

# OPUNTIA

## 278

Middle June 2014

**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.



## THERE WERE GIANTS IN THE EARTH IN THOSE FUTURES

by Dale Speirs

While thinning out my library, I saw that I had a number of books on the theme of giant vehicles. I've always been interested in the practical details of such vehicles. If a supervillain has his own personal giant submarine, how does he schedule his crews? How does he get them to keep their mouths shut? Drydocks for maintenance and repairs are not cheap. Somebody has to flush out the bilges or empty the garbage cans. One wonders about these things.

### There Go The Ships: There Is That Leviathan.

CV (1985, hardcover) by Damon Knight is about the Sea Venture, a giant floating city the size of eight ocean liners and nicknamed CV. It is a raft, has no propulsive engines, and floats along the North Pacific Gyre. Half the population on board are permanent residents who provide the services for the other half, the tourists. The CV is submersible and can sink down below storms, an important point since it cannot maneuver on the surface. The corporation that owns CV is trying to make it self-sufficient, growing hydroponic vegetables on board, harvesting fish as it floats along, and scraping the bottom for minerals to bring in some cash income.



It is the last that triggers the horror. One day the scoop brings up some manganese nodules and tektites. One of the tektites is cracked open to see what was inside. Apparently nothing but a glassy hollow sphere that breaks open in turn to reveal ... nothing. But in that moment an unseen and unfelt entity, a pure energy being of some kind, escapes and begins sequentially parasitizing the crew and passengers, hopping from one to the next when they

come into contact. The victim is unaware of being parasitized, and the entity is only interested in collecting information and new experiences. When the entity leaves a body, that human collapses into a semi-conscious funk and remains so for days. On finally reviving back to health, the personality has changed. Nothing seems to matter, and the victims no longer put up with ordinary human failings in others. That means the collapse of civilization, if married couples separate just because they had a minor tiff, crew members say to hell with the discipline needed to keep the ship running, or people decide they don't want to work a dull job anymore. Somebody has to unplug the sewer, somebody has to tote food on board to the kitchens.

The entity is intelligent, and is the survivor of a diaspora from outer space that fell to Earth. It was confined for countless millennia inside its shell, probably never to have been released had it not been scooped up. Once the medics and ship commanders realize what it is and not just an epidemic of some kind, the struggle begins. Various methods are tried to isolate the entity and prevent it jumping from one host to another. If it cannot be trapped and destroyed, it will reproduce and spread through the human race. The entity is not malicious, just unaware of the effect it leaves behind as it hops from one mind to another.

The captain and ship's doctor are hampered by the mutinous behaviour of the crew and the panic of the passengers once word gets out. A gigantic floating city does not run itself, and if no one can be bothered to empty the garbage cans or prepare the meals, then anarchy will bring everything and everyone down. The ending is a twist; the entity is destroyed but what did it do when it stayed in a pregnant woman? The novel is well written and a steady page-turner.

### **Above The Earth In The Open Firmament Of Heaven.**

STEAM BIRD (1988, mass-market paperback) by Hilbert Schenck is about a gigantic steam-powered bomber aircraft equipped with a nuclear reactor to heat the water. The weight of the water and reactor safety problems cancelled out any benefit of being able to fly for days at a time. The idea was taken seriously in the early days of the Cold War. In his author's foreword, Schenck explains how he worked on the project as a young engineer in 1952. USAF had put out a tender for such a plane but the main problem was "roll-up", the fear that if the plane crashed on landing, the reactor would roll out of the wreck and the heavy radiation shields that protected the reactor would crush it and trigger a nuclear explosion. The rise of ICBMs killed the idea of steam-powered bombers. But what if?



Mooseport Air Force Base, Maine, is the home of the Samuel Langley, one such steam-powered nuclear reactor bomber. It is an immense plane, the size of a zeppelin with wings to match, only not as light and maneuverable. The runway is ten miles long and the plane needs every inch of it to get up into the air. The project was cancelled long ago but the base was left in maintenance mode by politicians to provide some jobs to locals. The flight crew endlessly train and yearn for the day they get an order to take the Langley up into the air. The crew are all steam rail fans, as is the pilot's brother-in-law, a Congressman who keeps the maintenance funds flowing.

