

# OPUNTIA 409





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**Opuntia** is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) and [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org). My e-mail address 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.

EASTER BUNNIES IN COWTOWN

photos by Dale Speirs

About the cover: I took out the garbage one night and startled this snowshoe hare in my backyard. It froze for a moment, long enough for me to get my smartphone out of my shirt pocket and take its picture. The rays of light are from my neighbour's backyard light shining through the slats of our mutual fence. Alas, Mr Bunny didn't leave any Easter eggs for me.

Snowshoe hares are extremely common in Calgary, at least two or three per city block. They are one of the few native mammal species that have done quite well in human contact. It also explains why coyotes are so common within the city.

At right: I was in the Southcentre Mall at Purdy's Chocolates, and splurged on a small nibble. They have the best chocolate in Canada, with prices to match, so I don't buy too often from them, as much as I would like. On my way out, I snapped a photo (how did we ever get along without smartphones?) of these two giant chocolate bunnies at equally giant prices.

The taller Easter bunny is about 1 metre high, and according to the sign weighed 12 kilogrammes. Only \$400. The smaller bunny weighed 2.5 kg and could be had for \$175. Somebody must be buying them, otherwise Purdy's wouldn't produce them.







This bus stop on 20 Street SW in the Altadore district, shown here in Easter finery in Easter 2017, is decorated seasonally by the adjacent homeowner. See OPUNTIA #369 for some other decorations.





## EASTER FICTION

by Dale Speirs

I thought of doing a series of fiction reviews for each seasonal holiday. Halloween, Christmas, and New Year's Eve were easy, but many of the others were not. There is at least one Saint Patrick's Day cozy mystery, but I am prejudiced against that holiday. No Irish in our family, but more importantly, my mother was Finnish and we celebrated March 16 as Saint Urho's Day. Easter has enough religious overtones that most authors are hesitant to use it as a setting for murders or comedy, but I did find a few.

### No Resurrections From Easter Murders.

CUE THE EASTER BUNNY (2005) by Liz Evans is a novel from a series about private investigator Grace Smith, set in Seatoun, England. Both the town and Smith have seen better days. In consequence, Smith takes a job with the Tourist Board, dressing up as the Easter Bunny.

She's not child friendly to begin with, and has troubles with obnoxious teenagers and perverted furry fans. The nadir is when she is run in by police for Grievous Bodily Harm, after an unfortunate misunderstanding. Since Smith is known as a private investigator, everyone assumes she is wearing the bunny costume as part of an undercover operation.

Things finally turn for the better when Smith is hired by Della Black to investigate threatening letters her son Jonathon has been receiving. He is an actor and script writer married to a soap opera actress far more famous than him. The happy couple are renovating a house in a gentrifying neighbourhood.

Della arranges for Smith to be infiltrated into her son's household as the new gardener. Tradesmen are constantly underfoot, not to mention a pet rabbit named Capuccino. Another private investigator named Dane O'Hara shows up with a tale of a cold case involving manslaughter and child abduction.

The buildup to Easter becomes bloody. Jonathon is murdered with no hope of resurrection. Smith winds up in a hospital from poisoning and almost dies before being resurrected by the hospital staff. The bodies pile up and the plot threads tie themselves into a knot.

The complications are basically resolved by killing off whoever is seen holding a loose thread. The good news is that the Easter egg hunt went well.

EASTER BUNNY MURDER (2013) by Leslie Meier is part of a cozy mystery series set in the village of Tinker's Cove, Maine, which has a murder rate that make Chicago slums look like a walk in the park. Lucy Stone is the protagonist, a part-time newspaper columnist and full-time Miss Marple. If anyone in the county or within an hour's drive of the seacoast dies from foul play, she's the one who finds the body.

There is an annual Easter egg hunt at the oceanfront estate of elderly socialite Vivian Von Vorst. It is where the latest murder occurs, with no hope for resurrection three days later. Her grandson Van Vorst Duff, wearing an Easter bunny costume, is the victim. Rather traumatic for the kids to see Mr Bunny drop dead in front of them.

After the children are sent away for therapy, there then follows a nasty dispute, legal and otherwise, between feuding heirs, some of whom won't wait for VVV to actually die. Stone is in the midst of it. Brake lines are cut, there is a sensational trial for elder abuse, and private detectives show up. Stone has no lack of copy for the newspaper, some of which she creates herself.

Easter is pretty much forgotten amidst all the excitement, save for repeated mentions about eating fish on Friday. The murderer was an unacknowledged heir to VVV but she doesn't live to see the money. The epilogue is next year's Easter egg hunt, considerably more sedate. Recipes at the back of the novel, which are baffling because this isn't a food cozy. Nonetheless, there are valuable hints about hot cross buns and ricotta pies.

