

# OPUNTIA 453





**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) and [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org). My e-mail address is: [opuntia57@hotmail.com](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com) When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

**COWTOWN FESTIVALS**

photos by Dale Speirs

Once the festival season gets going after the Stampede, there are two or three every weekend across the city. I enjoy a party as much as the next person and try to visit as many as I can. Starting with the Calgary Arab Festival in late July, downtown at the Olympic Plaza, herewith are photos accumulated over the summer.

The cover is from the Carifest parade on August 17, about which more a few pages further on.







Above: Same weekend as the Arab Festival was this event in front of the New Central Library.



At left: Sunfest, August 3, the annual street festival in Inglewood on 9 Avenue SE. Just east of the New Central Library.





Two more views of Sunfest. Inglewood was Calgary's first residential neighbourhood when Fort Calgary grew into a village. A five-minute walk from the downtown core today. You can't afford to live there.





The biggest ethnic festival is Carifest, held this year on August 17. It began with a parade down Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall from Olympic Plaza to Millennium Park at the west end of the downtown core. That was where the main festival took place.

At left: I thought about saving these two photos for next Canada Day, but what the heck, eh?

Below: Lots and lots of showgirls.









August 17 was a very busy day downtown. A few blocks north of Olympic Plaza was the Chinatown Street Festival.







Simultaneously, at the Olympic Plaza, was the Franco Festival. It is the smallest of the ethnic festivals. In Alberta, French isn't even in the top ten of languages spoken. The fete was very sparsely attended.





## ALTERNATIVE HISTORY REVIEWS: PART 9

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 8 appeared in OPUNTIA #67.1E, 68.1B, 291, 303, 304, 312, 336 and 370. See also the cumulative subject index of OPUNTIA for others. I also recently separated out steampunk reviews in their own category. Parts 1 to 3 of Steampunk Reviews appeared in OPUNTIA #364, 393, and 412.]

I have a number of hopeless causes in my life, such as insisting the correct term for this branch of fiction is “alternative history”, not “alternate history”. The word ‘alternate’ is used in a specific meaning in science.

My university training was botanical, and the meaning of alternate was that leaves, branches, or flowers to which it applies grow on opposite sides of a branch or flower stalk in succession. In electrical engineering, an alternator produces pulses that switch polarity back and forth. The word ‘alternate’ does not mean a choice or different path.

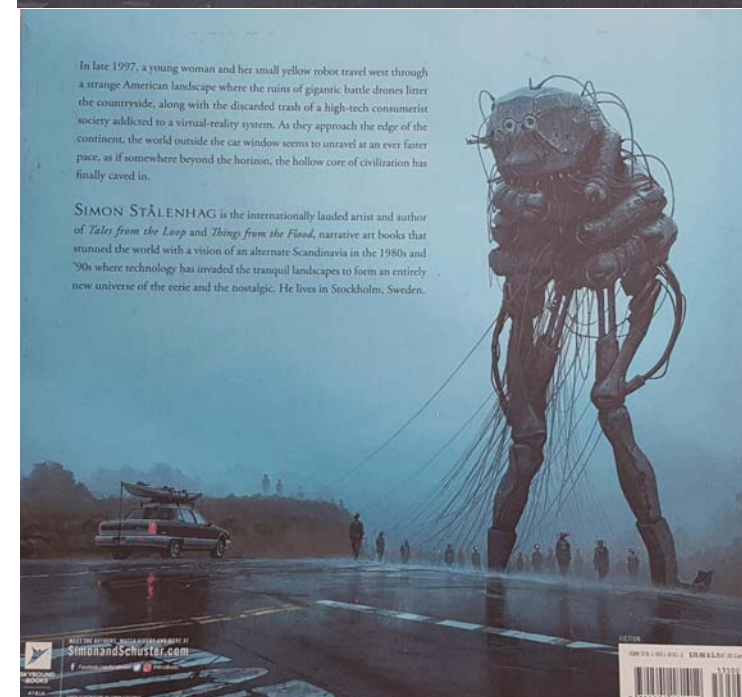
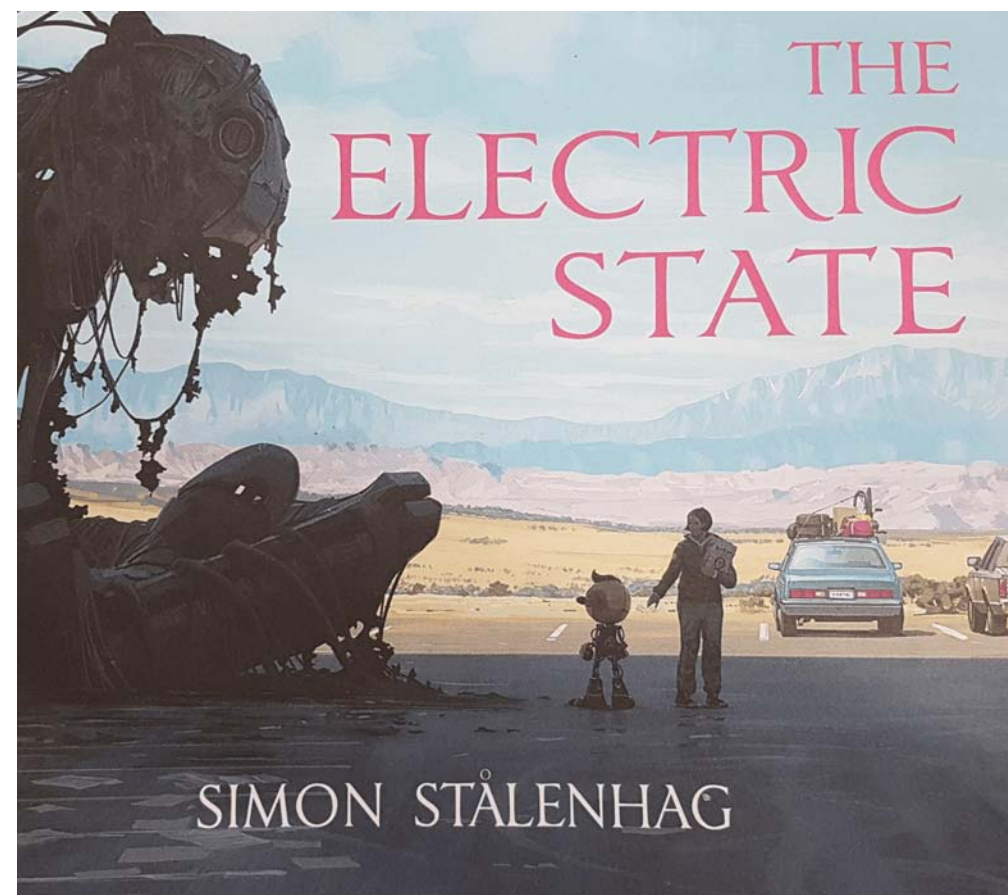
By contrast, ‘alternative’ means a different choice, one that you stay with. A restaurant does not offer you an alternate of salad if you’re a vegetarian and don’t want the steak, it offers you an alternative.