The greatest difficulty is that once the Langley goes up, there is no provision for it to land again. The shielded hangers to screen the hot reactor after the plane returned to base were never built due to budget cuts. The plane can only be flown once, presumably during World War Three when budgets don't matter anymore. It takes several hours and 3,000 miles for the plane to reach its top speed of 200 knots and cruising altitude of 20,000 feet. This makes it a sitting duck for any Soviet fighter pilot who has the sense to stay away from its radioactive exhaust.

During a minor crisis over an Arctic ice island, the Pentagon generals convince the President to order the Langley up into the air as a warning to the Soviets. They were unaware of the abovementioned details about the plane and were just going from a list on the duty roster as to which bomber was immediately available. More importantly, they forgot that an air base in maintenance mode does not store nuclear weapons, and it isn't until after the bomber is launched that they discover it is unarmed.



The ice island crisis takes a back seat to the question of what to do with a multibillion-dollar plane that can only be flown once, is not fitted out for the purpose for which it was intended, and has nowhere to land. The politicians save face by announcing that the Langley will fly around the world on a goodwill mission, as if it were planned that way. That will give them time to decide where and how to land the plane, whether to ditch it in the ocean over deep waters or to land it on the ice island and make the place unsuitable for Soviets. They decide on the latter.

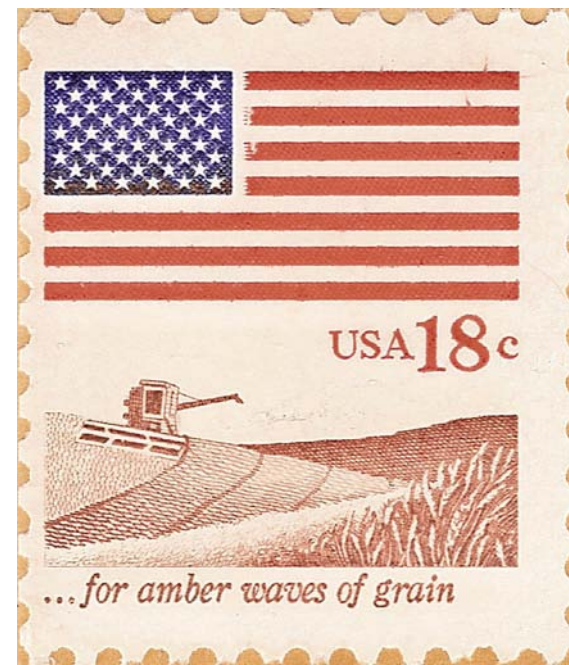
The novel is quite funny in places, a Dr. Strangelove with steam bombers instead of B-52s. The humour sometimes drifts into Hee-Haw redneck style (or Judy Canova for you old-time radio fans). The epilogue is an unnecessary anticlimax, and there are too many infodumps about how steam engines work, but on the whole this novel is an enjoyable read.

### **He Shall Tread In Our Palaces.**

As a farm boy I haven't noticed too much in the way of agricultural science fiction. Keith Roberts, best remembered for his novel PAVANE, wrote one short story "The Grain Kings" in 1972, later published in a collection of his stories under the same name. Like many of his other works, it is alternative history, this one where global warming has opened up the tundras of Canada and Alaska for wheat farming. The wheat is being harvested by gigantic combines of the United Nations and the Soviet Union, which makes one wonder why the USA and Canada are allowing them to do that.

The story is set on Combine Patsy, which will harvest a 250-metre-wide swath of wheat 200 km long and then back again on the adjacent track. The author keeps jumping back and forth between metric and British measurements, but the above are as specified in the story. I kept thinking throughout the story about how that wheat must have been sown in the first place and what kind of weed control methods were used. The tundra occupies hundreds of thousands of hectares. How was the soil broken? Seeding and spraying that much land must have been done by Zeppelin. Of course it isn't real AH until an airship floats by.

The combine is a small village, with 100 people on board, and towers into the sky. It is articulated into ten sections, since the ground will vary as it swaths the wheat. The course it follows is controlled by computer GPS systems, but strangely when it turns around for the return swath the crew have to manually



steer it. The story is mostly a guided tour of the innards of the combine and the people who live and work within it.

