

OPUNTIA

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ISSN 1183-2703

Late July 2012

OPUNTIA is published by Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada, T2P 2E7. It is available for \$3 cash for a one-time sample copy, trade for your zine, or letter of comment. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada as the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount. US\$ banknotes are acceptable in Canada at par value; what we gain on the exchange rate we lose on the higher postage rate to USA. Do not send mint USA stamps as they are not valid for postage outside USA and I don't collect them. A cumulative subject index for all issues is available on request.

THE MAN FROM MONTENEGRO: PART 1

by Dale Speirs

Sherlock Holmes is widely recognized as the greatest fictional detective, and Nero Wolfe is the close second. Rex Stout (1886-1975) wrote 33 novels and 39 short stories between 1934 and 1974 involving the gargantuan detective and his assistant Archie Goodwin. (Rest easy; I'm not going to review all of them.) Numerous radio, television, and movie adaptations were made. There haven't been as many pastiches because the stories are still under copyright and the Stout Estate keeps close watch on its main money-spinner.

Wolfe lives in a Manhattan brownstone and seldom stirs from it. More than once he mentions that he was born and raised in Montenegro. As a young man, he was in the Serbian Army during the Balkan Wars prior to WW1, and afterwards traveled around Europe living by his wits. He made his fortune somehow and came to America in 1930 as an immigrant. Wolfe weighs about one-seventh of a ton in Goodwin's estimate (he likes to say) but Wolfe hasn't weighed himself in years. His only exercise is working with his vast orchid collection in a rooftop greenhouse. Goodwin is younger, a licenced detective like Wolfe, does his legwork for him, and is a skirt-chaser. He lives in the brownstone along with Fritz the cook, and has his desk in Wolfe's office where he takes dictation, works on files, and does the bookwork.

During an investigation, Wolfe would invariably gather all the suspects in his office and interrogate everyone until the facts were known and the guilty party exposed. It is this aspect of the stories that have kept Wolfe in print for decades: the ambience of the brownstone, the relentless questioning that will not stop until justice is done, and the insouciance of Goodwin as he chases women and pushes his boss to get some work done. This is similar to why Sherlock Holmes is with us always. The Holmes plots are either Lord Jones dead in a stately manor house or some sort of criminal conspiracy, but people read them because of the three characters: Holmes, Watson, and the gaslight era.

Wolfe's Lair.

FER-DE-LANCE (1934) was the debut of Nero Wolfe. His world is already fully formed, and he and Archie have been working together for several years. Just as Watson referred to cases of Holmes that were never written up, so does Goodwin mention in passing some of the jobs Wolfe has done in recent years. Like Watson, Goodwin is the first-person narrator of the stories. There are some rough edges in the setting and relationships of the two men, but those would be smoothed off in future novels. Inspector Cramer of the NYPD Homicide Squad does not appear in the premiere novel, although in future stories he would be a frequent adversary.

The novel begins with the death of an Italian immigrant metal-worker in mysterious circumstances, from which Wolfe deduces that the death on a golf course a few days previous of a distinguished university president wasn't due to a stroke as surmised. The president was killed by a tiny poison dart fired by a booby-trapped golf club, which detail the police missed because they thought it was natural causes and no one looked any further.

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This causes a sensation over Wolfe's uncanny powers of deductions. It raises, not for the last time, the ire of a District Attorney who resents having been made a fool. Goodwin begins his legwork, competing with police detectives and bringing out the details from people who would rather not have them brought out.

The story takes a sudden twist when it turns out that the deadly golf club was intended for someone else. On knowing who the intended victim was, the suspect is immediately identified. He is not easily trapped, and goes on the offensive against Wolfe. When legal threats don't work, he tries releasing a poisonous snake inside Wolfe's office, the fer-de-lance of the title. The battle shifts back and forth, but a frontal assault is out of the question because the suspect is just as capable. Wolfe turns the enemy's flank by instead getting evidence of the metal-worker's murder and then driving the suspect to suicide.

The novel is a very well done debut. This is not a pilot story that supplies the background and explains how everyone came to be. The reader simply accepts the settings and characters as fully formed, without the need for a Read Me First file.

