

# OPUNTIA

## 277

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**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. Since you are reading this only online, my real-mail address doesn't matter. My eek-mail address (as the late Harry Warner Jr liked to call it) 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.

### THE OTHER MARXISTS

by Dale Speirs

I have long been a Marxist. Groucho, that is, not Karl. Neither of them make any sense when you analyze them too closely, but Groucho is funnier than the bearded sourpuss whose writings caused so much misery in the world. Groucho was a self-educated man, quite intelligent and learned in private life. He was famous for his ability to ad-lib quips to meet any situation. I've previously reviewed one murder mystery involving the Marx brothers, *YOU BET YOUR LIFE* by Stuart Kaminsky (in *OPUNTIA* #67.1D, April 2009) but will now add to that with a series involving just plain Groucho.

The humour writer Ron Goulart wrote a series of mystery novels using Groucho in private detection to solve murders in Hollywood. The narrator is scriptwriter Frank Denby, who plays Dr. Watson to Groucho's Holmes. Running gags include Groucho constantly being plagued by autograph seekers, and his ongoing battles with show sponsors and studio producers who think they know comedy better than he does.

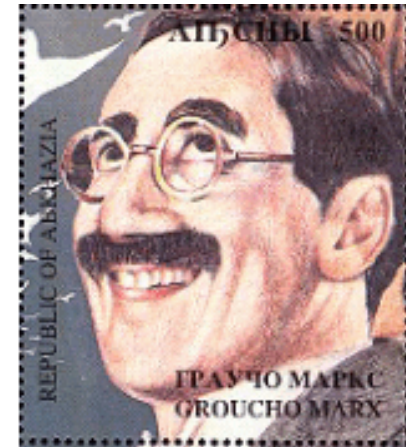


The first novel in the series is *GROUCHO MARX, MASTER DETECTIVE* (1998, hardcover) and begins in October 1937 with the apparent suicide of a young actress named Peg McMorrow. Groucho knew her, both socially and in the biblical sense, and doesn't believe it was suicide. The police are covering it up, the evidence and files go missing, and the body is quickly cremated. Denby, an ex-reporter, and Groucho make separate enquiries and come to the same conclusion: something is rotten in the state of

Hollywood. The two of them are constantly being warned off the case, as there seem to be gangsters and nasty studio executives involved. Sgt. Branner, a corrupt police officer, pops up at intervals to make meaningful threats.

McMorrow liked to live dangerously. So are Denby and Groucho, as their snooping around gets them shot at. Groucho still manages to get a few quips and ad-libs on each page though. Several more bodies show up along the way. The MacGuffin of the plot is a batch of photos that McMorrow took, and which it seems everyone in the Los Angeles basin is haring after.

The suspects multiply like the vermin they are. By the time I got three-quarters of the way through the novel, I was wondering how all the loose threads would be tied off. However, it winds up nicely with Groucho hosting a J'accuse! denouement live on stage before a theatre audience that was expecting to see a movie premiere. Instead, they get a multiple shooting as the suspects kill each other off during Groucho's expose. That's one way to thin out the subplots. It may not have been art, but it was great spectacle.



GROUCHO MARX, PRIVATE EYE (1999, hardcover) is the follow-on novel, with Groucho's radio show having just changed sponsors in the spring of 1938. That means he and Denby have a new blight in their life, as the sponsor insists the show stop abruptly in the middle of each episode so teenage singer Polly Pilgrim can warble a love tune. Groucho describes her as having "*all the best qualities of Typhoid Mary, Ma Barker, and Louis B. Mayer*".

Notwithstanding their distaste for her, they agree to help when her mother, faded actress Frances London, is accused of murder. Dr. Russell Benninger, a plastic surgeon to the stars, departed this world suddenly due to high-speed lead poisoning. All the evidence is stacked against London. There is also the unexpected death of leading man Brian Montaine, from a heart attack while only in his 40s. It seems completely unrelated but of course the reader knows more of him will be heard.

It seems that Benninger was a ladies man and also supplying actors with drugs to help them ease the pain of being rich and famous. His death may have been a gangland execution, a cuckolded husband settling a score, or a patient whose face was botched by him in an operation. Sgt. Branner reappears to threaten Groucho but he finally gets his.

The storyline seems convoluted and certainly was lengthy in the J'accuse! meeting, but it straightens out into a linear narrative that makes sense. It leads logically to a character who was not considered as a suspect but whose actions match the detected facts.

ELEMENTARY, MY DEAR GROUCHO (1999, hardcover) has our favourite Marxist playing detective a third time when the body of director Felix Denker is found on the movie set of "The Valley Of Fear", sitting in Holmes' armchair. Miles Ravenshaw is playing the part of Holmes and challenges Groucho to a race to discover the murderer.

It is December 1938, and the clouds of war can be seen gathering even in sunny California. Groucho's radio show was canceled in October, and he and Denby are now working on a script for a comedy movie. As they enter Mammoth Studios to pitch their project to a producer, the body has just been found. Another useful tidbit is that a few days prior, the studio's Assistant Art Director died in an automobile accident. She had been having an affair with Denker. He was a German refugee publicly involved in anti-Nazi groups, was a ladies man, and had many other good and sufficient reasons to be murdered.

Groucho and Denby compile their evidence and work out a complicated plot where most of the protagonists are Nazi spies. The actual expose doesn't work out as intended, but the guilty spy is finally caught and gives herself away in front of the cops. This novel is one long stream of Groucho quips, especially when he is fending off autograph requests from the general public, all of whom want to know why he shaved off his mustache. Almost every quote you ever read attributed to Groucho is in here. It does keep the narrative flowing nicely though.

