly portrait of an eighteenth-century bagpiper.*"

Hidden behind the canvas was a treasure map. One of the early Chadwicks was a smuggler who brought in contraband from Canada. MacCrimmon headed north to research the genealogy in the village of Chadwick, Nova Scotia, whence came the Maine branch of the family.

Her first stop was to see a genealogist who unfortunately now had a death date for his entry in the family tree. The RCMP interrogated her and then let her go. She was surprised they weren't in scarlet serge, and looked like ordinary police officers. (Scarlet is dress uniform. On regular duty, the Mounties look like any other police force.)

Upon her return home, MacCrimmon began deciphering the map, with assorted adventures along the way. One of those adventures was with a pharmaceuticals company searching for its own lost treasure. A formula for a miracle cure had been taken by a scientist and might have been hidden in Moosetookalook.

The two plot lines came together in a remote section of the woods where MacCrimmon went to meet the culprit. How that woman ever survived this long is something that will puzzle the reader. Notwithstanding that, with a single bound MacCrimmon was free. An actual bound, for she knew Highland dancing and how to do a real drop kick. As my own Lowland Scots ancestors would have said, “Dinna fash yersel”.

Shop Keeping: General Stores.

BETWEEN A BOOK AND A HARD PLACE (2016) by Denise Swanson is set in Shadow Bend, Missouri, where Devereaux Sinclair operated a dime store. The business was struggling but nonetheless she had plenty of time for amateur sleuthing. In other cozies, the local Miss Marple goes about uncovering other people’s disreputable pasts. In this series, few could beat the Sinclair family when it came to white trash soap opera.

The village library closed years ago due to budget problems. A financial angel had come forth to re-open the library. He was Jeff Benedict, the latest husband of Yvette, Sinclair’s mother. Yvette had abandoned Sinclair when she was 16, her father had done hard time in prison, and Sinclair’s potential mother-in-law Nadine Underwood hated her dating her son Noah.

Nadine was in her declining years and was more concerned about space aliens invading Shadow Bend. Sinclair was also dating Jake Del Vecchio, an ex-U.S. Marshal, whose ex-wife was insane. Sinclair hated her mother, but when Benedict was murdered, she had to do some investigating. Her paroled father was a suspect. I told you they were white trash.

The UFOnuts took an interest in Nadine’s blogging, egged on by a ‘Professor’ declaring that the aliens were intent on possessing the minds of Shadow Bend teenagers. He was a partner of Benedict. Both were hunting treasure, distracting the village folk with UFO stories so they could search for hidden gold in the guise of alien hunting.

There really were gold bars from the Civil War, found by Sinclair after she had the usual held-at-gunpoint meeting with the murderer. That wrapped up the novel. All the lunatics and white trash were left to roam freely, to make further appearances later in the series.

LIONS AND TIGERS AND MURDERS, OH MY (2017) carried on the saga of Shadow Bend. Jake Del Vecchio was now a licenced private investigator, renting office space on the second floor of Sinclair’s dime store.

That naturally dragged her into his first case. He was hired by Elliot Winston, who wanted to develop a wildlife park with his fortune. His wife Gabriella disagreed and then disappeared, setting the plot in motion.

More important to Sinclair was trying to decide between Del Vecchio and Noah Underwood in her romantic life. Gabriella was eventually recovered from her kidnappers. A body was found but not hers. Then another body. The kidnapping had been faked. Gabriella used it to get her husband’s money.

She tried to weasel her way out but failed the police interrogation and then broke down and blabbed all. Sinclair having solved the crime, then made her choice of boyfriend. Not a surprise, for that had been telegraphed about halfway through the novel.

Shop Keeping: Specialized Stores

In the past I’ve grumbled about the implausible economics of cozies, whereby Miss Marples open specialized shops in rural villages that wouldn’t last a month in the big city. The worst of these was a series about a typewriter repair shop in a Utah ski resort. It now yields to Emmy Adler of Rock Point, Oregon, who opened a kite shop. The first novel about her was BLOWN AWAY (2017) by Clover Tate.

The book began on the grand opening day of the kite store, called Strings Attached. Getting to the Marpleing immediately, that same day the body of local chef Miles Logan was found on the beach by you-know-who. He was the ex-boyfriend of a woman whose grandfather operated Sullivan’s Kites, two blocks from Strings Attached.

Apparently there was enough kite business to keep two stores going. Adler did steady business selling designer kites, just what every villager needed. It must

be different in Oregon. I grew up in rural west-central Alberta without the benefit of designer kites.