There is a conflict to motivate the story, that of the Soviets combining too far into the UN-claimed wheat field. There is a collision between the two towering machines. Instead of being the opening shot of World War Three, the story ends in an anti-climax.

After sorting out the damage and the dead, everybody shrugs their shoulders and heads back home. The Soviets are built up as villains but then someone casually remarks that perhaps Combine Patsy was the one that was off course. That's one way to wimp out an ending.

THE INVERTED WORLD (1974, hardcover) by Christopher Priest is a high-concept novel of the kind we don't see enough of anymore. The novel changes viewpoints several times during the story but the main character is Helward Mann, a young man who comes of age in the course of events. He lives on board a mobile city which was originally on crawlers and now moves on tracks laid down in front of it and taken up from behind. The city is run by the guilds, and the children raised in a creche before being assigned to their life duties. Those not in the guilds are the lumpenproletariat, who labour within the city and are kept ignorant of the outside world. The reader is also kept ignorant, and has to wait for each piece of information to be unveiled as Mann stumbles across it. He is assigned to the Futures guild, the surveyors who go out ahead of the city to plot its course across the land. His initial apprenticeship is to rotate from one guild to another at intervals so that he understands everyone's place in the scheme of things.

The city must keep moving and stay even, or at least as close as possible, with a mysterious energy source called the optimum. It powers the city, but also creates a distortion of space-time around the city. The further away from the optimum, the greater the distortion. It will kill the inhabitants of the city if they go too far from it. The optimum does not stay still. It slowly circles the planet and thus the city must follow it.. The inhabitants of the city don't know the planet is Earth because the city has been on the move for so long that they think they are on a different planet out in space.

There are other inhabitants of Earth, which has sunk back into a village economy after the Crash, caused by peak oil. As the city crawls along, the Barter guild meets with local inhabitants to hire them as track-laying labour. Relations are never good with locals. To them, the city is a juggernaut ploughing its way through their land with no respect for property rights or the damage it does, both from the track laying and from the distortion field. The city thinks of itself as a benign traveler, dispensing wisdom as it goes along and acting as the last bastion of scientific knowledge.

Ultimate disaster comes when the city reaches an ocean, with which the guilds have no experience or understanding. The optimum keeps drifting out into the ocean, while the city is stranded on the beach. The city knows how to bridge rivers and canyons but can't think how to get across the ocean. At that point, matters come to a climax, and the true history of the city and its origin is revealed. The power field is shut off, the distortion of space and time ends, and the inhabitants find they were always on Earth. They also find that the rest of the planet did not view them as the last best hope of civilization but as a disruption against which nothing could be done while the force field was running. The rest of the world is recovering from the Crash, and there are places of knowledge and enlightenment. Mann and his comrades have to undergo a sudden wrench in their view of life and what is important.

The novel changes viewpoints without annoying the reader. The prologue is totally useless, as it refers to a character and place who don't show up again until the last few pages, by which time the reader has completely forgotten the details. Overall however, the book is a good read and well recommended. This is science fiction as it should be wrote.

## **THE MAN FROM MONTENEGRO: PART 4**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 and 2 appeared in issues #252 and #253 in 2012. Part 3 was in #275 in 2014.]

### **Wolfe's Moriarty.**

As Sherlock Holmes had Professor Moriarty, so it was that Nero Wolfe had Arnold Zeck for his archenemy. Unlike Moriarty though, Zeck was not a cardboard cutout, an evil villain who was evil because he was evil. Zeck was Mr. Big in an organized crime outfit, pulling strings from his Westchester estate to run his empire. He could always find out things about Wolfe that even Wolfe didn't know, threatening him with very effective means to stay away from his organization. They were enemies, but sometimes ended up working together. Zeck admired Wolfe, and often regretted to him that they had to be enemies. But Zeck was ultimately ruthless in the clinch and would stop at nothing to get his way. Wolfe was sworn to destroy him, and ultimately did.