### Iron And Crosses.

THE ELECTRIC STATE (2017) by Simon Stålenhag is a hardcover coffee table book of paintings documenting the aftereffects of a drone war fought in the California deserts sometime in the 1980s or earlier. The narrator, accompanied by her trusty robot sidekick, drove across the battlefields years later in 1997.

The abandoned or wrecked technology, mixed in with mundane vehicles and equipment, made for surreal paintings. The art was photo-realistic and very well done. The hulks of giant spaceships rusted beside two-lane highways. Leftover autonomous war machines squatted like mountains, unable to move for lack of fuel and out of ammunition. Some were still mobile though, presenting traffic hazards the narrator had to zigzag around.

The scale of the machines was beautifully rendered. The artist noted what is commonplace in abandoned areas everywhere, that advertising signs survive longest after houses and shops have crumbled into ruins. An impressive alternative history and well recommended.





“On Stony Ground” by Cynthia Ward (2019 May/June, ANALOG) was set in an alternative Palestine about two millennia ago in a world where Alexander the Great lived to a ripe old age and kept his empire. Steam engineering developed then as it never did in our timeline.

The story began with the completion of the Mageddon-Damaskos Rail Road. The engineer who designed it was justifiably proud of it and how it would strengthen the empire. He got a shock from a carpenter’s son born in Bethlehem. He realized that the man had an idea whose time had come and would prove to be more powerful than the railroad or the empire.

**Meanwhile, Back At The Timeline ...**

MORE STORIES FROM THE TWILIGHT ZONE (2010) is an anthology of original stories (not transcripts from the television series) edited by Carol Serling. A couple of them were alternative histories.

“Curve” by Loren Estleman is about a man in 2009 who fell asleep watching television and woke up in an alternative timeline. He didn’t realize it at first, but slowly learned that he and his wife were lower-class instead of well-to-do, they never had children, and he was an ordinary wage slave.

When he woke up, the television set was showing former President John F. Kennedy’s funeral, who died an old man in retirement after serving one term in office.

There had never been a Cuban missile crisis because Cuba had never gone Communist. The Soviets won the race to the Moon and had crushed Afghanistan. No Vietnam War meant no civil disobedience or civil rights movement.

The divergence was Fidel Castro. In our timeline, he had tried out for the New York Yankees baseball team but didn’t make the cut. He went back to Cuba and got into politics. In the alternative timeline, he became a star player and stayed in America. (This is a popular divergence; see OPUNTIA #312, page 10, for reviews of other such stories.)

The ending was open-ended. While the man struggled to adapt to his new life, the Soviets decided to launch an orbital nuclear missile. Ground Zero was the World Trade Center.

“Reversal Of Fortune” by Robert J. Serling had extended what-if? arguments between history professors about the Battle of Midway, which was the turning point of the Pacific War. Two of the professors revealed they were from a timeline where the Americans had lost Midway Island because their military never cracked the Japanese codes.

The professors developed a time machine and went back to encourage the code breakers and thus changed their timeline. Now they decided to go back in our timeline before the September 11 attack to prevent the three passenger jets from taking off. That was the last anyone saw of them. The question was whether they failed, or if they succeeded but moved the result into a different timeline.

**GROUND CONTROL TO MAJOR TOM: PART 3**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA #396 and 405.]

**Palaeorocketry.**

THE THIRD MAN, popularly remembered as HARRY LIME, was a short-lived old-time radio mystery series in 1951-52. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org).) It was based on the novel by Graham Greene and the film made from it, using a supporting character, Harry Lime, who died messily underneath Vienna in a sewer. He was a con man who lived by his wits, and often not well. Radio scripts were not credited to any writers, even though they were new material, not from Greene’s book.

The series is remembered for several aspects. Orson Welles played the part in the OTR series, narrating the scene changes in his distinctive voice. Each episode opened with the sound of a gunshot. Welles then told the audience that it was the shot that killed Lime in the sewer. There was more to Lime’s life than the manner of his passing, and here was a story from his earlier days. How did he know? Because he was Harry Lime.