GROUCHO MARX AND THE BROADWAY MURDERS (2001, hardcover) follows Groucho and Denby as they travel by train in the summer of 1939 from Hollywood to New York City. Once again they are involved in a murder case. "*We're as good as the Thin Man, Philo Vance, and Charlie Chan rolled into one*", Groucho maintained. "*Although why anyone would want a five-hundred-pound detective is beyond me.*"

As Denby and his wife prepare for a trip to New York City, he and Groucho are "requested" by local mobster Vincent Salermo to help solve the murder of one of his lieutenants, widely assumed to be a gangland killing. Salermo doesn't think so, but Groucho begs off, claiming he's going to New York City with the Denbys. On the train there are a number of Hollywood types who get up to all sorts of the rubbish that Hollywood types famously do. The trip is an eventful one with numerous alarms and excursions. There are the usual suspects with something to hide, assorted characters are rendered unconscious, and Groucho and Denby get the regular threats to lay off investigating.



George Kaufman

The first body, surprisingly, doesn't show up until halfway through the novel, and not on the train either. Groucho is attending a Broadway murder mystery play when a real body shows up on stage and stops the show, not just figuratively. Both the amateur and police detectives swing into action. So does the murderer, as a second body shows up at the World's Fair. Groucho is still being annoyed by autograph seekers in New York City, but even more so because they think he is George Kaufman, the famous playwright.

Events subsequently trundle to a conclusion without a J'accuse! meeting. Instead there is a final confrontation with the state police eavesdropping and bursting in at the final moment. It is a twist ending, as there were two murderers working together, and it all ties in with the death of the Los Angeles mobster.

GROUCHO MARX, SECRET AGENT (2002, hardcover) has Groucho and Denby investigating the death of British director Eric Olmstead, an apparent suicide. The widow doesn't believe it was, and asks the two men to investigate it since the police won't. It is Halloween 1939. Europe, Canada, and the British Commonwealth are in the war, although the USA will wait a couple of years. Hollywood is rife with rumours of war and spy rings.

Groucho and Denby get started with their snooping. It was a strange suicide. The note was typed with no signature, and the gun that Olmstead allegedly shot himself with cannot be found. Higher-ups in Washington, D.C., are leaning on local police not to be too thorough in their investigation. Olmstead left something hidden that various no-gooders are chasing after. The two men are hampered, if only slightly, by the fact that Warren Lockwood, the owner of Warlock Pictures, is considering their proposal for a new radio show "Groucho Marx, Secret Agent", featuring the star as J. Edgar Bedsread. Lockwood is also trying to muffle the murder investigation because the widow is one of his contract players and he doesn't want her reputation tarnished by scandal. The FBI are concerned more about J. Edgar Bedsread than the actual murder.

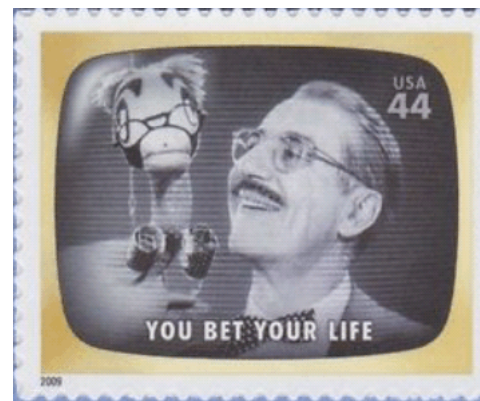
Lockwood owns an aircraft factory and is an obvious analogue of Howard Hughes. His flunkies are busy covering things up, the FBI tell Groucho and Denby to back off, and the Silver Shirts (Hollywood's equivalent of the Brown Shirts) are phoning in threats to Groucho because he is a Jew. Meanwhile, back at the casbah, Nazi spies are scuttling about looking for top-secret aircraft plans from Lockwood's factory. Another corpse shows up, not unexpectedly, and Denby is knocked unconscious while snooping, again not unexpectedly. It turns out that Lockwood, the police, and the FBI are on the side of the angels in this case. They are well aware that Olmstead's death was really murder, and are trying to trace his history and connections with Nazi spies.

However, Lockwood was not without sin. He ordered the murder of Olmstead for reasons unrelated to the spy ring. Groucho, as always, picks an unusual place for the J'accuse! meeting, this time Olmstead's funeral. The truth will out, if only in the strangest places.

GROUCHO MARX, KING OF THE JUNGLE (2005, hardcover) takes place in April 1940 on the movie set of "Ty-Gor And The Lost City", a ripoff series of Tarzan. Denby is the screenwriter, and at his suggestion Groucho was brought in to do a humourous walk-on. Denby's wife is in her final month of pregnancy, so the plot is enlivened by various vignettes of her, not to mention the endless streams of puns and quips from Groucho. The first corpse shows up on page 5, when Denby and Groucho arrive at the studio just as the body of leading man Randy Spellman is discovered with two bullet holes in his chest. Spellman was a womanizer, a blackmailer, and, even worse, a terrible actor, so the motive is not in question here.

Stuntwoman Dorothy Woodrow went missing immediately after the murder and is suspected by the police. She had an affair with Spellman but then dumped him for a very secret romance with Eneery McBride, a black man playing a bit part in the movie as a cannibal chief. In 1940, such a romance could get him lynched, so he comes to Denby and asks him to investigate. Woodrow is in hiding at McBride's place, and if they are found, both of them would probably swing from a rope.

Blackmail photos that Spellman was using are one of the MacGuffins of the plot. Los Angeles mobster Vincent Salerno reappears from previous novels in the series for a friendly chat with Groucho. The Ty-Gor movie stumbles its way from one rewrite to another, not to mention a new Ty-Gor leading man. Denby is sapped unconscious again, as we knew he would be sooner or later. It all ties together in the end, without a J'accuse! meeting yet.