### **Poison And Poison Pens.**

Arnold Zeck made his debut in *AND BE A VILLAIN* (1948), which starts off with Wolfe wedging his way into a murder investigation because he needs the money, having spent too much on orchids, food, and income taxes. Radio talk show host Madeline Fraser was considerably embarrassed when one of her guests took a drink of Hi-Spot soda pop on the air and promptly expired from cyanide poisoning. He was a tout-sheet publisher with no apparent enemies, at least none who wanted to kill him, and the question arises as to who the real target was, him or Fraser. Both Wolfe and the police are stymied because all those involved in the radio production are lying and lying big, each for their own reasons. After stumbling about helplessly, Wolfe notices that another publisher, this one of a weekly political commentary, was shot to death. She had no connection whatsoever with the radio folk, but both her office and the office of the tout sheet were stripped of all documents and wiped clean of fingerprints by a person unknown.

Wolfe gets a phone call from Zeck telling him not to stray too afar in his investigation into other things that do not concern him. What those things are turns out to be a poison-pen racket of unusual subtlety. Well-to-do victims are being targeted by poison-pen letters. They then receive a phone call telling them the letters will stop if they subscribe to either the tout sheet or the political

weekly at \$10 per week. That was considerably more money then than now. The weekly sheets are indirectly controlled by Zeck, who operates at several removes in all his operations so that no one suspects him. Even a rough estimate puts his share of the take at \$600,000 per year, which was real money back then.

It turns out that Zeck was surprised as anyone else at the deaths of his two sheet publishers. He therefore tolerates Wolfe's investigation into the murders, which turn out to have been done by one of Zeck's victims, who didn't know about him but did know the publishers were too much to be tolerated. The novel contains a few forebodings of what is to come in future Zeck novels, and Stout had obviously planned this as an extended story arc.

### **Too Many Confessions.**

THE SECOND CONFESSION (1949) was published as Red-baiting became a national sport in America. Wolfe was hired by mining company CEO James Sperling to investigate Louis Rony, a young man courting one of Sperling's daughters. He doesn't like Rony but the traditional methods of ordering young women not to see their swains don't work in this modern age. Sperling has a suspicion that Rony is a card-carrying Communist and wants Wolfe to find proof.

That investigation gets off to a rough start when Wolfe and Archie Goodwin discover that Rony is one of Zeck's proteges, with a bright future ahead of him as both a corporation lawyer and a mobster. Zeck emphasizes to Wolfe that he wants him to lay off Rony. He does this by having hired guns set up one dark night on the roof of the building across the street from Wolfe's brownstone. Using heavy machine guns, they totally destroy Wolfe's rooftop greenhouse wherein he keeps his prized orchid collection.

Wolfe refuses to take the hint and continues the investigation. It seems at first that this novel will be a standard plot of fighting the mob while finding the truth, but the story suddenly takes a twist. Wolfe and Goodwin visit the Sperling estate. While they are there, someone borrows their car and runs down Rony. The post-mortem is sloppy, and the coroner overlooks a dent on Rony's head, indicating he was slugged before being run over. Goodwin had an alibi though, and the police start poking around the shrubbery of the Sperling manor. This is all very embarrassing, so Sperling bullies his flunky Webster Kane into signing a confession that he had borrowed the car and accidentally run over Rony.

He'll get a fine and court appearance, but since the Sperling name is not to be trifled with, the county judge will go along with the deal. The whole matter will be quickly forgotten, with no need for a sensational murder investigation that would annoy the Sperlings, who are above that sort of thing.

The murder investigation still takes place though, by Wolfe and not the police. The reason why is \$50,000 in used bills, delivered in a suitcase to Wolfe's brownstone by Zeck's middlemen, and a phone call from Zeck wanting justice for Rony, who was like a son to him. The two men thus ending up working together for different reasons. Wolfe has Goodwin take the money to a New Jersey bank, rent a safe-deposit box in an assumed name, and stash the cash there. In a piece of ominous foreboding, Wolfe tells Goodwin the cash will be there as a bolthole of sorts, in case they have to go on the run from Zeck in some future case. (Spoiler alert: In a future novel they do.)