THE LEAGUE OF FRIGHTENED MEN (1935) is the search for evidence to convict author Paul Chapin of murdering some of his Harvard classmates one by one. As a result of a hazing stunt in their undergraduate days, Chapin was left permanently crippled, physically distorted, and psychologically warped. The fellow students who caused the accident have borne the guilt ever since. They formed a League of Atonement and over the years paid for his medical and living expenses. Most of the League men are respectable middle-class or upper-class citizens, although some have fallen on hard times because of the Great Depression. Others never lived up to their potential; one drives a taxicab and another is a newspaper reporter who can't stay sober.

Serial deaths of League members are followed by twisted and distorted poems sent to the others. Everyone is convinced that Chapin is somehow arranging it. Certainly the mortality rate of people who knew him well has suddenly begun climbing. Some League members hire Wolfe, others hire another detective agency, and the higher-placed ones are able to use their influence to get the NYPD on the job. So many men are tailing Chapin that there is an hilarious scene where he leaves his apartment, hails a

taxicab, and unknowingly causes a massive traffic jam behind him as all the stakeout men rush for their vehicles to follow him.

Wolfe collects enough evidence to prove that Chapin sent the poems, but any further investigation by Wolfe as to his guilt comes to a halt when Goodwin realizes that one of the men tailing Chapin is the first victim, hale and hearty. When a real murder occurs, Chapin is on the scene but Wolfe and Goodwin are convinced that whatever other sins he committed, murder was not one of them. Inspector Cramer hauls Chapin away in handcuffs as Wolfe and Goodwin do an about-face and now rush to try and prove Chapin innocent.

At this point the reader's attention is directed to the next suspect who seems the logical choice. The actual perpetrator, revealed at the usual type of meeting in Wolfe's office, is one of the spear-carriers who walked across the stage a few times earlier in the novel. There was one foreboding that pointed to him, but not until the penultimate chapter is he illuminated by a spotlight. The case doesn't end as cleanly as it should for the reader.

THE SILENT SPEAKER (1946) begins with an ending, that of prominent government bureaucrat Cheney Boone, who suddenly departs this world for the next one just before he was to give a speech to the National Industrial Association. Boone was the Director of the Bureau of Price Regulation.

The NIA and the BPR do not see eye-to-eye, to put it mildly, and Boone was in enemy territory. The general public and the press know who is to blame for the murder, and the NIA is greatly embarrassed. Wolfe is also embarrassed but financially (he spent too much money on orchids), so he maneuvers the NIA into hiring him for \$10,000 plus expenses. He calls a meeting in his office, rather larger than usual, with NIA representatives on one side of the room, BPR mandarins on the other, and Inspector Cramer and various police authorities sitting in the middle as a buffer zone. A few facts come to light but the meeting breaks up in disorder.

Goodwin then takes centre stage, tracking down suspects and asking them impertinent questions. One valuable piece of evidence comes to light, a group of dictation cylinders that Boone had made just before his demise and which had not yet been transcribed. Wolfe calls back the suspects for a second meeting in his office, during which Boone's secretary, a late arrival, is murdered on the steps of the brownstone just as she is about to ring the doorbell.

Subsequent complications come fast and furious. Everything seems to hinge on one missing dictation cylinder that Boone had made just before his death and which cost his secretary her life. Where did she hide it? All the combatants on all sides of the case are turning over heaven and earth trying to find it. When it is discovered, there is a neat twist as to where she hid it. The

cylinder is Boone's voice from beyond the grave, identifying the man who had reason to kill him.

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One final "J'accuse!" meeting in Wolfe's office wraps it up, although the effect was spoiled because there were two following chapters tying up loose ends. The novel peters out in an anti-climax, but the final third of the story makes up for that, with its buildup to the essential clue and the steadily increasing pace as everyone scrambles for the missing cylinder.

THE GOLDEN SPIDERS (1953) begins with an unusual client, a neighbourhood boy who saw a woman in a car with a man holding a gun on her. The boy naturally makes a beeline to Wolfe's brownstone and puts the case to him. The distressed woman was wearing gold earrings that looked like spiders. The case becomes a police matter when the boy is deliberately run over and killed by the same car. His grieving mother asks Wolfe to help investigate, for a fee of \$4.30, all she has. Wolfe doesn't want to dignify the matter with his presence, but does put out a few feelers pro forma.

Sure enough, the plot is soon rolling along, with Inspector Cramer and Sgt. Stebbins visiting, another body surfacing, and the usual plot coupons handed out like candy. Then a third body appears, run over by a car like the first two. Neither Wolfe nor the police can tie the three murders together by motive, although everyone agrees there must be a connection.

