

Tall tales short on substance

SHORT & TALL TALES

by Lilian Jackson Braun (G. P. Putnam's Sons, \$24.95)

Feling in the mood for something utterly light-weight?

Pick up a copy of *Short & Tall Tales*, by Michigan native Lilian Jackson Braun. The author of the highly successful *The Cat Who* books has produced 27



Victoria Diaz

thin vignettes supposedly compiled by that "star" of *The Cat Who* books, James Macintosh Quillman. They "center around legends and the local history of Moose County" ("400 miles north of everywhere"). In a sense, we follow the intrepid reporter Quillman around the region, and we listen as he listens to the tales and the folklore of local yokels.

Begin with "The Legend of the Rubbish Heap," a "story of two German immigrants who arrived in Moose County in mid-nineteenth century, when the area was experiencing its great boom. Seems they applied noses to grindstones, amassed a nice-sized fortune together as business partners, and eventually had a permanent falling-out when one of their daughters eloped with the other one's son (on the eve of her wedding to a "more suitable" groom). Many of the principals in the tale

come to a bad end, and eventually, things come to "a full circle."

Actually, the tale itself isn't much more developed than my description of it. It's a little like *Show and Tell*—except that Braun has chosen here to do almost all telling, and very little showing in these pages.

In "House Calls on Horseback," readers can learn something of what it was like to be a physician (or a patient) "in the early days of Moose County." As it turns out, this contribution is one of the most enlightening and rewarding in the collection. Doctors were needed by the pioneers (24/7, of course) to treat such awful diseases as smallpox and yellow fever, and also to deal with the effects of such things as forest fires, tree-felling, snakebite, overturned carriages, shipwrecks, kicking mules, and mining accidents.

A pioneer doctor carried his drugstore in his shoulder bag or in...saddlebags...His miracle drugs were rhubarb powder, quinine flakes, digitalis, amies, capsules, new venies, and the like. In addition to his duties as a doctor, he also acted as the community dentist, always stowing in his little black bag a serviceable pair of "riveters for yanking bad teeth."

In another of these wisp-y yarns (though definitely tall, most are no more than three to four pages in length), we learn about "Hilda the Clipper," who gained notoriety as she went about the tiny town of Brrr, brandishing her hedge clippers, and amusing local residents. ("Click-click!")

In "Emmaline and the Spiral Staircase," we meet another local legend from the past.

Seems the ghostly Emmaline was once in love with a local man, of whom her stern father, Captain Fugtree, did not approve. Sadly, the young man was killed after being thrown by a horse, and shortly after, the grieving Emmaline climbed to the top of the tower stairs in the Victorian family mansion, and jumped to her death.

Now, "On every dark and stormy night, they say, Emmaline can be seen walking up the stairs that are no longer there." (As it turns out, some can see Emmaline, and some cannot.) Among others, *Short & Tall Tales* also introduces us to Milo, the potato farmer (whose fortune, obtained through Prohibition era bootlegging, was no small potatoes); a peculiar wood sprite; a "spirit" encountered on a covered bridge; and a "demon" at Doggy Bottom.

In addition, we hear about "Those Pushy Moose County Blueberries," "The Curse on the Apple Orchard," and "The Noble Sons of the Noose." Ultimately, most modern-day readers would probably enjoy these stories more, had they been enlivened more as to character, or plot, or background. As is, each seems more like the bare bones of a tale, the merest skeleton on which to hang what might possibly be developed into a highly intriguing story.

Victoria Diaz is a Tivonia resident who writes about books for the *Observer & Eccentric*.

GameBoy handheld debuts

NEW YORK (AP) — The world's most popular video gaming gadget just got a tune-up.

Nintendo Co. unveiled the latest in its handheld GameBoy line this month, the GameBoy Advance SP, a sleek-looking device aimed at adult gamers that's about as big as a wallet and weighs just five ounces.