The investigation continues. A membership card is found with the Party name William Reynolds, but was it Rony or someone else who had the card? (No laminated photo ID, just the name and details on a piece of cardboard; remember this was in 1949.) Wolfe accumulates enough evidence to prove Rony was murdered, and the murderer was Reynolds. But who can identify Reynolds by his real name? Obviously the Communist Party hierarchy. They are reluctant until Wolfe points out that it will come out at the trial (he is bluffing), so it might be better to identify him at one of Wolfe's famous J'accuse! meetings. They do so, having first taken the precaution of publicly expelling him from the Party.

The novel has several lines of plots twining about each other. They all come together neatly in the final meeting. It was a pleasure to see how different threads suddenly tied together with an inevitability that seems obvious in retrospect, yet not seen by the reader the first time around.

### **Gunfight At The Westchester Corral.**

IN THE BEST FAMILIES (1950) is the final Zeck novel. Mrs. Barry Rackham, an ugly woman but a rich widow, married a second husband who could only have been after her money. He resents living on an allowance but soon finds a mysterious source of funds elsewhere that enable him to live in the style to which he would like to become accustomed. She hires Wolfe to find out where he is getting his money from, but that night is stabbed to death at her country home. Barry is the obvious suspect, but before Wolfe and Goodwin can

start an investigation, they get a parcel bomb at the brownstone. Not explosive, just a canister of tear gas that ignites as soon as it is inside the house, and is an obvious warning. Who sent the warning is quickly ascertained when Zeck telephones Wolfe a short time later and tells him to drop the Rackham case. By this time, the reader does not need to look up a Wikipedia article to know that Barry was in deep with Zeck. It turns out that Zeck's estate is only a short distance from the Rackham manor house in Westchester.

It is the third time that Zeck has phoned Wolfe, and the detective is getting tired of it. Wolfe doesn't want to spend the rest of his life wondering how many times he is going to get phone calls from Zeck, and resents the implication that Zeck is controlling him. A frontal attack will not work. If police at three levels of government can't get to Zeck, then Wolfe certainly couldn't dredge up any further evidence that would stick. Instead, he disappears, closing down his house, disperses his staff, announces his retirement in the newspapers, and leaves Goodwin at loose ends. Goodwin sets up his own detective agency and carries on. He often thinks of that safe-deposit box with the \$50,000 cash, but manages to survive on his own without having to dip into his capital.

For the next several months, everything drifts along, both the plot and the characters. One day Goodwin meets up with a new underworld boss named Pete Roeder, just moving in from Los Angeles and big enough to attract Zeck's attention. Roeder is Wolfe, having lost 170 pounds and now unrecognizable to everyone except Goodwin, who only recognizes him because of the eyes. Roeder/Wolfe manages to infiltrate Zeck's organization and meet with the man himself.

Zeck, meanwhile, has not been inactive. Barry Rackham inherited his wife's estate but is living under a cloud because everyone thinks he murdered his wife. He broke off his connection with Zeck, which annoys the man considerably because Rackham was a good shill for dragging in new victims to be milked. The police were not able to make an arrest for the murder, and while Wolfe could have solved it, he had to skedaddle. Zeck decides to force Rackham back into the organization, forgetting that conscripts don't make good warriors. He uses blackmail, telling Rackham that he can manufacture evidence to send him to the electric chair. Wolfe and Goodwin set up a final confrontation with Zeck at the latter's lair, although Zeck doesn't know it is his final hour in this world. The confrontation is neatly staged so that Rackham does the honours, while Zeck's henchman arrive just too late to save him but do kill Rackham in turn.

One might suppose that a three-novel story arc would end there, but the epilogue takes care of one major loose end; who killed Mrs. Rackham? Wolfe was the only person who believed Barry Rackham's protestations of innocence, so he sets up a final meeting in his office with members of the Rackham family and the District Attorney. He discusses one point which a good reader will have noticed, namely that Mrs. Rackham's death a few hours after her meeting with Wolfe could only have been done if an inside informer had tipped off someone. The other point is about a wounded dog's final behaviour at the time of the murder, and is a bit more debatable.