Secondary characters start showing up in Wolfe's office, some threatening him and others vice versa. Goodwin and some fellow operatives begin trailing some of the characters. Much to their surprise, they break the case wide open, but in a completely different direction, that of a gang of blackmailers. This time the final "J'accuse!" meeting in Wolfe's office is a mass meeting, with as many police officers as suspects.

There are several good twists as more than one person is exposed for more than one crime. Wolfe uses his favoured method of outflanking his enemies. A head-on investigation fails because the guilty are expecting it and compensating, but he takes them off guard by investigating what appears to be a minor side detail but which once spotlighted damns the murderer.

CHAMPAGNE FOR ONE (1958) has Goodwin being invited to a high-society dinner in aid of single mothers, not that anyone is implying that he has produced a few of them. Stout writes good conversations, and Goodwin's weaving and bobbing through the dinner talk made for steady page turning. One of the young mums is Faith Usher. She has been feeling a bit gloomy and telling others that she is carrying some cyanide tablets with her in case she's in the mood for suicide. Stout isn't just waving a red flag at the reader here; he's firing off flares and sounding a klaxon. Sure enough, she takes a glass of champagne a few minutes later and dies an agonizing death from poison. But was it actually suicide?

The police figure it was, but Goodwin says it was murder, and Inspector Cramer has been around him long enough to take him seriously. So does Edwin Laidlaw, one of the men at the party, who hires Wolfe to keep him out of trouble and find the murderer. Laidlaw, it transpires, was the one who fathered Usher's out-of-wedlock baby. The routine begins. Wolfe questions suspects, singly or in bunches, and there is a steady flow of traffic to and from his office. Four other men who were at the dinner party arrive as a delegation and threaten Wolfe with legal action if their names get into the newspapers. This, of course, only serves to rile him. The investigation goes nowhere until Wolfe tries an end run and starts looking into Usher's past. Things suddenly start to come together in unexpected ways. The final conversation with Wolfe and the suspects in his office ties together events and facts in new combinations. A very nice twist ending.

THE FINAL DEDUCTION (1961) begins with Mrs. Althea Vail visiting Wolfe. Her husband Jimmy has been kidnapped, she has not told the police, and has a typewritten ransom note to show Wolfe. A body quickly shows up but is not that of Jimmy, who was released after paying the \$500,000 ransom. It is of the Vails' secretary Dinah Utley, who was suspected by Wolfe of being in on the kidnapping. Her typewriter, on which the ransom note was typed, vanishes. How very convenient for someone, but who?

Since there is always a second murder, Jimmy Vail does the honours, crushed to death in his library by a life-size bronze statue of Benjamin Franklin. Wolfe and Goodwin are now dodging police inquiries about what they were doing on the case. The complications and supporting characters start to increase steadily. Althea Vail tells her grown children that if they find the ransom money they can have it as a gift. \$500,000 in the early 1960s would be millions in today's depreciated currency. As a result, amateur detectives are underfoot everywhere. A steady stream of suspects, angry cops bearing summonses, and Wolfe's various legmen come and go from the brownstone. It's a wonder the neighbours didn't complain about the traffic. Wolfe's office is busier than Grand Central Station with people denying things, admitting things, or brandishing court documents.

As Wolfe whittles down the list of suspects one by one, it becomes increasingly obvious who the guilty party is. She herself has a few twists of her own to apply to the plot, not about the murders, but the circumstances. It seems the kidnaping was a way to launder some money, but somebody got jealous and somebody else got angry enough to kill. The plot wraps up with a good twist.

DEATH OF A DOXY (1966) opens with Goodwin discovering the body of Isabel Kerr, the kept woman of a rich man named Avery Ballou but who herself is also keeping a handsome P.I. on the

side, Orrie Cather, who occasionally contracts out to Wolfe. The plot starts rolling when Cather is run in by Inspector Cramer for her murder, and he appeals to Wolfe and Goodwin for help. Cather's love life is rather complicated, for he was going to marry another woman, but Kerr claimed she was two months pregnant with his child. (Or was it Ballou's?) She had stolen personal items of his, which was how the trail led police to Cather. -6-

Goodwin begins his round to gather evidence, visiting one place after another, and always worrying about finding a parking space. Wolfe interrogates visitors at his office, but between the two they get nothing. It isn't until Ballou visits Wolfe and complains of a blackmailer that one of the supporting cast is spotlighted as the real murderer. Wolfe works relentlessly on both the suspect and his wife. He shows no mercy to them and drives the suspect to suicide. Or perhaps she shot him and made it look like suicide. The ambiguity does not bother Wolfe, who is defending Cather against a false charge of murder and will do what has to be done.