NICKELED-AND-DIMED TO DEATH (2013) by Denise Swanson takes place just before Easter. Devereaux Sinclair operates a candy store in the village of Shadow Bend, Missouri. It is one of the busy seasons for candy sales, so when Elise Whitmore offers her a pair of antique Easter bunny chocolate molds at a cheap price, she doesn't ask questions and pays cash.

Sinclair is juggling two boyfriends. Another old friend, Boone St Onge, is arrested that night for the murder of Whitmore, who didn't live long enough to spend her cash. She had been going through a nasty divorce, was dating St. Onge, and in general living the wild life. It didn't help that St. Onge was her lawyer in the divorce.

The story switches back and forth between character viewpoints, sometimes annoyingly so. There are several idiots whose gossip and unsubstantiated allegations might put St. Onge on Death Row if they don't shut up. There is a Deppity Dawg whose usual procedure is to choose a suspect and then fit the evidence to him. Sinclair doesn't think St. Onge did it, and begins sleuthing.

In between all that, she still has a candy store to run. On sale out front are the regular Easter baskets. In the back room, she makes special baskets for couples who would like something erotic. After all, Easter was originally a pagan fertility festival before Christian missionaries co-opted it. That explains why chocolate bunnies and marshmallow eggs feature in the holiday today.

Sinclair goes about spreading suspicion like icing sprinkles on chocolate. Near the end of the novel, another suspect is brought in out of the blue. He was an embezzler linked to the dead woman and her ex-husband, and an all-around bad guy. Despite his lawyer telling him to shush, he blabs all to the police, tying up the loose ends himself en route to his extended sojourn in SuperMax. Everyone else can relax and go back to nibbling the ears off chocolate bunnies.

PAGAN SPRING (2013) by G.M. Malliet is set in the English village of Nether Monkslip. The local sleuth is the vicar Max Tudor, formerly an MI5 agent. That makes him better qualified to investigate murder, although both his Bishop and the police Inspector wonder why he gets mixed up in so many murders.

Tudor's main problem is writing his Easter sermon, not an easy task for modern congregations. The village is being overrun by commuters from the big city. The novel takes a while to set up all the characters and their back stories. Everyone has something to hide.

A dinner party where the wine flowed like water brings out some hints. It also brings out murder, as the village's most annoying personality, Thaddeus Bottle, departs our world. He died in bed after coming home from the party. Someone stabbed him in the neck with a poisoned implement.

His wife Melinda goes to Tudor first, who then calls the police. Inspector Cotton snaps at him: *It's like you're a magnet or something. Since shortly after you came to live here, people have started dropping like flies.*

That got me thinking about the possibility of a General Theory of Cozies, whereby Miss Marple is considered as a catalytic agent per chemistry. The

initial murder would then trigger a cascade, which would branch along existing fault lines and cause more murders. Throw in some stochastic mathematics to make it look scientific, and use the concept of attractors from chaos theory.

Getting back to Nether Monkslip, half the villagers turn into Miss Marples, the murder being the only excitement in the place. Tudor alternates between sleuthing and trying to write his Palm Sunday sermon.

The murderer is caught and because her back story was never told, this fills out a chapter in the epilogue. She confesses all to Tudor because she had an unhappy history with Bottle. So did Melinda. When she arrived home just as the murder was committed, she helped out as an accessory after the fact.

The events finally break Tudor's writer's block and he finishes his Easter sermon. His topic is the switch from thought to action. One imagines that the congregation will pay rapt attention, and there will be sequel novels in this series as some of the parishioners take the sermon to heart.

THE CHOCOLATE BUNNY BROUHAHA (2016) is by JoAnna Carl, a pseudonym of Eve Sandstrom. This novel is an installment in a lengthy series of cozy novels about Lee Woodward and her aunt Nettie TenHuis (a Dutch immigrant). They run a chocolate shop in the village of Warner Pier, Michigan. Easter is big in the candy business, so the shop hires some temporary help to make all those chocolate bunnies.

One temp is Bunny Birdsong (really?), who is not very good at her job. Matters worsen when her dysfunctional family shows up in the shop for a loud and public argument. They are Bunny's soon to be ex-husband Beau Birdsong, his rich aunt Abigail, his new girlfriend and her brother. Abigail doesn't approve of the divorce and tells Beau that she will see her lawyer tomorrow and cut him out of her will.

It happened that TenHuis Chocolate had bought a vacant building next door and was renovating it for expansion of the chocolate shop. The reader will not be surprised when Abigail's body is discovered there the next morning.

Bunny, for whom the phrase "blithering idiot" was invented, becomes the prime suspect when she babbles to police that she was in the construction area about the time Abigail was murdered. Further investigation reveals that during the night Abigail had written a holographic will which left everything to Bunny.

Woodward has no choice but to begin sleuthing. Plenty of suspects beside the obvious one, and a final confrontation with the murderer, who was not an obvious suspect. The murderer was a gigolo who worked in various towns, borrowed money from the women he romanced, and then disappeared. Except this time he didn't disappear fast enough.

