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Whole-numbered OPUNTIAs are sercon, x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines, and x.5 issues are perzines.

ALTERNATIVE HISTORY REVIEWS

by Dale Speirs

One of my sub-collections is alternative history. Note the correct term "alternative", not "alternate" as is commonly mis-used; the two words are not synonyms. Yes, I know it is a lost cause, among my many other lost causes, but I shall go down fighting.

Steampunks.

I include steampunk as a sub-genre within AH, the idea of it being there was a different Victorian world where the mechanical and steam arts are much more advanced than they were in our timeline. A recent addition is EXTRAORDINARY ENGINES (2008, mass-market paperback), an anthology of original steampunk short stories edited by Nick Gevers. The first story of the anthology is "Steampunch" by James Lovegrove, whose narrator, Chas Starkey, tells the story of battling steam robots. Mechano-boxers were one of the fads of the para-Victorian era. Starkey and his gang built Steampunch, who wins steadily in the ring. Unfortunately the Marquis of Queensberry is campaigning in the House of Lords against boxing machines and succeeds in getting them banned. Starkey, Steampunch, and company try to run for it to Ireland, but the ship's captain wouldn't stay bought and the constabulary are waiting for them. Steampunch is brought down by countless rounds of solid slugs from shotguns, and

Starkey is transported for life to the penal colony on Mars. The story reads well, but unfortunately is overladen with pseudo-Cockney and underworld argot.

"Static" by Marly Youmans is more a fantasy story, not AH. It is a wish-fulfillment about a young girl under the thumb of a great-aunt who is denying her the manor house and inheritance she is rightfully entitled to. They live in a world saturated by static electricity, which is part of the M.O. used by a murderer to kill the great-aunt, a woman given to wear multiple layers of silk and wool petticoats. It is a rather clever idea but doesn't really qualify as AH. One of the characters makes reference to multiverses, in an apparent attempt by the author to justify this story as AH. I suspect that if this story had not sold to this

anthology, those few sentences about AHs would have been clipped and the story sold elsewhere as a pure fantasy story.

"Speed, Speed The Cable" by Kage Baker deals with an attempt by neo-Luddites to sabotage the proposed trans-Atlantic telegraph

cable. Not everyone wants to abolish distance or be in instantaneous communication with the colonies. The cable company hires undercover agents to sniff out infiltrators in the cable ship's crew, and for good measure hires a submarine to follow the ship. All goes well and the cable is successfully laid.

This would make a good Hollywood action-adventure movie.

There is a twist in the epilogue when we find out that the leader

who wants to stop Americans from stealing his work. (During Victorian times, the USA did not respect copyright elsewhere and pirated editions of British books were very common.)

"Elementals" by Ian MacLeod is about an obsessed young

-2-

and financier of the neo-Luddites is a British author

scientist named James Woolfendon, convinced he has found a new source of energy. He calls it/them "elementals", some sort of spirit that must be confined in a Faraday cage. One of them becomes human, and a human becomes one of them, the spirit made flesh and vice versa. A parallel theme in the story notes the passage of the Victorian era from fertilizing with guano to the Haber process, from gypsum to cement powder, and from hansom cabs to horseless carriages. This was a transition that threw down many great families dependent on the old ways and raised up new titans of science and business.

"Machine Maid" by Margo Lanagan is about an Australian rancher's wife during the days of the gold rush, settling into a remote life with only a few good robot servants and an often-absent husband. As was often the case in those days of the Victorian era, she had not been instructed in what to expect in the marriage bed, found it disgusting, and found a method to reprogram a robot maid to deal with her husband in a rather cruel manner.

Capt. Archibald Carmody, whose ship, in the year 1899, is traveling through the Indian Ocean when it comes across an unknown island inhabited by Neanderthals. In a bit of regressive fiction, Carmody finds another diary, that of Katherine Glover, and quotes it within his. The digression concerns Lady Witherspoon's experiments turning men into apes by injecting them with a chemical. Glover does some experimenting on her own, which goes terribly wrong and finds herself a Neanderthal. The story is basically a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde variation but with a rather gruesome ladies' society.

"Lady Witherspoon's Solution" by James Morrow is the diary of

"Hannah" by Keith Brooke is set in a Victorian London where the narrator is a medical doctor working on a new technique that is a combination of stem cell and DNA technology, which he offers to the police as a forensic technique. It turns out to be a Brave New World, where the cells can be grown into a regenerated human, but not with the same memories and motives.