This novel seems mostly well worn routine, although there is a passing reference to Vietnam. It is the ending that gives the reader pause, about the ruthlessness of Wolfe. He is not the fat buffoon that many think him to be.

[To be continued]

DEPRESSING MATTERS

by Dale Speirs

FORTUNE'S BEFORE YOU is a 1937 book by Charles J. Collins about how to invest during the depths of the Great Depression. It appeared just as the economy was going into a second decline after bouncing somewhat from its 1933 low. Economic recovery would not finally appear until after World War Two had destroyed the excess production capacity that caused the Great Depression and killed off tens of millions of people, thereby removing surplus labour from the market. The first chapter of this book is a remarkable panegyric to the natural wealth of the USA and the joys of prospering by buying common stock, written without once mentioning the Great Depression. This is like writing a history of World War One without mentioning the Germans.

From there, Collins goes on to discuss the advantages of owning dividend stocks in large corporations. Dividend stocks are those which pay a regular bonus to the owners. Collins especially likes the monopolies or near-monopolies who act for the good of us all (that was me being ironic) and are controlled by various factors that "*have combined in this country to keep evil monopolistic control in abeyance*". He makes the brave assertion that the best time to buy stocks is at the bottom of the market. I'm not being ironic here, because studies have shown then and now that most individual investors buy near the top of the market and then sell

in panic or disgust at the bottom of the market, what is known as momentum chasing.

Collins then is forced to acknowledge, however obliquely, that economies do move in cycles up and down, and that his times were in a down swing. He correctly identifies the problem as too much credit chasing too many investments which in hindsight are the result of excessive production. When the excess production is finally recognized, prices pop, things crash, and a sadder but no wiser generation says never again. This is the time for the brave few to buy, while the chastened majority are paying off their debts or filing for bankruptcy.

What makes this book interesting to read in the 21st century is the section on what lies ahead in the future as seen from 1937. Collins quotes his earlier prediction in 1932 that it would take a decade to work out the problems of the Great Depression, with false rallies and abrupt reversals along the way. That is what did happen, and 1937 was one of those reversals. He notes that the American economy was still in an oxygen tent functioning on one lung, and the oxygen was heavy government stimulus that would cause the patient to die if removed. The long term seemed favourable in 1937 but Collins noted in passing the winds of possible war that might upset a regular economic recovery.

Collins warned against investing in long-term bonds because inflation had nowhere to go but up. Inflation is a hidden tax that depreciates fiat (paper) currencies and allows debt to be paid off faster while sticking it to the creditors such as bondholders. That is why I don't hold any bonds longer than five years, and if inflation becomes really obvious will go to shorter bonds.

The better deal, Collins wrote, is to own equities such as dividend stocks. In today's world, the equities I own are mostly commodities such as oil and metals. Collins was writing for an American audience who could not own gold legally until 1974, so it doesn't enter too much into the discussion other than in balances of trade settled between central banks. Canadians and other nationalities could still own gold, but the world was on the gold standard at the time and the price was fixed by law. There was no advantage for individuals to own physical gold other than as a form of insurance that could never go bankrupt. Collins notes that while bonds lose value because of inflation, equities (commodities, real estate, stocks) can outpace it. There is, however, risk involved in many equities, such as stock or commodity prices declining, rents falling, or rental property needing expensive repairs that wipe out the income.