The music was unlike any other radio series or for that matter, television. The opening theme, segues, and transitions were all played by Anton Karas on a zither. The haunting sounds set the music apart from the usual orchestras or



organs, and made Karas a fortune in royalties. It was as much a part of each episode as the script or the actors.

“The Third Woman” was a 1951 episode, set during World War Two when Lime was a corporal in the army. He was pulled away from his barracks, given a Saville Row suit and civilian identity, and ordered to rendezvous with a spymaster in London.

As he talked with his superiors, there were the distant sounds of V2 rockets hitting the city. Lime was told to use his pre-war connections in Europe to check up on a spy who had given the Allies the wrong location for a V2 factory. It was believed she had been turned because the Nazis had kidnapped her sister and were holding them both in the German embassy in Turkey.

The action began in Lisbon, moved to Turkey, and involved a rather implausible rescue of the women by Lime. He returned in triumph, waving a piece of paper with the address. The spymaster told him they had gotten the correct address three days earlier from another spy and had already bombed the V2 factory. Lime was sent back down to the ranks without any acknowledgment of his work. Just another minor incident in the war.

ESCAPE was an old-time radio anthology series. A 1954 episode “Affair At Mandrake”, written by Ben Wright, began on the beaches of Dunkirk, where a British officer almost shot a German prisoner but was stopped by his aide. The story then jumped ahead to England, where the officer was promoted to colonel and placed in charge of a rocket project in Mandrake Forest.

The British were far behind in rocket warfare, and trying to catch up with the Mandrake project. The colonel was warned that the Nazis were aware of the project and him, and had an agent loose in the area.

Just after he took up his command, he learned there had been an escape from a nearby prisoner-of-war camp, none other than the German he tried to kill on the beach. The two eventually met and there was a shootout. There was a last-minute twist in the plot when microfilm was found in the unspent cartridges of a gun used in the fight.

A fair-to-middling drama that relied on the final twist to justify itself. The opening scene at Dunkirk had excellent and accurate sound effects of the battle. The rest of the episode was standard spy fiction. Worth listening to once.

## **Far Future Rocketry.**

“Space Wreck” is a 1950 episode of the old-time radio series 2000 PLUS, no writer credited. It was the year 2000 plus 370 (as all the dates were announced on the show). The cruise liner spaceship Golden Star, carrying 750 passengers and crew, headed to Mars. A reporter on board worked as if it were still 1950, hunting for a scoop. He got one all right.

The excitement began when someone spotted a flaming meteor heading straight on to the spaceship. This was a popular scene through the 1950s B-movies and into the 1960s. Even then, astronomers were well aware that meteors in space are cold dark rocks. Too dull for Hollywood, which made them great balls of fire.

The captain ordered full reverse, as if he were in command of an ocean liner. A spaceship suddenly backing up is ridiculous, not to mention what it would do to the passengers. Even on Earth, that wouldn’t work. Anyone who sees something coming straight at them is not going to shift a vehicle into reverse. They’ll swerve, of course, port or starboard, left or right.

Bang she went, with only four survivors beside the reporter. All other compartments on the spaceship were breached, and there was no time to send an SOS. Panic everywhere, including the captain, which leads one to wonder about the selection process for the crew. Fortunately he committed suicide in grief and got out of the way of the plot.

One space suit worked, so the reporter used it to retrieve a lifeboat floating nearby. Since this was radio, he muttered constantly to himself, explaining what he was doing. It was a false hope because the lifeboat wouldn’t work.

The explanation was that the meteor impact changed its molecular structure. Mighty strange meteor. Let’s be charitable and assume the metal was, in engineering terms, shivered, that is, weakened by countless microscopic cracks caused by the impact shock.

They’re doomed! Left to die slowly as the oxygen and heat run down. The survivors still had breath left to squabble. The rescue finally came because a number of Earth astronomers had their telescopes pointed in the right direction and noticed the collision, then notified the authorities. Indeed.



## MISCELLANEOUS MYSTERY FICTION

by Dale Speirs

### Masquerades.

THE CINEMA MURDER (1917) by E. Phillips Oppenheim is a mystery novel available as a free download from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). It was about a murderer who assumed the identity of his victim to escape and then discovered he had jumped from the frying pan into the fire because the victim was a wanted man.

Phillip Romilly was a starving artist in London, England, whose girlfriend Beatrice dumped him for his rich cousin Douglas Romilly. Enraged, Phillip met Douglas, strangled him, then switched wallets and other items with the dead man. He threw the body into a nearby canal. Learning from the dead man's papers that he was sailing to New York City, Phillip assumed his identity and took the ship.

He was found out by a mysterious actress named Elizabeth Dalstan, also traveling on the ship. She said she would keep quiet about it. Phillip wanted to write plays, so she offered to look at what he might produce. On board he met Raymond Greene, a movie producer. Mark that name well.

Arriving in New York City, he changed his identity to Merton Ware and not before time. It transpired that Douglas's company had gone smash, and the deceased was wanted to assist police with their enquiries into certain sharp practices. Phillip met up with Martha Grimes, who read his first draft play and also read a bit into his mysterious background, which wasn't turning out to be as mysterious as he wanted. Dalstan reappeared, but was still keeping his confidences.

His play "The House Of Shams" was a success. His triumph was soured when NYPD Detective Edward Dane announced himself and told Phillip he was on the trail of both Romillys, living and dead. Dane didn't have evidence to arrest, much less convict, so he decided to put on psychological pressure.