"Petrolpunk" by Adam Roberts is an alternative England where Queen Victoria decreed, for some reason, that no one should defile the earth by tunneling or digging into it. This presupposes that she was an absolute monarch and that people paid more than lip service to her, which seems to be because she is immortal.

Taking that as the divergence though, England has to run its

vehicles on biofuels, mainly charcoal. However, one radical is

preserved, using a substance known as petroleum. Petroleum would be environmentally friendly, and save the forests. There is a terrorist attack, panic in the streets, an assault on the Palace, travelers from a parallel universe, and unicellular immortals who secretly rule the world. The story quickly goes from AH to fantasy. It does bring in a nice touch though; the unicells live underground in the petroleum deposits and while immortal, cannot survive burning. I got the impression that Roberts thinks petroleum is found in underground caverns, rather than porous sediments as in reality.

proposing a cleaner method that will allow the forests to be

"American Cheetah" by Robert Reed is about a steam automaton modeled on Abraham Lincoln who has dreams when it is shut off, despite the assertions of technicians that machines cannot dream. The automaton works as a sheriff in a post-bellum Minnesota town. One day, the James-Younger gang rides into town, not the real ones, but automatons simulating them and riding automaton horses. They are invulnerable to gunfire, and the sheriff is an older model not as good as they are. The townspeople keep their wits about them and stop the robot gang with an ingenious ambush. On the face of it, a routine Western, but there is some good interior dialogue as the Lincoln automaton spends its spare time thinking about immortality, not just as a mechanical device but as a mind

-3

"The Lollygang Save The World On Accident" by Jay Lake is an unusual mixture of cyberpunk as it would have been in the steampunk era, with a gang of punks (forgive me the overuse of this word) roaming a space habitat called the Big Pipe. The inhabitants, as per Heinlein's UNIVERSE, have forgotten their origins from Victorian England's space programme. There is an infestation of sentient Gloves which confer powers but also have their own agenda. One steam/cyberpunk figures out a way to stop the Gloves. An interesting story that basically parodies cyberpunk

"The Dream Of Reason" by Jeffrey Ford finishes off this anthology. This is a fantasy story about an astronomer who manages to slow down starlight and make it stop, before injecting it into a test subject's eye. Marginally steampunk.

by rewriting it as steampunk.

All told, most of the stories read well, and I thought it a good

And The Murderer Is ...

SIDEWAYS IN CRIME (2008, trade paperback) is an anth

anthology overall. Like almost all anthologies these

days, the editing seems a bit lenient.

SIDEWAYS IN CRIME (2008, trade paperback) is an anthology of AH mystery stories edited by Lou Anders. It leads off with "Running The Snake" by Kage Baker, which appears to have as its divergence the non-assassination of Julius Caesar, he having decided to heed the soothsayers and staying at home during the Ides of March. Fast-forwarding to London, England, we find a world where the old gods still prevail, and druids still infest the streets. There is an Elizabethian queen who is a druid, blue body paint and all. Will Shaxpur, a street bard, joins up with a group of Roman con men to get a new religious cult going as a way of making money. They invent a Greek snake god called Glycon, and are soon rolling in gold and silver. Unfortunately an earl mysteriously dies in the temple, making the temple staff and their god the main suspects. A few more titled bodies later, all from poison and obviously faked snake trails, the Queen surmises whodunit, with the help of Shaxpur collecting the evidence on her

"Via Vortex" by John Meaney is set in a world where the nascent USA decided to make German its official language, as it almost did in our timeline. This is a police procedural in Neu Munchen

behalf. All's well that ends well, if I may borrow a phrase.

neatly told puzzle story with a nice twist at the end. (If you fire a bullet into a transporter just as everything dissolves, will it kill the victim at the other end?)

"Fate And The Fire-Lance" by Stephen Baxter is a Rome-never-fell murder mystery, set in the year 1914, when the Emperor's son has been murdered in London, England. The investigation must be done quickly, else the Roman and Ottoman empires will be plunged into a world war. The four empires

(including the British and French) are in a delicate balance, and

there are fanatics about who yearn to trigger a war in the hopes of destroying one empire or another. The investigation is solved by

Miss Marple, pardon me, a translator. The vital clue is withheld

from the reader, a bit of a cheat.