The answer, the same then as now, is to diversify into different categories so that if one goes down, another is rising. I follow the 25% rule, which is not more than about 25% of my investments

in any given category such as petroleum, precious metals, bonds (Canadian banks only), etcetera. The investor in 1937 had fewer alternatives than today. In particular it was more difficult to buy into commodities, so Collins spends most of his time on stocks and bonds. -8-

Collins was, like I am, a fundamentalist. Nothing to do with religion, though. The two types of investing are fundamentals and technical analysis. Fundamental investing is to study the economy and satisfy yourself what the long-term trends are, and then to buy and hold in the uptrending areas. This takes courage which few investors have. Technical analysis (TA) is the study of financial charts for patterns and using them to predict which way the market will fluctuate in the short term. This is the province of day traders and hedgers. TA was only used by a few brokers up until the 1990s, when desktop computers became widespread. During the Great Depression, everything had to be calculated and plotted by hand, a tedious job which discouraged most people. Nowadays you can buy cheap software that will calculate trends and draw charts in more ways than you could ever analyze in a lifetime. In fact, computers have led to what is known as information paralysis, where day traders are overloaded with data and don't know which way to go when confronted with thirty charts and a hundred price series.

Collins suggest a fifty-fifty rule to the reader, keeping half your investments in short-term bonds (five years or less) for safety, and half in stocks to grow your capital, assuming, of course, that you picked them right and don't panic during corrections or downdrafts in the market. The stocks should not be more than 15% in any given industry or 5% in a particular company. In his day, automotive companies were the tech equivalent of computer stocks today, with a bright future. Mail order companies also boomed then, and for the same reasons as Amazon does today.

A section of the book is devoted to the looming spectre of all-out war in Europe. "Who would win the war?", Collins was asked, to which his reply was "Who won the San Francisco earthquake?". Collins' conclusion is that American factories would do alright from exports, as indeed it turned out. Another future concern was inflation; what would happen when the grinding deflation of the Great Depression finally stopped? Bonds do not do well during inflation. Stocks of companies who can quickly pass on their price increases will do okay, while those which are price regulated (few these days, but most utilities back then) will suffer.

In his conclusion, Collins emphasizes a point which many mundanes today still refuse to acknowledge, that you must assume responsibility for learning about investments and planning them in a logical manner. It doesn't mean spending ten hours a week reading and talking with financial advisors, but it does mean

turning off the television set for a couple of hours and reading some self-help books or browsing the Internet. I can't emphasize enough that in our times it has become easier than ever before to do research, thanks to the Internet, and I say that as a semi-Luddite myself. Not everyone was destitute during the Great Depression, and you don't have to suffer after the Panic of 2008.

ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$3 cash (\$5 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.]

[SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, sercon is serious-constructive, and a genzine is a general zine]

The Ken Chronicles #23 (The Usual from Ken Bausert, 2140 Erma Drive, East Meadow, New York 11554-1120) Perzine with an article about renovating his den, demonstrating one of the basic rules of DIY, that you can never just do one thing without spending money on something else. Also letters of comment, some reviews, a trip to New York City, and flea markets.

The Frenetic Fanac Review #1 (The Usual from R. Graeme Cameron, 13315 - 104 Avenue #72G, Surrey, British Columbia V3T 1V5) Entirely given over to fanzine reviews.

Cuneiform #1 (Frederick Moe, 36 West Main Street, Warner, New Hampshire 03278) This is a new apa (amateur press association) for reviews of zines, obscure books and authors, and discussion of the micropress. Like other apas, it is not available for subscription; you have to be an active participant. Copy count for your material is 40, in the 8.5 x 11 size, up to four pages.

EOD Letter #2 to #22 (The Usual from Ken Faig Jr, 2311 Swainwood Drive, Glenview, Illinois 60025-2741) Apazine devoted to H.P. Lovecraft. These two issues compare various story collections of HPL. Now that the Lovecraft stories are in the public domain, the production of anthologies of his works has become a minor industry, some done with care by fans and scholars, while others are churned out by scan-and-dump Internet publishers. Also reviewed are some recent literary and historical books about HPL.

Paper Radio #9 (The Usual from Frederick Moe, 36 West Main Street, Warner, New Hampshire 03278) Some thoughts on the decline of radio broadcasting as the iPod generation prefers their own music rather than what the disk jockey plays. There is a brief biography of English disk jockey John Peel (1939-2004) who was

probably one of the last radio hosts who could influence large numbers of listeners in their musical tastes. Also a brief look at ham radio operators and their Hurricane Watch Net system. -10-

OSFS Statement #395 to #398 (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with the regular news and letters of comment, but also very strong on astronomy.

Space Cadet #17 to #18 (The Usual from R. Graeme Cameron, 13315 - 104 Avenue #72G, Surrey, British Columbia V3T 1V5) Perzine, mainly with the saga of Cameron's hernia operation, but also letters of comment and an on-going series on ancient coins.