She did get in her sleuthing. Logan had been mixed up with a tangled land deal, enough that the killer figured the easiest way to cut the Gordian knot was to cut Logan.

The final confrontation was unique though. Adler saved her life by dropping a large kite on the murderer, who got tangled up in the fabric long enough for her to escape. Beats having to heave a typewriter at the killer.

Miscellaneous Cozies.

MUCH ADO ABOUT MUFFIN (2016) by Victoria Hamilton (pseudonym of Donna Lea Simpson) is part of a supposed food cozy series about Merry Wynter, of Autumn Vale, upstate New York. I write ‘supposed’ because the food interest was tangential at best. Wynter had inherited a manor house called Wynter Castle. It was partially a bed-and-breakfast and partially cluttered up with guests, wanted or unwanted, such as opera singer Roma Toscano.

The diva had botched up badly in New York City when her voice suddenly went during a performance. The result was that she now suffered from permanent stage fright. Her agent, and a friend of Wynter, decided to help her regain her confidence by performing with the Autumn Vale Community Players.

Wynter had long been feuding with the village postmistress Minnie Urquhart. Toscano joined the feud upon arrival in Autumn Vale. Someone stuck a letter opener into Urquhart, and the chase was on. Wynter discovered the body but the clues keep pointing to Toscano. Lots of soap opera plots. The cast of characters tended to gather at the local bakery to discuss events. Not for muffins, strangely, but for madeleines and other pastries.

The final section of the novel reveals that Urquhart’s granddaughter was a drug addict constantly hitting up Granny for money. She was also Urquhart’s only heir, so when the old biddie announced she was going to change her will, that was the trigger for the murder.

Special note for rich folk: If you’re going to cut someone out of your will, don’t tell them until after you’ve signed the new documents. And so to the recipes at the back of the book, starting off with apple crisp muffins.

MUFFIN TO FEAR (2017) opened with Merry Wynter having just married a local lawman. While they were honeymooning, her house sitter opened up Wynter Castle to a paranormal television show called HAUNT HUNT. They were a squabbling bunch, accompanied by psychics who claimed they had been in contact with the ghosts of people murdered on the property. Since Wynter was constantly tripping over bodies, they might not be far wrong.

The show was phony as all get out. Wynter had trouble controlling her temper as they fabricated hauntings and ignored the actual history of the mansion. The first murder was the star of the show, a legend in his own mind. That investigation took up half the novel. The second murder victim was one of the crew who broke up with his wife and then shot himself in the head.

Wynter’s first thought was to be glad she wasn’t the one who found the body. Eventually the culprit was exposed, a production staffer who felt he was going nowhere, and resented others for assorted reasons out of soap operas.

The greatest mystery was about the title and series name of this novel. If muffins were mentioned in the text, I missed it. There are a couple of muffin recipes at the back of the book, but other than that, any link with food cozies isn’t just tenuous, it evaporated completely.

THE OTHER INVISIBLE MEN: PART 4
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA’s #262, 360, and 379.]

Although the H.G. Wells story became the definitive version of the invisible man, many others had written such plots before him. The general consensus of writers was that anyone who could make himself invisible would soon begin to feel like a god and become corrupted to the point of insanity.

Invisible Men On The Page.

Numerous issues of pulp magazines are being scanned and made available as free downloads at www.archive.org or www.gutenberg.org. Well worth browsing.

“My Invisible Friend” by Katharine Kip (1897 February, THE BLACK CAT) was published four months before H.G. Wells’s better known story. In Kip’s story, the narrator was living in a large boarding house, one of whose occupants was William Elliott, resident mad scientist. He was working on an invisibility formula and succeeded.

The other residents began to make wild surmises as strange events occurred. Those surmises developed into fear, multiplied in intensity by the lack of certainty.

It came to a bad end. The power of invisibility brought with it delusions of godhood and detachment from law and order. If one is invisible, one can commit all sorts of crimes with impunity. What finally brought Elliott down was a heart attack.

From the 1929 May issue of AMAZING STORIES is “The Invisible Finite” by Robert A. Wait. The mad scientist in question had a superscience machine designed to make things invisible. Something went wrong and he was made invisible, then became a ghostly spirit gradually dissipating into another dimension.

The plot was about three pages worth, but was padded out with several more pages of handwaving about how atoms vibrated, colours were generated by electrons, and so forth. Rather blatant padding of the word count. Some of the superscience was possible but most of it wasn’t credible even back then when quantum physics was still being born and anything was possible.