(New York City) as officers hunt down a serial killer. Einstein

had invented teleportation, not relativity, and the killer is using the teleport booths to get around. This story deals with one aspect of

teleporting that many SF stories gloss over, specifically where the atoms come from to reassemble the traveler at the other end. A

"The Blood Of Peter Francisco" by Paul Park is a mishmash of AH and crime noir. A Communist is doing a Miss Marple routine in search of a murderer who killed a Rothschild wife in the theatre, which the police are blaming on the anarchists and

Communists. The USA has a governor-general, Lee surrendered

at Appomattox to Lord Cardigan, and other changes are

thrown in just to make it AH, rather than at least of modicum of thought as to how a given AH could appear from a divergence.

"The Adventure Of The Southsea Trunk" by Jack McDevitt is a

mentioned in passing. The story is random AH divergences

police procedural. Prof. Henry Cable has been murdered, his house ransacked and his computer stolen. One of his acquaintances was Christopher McBride, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. McBride is a distant relative of Arthur (not Sir) Conan Doyle, who was famous for his Professor Challenger stories and historical novels. The police inspector plods his way through the details of the case and determines that Doyle had written the Holmes stories, couldn't sell them, and dumped the manuscripts into a trunk where eventually McBride found them. McBride passes himself off as the originator of the stories. Cable finds a letter from Robert Louis Stevenson to Doyle (both were Edinburgh men) discussing "A Scandal In Bohemia". Cable is foolish enough to tell McBride that he is going to expose him,

"G-Men" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch considers the question of what would happen if Jedgar Poofter had been exposed in the 1960s. This police procedural opens with two bodies in a New York City alley, murdered execution-style near an apartment building whose penthouse owner hosted

-5-

with the inevitable result that he suddenly departs this world. The

could never happen in our timeline.

bodies are those of J. Edgar Hoover and his long-time assistant Clyde Tolson. This triggers a three-way race between the Poofter faction of the FBI, President Lyndon Johnson, and Attorney-General Bobby Kennedy to get to the files that had kept Hoover in power so many years. Some neat twists, and a well thought-out AH.

a weekly Thursday night party for the homosexual element. The

"Sacrifice" by Mary Rosenblum is a world where the Aztec Empire didn't collapse against the Spanish, and the Chinese are in the Americas early. Their arrival, bearing gifts of gunpowder, meant the Europeans were unable to sweep through the continent as they did in our timeline. The narrator, named Gerard, is an English-language teacher instructing the daughter of The Quetzal. When the Chinese consul's son is murdered, Gerard is asked to investigate because the accused is an anglophone who proclaims his innocence. There will be a diplomatic incident if the Chinese consul is not satisfied that the correct murderer is found. The setting of this AH seems to be in the 1800s, since there are references to Carl Linnaeus's book SYSTEMA NATURAE, the founding of modern biological nomenclature published in many editions during the late 1700, and early steam-driven vehicles. The Chinese have been in the Americas for some time. They still think of the Aztecs as a primitive people and have not realized that the natives have been advancing on their own. The story shows

the different cultural ways of thinking, and how they hover in the

magazines. The AH divergence was newspaper magnate Hearst losing a son in the Spanish-American War, having a change of heart about jingoism, and then defeating McKinley and Bryan in the 1900 presidential election. The narrator is a nick carter, slang for private investigator, hired to investigate a murder the police say was just a heart attack. The story goes overboard with all the lingo from the pulp era and too many in-jokes from science-fiction fandom. (Literary fandom, that is; media fans who only read Star Trek novels will miss most of the references.) "Chicago" by Jon Courtenay Grimwood is an AH where American prohibition continued indefinitely, the Mafia run the government, and you can get memory wipes on demand at a clinic. The narrator was a former capo who cloned himself in case of high-velocity lead poisoning, but his clone took over, was subsequently murdered, and the capo is now on trial. Then