Various forebodings sprinkled through the novel in the background suddenly take centre stage and expose the true killers. All the obvious suspects are suddenly shuffled to one side in the denouement. Woodrow is acquitted and immediately dumps McBride when she realizes the danger they are in. And so to the grand finale, when Denby's wife gives birth to their first child. Out of death, life.

**SIGNS, SIGNS, EVERYWHERE A SIGN**

photos by Dale Speirs

At left is a bicycle shop on the corner of 11 Avenue SW and 4 Street in the Beltline district of Calgary. What the shopkeeper meant to say was that the entrance was around the corner.

The signs below were spotted in Olds, a town about an hour's drive north of Calgary. Who are you going to believe, the sign or your eyes?



## SHOULD WE STAY OR SHOULD WE GO?

by Dale Speirs



One distinctive aspect of Canadian literature is separatist fiction, given that Canada is not a federal state but a confederation held together by mutual consent. (And, as the old joke goes, by mutual hatred of Toronto.) Alberta and Québec are the two noisiest provinces in Canada, and most of the separatist fiction is

about them. In recent years, separatism has died down. The Parti Québécois still huff and puff about it, but they have lost every referendum they held, and were booted from power in 2014 when they tried to bring up the issue again. Alberta has been quiet since the disastrous National Energy Policy was repealed, which looted \$50 billion in oil taxes from the province in the early 1980s to subsidize Ontario and Québec so Pierre Trudeau could bribe the eastern voters.

During the heyday of separatism, a number of novels were churned out on the subject, none of which were great literature but which were best-sellers at the time. Richard Rohmer was the king of this genre. I have reviewed his novels earlier in OPUNTIA #71.1A in 2011, so this article will concentrate on other authors.

### **Alberta Takes A Hike.**

The subject of ALBERTA ALONE needs no guessing. Written by John Ballem, it was published in 1976 and was remarkably prescient about the National Energy Policy of 1979. Ballem died in January 2010 after a long career as a petroleum industry lawyer. His textbook THE OIL AND GAS LEASE IN CANADA, now in its fourth edition, is the standard legal reference for the industry. Over the years he also wrote a series of murder mysteries set

in Cowtown, and was correcting the proofs of MURDER ON THE BOW when he died. (Calgary is on the Bow River.)

The novel opens with Peter Groves bringing his horses into the Calgary Stampede rodeo for a riding competition. Things are seething in Calgary because of a trade war between Canada and the USA. Ottawa restricted auto parts imports to protect Ontario industry, and the American government retaliated by banning cattle imports. This meant that Alberta took the brunt because, in addition to the oil, it is a major beef producer.

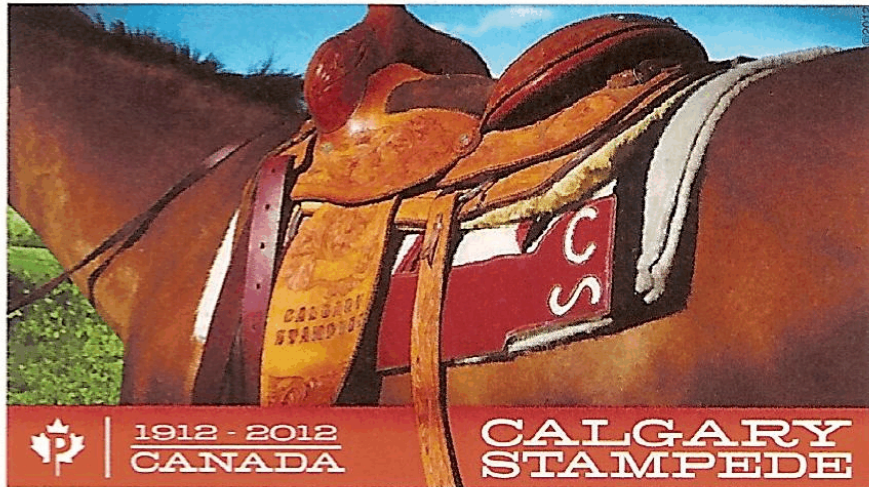
Simultaneously the prairie provinces were suffering under the century-old Crowsnest freight rates, which allowed subsidized cheap rates for grain and minerals shipped east to Ontario and manufactured goods shipped west from Ontario. This had the effect of destroying western manufacturing or value-added processing of grains or minerals which weren't eligible for the subsidy. The eastward rates for such were sky-high to compensate for the subsidy, which meant that Alberta manufacturers couldn't compete in eastern Canada. The Crowsnest rates were finally abolished in 1995 and freight rates are nowadays whatever the free market sets. Back in the 1970s though, it meant low prices for beef. The 1970s and 1980s were not a good time to be a farmer in western Canada, and this malaise fed western separatism. This was one reason why I never became a cattle rancher like my father. He was a livestock veterinarian who used the losses of the farm as deductions against his veterinary income. Most farmers and their wives had to take day jobs in town to survive.

Meanwhile, back at the novel, one of the ancillary characters is murdered by hitmen looking for something they can't find. They then go after a damsel and duly distress her, still trying to find the package, about which she knows nothing. Groves becomes involved with Valerie Thompson, her father Charles being an oilman who carries a grudge against the governing Liberal party. Charles seems like a normal Albertan for the time, when the Liberals were just reaching their stride in Ottawa. He is different in two respects; the hitmen are working for him, and he is busily building up a secret private militia called Force 81 (secret because private militias are illegal in Canada) and speechifying to the right-wingers in a bid at federal politics.