“The Invisible Man Murder Case” by Henry Slesar (1958 May, FANTASTIC) was narrated by Jeff Oswald, a mystery author who was active in the Mystery Authors Association. He was a young man on his way up who crossed paths with Kirk Evander, a big name on his way down, whose style of locked room mysteries had become obsolete. Wharton Publishing had just signed the former to a contract and dropped the latter due to declining sales.

Not long after, publishing staff and those associated with them began dying in locked rooms for real. Then Evander was decapitated. Oswald went snooping and talked to the brother Dr Borg Evander, a mad scientist of private means. Among his other inventions was sulfaborgonium, a cream which made anything coated with it invisible. It had one side effect, that of a pungent odour.

That made the rest of the plot rather obvious. Kirk having stolen a supply from his brother, he had faked his death and set out for revenge. Some of his victims he tormented first by teasing them, such as ripping the clothes off a female author. Fratricide was next, killing his brother, who was the only person who knew how to make sulfaborgonium.

How do you catch an invisible man? The police arranged for a fake testimonial dinner to be held in Kirk Evander’s memory, along with a literary prize in his name. Once the banquet began, they sealed the room, not just figuratively. All those attending were undercover police.

When the ceremonies began, everyone stopped and reached under their tables for respirator masks. Poison gas was then pumped into the room. The plan worked. As surmised, Kirk couldn’t resist attending the banquet as an invisible man. That didn’t protect him from the gas.

“To See The Invisible Man” by Robert Silverberg (1963 April, WORLD OF TOMORROW) took place in the year 2104. The narrator was convicted of a crime and sentenced to one year of invisibility. Not actual transparency but rather a mark branded on his forehead. Citizens were indoctrinated to ignore branded criminals as if they weren’t there. Invisibles could not get service in a store, no one would speak to them, and they were shunned as if they had the plague.

There were some benefits. Invisibles could steal from stores. However, if the shopkeeper had a gun and fired at such thieves, he was not charged because he could claim he didn’t see anything. The narrator was taken seriously ill but could not get a doctor to treat him.

He was intensely lonely because no one would speak to him or acknowledge his existence. After finishing his year of invisibility, the brand was removed and the narrator returned to the visible world. An interesting study of social relationships.

Invisible Men On The Air.

“The Man Without A Body” is a 1943 episode of the old-time radio series SUSPENSE, based on a story by John Dickson Carr. (This and hundreds of other OTR shows are available as free mp3s at www.otrrlibrary.org) The opening narration immediately disclaimed any resemblance to H.G. Wells’s famous story. It was set in an English seaside village. Mention was made that the seawall had an air raid shelter built against it, so it was World War Two.

The village was being terrorized, as such villages often were, by a menace apparently created by an American mad scientist who was renting a house nearby. An invisible man was galumphing about the countryside footpaths, but the London folk didn’t believe it. The curate who reported it had one pint of ale too many, they said.

There was, nevertheless, trouble afoot. The villagers muttered about importing the American custom of lynching, and a sharp-practice man said it was a secret military project to do with camouflage. The mob gathered at the Professor’s house for what turned out to be an interminable J’accuse! mass meeting, where most of the alarums were explained away as stage magic tricks.

There was a sudden sideways yank in the plot when the Professor was revealed to be a German spy, masquerading as an American scientist. Not very plausible. This was a problem in most of Carr’s stories.

“I Thought I Saw A Shadow” is a 1976 episode of CBS RADIO MYSTERY THEATER, written by Bob Juhren. (This series is available as free mp3s from www.cbsrmt.com) Scientists John Gilbert and Steven Kaplan had been working on an invisibility serum that worked on small lab mammals. Now it would be tested on a human.

Gilbert took the first injection but nothing seemed to happen. Disappointed, he and Kaplan went out for a walk. With the sun behind them, they discovered that Gilbert had no shadow. Back at the lab, Gilbert stayed behind to work late on this conundrum. As he did so, he saw a shadow enter the room. His shadow.

It came and went, and people started dying. People that Gilbert had known and might have had a grudge against. They were suffocated by the shadow, loose with a will of its own. Then it began killing people at random. Gilbert met his shadow at the lab and both died when they were reunited. The invisibility

project was suppressed, for there are some things we were not meant to know. A clichéd ending, and not very satisfactory. More an indication that the writer couldn’t think of anything better.

Other Invisible Things.