another clone shows up, and the plan gets complicated. The idea

of organized crime pulling the strings behind the scenes of the

Chicago government is, of course, pure fiction. Such a thing

where everything is Hugo Gernsback-style technology, all the

gadgets and nomenclature straight out of the 1930s pulp

"The Sultan's Emissary" by Theodore Judson starts off with Cromwell being a loyal Roman Catholic and the Stewart monarchy in 1650. In earlier centuries, the Huns had successfully wrecked Europe, leaving it a patchwork of postage-stamp principalities easily overrun by the Islamic empire, which now controls Europe, almost all of the Cabotlands (as the Americas are known), and is threatening the last holdout, Britain. The story has to do with the murder of the Caliphate's emissary in London, and the diplomatic repercussions that will arise, up to and including the possibility of war. The murderer is found to be someone in the emissary's household, but before the case is closed there are a couple of twists in the plot. The Caliphate is not as strong as it

"Worlds Of Possibilities" by Pat Cadigan is a police investigation of a double homicide in a fortune-teller's shop, one of the deceased being a Mafioso who died several years previously and was not known to have a twin brother. The story hints that the psychic was manifesting people from parallel universes. This technically isn't AH, which is a change in the timeline of the story's setting, not multiverse traveling. As the story is unremarkable, however well-written, I'll use it to discuss the

distinction between AH, multiverses, and time travel. True AH

posits a divergence in our timeline, something that did or didn't happen. This sets off a chain reaction of events, and the longer

the time elapsed, the greater the divergence. Within 50 or 100

appears; the centre cannot hold and things fall apart.

years from a divergence, it is possible to have the same people as lived in our timeline, but the longer a divergence goes, the less likely some famous historical person would still exist. For example, if Rome never fell, Hitler would not have arisen as the dictator of Germany. Technology may be advanced or retarded; there is a joke that it's not real AH unless there are Zeppelins. Multiverse traveling, that is, going between parallel universes, is not AH because within each universe there has been no divergence. Time travel is often used to start off divergences, but really belongs in its own sub-genre because those divergences weren't due to natural probability but interference from the future.

"A Murder In Eddsford" by S.M. Stirling is set in England of 2049 AD, where horse transport is the norm and guards carry crossbows. The divergence was a sudden change in the laws of thermodynamics on March 17, 1998, when mechanical work could no longer be obtained from heat and the electricity stopped. Not absolutely so, otherwise neurons would shut down and every animal fallen dead, but no steam, gasoline, or jet engines. Every large city only has three days supply of food in its warehouses, and all of that delivered in the last kilometre by trucks, so it was not surprising that there was a massive population collapse and economies reverting back to village cultures.

There are still old-timers who remember the good old days, but the younger generation only know their fallen world.

living standards. Inspector Rutherston is investigating a murder in the village, a man who died of mysterious causes that left blisters all over his body, thought to be some sort of poison. The victim was none too popular in the village, and the suspects are anyone who knew the deceased. The Inspector makes his queries, and fortunately there is no Miss Marple getting underfoot. The deceased was an inventor; he thought he could use a cache of plutonium to run a steam engine. Someone else, for good and sufficient reason, finds a way to kill the man by exposure to the radiation. A neat twist ending.

It is, however, a stable society, albeit with considerably lower

Resnick and Eric Flint pokes fun at conspiracy theorists by lashing together every theory into a coverup by the government and aliens. Jimmy Hoffa wasn't disappeared by the Mafia; he's negotiating union contracts for alien species. This is more a hidden history story than AH, but good fun to read.

"Conspiracies: A Very Condensed 937-Page Novel" by Mike

"The People's Machine" by Tobias Buckell is set in an alternative Americas where the Aztecs fought off the Spanish, the British defeated the revolutionaries back in 1776, and the French held on

to Louisiana. Plus, of course, airships. A murder has been done

in New Amsterdam in the late 1800s. Despite all the divergences

there is still a Mr. Hollerith building mechanical tabulating

machines that run on punchcards, and the investigating police

between parallel universes has its navigator murdered en route. There follows the obligatory second murder and various threads of investigation. If Agatha Christie had ever written SF, this would have been it.