The Liberals get the ball rolling when the Prime Minister announces he is nationalizing Alberta's natural gas for the good of us all. In a show of bravado, the P.M. announces he will be in Calgary to be Honourary Parade Marshall at the Stampede parade on Monday. This is a glaring error that sticks out for any

Calgarian because the parade is always held on the Friday morning before the Stampede begins and is the official start of the rodeo. This surprised me because the author was a Calgary oilman who knew better, and the change was not essential to the plot. Be that as it may, the P.M. survives the booing and catcalling. There is a kidnaping from the parade though, as Force 81 snatches a girl and tries to apply pressure on the child's mother, who may know where the missing package is, now revealed to be blackmail photos of the Prime Minister in a homosexual encounter. Thompson has another string in his bow, that of a geneticist with a bad attitude who he is funding to produce a controllable form of green monkey virus, closely related to the Ebola virus.

The virus alternates with rodeo mis-adventures as part of the subplots, most of which begin to thread together as the novel approaches its climax. There is to be a mass rally of 100,000 protestors in Red Deer, the central Alberta town where I grew up and which in the 1970s had a population of about 30,000. This led me to wonder where everyone would be staying, not to mention the mother of all traffic jams because there were only three entrances into the city centre in those days. Even then, Red Deer was notorious for its traffic jams. My father liked to call it Red Light. But that is a plot point of interest only to people like myself who have been on the ground.



Thompson evidently saw the movie THE MANCHURIAN CANDIDATE, for his plan is revealed to be an assassination at the Calgary Stampede not of the Prime Minister but of the Alberta Premier standing next to him. The sniper will be in a helicopter, which would not be a completely impossible shot from a kilometre away but very optimistic. Thompson has stage-managed the hit with the idea that he will rush over to the Premier, cradle the dead man in his arms, and make an impassioned speech declaring that it was a federal plot and Alberta will separate. The P.M. will be held to silence and co-operation by the photos and the threat of the virus being released.

As always, the first casualty of battle is the plan of action. In the actual event, the sniper's helicopter gets into a dogfight with a police chopper over the Stampede infield. This confuses the audience in the bleachers (the Stampede after-rodeo show is an outdoor event) because they're not sure if this part of the grandstand show or the real thing. The sniper's chopper goes down in flames, Thompson is arrested, and in the closing scene the stage orchestra strikes up with a rousing version of "Oh Canada!". All's well that ends well, eh?

Like most topical novels, this one has failed to stand the test of time even as an action-adventure story, because so many of the premises it is based on have vanished into the dustbin of history.

### **They Remember.**

KILLING GROUND (1968) is subtitled "The Canadian Civil War" and was written by Ellis Portal, a pseudonym of Bruce Allen Powe. The novel opens with the narrator, Col. Hlynka, and his aide-de-camp returning from a tour of duty in United Nations-occupied South Africa, arriving in Montréal on a ocean liner. No rest for the wicked, as someone has blown up the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation building, which could be separatists or which could be millions of Canadian taxpayers who resent subsidizing the CBC. Hlynka gets his marching orders at the Montréal docks, where the army is occupying all strategic points. In typical army fashion, he is to proceed at once to London, Ontario. This makes no sense, since there are plenty of regiments in Ontario, so why send in another from elsewhere?

The separatists have taken control of the Québec provincial government and are intending to hold a referendum. This was before the Parti Québécois was formed in the real world, so they are not Pequistes but social democrats. The militant wing is the PDQ, not the FLQ. There are bombings and assassinations

throughout Québec, aimed at the anglophones. Hlynka has to get his troops trained and up to standard, a difficult task since few are experienced in actual combat (the last war was Korea) and they are only trained for peacekeeping missions, an entirely different thing. There are lots of raw recruits, but most are city boys.

Contrary to all those mean-streets cyberpunk science fiction stories, where unemployed street punks take on the authorities and win with little more than a knife and a USB memory stick, military commanders prefer farm boys who know how to fix things without calling a mechanic, aren't bothered by unpaid overtime tramping about in the dark and mud, and know how to round up cattle, whether four-legged or two-legged. Hlynka bogs down in the details of bringing a new regiment up to snuff from peace-time neglect. This also bogs down the narrative, as necessary as it may be to set the tone of desperation faced by an army that is scrambling to do a job it knows it isn't prepared for. A clear case of the old adage that authors should not put all of their research into a novel.

The fighting eventually gets serious between the Canadian government and the Provisional Government, with ample numbers of traitors and sundered families as everyone is forced to choose sides. Besides the combat scenes, there are the usual love triangles and mistresses and other slow parts thrown in to develop the characters.

The Americans decide they want peace in our time and launch an expeditionary force across the St. Lawrence River. The Canucks and Québécois immediately put aside their differences and join together in guerilla warfare to drive out the Yanks. That is where the novel abruptly ends, as a company of defenders wait to ambush an American patrol near St. Louis du Ha! Ha!. And yes, there really is such a town, said to be the only place in the world where exclamation marks are part of the legal name.



The novel reads better than most of its ilk, setting aside the fact that history has rendered its premises useless.



CHAIN REACTION (1978) by Gordon Pape and Tony Aspler opens with the Québec government having won a referendum to separate two years previous, but now bogged down in negotiations with a hardline Canadian government.

A unilateral declaration of independence would

cripple Québec economically, and it would lose the northern two-thirds of the province (which was gifted it in 1912 and is occupied by native tribes who are federalists). The provincial cabinet is torn between a Premier who wants to move cautiously and avoid economic disaster, and firebrands for whom ideology trumps the real world. The Premier is assassinated in the first chapter by an Ulsterman, and the plot gets rolling.

As the title of the novel suggests, the murder touches off a chain reaction. The American government do not want to see an independent Québec, but are uncertain how to react. The head of a multinational conglomerate based in Britain does know how to react; there'll be money in it somewhere. The police investigation of the murder is slow but necessary procedure, knocking on doors, sorting through paperwork, and all the other stuff that takes days or weeks, not one hour like television shows do.