"There's nothing kid about this system," said Nintendo spokesman Chris Campbell. The GameBoy Advance SP (the SP stands for "special") looks more like an executive plaything than a child's toy. But it handles all the roughly 1,000 games for the hit GameBoy, including the Advance model that went on sale in June 2001.

More than 150 million GameBoy systems have been sold since 1989 and it has no strong competitor in its size category, though users have long complained that its display was too dim and power drained too quickly. Sony's Playstation2, the fastest-selling console today,

'The \$99 price point is really a magic number. They've kept it in reach of the masses.'

Michael Gartenberg
Jupiter Research analyst

has sold more than 41 million units since its March 2000 release.

The new Nintendo handheld has the same CPU as the current GameBoy Advance but opens and closes like a laptop and has a front-lit screen that allows it to be played in darkness or in bright sunlight. It also has a rechargeable lithium ion battery.

Nintendo plans to sell the GameBoy Advance SP for \$99.95 in the United States. The GameBoy Advance SP retails for \$69.99 but Nintendo believes adults won't mind the higher price.

"The \$99 price point is really a magic number," said Michael Gartenberg, an analyst with Jupiter Research. "They've kept it in reach of the masses."

Analysts expect the GameBoy to compete with cell phones that run games and be popular among makers of aftermarket parts.

It can play video on its 2.9-inch screen and designers might develop hardware that enables it to be used for phone calls, said Richard Doherty, research director of the Envisioning Group. Square in shape, the new unit is 3.1 inches long and an inch thick — perfect. Nintendo says to be dropped in a purse or briefcase.

The battery lasts for about 10 hours with the display illuminated or 18 hours with it off.

GameBoy Advance SP is slated to hit stores March 23 in the United States and five days after that in Europe.

Want to go to this year's Super Bowl? Try taking a Super Train

Heading to the Super Bowl? Consider taking the train.

The Super Train to the Super Bowl tour costs \$2,995 and includes round-trip travel from Dearborn, overnight accommodations and some meals. Passengers will connect with the Super Bowl train in Chicago, via the Amtrak train from Dearborn. The train departs on

Wednesday, Jan. 22 and includes a bon voyage party with cocktails and hot and cold hors d'oeuvres. It arrives at Los Angeles Union Station on Friday, Jan. 24.

The rail cars will be parked in the Santa Fe Depot in San Diego. A trolley transit system can transport passengers to downtown San Diego attractions.

An afternoon Super Bowl "Rail-Gate" Party will be held. Game tickets are not included in the tour package.

The train departs for Michigan on Monday, Jan. 27. Passengers arrive in Dearborn on Wednesday, Jan. 29.

For reservations, call Prochman Rail Services at (248) 435-2858.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

SCHEDULED TO OPEN FRIDAY, JAN. 17

A GUY THING

Paul Morse is a good guy. When his friends throw him a wild bachelor party, he just wants to keep his conscience clean, which is why he's shocked when he wakes up in bed with a beautiful girl named Becky and can't remember the night before.

Worse than that, she also happens to be his fiancée's cousin. Desperate to keep his fiancée from finding out, he

tells her a teeny lie, which turns into a bigger lie.

From the bachelor party to the wedding, soon his lies are spiraling out of control and his entire life is a series of comical misunderstandings. Featured players include Jason Lee, Julia Stiles, Seema Bisir and James Brolin. Chris Koch directed the comedy marking his first since completing *Snow Day* in 2000. (MGM/UA)

NATIONAL SECURITY
The story follows a young rookie security guard, Earl Montgomery, who is

forced to team up with ex-cop Hand Rafferty as they seek the men who are out to kill them both, and unravel a smuggling operation.

Featured players include Martin Lawrence as Earl, Steve Zahn as Hand, Eric Roberts as the leader of the smuggling operation and Colin Farrell as a corrupt police officer collaborating with professional criminals. Dennis Dugan directed the action, marking his first since completing *Saving Silverman* in 2001. (Columbia Pictures)



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