*"I can claim that at any moment", the man replied. "I have had my reasons for waiting. It's partly those reasons that have brought me here. For one thing, Mr. Douglas Romilly was supposed to be able to put his hand on a matter of a hundred thousand dollars somewhere in New York. You haven't shown many signs up till now, Mr. Ware, of having any such sum in your possession."*

*"I see", Philip assented. "You wanted the money as well."*

*"The creditors of the Douglas Romilly Shoe Company are wanting it pretty badly", the man proceeded, "but that wasn't all. I wanted to find out what your game was. That I don't know, even now. That is why I have come to you. Have I the pleasure of speaking to Mr. Douglas Romilly?"*

*"I really don't see", Philip protested thoughtfully, "why I should go into partnership with you in this affair. You see, in the long run, our interests might not be altogether identical." Mr. Dane smiled grimly.*

*"That's a fairly shrewd calculation, Mr. Ware" he admitted. "You ain't bound to answer any question you don't want to. This is just a friendly chat and no more."*

Then and now, a successful play is commonly made into a movie. It was a bit jarring though, to realize that this novel was published in the silent film era, and the movie would not be a talkie. A studio made an offer, and sent Greene to negotiate. He was thunderstruck on seeing Merton Ware, for he had met him on board the ship as Douglas Romilly.

Romilly qua Ware began to see the shadow of the noose wherever he went. His personal life became complicated, between Grimes and Dalstan (think of them as Mary Ann and Ginger respectively). He got mixed up in a gunfight with a jealous man who wanted him to stay away from Dalstan. Detective Dane went to England and brought back Beatrice to identify him. No matter which way Phillip turned, his way was blocked.

After the buildup, the ending was an incredible contrivance. Douglas apparently survived his disposition into the canal and had been laying low until he could get his hands on the stolen money. Phillip had three angry women expecting him to marry them, and even a Mormon would have difficulty handling that situation. Since Douglas wasn't dead, Phillip was in the clear, and Douglas was on the hook for the money.

This was an abrupt reversal in the plot that suggested the author ran out of ideas for an ending and decided to quickly wrap it up. Until then, the novel had been a reasonably good read, notwithstanding the misleading title. The writing style has not aged well, which may discourage some readers, a common failing with works from that era.



### **Gimme That Old Time Radio.**

One of the better old-time radio mystery shows was SUSPENSE, an anthology series that aired from 1942 to 1962. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org).)

The 1947 episode “The X-Ray Camera”, written by George and Gertrude Fass, was about Johnny, an angry man who decided that if he couldn’t have his estranged wife Anna, then no one could.

Johnny was trying to reconcile with Anna and decided to buy an expensive watch for her. He was smitten by Joyce, the shop girl who sold him the watch, and made a date with her, initially with romantic intent. A wife and a girlfriend proved too much to handle, so he planned an elaborate double murder.

He deluded Joyce into believing that he was a private detective, whose current case was tracking a woman suspected of stealing diamonds from her employer. Johnny had a hand grenade, a souvenir of the war. Scrounging around, he found an empty box from the department store Joyce worked at and packaged the grenade inside. A string was tied to the pin and let out through a hole.

Joyce was bored being a shop girl, so Johnny had no difficulty getting her to assist him. He told her the woman knew him, so he couldn’t use an X-ray camera to photograph her up close to prove she had the diamonds. Joyce was to get in close, pull the string, and wait 15 seconds for the camera to make the exposure. The grenade would take both women out, leaving Johnny with a clear field.

Except that Joyce was careless and left the package sitting on the bench beside her while waiting to get in close to Anna. A sneak thief stole it, which sometime later proved to be the last thing he ever stole. Homicide detectives examined the remnants of the package. Overlooked by Johnny was a receipt between two layers of wrapping paper with his name on it and Joyce’s signature as the sales clerk.

The rest of the details were relatively easy to put together. Johnny was upset that neither woman would visit him on Death Row.

“Never Follow A Banjo Act” was a 1954 episode of SUSPENSE written by James Poe, and starring Ethel Merman, the great Broadway singer. She was

famous for being able to project her voice better than a foghorn and enunciate clearly, something songwriters particularly appreciated.

The story is based on a theatrical tradition that a variety show should never follow a banjo act with another banjo act. It was about Cary Dane, a young crooner in the Frank Sinatra tradition that the women went crazy over. He liked to sing duets, and also liked to play with very sharp knives.

Merman played the part of Rosie Jones, a thinly disguised version of herself, a mature woman with a powerful voice. Dane’s previous female partner had died supposedly by falling through a glass shower door and bleeding to death. His agent decided that perhaps it might be better not to replace her with another young woman but with an older woman such as Jones. As he said, he didn’t want another banjo act.

Jones soon learned that Dane was outright psycho, and that there was a real possibility she could be sliced and diced by him. She couldn’t get anyone to take her seriously because Dane was a multimillion dollar act back when a million dollars was still something. He finally went berserk on stage during a performance and tried to kill her in front of the audience.

The plot had about fifteen minutes worth of action. The episode was mainly a showcase for Merman’s singing, and she did belt out a few loud ones. It was bizarre in many aspects, almost weird fiction, and an interesting listen.

### **Surprise Twists.**

THE WHISTLER was an old-time radio anthology series that aired from 1942 to 1955. It was not a mystery series, since both the narrator and the lead character explained the action along the way. The scripts were “perfect crime” stories, whereby the lead character set up and committed a perfect crime with the listener following along. After gloating about having gotten away with it, the episode then cut to the final commercial. On returning to the epilogue, a twist was revealed that trapped the murderer, based on a trivial detail mentioned earlier.