The Pequistes have to elect a new leader, resulting in a vicious campaign made worse by France backing one of them in an effort to secure uranium supplies from the Québec mines. And, of course, the ace newspaper reporter who is hunting down the conspirators of the assassination. At the end of it all, the American military starts to move in on Québec. The novel burbles along brightly with its mixture of political wrangling, conspiracy theory, and geopolitical gamesmanship, the only real failing being the abrupt cut-off when the American army begins the attack. This seems to be a failing of many separatist novels, cutting off abruptly as if a sequel was going to pick up immediately where the last novel left off.

# DOWNTOWN COWTOWN: THE PLUS 15 SYSTEM

photos by Dale Speirs

Back before Canada went metric in 1971, the City of Calgary began a scheme to connect all the downtown skyscrapers by a network of covered pedestrian overpasses at the second-floor level. It became known as the Plus 15 system because the underside of the overpasses were 15 feet above ground. The earliest overpasses were exposed to the weather or if covered were unheated. The landlords initially kicked at having to build them but as the network grew over the decades, they changed their stance when they saw how much pedestrian traffic the Plus 15 system generated. As a result, the prime retail space in the downtown core is not the ground floor as it is elsewhere but the second floor. In recent years, new skyscrapers have been built with multistory overpasses to maximize the system. The City leases the air rights over the streets and reaps extra tax revenue for no cost, since the system is paid for by the landlords.

The photo below shows why Plus 15 has been so successful. Office workers can walk from one end of the downtown core to the other in shirtsleeve comfort during blizzards or rain. This is a Plus 15 over 3 Street SW during a blizzard. For the past several decades, the overpasses have been heated and nicely

maintained. The photo below here shows one of the oldest Plus 15 overpasses, an unheated arched bridge over the LRT route on 7 Avenue SW connecting a skyscraper to the 4 Street train station. It was finished in a polished pebbly surface that indicates the architect didn't think for one second what would happen when pedestrians tracked snow or water onto the bridge.





Some of the Plus 15 overpasses get quite fancy, as shown by this CPR bridge where 1 Street SW goes underneath the transcontinental railroad (hidden from view on the other side of the Plus 15).



And here is one of the newer three-story Plus 15s, photographed from another overpass.



At left is a curved part of the Plus 15 where it goes around the corner of a building en route to the LRT overpass shown on the previous page.

Older buildings are not obligated to connect to Plus 15, although many landlords have done it anyway given the benefits. Every year, two or three new skyscrapers are completed downtown and they connect as a matter of course. If one does not wish to go outside, then it may be a 1 km zigzag to go three blocks because of gaps. But as the years go by, the system becomes better and better.

On the next page are a couple more views taken from other Plus 15s. Notice the almost total lack of pedestrians on the street, since they prefer the Plus 15.



4 Street SW between 8 and 9 Avenue



3 Street SW looking south

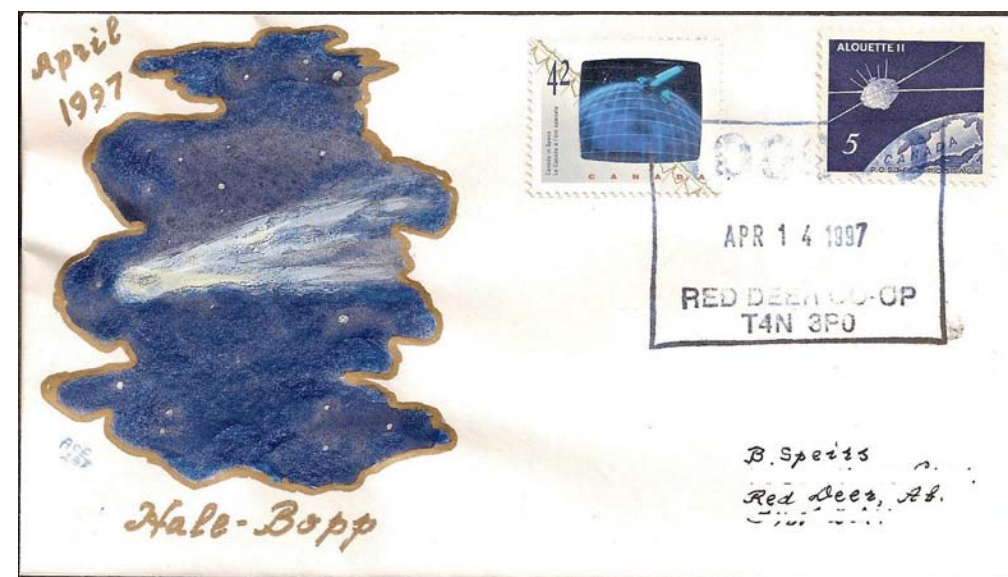
# BRANDISH YOUR CRYSTAL TRESSES IN THE SKY

by Dale Speirs

## A Personal Look At Comets.

The only comet I have seen with my own eyes was Hale-Bopp 1997. It is a rule that no matter where I live, as soon as some great astronomical event takes place, be it an eclipse, meteor shower, or comet, the skies will cloud over five minutes before the start and stay thus for the duration. However, Hale-Bopp was an exception, and a particularly emotional one for me. I drove up to Red Deer to visit my mother on the first anniversary of my father's death. They had been married 44 years and only death parted them. Dad was walking out to his car and fell dead to the ground from a coronary thrombosis. His doctor told us that as Dad took his last step he would have felt himself blacking out, but not hitting the ground.