MUSIC REVIEW

by Dale Speirs

I seldom write music reviews and don't intend making it a habit

officer has a brother named Arthur Conan Doyle

living in England who writes short fiction. The criminal

from our timeline are still the same in the AH timeline.

plot is a conspiracy of tabulating men attempting to assert

Manifest Destiny by bringing everything under the control of a

network of tabulating machines. The basic story isn't so bad, but

it displays a common fault of AH stories whereby no matter how

much time has passed since the divergences, historical characters

"Death On The Crosstime Express" by Chris Roberson is not AH

but rather a multiverse story. A space-traveling airship going

-8-

because, as the saying goes, writing about music is like dancing about architecture. Most of my music is on cassette, which immediately gives you an idea of how dated I am, although I do

have CDs, mostly techno and older bands that I had to upgrade

when the cassette finally gave up the ghost. I don't listen much to

only successful composition, hence the title of the CD. Ravel did compose other music, but if he had never written Bolero, he would be forgotten today, or at best a lower-midlist composer. Ravel intended Bolero to be played at a tempo of 17m10s, but orchestra conductors generally prefer to run it faster. Ravel once got into a famous backstage argument with the great conductor Arturo Toscanini, when he dared suggest that the maestro, then at the height of his fame, slow it down a bit. It was a lost cause; conductors insist on playing it faster than Ravel intended. Personally, I agree with Ravel. The slow buildup to the final crescendo is much better than rushing to the conclusion. When an orchestra plays Bolero, it should demonstrate its power and depth, instead of rushing along as if the musicians were in a hurry to get to the tavern after the show.

This CD has two full orchestral versions bookending eight shorter versions by small bands, although neither is the full tempo. I

much preferred the Dallas Symphony Orchestra version, which

Eduardo Mata conducted to 14m49s. The eight band versions

range from novelty acts to short clips of Bolero. A techno version

classical music but do have two favourites in that genre, "The

Blue Danube" and "Bolero". The latter cassette became too

squealy to listen to, so I went on-line to see what there was. I spotted and ordered Ravel's Greatest Hit: The Ultimate Bolero.

This CD consists of ten versions of "Bolero", Maurice Ravel's

merely clowning around, such as changing the three-bar beat of Bolero to a four-beat foxtrot. Others do okav, albeit in abbreviated versions of 3 to 5 minutes. ZINE LISTINGS by Dale Speirs [The Usual means \$3 cash (\$5 overseas), trade for your zine, or letter of comment on a previous issue. 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 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, a genzine is a general zine? The House You Grew Up In (The Usual from Katie Haegele, Box 284, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania 19046) One-shot with accounts by 17 writers of the houses they grew up in, some fond, others still trying to erase the memories of child abuse or other

comes off as too squeaky, and a piano duet is irritating. Some are

hard luck. The consensus is that a house is a building, and a home is the people who live in them.

Reviewzine of SF zines and e-zines.

The Zine Dump #22 (The Usual from Guy Lillian, 8700 Millicent Way #1501, Shreveport, Louisiana 71115)

-9-

The Fossil #340 (US\$10 from The Fossils, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan, Denver, Colorado 80209) Devoted to the history of zinedom, with articles on an early book printed on cheap newsprint and now unreadable, and Australian zinesters in early 1900s.	Statement #365 (The Usual from Ottawa SF -10-Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine, this issue mostly being taken up by multiple accounts of a club outing to a local orchestra programme of SF music, and another club outing to the premiere of the new Star Trek movie.
Alexiad V8#2 (The Usual from Joseph and Lisa Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040) Lots of book reviews, news and notes about horses, engineering, chocolate bars, and letters of comment.	Ish #5 (The Usual from Felicity Walker, 3851 Francis Road #209, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1J6) Perzine with a humourous list on how to fail an exam, letters of comment, and a Jon Voight movie review.
Hiroshima Yeah #51 (The Usual from Mark, Flat 1-1, 19 Kelvinside Terrace South, Glasgow G20 6DW, Scotland) Rock music reviews, some poetry and short fiction. Ethel The Aardvark #141 (The Usual from Melbourne SF Club,	The Ken Chronicles #11 (The Usual from Ken Bausert, 2140 Erma Drive, East Meadow, New York 11554-1120) Perzine with a recipe for pizza, a look back at a car that Ken customized in his youth, and a drag strip that is now a housing development.
Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne, Victoria 8005, Australia) SF clubzine with news, reviews, and letters of comment. I particularly enjoyed the KTF reviews of boilerplate fantasy novels. There is also a discussion of "fan fiction", not in its original meaning but rather on-line fiction written by fans and	This Here #10 and #11 (The Usual from Nic Farey, Box 178, Saint Leonard, Maryland 20685) Genzine with articles on moving a camping trailer cross-state during a severe storm, television wrestling, and letters of comment.
set in Star Trek or other media universes. Royal Swiss Navy Gazette #17 (The Usual from Garth Spencer, Box 74122, Vancouver, British Columbia V5V 3P0) A couple of essays on furry fandom and lots of letters of comment.	BCSFAzine#431 (\$3 from British Columbia SF Association, c/o Felicity Walker, 3851 Francis Road #209, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1J6) SF clubzine with movie and book reviews, convention listings, and letters of comment.

able to find his house.