“A Mask For Kinsella” was a 1949 episode of THE WHISTLER, written by Richard Creedon. Jim Kinsella was badly burned in a laboratory explosion while trying to rescue his colleague Ted Brewster, a wealthy man, who died. There was a mixup at the hospital, and the plastic surgeon reconstructed



Kinsella's face using photographs of Brewster. It was a case of mistaken identity, but Kinsella decided to go with it.

He started a new life in the Brewster mansion. He used the trauma of the fire to cover up for having to re-learn everything. There were some complications but they were minor after the surgeon showed up and told Kinsella that it wasn't a mistake. It was done as a way to get at the Brewster fortune, and Kinsella had better comply with the blackmail.

Kinsella had a better idea, and killed the surgeon. Then the twist. As he exited the scene of the crime, Homicide investigators arrived to arrest the surgeon. They told Kinsella that the doctor had conspired with his girlfriend to blow up the laboratory to kill her husband. The girlfriend was Kinsella's wife. But when the police enter the room, the murderer they will arrest ...

"Element X", written by Adrian Gendot, was initially aired in 1952 and redone in 1955. The protagonist was Grant Forbes, a shyster who dabbled in blackmail on the side. He was hired by Floyd Markham and drove out to his place for an initial consultation. Just as he arrived, a gunshot rang out. A woman ran out and drove away. Inside the house, Forbes found the dying Markham, who with his last words told him that his wife Lidia had shot him.

Forbes quickly left and then waited until a week after the funeral to see if the police cracked the case. The answer being no, he then paid a call on the grieving widow, who was already living with her boyfriend Ralph Leonard.

Talking to her privately, he said he represented someone who saw her at the crime scene but would be prepared to remain silent for a considerable sum. Leonard didn't like Forbes, but the widow agreed to pay \$10,000.

Forbes left the apartment and walked down the street. As he did so, a car tried to run him over. The man behind the wheel was obviously Leonard. Forbes escaped and went to ground in a cheap motel. He then came up with the perfect crime. First he checked out a street corner in the warehouse district, with plenty of darkened doorways.

The next step was to telephone Leonard and tell him to meet at the street corner, being sure to wait in a certain dark doorway for a car to drive up and park in front of the door. Leonard agreed and it was obvious he would be packing heat to kill Forbes.

Next Forbes called the widow and told her to bring the blackmail money to that street corner. She was to park her car in front of a certain doorway where he would be waiting. Just before the assignation, Forbes went to a tavern across the street and watched while slowly sipping on a beer.

The plan worked. The two victims exchanged gunfire, neither being able to see the other in the dark except their shadowy forms. Forbes, playing the part of an innocent bystander, rushed outside, hoping to grab the cash off the widow's body before the police arrived. One of the gunshots had gone wild, hitting a passing truck and causing it to swerve into the tavern entrance, crushing Forbes to death. The best laid plans gang aft agley.

From 1953 was the episode "Lady On A Yacht", no writer credited. Greta Fontez was a German woman who had been married to a Nazi general. She escaped to Argentina after the war with a bounty on her head for war crimes. After several years she married Fontez, and after his death married a third time, an American millionaire named Philip Collins.

Her hope was that once inside the USA she could live a normal life. Too many people in Europe were still looking for her, so she was dismayed when Philip insisted their yacht first go on a honeymoon tour of the Mediterranean. They moored in Italy where Philip put in a request to the American Consulate for a visa for Greta.

An artist managed to latch on to Philip and was commissioned to paint a portrait of Greta. He used the name Conrad Marlin but his real name was Kruger. He recognized her because he had painted a wedding portrait of her and her first husband. He wanted to get to America as well, and blackmailed her into helping him.

After painting her portrait the second time, he gave her a landscape to give to the American Consul. Subsequent events caused Kruger to panic and flee. He was killed in a gun battle with Italian police.

That prompted enquiries from the Consul, who knew Kruger had stolen many valuable paintings and then smuggled them out by painting over top of them after first protecting the originals with a heavy coat of varnish.

Greta was granted her visa and she thought she would soon be free in America. But just before the yacht was to sail, the Consul brought in an art restorer to



strip away the Kruger painting to see what was underneath, thinking it would be a Rembrandt or some such. Instead it turned out to be the wedding portrait.

**SURPRISE ENDINGS** was a single show aired on 1945-07-29 but failed its audition. It had two 15-minute plays, and the mp3 took its name from the first one, “The Canceled Resurrection”. Obviously no advertiser was interested in it, nor did the network bother to sustain the show. Sustained series were supported by the networks with house ads, in the hopes that eventually they would attract the attention of a commercial advertiser.

The first play, of the same title, was about a gangster scheduled to hang. He arranged for a hearse to pick up his body immediately after his execution. The big car would be filled with medical equipment and supplies that would be used to revive him, unbeknownst to prison officials.

It was the gangster’s misfortune that the plot was bekownst to them. They quietly intercepted the hearse but didn’t tell him. Their thinking was that he would go quietly to his death, not knowing his resurrection had been canceled.

The second play was about a songwriter who hated the constant repetition of hit songs on jukeboxes, radios, and, more particularly, his upstairs neighbour who played the piano incessantly. The songwriter was trying to write a hit song, so it was annoying to hear the others. He went upstairs to shut up the pianist and found it had been a ghost playing, but not just any ordinary ghost.

An over-acted part, which was probably why the show wasn’t picked up. Another reason why the show never made it past the audition was that there already was a series with surprise endings, **THE WHISTLER**.