Fadeaway #28 and #29 (The Usual from Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Road, Oxford, Massachusetts 01540-2035) Issue #28 starts off with books compiling old newspaper comic strips, then Hugo Gernsback (the founder of modern SF) and the history of his magazine AIR WONDER STORIES, and letters of comment. #29 has more bad news about the implosion of the publishing industry as e-books destroy it, a look at some 1930s movies, and letters.

Mark Time #105 (The Usual from Mark Strickert, Box 1051, Orange, California 92856) Perzine with trip reports, transit fanning, zine reviews, and letters of comment.

Alexiad V11#2 to #3 (The Usual from Lisa and Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040) Lots of book reviews, racehorse news, personal happenings, letters of comment, and the history of dental tools.

Chunga #19 (The Usual from Randy Byers, 1013 North 36 Street, Seattle, Washington 98103) SF genzine, with an article on costuming, several reminiscences about bookstores and dealers, some fannishness, and letters of comment.

The Fanactical Fanactivist #8 (The Usual from R. Graeme Cameron, 13315 - 104 Avenue #72G, Surrey, British Columbia V3T 1V5) This issue is about a new system of awards being proposed for Canadian SF fanzine fandom. All six of us. This would be somewhat like the FAAN Awards run by American fanzine fans. All twelve of them. As I understand it, the idea is that by creating such awards, it might encourage more Canuck zinesters.

One Swell Foop #7 (The Usual from Garth Spencer, 82 East 40 Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia V5W 1L4) Perzine with spoof proposals for political parties, a primer on copyrights and trademarks, zine reviews, and letters of comment.

Steam Engine Time #13 (Bruce Gillespie, 5 Howard Street, Greensborough, Victoria 3088, Australia) The final issue of this

zine, with extended essays on Theodore Sturgeon and numerous letters of comment.

Auroran Lights #6 (The Usual from R. Graeme Cameron, 13315 - 104 Avenue #72G, Surrey, British Columbia V3T 1V5) This issue discusses the Aurora Awards (for Canadian SFdom) and the Canadian Unity Fan Fund. CUFF is a travel fund to send an eastern Canadian SF fan to a western Canada SF convention or vice versa. This year the competition is between two easterners vying to come to Calgary for the When Words Collide convention.

Banana Wings #49 (The Usual from Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer, 59 Shirley Road, Croydon, Surrey CR0 7ES, England) SF fanzine about British conventions and fannish musings, with lots of letters of comment. Also some perzine accounts about dogs and how to rate beers.

One Minute Zine Reviews #4 (The Usual from Frederick Moe, 36 West Main Street, Warner, New Hampshire 03278) Brief reviews of a few oddball zines.

Xerography Debt #31 (US\$4 from Davida Gypsy Breier, Box 11064, Baltimore, Maryland 21212) Reviewzine of zine reviews by multiple zine reviewers reviewing multiple zines.

All clear?

Brooklyn! #76 (US\$10 for four issues from Fred Argoff, Penthouse L, 1170 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, New York 11230-4060) A look at how Brooklyn and various places within it got its name, along with photos of various buildings and houses.

Christian New Age Quarterly V20#2 (US\$3.50 from Catherine Groves, Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey 07015-0276) Starts off with an article about whether or not e-only books should be reviewed in the Papernet, also commentary about Saint Iodasaph/Josaphat, and letters of comment.

The Fossil #352 to #353 (US\$10 from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan, Denver, Colorado 80209) Covers the history of zines, with an article in #352 on Rev. Charles Uncles, a zinester who was also the first black Roman Catholic priest ordained in the USA. #353 has the bio of Tryout Smith (1852-1948), who printed his first zine in 1872.

Night Train To Mundo Fine #5 (The Usual from Frederick Moe, 36 West Main Street, Warner, New Hampshire 03278) A look at cellphone advertising aimed at children and a couple of zine reviews.

Zine World #30.5 and #31 (US\$5 from Jerianne, Box 3556, Portland, Oregon 97208) Large number of zine reviews from the alternative world and letters of comment.