Plokta #V14#2 (The Usual from Alison Scott, 24 St. Mary Road, Walthamstow, London E17 9RG, England) SF fanzine, mostly devoted in this issue to the plokta.con convention in beautiful Sunningdale, somewhere in England. Also reminiscing about a cassette collection of Dr. Who sound recordings of the shows in

Lamplighter #19 (The Usual from Guy Miller, 2951 Archer

Lane, Springfield, Ohio 45503-1209) Perzine discussing the reliability of Google Maps and Map Quest, both of which incorrectly omit Guy's house and street. He complained to them

about it, but then realized it was better that strangers shouldn't be

the era before VHS and DVD.

WORLD WIDE PARTY #16 IN 2009

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria), the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet around the world. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. If you are a zinester, it is

a reminder that you are not alone, but a node on the Papernet.

Cirkovic, M.M., and B. Vukotic (2008) Astrobiological phase transition: Towards resolution of Fermi's Paradox. ORIGINS

OF LIFE AND EVOLUTION OF BIOSPHERES 38:535-547

"Can astrophysics explain Fermi's paradox or the "Great Silence" problem? Based on the idea of James Annis, we develop a model of an astrobiological phase transition of the Milky Way, based on the concept of the global regulation mechanism(s). The

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

noticed by Dale Speirs

dominant regulation mechanisms, arguably, are gamma-ray bursts, whose properties and cosmological evolution are becoming well-understood. Secular evolution of regulation mechanisms leads to the brief epoch of phase transition: from an essentially dead place, with pockets of low-complexity life restricted to planetary surfaces, it will, on a short (Fermi-Hart) timescale, become filled with high-complexity life. An observation selection effect explains why we are not, in spite of the very small prior probability, to be surprised at being located in that brief phase of disequilibrium. In addition, we show that, although the phase-transition model may explain the "Great Silence", it is not supportive of the "contact pessimist" position. To the contrary, the phase-transition model offers a rational motivation for continuation and extension of our present-day Search

for ExtraTerrestrial Intelligence (SETI) endeavours.

-11-

include the decrease of extinction risk in the history of terrestrial life, the absence of any traces of Galactic societies significantly older than human society, complete lack of any extragalactic intelligent signals or phenomena, and the presence of ubiquitous low-complexity life in the Milky Way." Speirs: For those not familiar with it, the Fermi Paradox basically

Some of the unequivocal and testable predictions of our model

asks "Where are they?", in other words why are we apparently the only spacefaring species in the galaxy. (The UFO lunatic fringe does not count.) We have always operated on the assumption that there must be older civilizations than ours, but as this paper suggests, it is not unreasonable to believe that we are in fact the oldest.

Belcher, C.M., et al (2009) Geochemical evidence for combustion of hydrocarbons during the K-T impact event. PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF

SCIENCES USA 106:4112-4117 "It has been proposed that extensive wildfires occurred after the

support for this hypothesis. However, nonmarine K-T BIRs, from

Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) impact event. An abundance of soot and pyrosynthetic polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (pPAHs) in marine K-T boundary impact rocks (BIRs) have been considered

of charcoal yet abundant noncharred plant remains. pPAHs and soot can be formed from a variety of sources, including partial combustion of vegetation and hydrocarbons whereby modern pPAH signatures are traceable to their source. We present results from multiple nonmarine K-T boundary sites from North America and reveal that the K-T BIRs have a pPAH signature consistent with the combustion of hydrocarbons and not living plant biomass, providing further evidence against K-T wildfires and compelling evidence that a significant volume of hydrocarbons was combusted during the K-T impact event."

across North America, contain only rare occurrences

-12-

Speirs: In other words, not only was the Cretaceous the Peak Dinosaur era, the asteroid impact also wiped out a good chunk of petroleum. If the asteroid hadn't hit, then North America would make Saudi Arabia's oil look like a puddle, and no one would be talking Peak Oil. Note well that oil comes from marine algae, not dinosaurs as popularly believed.