## **Movies.**

**MYSTERY LINER** (1934) is a movie based on the story “The Ghost Of John Holling” by Edgar Wallace, adapted for screen by Wellyn Totman. It is available on the Mill Creek DVD box set of 50 Mystery Classics.

The movie began with Captain Holling, who had commanded the passenger liner S.S. Guthrie for twenty years, being relieved of command due to a nervous breakdown. He was sent ashore to a sanitarium. Not helping was that the next voyage was to test a remote control device invented by Professor Grimson and paid for by the shipping line. If successful, it would eliminate the need for many

crew members. The Professor came aboard with the company executives to finish up the remote control device by adding in a special vacuum tube called the S-505.

The control room of the device was filled with electrical panels, spark arresters, and Jacob ladders. One suspects, even without being a journeyman electrician, that those impedimenta were there for show, not for any practical reason. Also added was a ship-to-shore communication system that reproduced handwritten messages on a screen sent from the other end. Since ships had radios and wireless telegraphs, one wonders why that method was needed.

Meanwhile, spies with distinctive foreign accents that fluctuated between German and Slavic were monitoring the ship from a distance via radio, part of a plan to hijack the automatic controls. Someone attacked Grimson and nearly killed him, so he remained on shore in serious condition.

The ship sailed with a load of assorted passengers, foreign saboteurs, a Prussian count who was born looking guilty, and Major Pope, a private detective hired by the company. The new captain and his officers were suspicious of each other and of Pope, who returned the suspicions.

A dozen people were skulking around the ship and not just figuratively. They were busy snooping in other people’s cabins and making clandestine rendezvouses. Holling escaped from the sanitarium and stowed away on the ship, adding to the general disorder. The replacement captain was the next victim, this time fatally.

The experiment began and the ship went under remote control. At this point, I suddenly wondered if the passengers had been told, for none of them, the ones that had speaking parts, mentioned it.

They soon found out though. The saboteurs took remote control of the ship, an early example of hacking. On board, shots were fired, passengers panicked, and alarums and excursions too numerous to mention took place.

The ending was a twist, when Pope was revealed to be not the man he said he was. The sabotage was undone and the ship returned to manual control. A good movie made from a good copy, and worth viewing.



## Anthologies.

BETWEEN THE DARK AND THE DAYLIGHT (2009) is an anthology of 28 mystery short stories, edited by Ed Gorman and Martin H. Greenberg. I'll pick a couple of stories for mention, but the book is worth reading in toto.

"Ms Grimshaw Regrets" by Nancy Pickard is about a retired schoolmarm who wrote nit-picking letters to everyone. Nothing in anger or threatening, just constant harping about their minor mistakes. Or, more commonly and worse yet, little details perfectly acceptable to normal people.

The story had a plentitude of suspects, one of whom strangled the old biddie when he couldn't take it anymore. The police weren't able to solve the crime because there were so many people who had motive and opportunity. Some victims do indeed get what they deserved.

"The Devil's Acre" by Steve Hockensmith is part of a series about Old West cowboy detectives, the brothers Big Red and Old Red Amlingmeyer. They were visiting San Francisco and ran afoul of a clip joint in the Barbary Coast district. A humourous read about how they extracted themselves from trouble. There is a funny twist at the end about a landlady who was no lady of any kind.

THE BIG BOOK OF FEMALE DETECTIVES (2018) is an 1,115-page anthology edited by Otto Penzler, compiling 67 stories. Most of them are about private detectives but a few are about femme fatales.

Penzler's foreword noted that female private eyes and police detectives first appeared in fiction in 1864, a couple of decades after Edgar Allan Poe invented the detective genre in 1841. Excluding Miss Marples, female detectives for hire or policewomen were scarce in fiction until the 1970s. In the 1980s, Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky broke the field wide open.

The anthology presented examples in roughly chronological order. As Penzler remarked, most Victorian fiction is unreadable today. The female detective stories were no exception. Long and winding sentences were the norm. The term 'infodump' hadn't been invented yet, but they padded out Victorian novels even more so than today.

The first story in this anthology was "The Mysterious Countess" (1864) by an anonymous author. It featured Mrs Paschal as a Scotland Yard detective, on the

trail of a countess who had been embezzling bank funds. Once found out, she made a run for it but was ultimately captured.

As a random example of the stilted dialogue, when Paschal was talking casually with her superior officer, it went like this: *"We must consider now what is to be done," said the colonel; "There is no doubt whatever that the South Belgrave Bank has been plundered to a great extent, and that it is from that source that our mysterious countess has managed to supply her extravagant habits and keep up her transitory magnificence, which she ought to have seen would, from its nature, be evanescent. I am only surprised to think that her depredations were not discovered before; she must have managed everything in a skillful manner, so skillful indeed as to be worthy of the expertest burglar of modern times."*

And so through to the pulp era and up to modern stories. It was interesting to see the evolutionary changes in writing styles of the fiction in general, and of attitudes in particular toward women. The stories tended to go from condescension to bigotry to feminism to the beginnings of a balanced view.

Penzler's many Big Book anthologies perform a useful service, bringing out from obscurity the pioneer pieces that deserve renewed attention. What Sam Moskowitz was to science fiction, Penzler is to mystery fiction, digging out the obscure and giving it fresh exposure. This book is well recommended.

## Mysteries To The Fore.

I've never played golf nor had any interest in it. My only connection was through my Uncle Norman, my mother's older brother, who played quite a lot when he lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Once a year he drove out to Eckville, Alberta, the village where that side of my family homesteaded. Usually there would be a big family picnic at the original homestead, but one year it was on the dairy farm nearby of my grandaunt Lempi and her husband Kai.