BCSFazine #466 to #469 (The Usual from British Columbia SF Association, c/o Felicity Walker, 3851 Francis Road #209, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1J6) SF clubzine with news and event lists, letters of comment, and reviews. #469 has an extended essay on the Orion slave girls of Star Trek. -12-

The Knarley Knews #142 (The Usual from Henry Welch, 15290 Upper Ellen Road, Los Gatos, California 95033) Genzine that is pretty much now a letterzine, with one trip report and the rest as lots of letters of comment.

Lab Findings #2 to #3 (The Usual from Kobb Labs, Box 30231, Pensacola, Florida 32503) Lots of mail art listings and projects, and reviews of very obscure movies.

The Blurry Line #16 (The Usual from Loran Frazier, Box 600, Golden, Colorado 80402) Minizine about how the editor came across one of his old zines, inspiring him back into the game.

The New Port News #263 (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) SF apazine with comments on a variety of topics. Ned often illustrates his zines with scans of artwork from old magazines and books, from back in the days when it was all engraved or otherwise done by hand, not photography or Photoshop.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Robert Jennings
29 Whiting Road
Oxford, Massachusetts 01540-2035

2012-06-07

Some nations are happy with a modest rate of inflation but most, including the USA, are not delighted with the process when inflation moves faster than a point or so per year. One of the strongest reasons for the election of Ronald Reagan was the fact that he kept hammering on the point that inflation was out of control and that something must be done to save the economy.

[What people don't understand is that even 1% annual inflation is cumulative year after year. If you had \$100 at the beginning of the year with 1% inflation, then at the end of the year you can only buy \$99 worth of goods or services. The following year you lose 99 cents not on \$100 but on \$99, so that you have \$98.01, the year after that you end up with \$97.02, and onward. If you belong to a strong union you can get wage hikes that meet or beat inflation (my union got us 13.5% in 1981), but if you are on a fixed pension, each year you have to sacrifice a bit more. Eventually this hidden tax forces manufacturers to move overseas and municipalities to raise property taxes. Also, the official Consumer Price Index in both Canada and the USA is deliberately

falsified to come in low so that entitlements indexed to it don't go up as much. Americans should visit www.shadowstats.com to see what the real inflation and unemployment rates are for their country using the original methods of calculation.]

It might be worth mentioning that the government printing presses and borrowing programs are not nearly as effective at creating new money as banks and business [by making loans].

[True, and that is one reason why the Americans and Europeans are in crisis, because banks either aren't loaning, can't loan, or no one wants or is able to borrow. The banks created so much credit that most of it will not be paid back.]

You don't have to demonize the wealthy to see that this system is screwed up. Everybody across the board, top to bottom, needs to pay more in taxes to get this problem corrected. Those who are at the top of the ladder in earned income should pay more than those on the bottom whose every dollar is spent just to provide food and shelter. This is not a tax on wealth, it is a graduated tax on earned income, and it is the fairest method of taxation ever devised, in my opinion. The problem is that people don't like paying taxes, and politicians will do almost anything to get themselves elected. If that means promising to destroy the nation by not fulfilling their moral obligations, then most of them will cheerfully take the short-term

re-election gains to the hard long-term decisions that are necessary to correct the economic nightmare.

[Your last sentence basically sums up the entire problem. Here in Canada, Prime Minister Steven Harper and the Tories are attempting to cut back on government spending, as a result of which the NDP (labour-socialist) are climbing in the polls. Canadians want programmes cut back as long as they only affect someone else. Tax that man over there, and the one behind the tree, but don't tax me because I'm entitled.]

2012-05-29

Life is too short to waste on awful experiences. My firm belief has always been to never support bad movies by paying money to see them. If you do that, the people who made those bad movies will just take your money as a sign of support and then go out and make more bad movies with it. Use the economic ballot to cast a disapproving vote against crap.

[I haven't been to a movie theatre in years. The ones I review are from \$5 bargain bins that I play on a DVD stand-alone player. (I have never had a television set.) I view the bad ones not as SF or serious drama but as comedy, albeit unintended as such by the producers. My reviews follow the style of R. Graeme Cameron (a Vancouver zinester) who wrote a series of hilarious reviews on such movies back in the 1990s, and after which I pattern mine.]

FROM: Franz Zrilich
4004 Granger Road
Medina, Ohio 44256-8602

-14-

2012-04-30

The main problems you find with films such as IMPACT stem from lack of configuration management, as they call it in engineering. A project with more than one executor needs heavy continuity control, which is very costly in SF-type films. Each scene can be shot by a separate crew, and in the same scene there are errors in each shot. In CLOCKWORK ORANGE, there is the mystery spaghetti plate which alters from shot to shot in the amount of spaghetti it holds.