I had not been able to see Hale-Bopp in Calgary because of the usual clouds but Red Deer had crystal-clear skies. Mom and I stood outside on the pad behind the house where the cars were parked and looked up at the comet. It was everything I had hoped it would be. We stood there silently for some time, thinking our own private thoughts. Mom had just been diagnosed with congestive heart disease and, all too soon, in 2002 I would be acting as executor of her estate.



My mother was a mail artist and she prepared Hale-Bopp commemorative covers. Since I was and am a serious philatelist, she left her mail art collection to me, which I integrated into my postal history collection. Her comet cover is shown below left. The house was sold after her death but I have blanked out the street address in deference to whoever lives there now.

## The Wonder Come To Pass.

THE GREAT COMET CRASH (1995, coffee-table hardcover) is an anthology edited by John R. Spencer and Jacqueline Mitton about the July 1994 impact of Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 (SL9) on Jupiter. People like to see things smash or fall over, which is why war is so popular, as are YouTube videos of implosions and Russian traffic accidents. Comet SL9 was discovered sixteen months before impact, which gave astronomers plenty of time to prepare.



SL9 was discovered by the team of Carolyn and Eugene Shoemaker and David Levy on 1993-03-25 at the Palomar Observatory in California. The Shoemakers lead off in this anthology with a first-person account of the discovery. Because the comet had already fractured into a dozen pieces, it almost wasn't recognized as such because it looked like a linear smear on the film, not an actual artifact.

Other astronomers had photographed it earlier without identifying it for what it was, but credit in science goes to the first who recognize and publicize a discovery first.

There were worries that the crash might prove to be a damp squib but in the actual event the results of the impact were spectacular. The comet broke apart from gravitational stresses before the crash, providing multiple impacts to study.

The impacts were just over the horizon of Jupiter as seen from Earth, but the planet's rotation brought them into view soon after. This was actually beneficial because it allowed scientists to see the impact plumes from the side as well as looking down on their tops. The plumes radiated huge amounts of infrared, and spectroscopic analysis was able to detect a variety of chemicals, some unexpected. Radio emissions from Jupiter's magnetosphere increased for a week after the impacts, and the polar auroras began brightening 45 minutes after. The impact sites produced dark rings around them, and for months afterward, dark clouds drifted across the Jovian atmosphere.

Subsequent analysis of SL9 showed that it had been in orbit around Jupiter for several years but was undetected because it was a single dark object too small to see directly. When it made a close pass by Jupiter in July 1992, it broke apart, not only into large pieces but also generating a cloud of dust particles. It was the reflection of sunlight off the dust that finally made the comet noticeable. The American astronomer Brian Marsden electrified the astronomical world and caught the news media's attention when his calculations predicted an impact in 1994. His results needed further information to refine the impact data. In his article in this anthology, he is careful to credit all the other astronomers who worked together to calculate the date of first impact.

Kevin Zahnle then writes about the developing story. Astronomers around the world began running computer simulations. No one had ever seen an impact on a gaseous planet like Jupiter. Impact craters on Earth, Venus, and Mars, the only planets with deep atmospheres that had been studied, were used as a starting point for calculations. The supercomputers of 1993 couldn't produce high-resolution simulations of the whole impact event, so compromises had to be made. Segments of the simulations were coarse analyses basically papering over the gaps with back-of-the-envelope calculations.

The initial moments of the impacts couldn't be seen from Earth because they were just behind the limb of Jupiter, but the Galileo space probe had a clear view. The intensity and duration of the infrared emissions surprised everyone, and far more heat energy was released than the computer models predicted. Each impact produced two bursts of energy. Firstly, the impact fireball rose up 3,000 km above the atmosphere. Then the dust and debris fell back down into the channel blasted open by the fireball, and the re-entry heat produced a second pulse of energy. It took twenty minutes for the fireball to rise and about the same for the debris to re-enter, providing lots of time to analyze the impacts.

Michael A'Hearn then looks at the runup to the impacts. Astronomers had nearly a year to prepare, and they set up a wide variety of communication networks. The World Wide Web had just been born, email lists (then called exploders) were set up to notify large numbers of people at once, and a centralized bulletin board system was established. For the first time in history, astronomers could communicate around the world in real time about a breaking event. Images and data from the impacts were transmitted worldwide within a minute of the events to anyone who was online.

One of the features of SL9 was that it was a straight line of about twenty fragments, not a spherical cluster. Harold Weaver and David Jewitt discuss this "string of pearls" and how it evolved as it approached its moment of destiny. Each fragment was about 3 km in diameter, and the train of them stretched out 1.5 million km by the time of impact. The impacts lasted from July 16 to 22. At infrared frequencies, many of the impacts were brighter than the planet itself.

John Spencer editorializes about the initial reports of the impacts. The news media love visuals and they were given lots of spectacular images. The event also triggered debate about how Earth would handle incoming meteorites. (Answer: we couldn't, and still can't.) The impacts showed that the fireballs spread wider and higher than previously thought, which means more area would be crispy fried. We will indeed all go together when we go.