“Lords Of The Stratosphere” by Arthur J. Burks (1933 March, ASTOUNDING, available at www.gutenberg.org) began when a test pilot vanished in the stratosphere. It was not a matter that his aircraft failed up there and he crashed in a place unknown. He vanished at that altitude into the thin air.

The heroes, Lucian Jeter and Tema Eyer, went up in their aircraft to search. As they flew through the stratosphere, they felt a sudden change in air currents, as if turbulence from a large object. They landed on what seemed to be an invisible air base. Their plane gradually sunk into an invisible force field, then through a second layer before they found themselves inside the floating city in the sky.

It was well equipped with an invisibility shield, tractor beam, death ray, and assorted superscience gadgets. The controllers were Asians out to rule the world, bwah ha! ha!, from their invisible fortress. They explained everything to Jeter and Eyer, and seemed invincible. They were not, of course. The heroes managed to escape and caused the destruction of the ship. Its levitation ray kept operating even as everything else fell apart, and pushed it out into space to drift into infinity. A standard plot of the pulp era, written at the height of the Yellow Peril scare. More of a concept story to modern readers, with some nifty ideas.

INVISIBLE BEASTS (2014) by Sharona Muir was not a novel per se but a bestiary of invisible creatures that only amateur naturalist Sophie could see. Each chapter is a description of one such invisible species, together with an anecdote or vignette involving Sophie. Among the invisible animals, to name but a few, were the parfumier bees and the truth bats. The spiders of Theodora spun an invisible dome over the abandoned city of Theodora. Grand Tour butterflies outdid monarch butterflies in their travels. Fine Print rotifers fed on ink on the printed page, changing words as they went, which caused trouble if it was a printed contract.

The book is not suitable to read in one sitting, but rather to be picked up and put down in spare moments, a chapter at a time. All told, an interesting read.

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

2019-07-02

I spent a month getting ready for a three-week trip to England, so that is a total of seven weeks, and I figure I am that far behind with responding to OPUNTIA.

OPUNTIA #441: People here who voted for [Ontario Premier] Doug Ford have found that they got the cuts they expected, but definitely not in the places they expected. Ford’s governance has been haphazard and random, and his cuts have hurt an awful lot of people. [Alberta Premier] Jason Kenney’s cut from the same Conservative cloth, so I suspect there will be the same kind of cuts coming. I had read that the NDP government actually did not spend recklessly, but opposition parties will say what they wish.

[In the final year of the Alberta NDP government, they ran up the net debt of the province to \$12 billion.]

We didn’t have any Easter chocolate this year, and no one from the industry banged on our door to figure out why we didn’t indulge.

We did mark the World Wide Party this year! We were freshly back from England, but we did have a little something to drink, we toasted our fellow fans to the four corners, and then we went to bed. Not exciting, to any degree, but we did remember.

OPUNTIA #442: I don’t think we’d see any parades connected with any comic cons in Toronto. Anyone dressed a little differently, let alone in a costume, rapidly becomes a target. Thy shoes shalt match thy costume.

OPUNTIA #443: We didn’t get to our own local anime convention, Anime North, this year. Usually, we’d be vendors there, but a change in the application form slowed me down by a couple of minutes, which meant the difference between getting a table and being 23rd on the waitlist. So, we didn’t get a table, but that’s just as well, for it gave us more time to tighten up the final details for

the trip to England. Everything worked out for the best, and we will try again next year.

OPUNTIA #445: The illustration on page 2 of a futuristic vehicle pushing other vehicles out of the way just shows that some things don’t change ... well, not too much, anyway. Every so often, when we’re cut off on the highway by another car (usually an Audi or Mercedes-Benz or Lexus), I remind my wife Yvonne that there’s a good reason why cars aren’t equipped with weaponry.

[It’s too bad armoured vehicles aren’t street legal, except for the army. I’d like to buy one and see which SUVs dare jump in the line.]

OPUNTIA #446: July 5th, the Stampede starts! Hope you have yourself a great time, and I am sure we will all find out about your adventures there. There was a big ribfest in Etobicoke yesterday, and we were in Scarborough at their Canada Day celebrations, selling our merchandise, or at least, trying to.

When Words Collide 2019

You can expect my report on this readercon in August. As usual, it sold out in June and the hotel is fully booked. 750 members plus volunteers. See my previous reports in OPUNTIAs #71, 253, 266, 282, 318, 350, 387, and 421. I’ve been to every one of them and enjoyed them all.