### **Doyle Versus Stout.**

The late unlamented Zeck has his character drawn more deeply by Rex Stout than Sir Arthur ever did with Professor Moriarty. Indeed, Moriarty was such a cardboard villain that many modern pastiches have been written trying to flesh out his personality. Stout's plots and methods of detection are average at best, but he was unsurpassed in writing dialogue and delineating characters. Doyle's forte, by contrast, was in describing the world in which Holmes and Watson lived. The gaslights and the Baker Street rooms are the third leg upon which the stories stand. Wolfe and Goodwin were not straightforward imitations of Holmes and Watson.

### **WORDS, NOT WORLDS**

Calgary's annual readercon is When Words Collide, this year from August 8 to 10. This literary convention brings together readers, writers, editors, and publishers from science fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, and westerns. The bourse is for books, not crystals or steampunk T-shirts. Many publishers and editors have pitch rooms, where writers can meet them one-on-one and try to sell their latest ten-volume trilogy. Attendance is capped at 400 in order to keep the convention small enough to be enjoyable, and there are no overweight Klingons wandering the hallways. Details at: [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org)



## LIFE AT CHEZ OPUNTIA

by Dale Speirs



My yard is one of the few in the neighbourhood that doesn't have dogs, cats, or small children, as a consequence of which there are a fair amount of wildlife roaming the grounds. The above photo, taken on 2014-05-30, shows a snowshoe hare in summer colouration. It is feeding on dropped seeds from a bird feeder directly over my front steps, but normally it spends most of its time munching grass. If it could be trained to feed in a systematic manner, up one row and down the next, then I wouldn't have to mow the lawn. I've seen at least three hares at one time within a block of my house.

Squirrels are everywhere. In my yard are a black and two brown ones, which recognize me and patiently wait for me to get some peanuts out of the house and toss the goobers to them one by one. All squirrels in Calgary are descended from a pair of pure black squirrels that escaped from the Calgary Zoo in the early 1930s. Over time, about two-thirds have reverted to the original brown colour, while recessive genes keep a minority of them black.

My yard has a big spruce with branches drooping to ground level and lots of shrubs to provide cover. With a guaranteed food supply of birdseed and peanuts, a lot of animals overwinter here at Chez Opuntia.

## ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: EASTERN KANANASKIS

photos by Dale Speirs

The eastern Kananaskis mountains are a half-hour drive from my house. The photos below were taken along the Little Elbow River.







Above: cowboys crossing the Little Elbow River (not one of whom is wearing a cowboy hat). Because the provincial government was late in establishing Kananaskis as a park, not until the 1970s, much of it is still commercial use such as cattle grazing and forestry. The government doesn't want to spend the money to buy out the leases, so it is mostly letting them expire with the passage of time. There were also several mines but they all shut down due to poor economics and have been abandoned.

The rangeland cattle generally stay on the bottomland pastures, but I have seen herds on the middle slopes in late summer. Since the cattle roam freely and are not confined to one place, they fill the exact same ecological niche that bison did before they were extirpated from western Canada. I grew up on a cattle ranch in central Alberta and while I am glad to be a city slicker, I still become nostalgic whenever I drive by any Kananaskis cattle, as shown on the next page.





Above is a calf nursery. Cattle herds spread out while grazing but two or three cows stay close to the calves and act as nannies. The little ones prefer to hang out with their own age group, just as with human children.

At right, a herd enjoys the sun in a Kananaskis meadow. The majority are sitting with their backs to the wind so that coyotes can't sneak up from behind without their scent giving them away. Cows have acute noses and hearing, as well as wide-angle vision, so sneaking up on a herd undetected is basically impossible. Cows sleep on the ground. Anyone who tells you a frat boy story about tipping cows is a liar. I'm an old cowhand from Red Deer, so I know.





# COWTOWN STRUTTING

photos by Dale Speirs

Calgary loves parades. The big one each year is the Stampede rodeo, which brings 200,000 spectators downtown to watch it, but there are smaller parades throughout the year. On June 6, the Canadian athletes who competed in the Sochi Winter Olympics were honoured with a parade along 8 Avenue South from one end of the downtown core to the other.



As is traditional, the parade was led off by Mounties (Fort Calgary was founded in 1875 by the North West Mounted Police), followed by our popular mayor Naheed Nenshi.