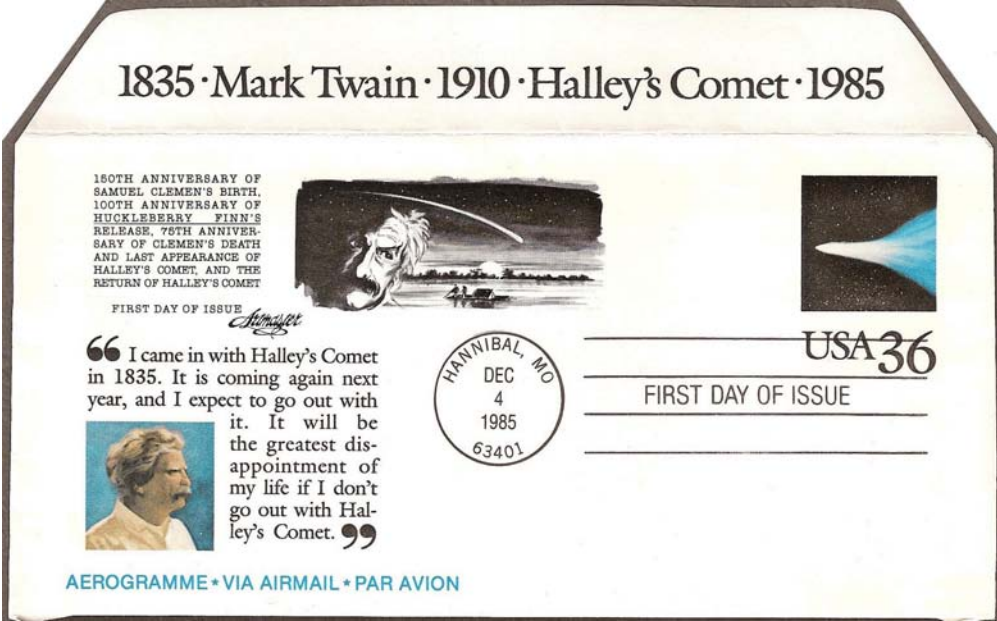
### **Now Shine It Like A Comet Of Revenge.**

A STAR SHALL FALL (2010, trade paperback) by Marie Brennan is a fantasy novel in a series about faerie folk who live hidden in London, England, in ye olden times. It is the middle 1700s. Many decades prior, the faerie fought a powerful fire spirit called the Dragon. They weren't strong enough to kill it but they did manage to exile it into a passing comet and send it off into deep space. What they didn't know was that the comet was periodic, none other than Halley's, and was now about to return. The Dragon is waiting for its chance, angrier than ever before, and just itching to lay waste to London.

Most of the characters are fictional but a few historical people wander into the plot. One of the faeries gets into an argument with Samuel Johnson about transcendence and loses. By and large though, the characters are the fictional ones. They desperately plot to deal with the imminent arrival of the Dragon, which succeeds in returning to Earth as Halley's Comet goes by. A plan is hatched to weaken it, enough so that it might then be killed.

Much of the novel is taken up by romantic subplots, the usual unfulfilled yearnings, things that can never be because Father wouldn't approve, and other soap opera standards. Fortunately the sucrose count doesn't get too high, especially after the hero makes the ultimate sacrifice and dies while killing the Dragon.

The novel manages to fit in lots of background without infodumps, particularly about the Royal Society of London. The word count of this thick novel is a typical product of the sad practice of letting novelists use word processors instead of making them write out the manuscript in longhand, so one has to speed read at intervals.



**WORLD WIDE PARTY #21**

2014 will be the 21<sup>st</sup> annual World Wide Party, held every year on June 21<sup>st</sup> at 21h00 your local time. It was invented by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria). The idea is to get a wave circulating the planet as zinesters and science fiction fans toast each other. At 21h00, you are requested to raise a glass to fandom. Do a one-shot zine or some mail art or have a party with fellow fans. Let people know how you celebrated by writing it up.

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY**

photos by Dale Speirs

I made my first trip for this year into the Rocky Mountains adjacent to Calgary on May 23. The photo below is looking north from the opposite side of the Bow River towards Mount Yamnuska, which stands at the entrance to the mountains. It is a sacred mountain to the Nakoda tribe, whose Reserve boundary is just to the right of the photo. Naturally the government back in the 1800s took it away from them and made it part of a provincial park. It is a popular climbing spot, and every year two or three climbers fall to their deaths from its kilometre-high cliff. Revenge of the angry spirits, I suppose.



Yamnuska guards the gap in the Rocky Mountains out of which the Bow River flows. Further upstream is Gap Lake, and there are no prizes for guessing where it is located. The photo on the next page is looking west from Gap Lake into the mountain pass. The lake is on the old Trans-Canada Highway off the tourist track. It is a popular fishing hole with local residents, and has a few picnic tables for people like me who know about it. When I am in the mountains, I like to have a picnic lunch there before going on any major hikes. Quiet and peaceful, with impressive views.



## 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

2014-05-17

I enjoy the Sherlock pastiches and I've even read one or two of them, but they do get a little much after a while. No one is THAT busy, and we'd need a battalion of Sherlocks to get to all these cases that spring up. It is good to see that Watson solves the odd case, and Sherlock need not be so embarrassed. Something had to rub off onto Watson. No man who could keep a busy doctor's office going in those times would ever be an idiot, early Holmes movies to the contrary.

[Blame it all on Nigel Bruce, whose movie portrayals of Dr. Watson as a bumbling, easily shocked duffer corrupted the image of him forever. Watson had served in combat against enemy fire, and was a military surgeon. The pastiches that show him a la Bruce are wrong. Watson would not be easily disturbed by any horrors in Holmes's cases, having personally experienced far worse in war. Medics are trained in logical diagnosis, and Watson would have been just as good at it as Holmes. Sir Arthur based Holmes on a Scottish doctor, in fact, and only added Watson as a foil for Holmes to explain things to.]

With your comments on the Calgary Comic Expo, coming up the weekend after I write this is Anime North, one of the biggest anime conventions on the continent. Attendance at this convention is capped at roughly 25,000, and we have a table for our steampunk goods in a secondary dealers room. We are hoping for good sales that weekend. Not everyone seems able to carry off a decent costume. We were at CostumeCon 32 in Toronto in April, and there were over a thousand people interested in costuming and cosplay, and we had a table there too. We seem to be reinventing ourselves as vendors, and we are enjoying ourselves and making a few bucks too.