Nyssen, J., et al (2008) Desertification? Northern Ethiopia re-photographed after 140 years. SCIENCE OF THE TOTAL

ENVIRONMENT 407:2749-2755 "A collection of sepia photographs, taken during Great Britain's military expedition to Abyssinia in 1868, are the oldest landscape significant improvement of vegetation cover. New eucalypt woodlands, introduced since the 1950s are visible and have provided a valuable alternative for house construction and fuel-wood, but more importantly there has also been locally important natural regeneration of indigenous trees and shrubs. The situation in respect to soil and water conservation measures in farmlands has also improved. According to both historical information and measured climatic data, rainfall conditions around 1868 and in the late 19th century were similar to those of the late 20th/early 21st century. Furthermore, despite a ten-fold increase in population density, land rehabilitation has been accomplished over extensive areas by large-scale implementation

of reforestation and terracing activities, especially in the last two

decades. In some cases repeat photography shows however that

riparian vegetation has been washed away. This is related to river

widening in recent degradation periods, particularly in the

1970s–1980s. More recently, riverbeds have become stabilized, and indicate a decreased runoff response. Environmental recovery

programmes could not heal all scars, but this study shows that

overall there has been a remarkable recovery of vegetation and

also improved soil protection over the last 140 years, thereby

photographs from northern Ethiopia, and have been used to

compare the status of vegetation and land management 140 years

ago with that of contemporary times. Thirteen repeat landscape photographs, taken during the dry seasons of 1868 and 2008,

were analyzed for various environmental indicators and show a

Speirs: This is why environmentalists don't show photos of old clearcuts, because they are now forests again.

invalidating hypotheses of the irreversibility of land degradation

in semi-arid areas."

Diamond, A.M. (2009) The career consequences of a mistaken research project: The case of polywater. AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY 68:387-411

"Polywater, one of the most famous mistaken scientific research programs of the past half-century, is used as a case study to examine whether polywater researchers later experienced lower citation counts, or less favorable job mobility. The primary result is that simply writing on polywater, either pro or con, has a negative impact on future citations, in comparison with those who never wrote on polywater. The lifetime value of the lost citations is roughly in the range of \$13,000 to \$19,000. However writing on polywater did not affect the probability of a scientist leaving university employment."

university employment."

Speirs: Polywater was the cold fusion of its day, a miracle form of water with all kinds of strange properties. Alas, it proved to be the result of contamination, causing a few red faces among the trendier chemists who leapt into the fray.

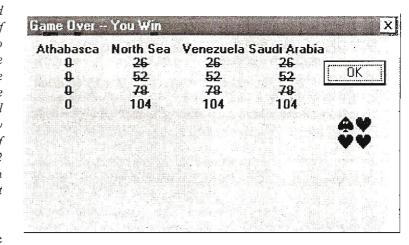
-13-

van der Zwaan, B., and R. Gerlagh (2009) Economics of geological CO2 storage and leakage. CLIMATIC CHANGE 93:285-309

"The economics of CO2 capture and storage in relation to the possibility of leakage of CO2 from geological reservoirs once this greenhouse gas has been stored artificially underground will be among the main determinants of whether CCS can significantly contribute to a deep cut in global CO2 emissions. This paper presents an analysis of the economic and climatic implications of the large-scale use of CCS for reaching a stringent climate change control target, when geological CO2 leakage is accounted for. The natural scientific uncertainties regarding the rates of possible leakage of CO2 from geological reservoirs are likely to remain large for a long time to come. We present a qualitative description, a concise analytical inspection, as well as a more detailed integrated assessment model, proffering insight into the economics of geological CO2 storage and leakage. Our model represents three main CO2 emission reduction options: energy savings, a carbon to non-carbon energy transition and the use of CCS. We find CCS to remain a valuable option even with CO2 leakage of a few percent per year, well above the maximum seepage rates that we think are likely from a geo-scientific point of view."