There seemed to be a caste system in effect. The athletes who didn't qualify for Sochi walked, the ones who competed but didn't win a medal were towed along in hay wagons, and the medal winners got convertibles.



The Canadian Forces had a group of gunships fly over the parade in salute but they went by so fast I was only able to photograph the tail-end choppers.





## JUNO BEACH

by Dale Speirs

The town of Nanton is about an hour's drive south of Calgary on Highway 2. Their main tourist attraction is the Bomber Command Museum of Canada, which has a variety of military aircraft, mostly from World War Two.

The centerpiece of the Museum is a restored Lancaster bomber. It is too valuable to fly but they do roll it outdoors on special days, such as Saturday, June 7, in honour of the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day the previous day. Canadian bombers such as this one softened up the beaches before the armada went ashore. Canada's assignment was Juno Beach, and the Canadian Army was the only one to reach all their objectives on schedule.





Notice the portable staircase below the nose of the Lancaster. Visitors were allowed to climb up inside and crawl through the plane. Despite what it looks like on the outside, the interior is a tunnel about the diameter of a sewer main. I had a hell of a time getting through because of my height and almost got stuck.

A museum docent sitting in the pilot's seat (seen leaning out of the window) told me that once while refurbishing a gunner turret, he got stuck and had to be pulled out backward. Obviously the Royal Canadian Air Force preferred smaller men. The lower forward turret is where the bombardier sat.





Looking out from the bombardier turret, showing his bomb sight.



The pilot's seat. Beside his right knee is the tunnel; there was no co-pilot.



Looking out from the top gunner turret.



The top gunner turret.







Looking out the pilot's side window.



## 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](mailto:opuntia57@hotmail.com)]

FROM: Murray Moore  
Toronto, Ontario

2014-06-09

My plan is to stop thinking of reading and responding and to begin by reading and responding to the oldest fanzine in the pile, OPUNTIA 272 [about Napoleon Hill's book THINK AND GROW RICH].

I wonder, Dale, reading your address: why did 56 people before you choose opuntia? Or did you choose opuntia57 for a reason, 57 being a significant number to you; perhaps your age when you created a Hotmail address?

[It was as simple as there being 56 cactophiles ahead of me who chose the name. I have published several papers on the genus *Opuntia* during my 35-year career as a professional horticulturist, the first one in 1978 just as I graduated from university.]

I cannot argue with you and Napoleon Hill. Were Hill's parents believers, I wonder, in positive

thinking, giving their son the name Napoleon? I went to the University of Guelph because I had no better idea of what to do when I finished high school and my parents paid the cost. After graduating with a B.A. in English I worked full-time rather than part-time for the family business, until one of my uncles fired me.

Weeks later my father told me that the local weekly newspaper needed an editor. I applied and I was hired. Nine months later, dissatisfied and restless, I quit and

announced that I was going to drive to the West Coast. The first night I stayed with a friend of the family. In the meantime my father's stock broker got me an interview at Thomson Newspapers' headquarters, on Queen Street in Toronto. I ended up at the now-defunct morning Thunder Bay Times-News. After nine months there I quit and moved to Kingston where, not by coincidence, my future wife was at university (teacher's college).

Unable to get a job in Kingston I applied for a newspaper job in Midland, Ontario. Getting that job led to living there from 1980 through 1997, working for a succession of newspaper employers, full-time then freelance. In 1998 I admitted I needed a different career. Information technology was new and hot. I became in Mississauga a member of DeVry Institute's first, guinea pig, one-year IT program.

I obtained a job after graduation not with DeVry's help but by researching employers and sending my resume to addresses in an expanding geographic circle. My first interview led to employment as a tech writer for 10 years, ending four years ago when I was able financially to retire following the deaths of my father (2003) and my mother (2007). As you see, I drifted through my life and only late did I set a goal and work toward it. Good for you that you knew what you wanted to do for work and subsequently applied yourself to reach your goal.

### WORLD WIDE PARTY #21

2014 is 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 raise a glass to fandom. Do a one-shot zine or some mail art, have a party with fellow fans, or whatever else you can think of to celebrate our connections. Let people know how you celebrated by writing it up.