[The April 2014 Calgary Comic Expo reported 97,000 paid admissions after the event. Every Victoria Day weekend, the local anime fans put on their own fan-run convention Otaka Con, held at the University of Calgary campus. They get hundreds, not tens of thousands, but I dare say they have just as much fun.]

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Gross, S.R., et al (2014) **Rate of false conviction of criminal defendants who are sentenced to death.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 111:7230–7235

Authors' abstract: "*The rate of erroneous conviction of innocent criminal defendants is often described as not merely unknown but unknowable. There is no systematic method to determine the accuracy of a criminal conviction; if there were, these errors would not occur in the first place. As a result, very few false convictions are ever discovered, and those that are discovered are not representative of the group as a whole. In the United States, however, a high proportion of false convictions that do come to light and produce exonerations are concentrated among the tiny minority of cases in which defendants are sentenced to death. This makes it possible to use data on death row exonerations to estimate the overall rate of false conviction among death sentences. The high rate of exoneration among death-sentenced defendants appears to be driven by the threat of execution, but most death-sentenced defendants are removed from death row and resentenced to life imprisonment, after which the likelihood of exoneration drops sharply. We use survival analysis to model this effect, and estimate that if all death-sentenced defendants remained under sentence of death indefinitely, at least 4.1% would be exonerated. We conclude that this is a conservative estimate of the proportion of false conviction among death sentences in the United States. ...*

*This is only part of a disturbing picture. Fewer than half of all defendants who are convicted of capital murder are ever sentenced to death in the first place (e.g., 49.1% in Missouri, 29% in Philadelphia, and 31% in New Jersey). Sentencing juries, like other participants in the process, worry about the execution of innocent defendants. Interviews with jurors who participated in capital sentencing proceedings indicate that lingering doubts about the defendant's guilt is the strongest available predictor of a sentence of life imprisonment rather than death. It follows that the rate of innocence must be higher for convicted capital defendants who are not sentenced to death than for those who are. The net result is that the great majority of innocent defendants who are convicted of capital murder in the United States are neither executed nor exonerated. They are sentenced, or resentenced to prison for life, and then forgotten."*

Zerefos, C.S., et al (2014) **Further evidence of important environmental information content in red-to-green ratios as depicted in paintings by great masters.** *ATMOSPHERIC CHEMISTRY AND PHYSICS* 14:2987–3015

Authors' abstract: "*We examine sunsets painted by famous artists as proxy information for the aerosol optical depth after major volcanic eruptions. Images derived from precision colour protocols applied to the paintings were compared to online images, and found that the latter, previously analysed, provide accurate information. Aerosol optical depths (AODs) at 550 nm, corresponding to Northern Hemisphere middle latitudes, calculated by introducing red-to-green (R / G) ratios from a large number of paintings to a radiative transfer model, were significantly correlated with independent proxies from stratospheric AOD and optical extinction data, the dust veil index, and ice core volcanic indices. AODs calculated from paintings were grouped into 50-year intervals from 1500 to 2000. The year of each eruption and the three following years were defined as “volcanic”. The remaining “non-volcanic” years were used to provide additional evidence of a multidecadal increase in the atmospheric optical depths during the Industrial Revolution. The increase of AOD at 550 nm calculated from the paintings grows from 0.15 in the middle 19th century to about 0.20 by the end of the 20th century. To corroborate our findings, an experiment was designed in which a master painter/colourist painted successive sunsets during and after the passage of Saharan aerosols over the island of Hydra in Greece. Independent solar radiometric measurements confirmed that the master colourist’s R /G ratios which were used to model his AODs, matched the AOD values measured in situ by co-located sun photometers during the declining phase of the Saharan aerosol.*"

Speirs: Setting aside years of large volcanic eruptions, this study shows that there is a long-term trend to redder sunsets because humans are throwing more dust and aerosols into the sky.

## **WORDS, NOT WORLDS**

Calgary’s annual readercon is When Words Collide (please note the correct spelling of that middle word), this year to be held August 8 to 10. This is a literary convention that brings together SF, fantasy, mystery, western, and romance writers, editors, and publishers. Very good panels, with cross-fertilization between the literary genres among the panelists. Details from: [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org)

## **ZINE LISTINGS**

by Dale Speirs

[I only list zines from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) or [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org), then I don’t mention them since you can read them just as easily yourself. SF means science fiction.]

[The Usual means \$5 cash (\$6 overseas) or trade for your zine. Americans: please don’t send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are still acceptable around the world.]

**CHRISTIAN NEW AGE QUARTERLY V21#2** (US\$5 from Catherine Groves, Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey 07015-0276) A look at the contact between Buddhism and early Christianity, and letters of comment.

**FLAG #15** (The Usual from Andy Hooper, 11032 - 30 Avenue NE, Seattle, Washington 98125) Thoughts on convention panels, zine reviews, and lots of letters of comment.

**FOR THE CLERISY #77** (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Reviews older books that deserve renewed attention, with some letters of comment.

**THE FOSSIL #359** (US\$10 per year from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) Published by zinesters devoted to the history of zines since the 1800s. This issue looks at public zine collections held by libraries and universities.

**GRUNTED WARNING #21** (The Usual from Stuart Stratu, Box 35, Marrickville, New South Wales 2204, Australia) Collage zine of weird news clippings, including people who dress up as dolls.

**THE KEN CHRONICLES #31** (The Usual from Ken Bausert, 2140 Erma Drive, East Meadow, New York 11554-1120) Perzine, with letters of comment, a look at how homeowners whacked by Superstorm Sandy are jacking up their houses up above the flood levels, and a trip to Florida.

**OSFS STATEMENT #421** (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with news and notes, and lots of astronomy news.