Speirs: In other words, if you're going through all that trouble

and expense pumping CO2 down old oil wells, it had better not come bubbling back up anytime soon. Western Canadian oil companies are rushing to embrace this technology, since not only can they claim carbon credits, but the CO2 repressurizes the old wells and allows the companies to squeeze out a few more barrels. (Not enough to prevent Peak Oil alas.)



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FROM: Joseph Major

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

1409 Christy Avenue Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040

ntucky 4

Re: Alexander Botts. The original Earthworm Tractor stories were published in the SATURDAY EVENING POST. Robert

2009-02-03

and educational opportunity. On the other hand, all these series he mentions are out of print and his stories aren't.

Re: murder mystery cliches. If I ever get the chance to hear truecrimes author Ann Rule speak, I'm going to ask if she's ever run across a real murder case that was like those "standard routine of murder mysteries". Most murderers couldn't scheme their way

Heinlein refers to them in a 1946 letter to his agent about hoping

to start a series: "The series will follow the formula, somewhat

modified, of the SEP series such as Earthworm Tractor, Tugboat

Annie, Gunsmith Pyne, Blue Chip Haggerty, etc., stories laid

against a particular occupation or industry." Heinlein quit after

his story "Broken Wings" was rejected, thus losing income, fame,

out of a paper bag.

[My favorite true premeditated murder story happened about a decade ago in Calgary when the perpetrator carefully put on a

inside an office building and shooting a creditor. He forgot about all those traffic cameras he drove past before arriving at his destination, so police just back-tracked on the cameras until they found a photo where he hadn't yet disguised himself or car.]

2009-04-24

disguise and smeared mud on his car licence plate before going

Next month we are going to one of those meetings of Holmes clubs, the Sherlock Holmes/Arthur Conan Doyle Symposium in Dayton, Ohio. It has occasionally published proceedings, and one of the meetings did indeed have a member talking about how he tried to stimulate interest in the young. You mention pastiches. One of the attendees had a publication containing a cartoon showing two Sherlockians talking. One exuberantly recounted the vast depths and breadths of adventures of Holmes. The other one asked him if he had read any of Doyle's stories, to which he said "Who?". This is a problem with writing to an idea developed by another. The writer almost always imposes his views on the other's work, or tries so hard to copy the other's work that his work slips to parody. From comments I have encountered along the way, the impression I get is that the Baker Street Irregulars club is not as insignificant or marginalized as Chris Redmond would have it. The BAKER STREET JOURNAL is still

the best-regarded publication of

literari. Isaac Asimov was a member of the BSI. I once read about an Emily Dickinson society that holds an annual meeting where women dress up as Emily and read her poems, gingerbread baked to her favourite recipe is sold, and other Dickinsonian matters are endlessly hashed over. I was sure that all of the attendees would, if asked, say that those sci-fi geeks out to grow up, quit that childish play, enter the real world, and read serious literature. 2009-04-22 FROM: Lloyd Penney 1706 - 24 Eva Road Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2 I have found over the past few years that no matter the interest, be it science fiction or space advocacy or shortwave DXing, there are the same personalities, the same fanboys, the same politics, the same so-called Secret Masters. We tried to be a part of the local Holmes club years ago, the Bootmakers of Toronto, but we were kept to the outside. I suppose any newcomers are looked at with suspicion, but there seems to be the attitude in some groups that they want your money more than they want you. The space advocates look with jaundice at outsiders, and the DXers look down on anyone who doesn't have the best shortwave sets. We

Sherlockian studies. The group began as a club for New York

FROM: John Hertz
236 South Coronado Street #409
Los Angeles, California 90057

Re: complaints against high cost of printing and postage from people who have money for drinks. Robert Heinlein remarked that science fiction writers are competing for beer money from the readers. I also suspect that absolute cost is lower than ever. Think

tried to make our way in, as we enjoy ourselves more

when we are active, but they'd have none of us, and we did not renew those memberships after two years.

-16-

when I could get a full hamburger combo for \$1. Of course, wages were much lower in those days as well.]

I Also Heard From: Phlox Icona, Anna Banana, Obvious Front,

Walker, Murray Moore

Henry Welch, John Held Jr, Franz Zrilich, Dave Hatton, Felicity

[My father used to tell us how a nickel would buy him a week's

worth of candy back in the Great Depression, and I remember

what 25 cents would buy back in the early days of zines.