[One of my favourite continuity errors is from MARY TYLER MOORE (second season, "And Now, Sitting In For Ted Baxter"). Ted is talking with Mary in the office and as he does so, he walks over to the coffee table. He picks up and fills a tea cup with coffee but when he turns back to Mary he is holding a large coffee mug with the name TED emblazoned on it.]

FROM: Lloyd Penney
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Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

2012-06-05

One graphic you used [of a fictional meteorite impact on the Twin

Towers] explains why disaster movies have largely gone away: 9/11. New York City lived through a disaster movie. Indeed, the world did, and we're still living it in some ways. I think it was Tom Clancy who said that he'd thought of just a scenario a few years previous but didn't pursue the idea. He thought it was just too crazy a tactic to make a believable novel.

FROM: Joseph Nicholas
15 Jansons Road
Tottenham, London N15 4JU, England

2011-04-05

I have seen a marked increase in the number of people who cannot seem to go anywhere without a mobile phone in their hands and their heads down as they text away, even when walking down the street. In London, it seems to be almost exclusively young women who do this, but is it so important that they have to do it right there, right now? Do they ever watch where they're going or notice their surroundings? One has the strong suspicion that if one was to plonk some of these people down in the middle of some of the most dramatic scenery on Earth, they'd mooch around with their heads down, texting about how awesome it all is, and occasionally raising their phone to take a low-res picture which they could immediately e-mail to everyone else, instead of actually looking at the view itself.

[It's worldwide; I see the same thing in Cowtown and while hiking in the adjacent Rocky Mountains as well, and not just young women. This year on July 6 at the Calgary Stampede parade I noticed a new thing happening; people holding up tablets to photograph the parade. This is very annoying because they block the view, whereas if someone holds up a camera or smartphone at least they're not as intrusive.]

FROM: Stuart Stratu
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Marrickville, New South Wales 2204, Australia

2012-07-12

I read the original Lovecraft Cthulu stories back in the early 1990s and still have a strong memory of pure despair and doom associated with these creatures. It seems they even go beyond such creations as Giger's and Ridley Scott's aliens for sheer terror. Cthulu invasion? Give up. Nothing can be done. Even your soul will be eaten. That's freakin' heavy, man.

I Also Heard From: Mike Dickau, Theo Nelson, John Held Jr, Ned Brooks

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

Swanna, A.L.S., I.Y. Fung, and J.C.H. Chiang (2012) **Mid-latitude afforestation shifts general circulation and tropical precipitation.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 109:712–716

"We show in climate model experiments that large-scale afforestation in northern mid-latitudes warms the Northern Hemisphere and alters global circulation patterns. An expansion of dark forests increases the absorption of solar energy and increases surface temperature, particularly in regions where the land surface is unable to compensate with latent heat flux due to water limitation. Atmospheric circulation redistributes the anomalous energy absorbed in the northern hemisphere, in particular toward the south, through altering the Hadley circulation, resulting in the northward displacement of the tropical rain bands. Precipitation decreases over parts of the Amazon basin affecting productivity and increases over the Sahel and Sahara regions in Africa. We find that the response of climate to afforestation in mid-latitudes is determined by the amount of soil moisture available to plants with the greatest warming found in water-limited regions. Mid-latitude afforestation is found to have a small impact on modeled global temperatures and on global CO₂, but regional heating from the increase in forest cover

is capable of driving unintended changes in circulation and precipitation. The ability of vegetation to affect remote circulation has implications for strategies for climate mitigation." -16-

Speirs: In other words, planting trees is bad for the environment and Arbour Day should be outlawed. It's tough being a Green these days.

Bathelt, H., and B. Spigel (2012) **The spatial economy of North American trade fairs.** CANADIAN GEOGRAPHER 56(1): 18–38

"Trade fairs are ... manifestations of the continued need for temporary proximity and face-to-face contact even within a globalized economy. ... All Canadian cities exhibit a high proportion of business-to-consumer fairs ... the average proportion of B2C fairs in US cities was 15 percent."

Speirs: The Internet is not killing off trade shows (of which SF conventions may be considered a tiny component) because people still like to have face-to-face contact and hear the gossip that will never be posted on Twitter.