Back in the 1960s, Norman drove a Bentley (he was a banker) but eventually gave it up for a Ford because the Bentleys were simply not adapted for Canada. They had no heating system for the passenger compartment that could handle Winnipeg winters, which even among Canadians are notorious for their vicious cold. (The polar vortex that makes Americans hysterical comes from Manitoba, and is the normal winter in that province.)



Norman stored his clubs in the trunk of his car and never bothered taking them inside his apartment. Driving the 1,700 km between Winnipeg and Eckville, he would stop off along the way at any rural golf club he hadn't been before and play a round.

At Aunt Lempi's farm, all us noisy youngsters (me, my brother, and a multitude of cousins) had room to run around outside without bothering the adults. Norman would eventually come outside to stretch his legs, and we would beg him to take out his golf clubs and let us play. He brought along a bucket of old balls for this eventuality.

We would run out into the pasture, stick tree branches into gopher holes as flagpoles, and herd the Holsteins to the other end. Each of us took turns with an old club of Norman's that he kept for the sacrifice. We would plough up divots everywhere trying to get a ball into a gopher hole.

Eventually Norman would take one of his drivers, point out a cow at the far end of the pasture, and as we watched, smack the ball down the field to give the cow a poke on the rump. She would jump and look round to see what had swatted her, while us kids laughed ourselves silly. Those were the days.

The days considerably before that were the focus of a short story "The Horror On The Links" by Seabury Quinn (1925 October, WEIRD TALES). If you are looking for old pulp magazines, go to [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) or [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). Thousands of issues are posted as free pdfs, a lifetime supply. I've been downloading issues and skimming through them.

This story was about a golf course where if you sliced or hooked your ball into the woods, looking for the ball might cost your life. Some sort of giant ape was terrorizing the golfers, but it always seemed to vanish in the pursuit. The authorities investigated, questioning the survivors. Even a century ago the plot was a boilerplate mad scientist story.

A young man was under suspicion, and when the ape was shot, the two were one and the same. The question was whether he was an ape turned into a man or vice versa. The good news was that it was safe to play the course again.

MURDER IN THE ROUGH (2006) was an anthology edited by Otto Penzler. He mentioned in his foreword that his publisher wouldn't agree to an anthology of Ping Pong mysteries, so he had to settle for golf. Many of the stories could

have been transplanted to any other setting without much revision but a few were tied intrinsically to the golf course.

"The Man Who Didn't Play Golf" by Simon Brett was about Leonard Wensam and his wife Amanda, an adulterous couple who wanted to be rid of each other. His claim to play golf every Thursday was false. He wasn't playing a round, he was playing around. Amanda made arrangements for the murder with her boyfriend, the golf shop pro. He devised a weapon that fired a golf ball with deadly accuracy. The coroner ruled accidental death by head injury on the golf course.

"Miss Unwin Plays By The Rules" by H.R.F. Keating was set in the 1890s in Britain, when golf was still being born as a popular sport of the masses. The story moved back and forth between England and Scotland.

Mungo McMurdo was jealous of his cousin Ian, who had inherited the family fortune. They both played golf. It was on a Scottish links that Mungo made Ian's death look accidental from a hit by a golf ball. Meanwhile, the governess Miss Unwin was an early version of Miss Marple. After Mungo pulled off the perfect murder, Miss Unwin pulled off the perfect blackmail.

"Unplayable Lies" by William G. Tapply was a humorous story about what happened when two Mafioso took up the game of golf. It wasn't just them cheating, but their caddies. The latter were nervous about what would happen to them when one of their masters lost.

### **Miscellany.**

"The Puzzle Duel" by Miles J. Breuer (1928 Winter, AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, available as a free pdf from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) was not a science fiction story but I can understand why the editor bought it anyway. It was a clever plot about two men trying to kill each other without detection.

One man poisoned the toothbrush of the other, but he didn't live much longer to gloat. His enemy had rigged a hidden high-voltage electric wire in the first man's garden, so that the next time he watered his flower beds with a hose, he got an electrical charge that killed him. For informational purposes only; do not try this at home.



# SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Wang, T., et al (2019) **A dominant population of optically invisible massive galaxies in the early universe.** NATURE 572:211-214

Authors' abstract: *Our current knowledge of cosmic star-formation history during the first two billion years (corresponding to redshift  $z > 3$ ) is mainly based on galaxies identified in rest-frame ultraviolet light.*

*However, this population of galaxies is known to under-represent the most massive galaxies, which have rich dust content and/or old stellar populations. This raises the questions of the true abundance of massive galaxies and the star-formation rate density in the early Universe.*

*Although several massive galaxies that are invisible in the ultraviolet have recently been confirmed at early epochs, most of them are extreme starburst galaxies with star-formation rates exceeding 1,000 solar masses per year, suggesting that they are unlikely to represent the bulk population of massive galaxies.*

*Here we report submillimetre (wavelength 870 micrometres) detections of 39 massive star-forming galaxies at  $z > 3$ , which are unseen in the spectral region from the deepest ultraviolet to the near-infrared.*

*With a space density of about  $2 \times 10$  per cubic megaparsec (two orders of magnitude higher than extreme starbursts) and star formation rates of 200 solar masses per year, these galaxies represent the bulk population of massive galaxies that has been missed from previous surveys.*

*They contribute a total star-formation-rate density ten times larger than that of equivalently massive ultraviolet bright galaxies at  $z > 3$ . Residing in the most massive dark matter haloes at their redshifts, they are probably the progenitors of the largest present-day galaxies in massive groups and clusters.*

*Such a high abundance of massive and dusty galaxies in the early Universe challenges our understanding of massive-galaxy formation.*

Serafinelli, R., et al (2019) **Multiphase quasar-driven outflows in PG 1114+445: I. Entrained ultra-fast outflows.** ASTRONOMY AND ASTROPHYSICS 627:doi.org/10.1051/0004-6361/201935275

Authors' abstract: *Substantial evidence in the last few decades suggests that outflows from supermassive black holes (SMBH) may play a significant role in the evolution of galaxies. These outflows, powered by active galactic nuclei (AGN), are thought to be the fundamental mechanism by which the SMBH transfers a significant fraction of its accretion energy to the surrounding environment.*

*Large-scale outflows known as warm absorbers (WA) and fast disk winds known as ultra-fast outflows (UFO) are commonly found in the spectra of many Seyfert galaxies and quasars, and a correlation has been suggested between them.*

*Recent detections of low ionization and low column density outflows, but with a high velocity comparable to UFOs, challenge such initial possible correlations.*

*Observations of UFOs in AGN indicate that their energetics may be enough to have an impact on the interstellar medium (ISM). However, observational evidence of the interaction between the inner high-ionization outflow and the ISM is still missing.*

*We present here the spectral analysis of 12 XMM-Newton/EPIC archival observations of the quasar PG 1114+445, aimed at studying the complex outflowing nature of its absorbers.*

*Our analysis revealed the presence of three absorbing structures. ... The ionization, velocity, and variability of the three absorbers indicate an origin in a multiphase and multiscale outflow, consistent with entrainment of the clumpy ISM by an inner UFO moving at 15% the speed of light, producing an entrained ultra-fast outflow (E-UFO).*

Speirs: What this means is that black holes at the centre of a galaxy are blowing gases and dust out the centre and sweeping it clean because of massive amounts of ionized radiation emitted as matter falls into the black hole. The radiation sprays out like water from a garden hose.



Gillman, M.P., et al (2019) **Mapping the location of terrestrial impacts and extinctions onto the spiral arm structure of the Milky Way.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 18:323-328

Authors' abstract: *High-density regions within the spiral arms are expected to have profound effects on passing stars. Understanding of the potential effects on the Earth and our Solar System is dependent on a robust model of arm passage dynamics. Using a novel combination of data, we derive a model of the timings of the Solar System through the spiral arms and the relationship to arm tracers such as methanol masers.*

*This reveals that asteroid/comet impacts are significantly clustered near the spiral arms and within specific locations of an average arm structure. The end-Permian and end-Cretaceous extinctions emerge as being located within a small star-formation region in two different arms. The start of the Solar System, greater than 4.5 Ga, occurs in the same region in a third arm. The model complements geo-chemical data in determining the relative importance of extra-Solar events in the diversification and extinction of life on Earth.*

Speirs: It takes the Solar System about 250 million years to make one revolution around our Milky Way galaxy. It was noted decades ago that mass extinction events tended to occur whenever the Solar System passed through an arm of the galaxy filled with stars, with stable periods in between when the system was passing through the gaps separating the arms. It also suggests that life may not be common above the level of microbes in denser regions of the galaxy, leading to an answer for the Fermi Paradox "Where are they?"

Mojzsis, S.J., et al (2019) **Onset of giant planet migration before 4,480 million years ago.** ASTROPHYSICAL JOURNAL 881:doi.org/10.3847/1538-4357/ab2c03

Authors' abstract: *Soon after their formation, the terrestrial planets experienced intense impact bombardment by comets, leftover planetesimals from primary accretion, and asteroids. This temporal interval in solar system evolution, termed late accretion, thermally and chemically modified solid planetary surfaces and may have impeded life's emergence on the Hadean (pre-3,850 Ma) Earth. The sources and tempo of bombardment, however, remain obscure.*

*Here we present a timeline that relates variably retentive radiometric ages documented from asteroidal meteorites to new dynamical models that invoke an early episode of planetesimal driven giant planet migration after the dispersal of the protoplanetary disk. Reconciliation of geochronological data with dynamical models shows that such giant planet migration should lead to an intense ~30 Myr influx of comets to the entire solar system manifested in radiometric age data.*

*The absence of wholesale crustal reset ages after ~4,450 Ma for the most resilient chronometers from Earth, Moon, Mars, 4 Vesta, and various meteorite parent bodies confines the onset of giant planet migration to ca. 4,480 Ma. Waning impacts continue to strike the inner planets through a protracted monotonic decline in impactor flux, in agreement with predictions from crater chronology.*

*New global 3D thermal analytical bombardment models derived from our revised impact mass-production functions show also that persistent niches for prebiotic chemistry leading to the emergence of life on the early Hadean Earth could endure late accretion since at least about 4,400 million years ago.*

Napier, W.M. (2019) **The hazard from fragmenting comets.** MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY 488:1822-1827

Author's abstract: *Comet disintegration proceeds through both sublimation and discrete splitting events. The cross-sectional area of material ejected by a comet may, within days, become many times greater than that of the Earth, making encounters with such debris much more likely than collisions with the nucleus itself. The hierarchic fragmentation and sublimation of a large comet in a short-period orbit may yield many hundreds of such shortlived clusters.*

*We model this evolution with a view to assessing the probability of an encounter that might have significant terrestrial effects, through atmospheric dusting or multiple impacts. Such an encounter may have contributed to the large animal extinctions and sudden climatic cooling of 12,900 yr ago, and the near simultaneous collapse of civilizations around 2350 BC.*