All is well. As the final line emphasizes, the TenHuis Chocolate gets back into production fast enough to finish a big order of chocolate bunnies in time for Easter.

### **Easter Humour.**

OUR MISS BROOKS was an old-time radio sitcom about Constance Brooks, an English teacher at Madison High School. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).) She roomed with a dotty old widow named Margaret Davis, and yearned for the handsome but oblivious Philip Boynton, the biology teacher.

The school principal was Osgood Conklin, a pompous blowhard. Conklin and his wife Martha had a teenaged daughter Harriet, the apple of his eye. She had a boyfriend Walter Denton, an obnoxious irritant to Osgood, who once remarked: *And to think that I wanted a boy.*

Each episode opened with Davis and Brooks at the breakfast table setting up what would happen. Denton usually came by for free food and to give Brooks a ride to the school. Once at Madison, there would be further developments which lasted most of the day. They invariably involved Conklin losing his temper and shouting at the top of his lungs as Brooks and Denton inflicted some disaster upon him despite their well-meaning intentions.

“Easter Egg Dye” is a 1950 episode about Denton's new invention “Tint Tomorrow”, an egg dye that looks like soap powder but doesn't produce any colour until a day after application. The episode begins in the Davis boarding house with Davis, Brooks, and Harriet boiling eggs and dyeing them.

They discuss what they are going to wear in the Easter parade tomorrow. I've never seen it out here on the prairies but apparently the American custom was, and may still be, that after Easter services in church, congregations would parade down the streets in their finery.

Denton shows up with his new dyes, which he wants to test out. He leaves the bags of powdered dyes, swearing Brooks to secrecy because he is paranoid about someone stealing the idea before he can patent it.

The soap dispenser in the bathroom runs empty, and of course it is refilled with Tint Tomorrow powder by accident. All the cast visit the house one by one on some sort of errand, and all have some sort of reason to step into the bathroom and wash their faces. Since it isn't until the following day that the dye colours show up, no one notices anything wrong.

The next day, everyone discovers one by one they have faces like rainbows, hardly the way to appear in the Easter parade. Many alarms and excursions follow, with a twist ending. Good comedy, and worth a listen.

### **Police Procedural.**

“The Man On The Cross” by Bill Crider is a short story from the 2006 anthology THOU SHALT NOT KILL, edited by Anne Perry. It begins on Easter Monday when the body of Ron Eller is found on the front yard of a church. Three crosses had been erected for Easter, in the Biblical tradition of a tall centre cross flanked by two smaller crosses, representing Jesus and the two thieves who were crucified alongside him. Eller was wired onto one of the smaller crosses, a task made easier by two bullet holes in him.

Sheriff Dan Rhodes investigates but is hampered by the list of suspects being limited to everyone in town who knew Eller. The deceased had sold his farm adjacent to town limits to Elvis Calame, who converted it into an open-pit limestone quarry. The mine did a lot of blasting that rattled windows throughout town, and anyone downwind had a constant drift of dust sifting into their houses. No one liked Eller or Calame.

There are other possibilities. Eller's wife played around. Some natural springs dried up just after the mine began operating, leaving farmers without water. The ending is contrived. The murderer is represented as a hard-nosed man used to pushing others around, yet he collapses in an instant when Rhodes confronts him.

The murderer wanted Eller out of the way so he could have his wife. He tried to muddy the waters by tying the body of Eller to the cross and making it look as if a townsman had taken revenge.



## CANSTRUCTION CALGARY

photos by Dale Speirs

Southcentre Mall put on a display of sculptures made from tins of food. After Easter, the cans go to the local food bank. The name of the event comes from the fact that it is sponsored by local construction contractors. The Easter egg below is made from tuna fish cans. The nest is packages of dry noodles.







After Easter, the poor folk of Calgary will be eating lots and lots of tuna fish.



**SPRING HAS SPRUNG**  
photos by Dale Speirs



As I strolled out one morning, March 25 to be exact, I spied an early Richardson ground squirrel out and about. Usually they don't come out of hibernation until April. Not much grass to nibble on just now.



Talk about having all your ducks in a row. These mallards were enjoying the sunshine on March 21 in front of the Anglican Cathedral, in downtown Calgary along the 7 Avenue SE portion of the LRT line. Like snowshoe hares, they are well adapted to city life.



**WHEN WORDS COLLIDE 2018**

Calgary's annual readercon When Words Collide will be held the weekend of August 10 to 12, 2018, at the Delta Calgary South Hotel on Southland Drive and Bonaventure Drive SE. This is a multi-genre convention covering science fiction, mysteries, fantasy, romance, westerns, and historical fiction, held for the eighth time. Information from: [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org)

Lots of writer workshops and panels on publishing, editing, writing, social media, and reading. The dealer bourse is strictly limited to books, with many small-press publishers attending. I've attended every WWC and enjoyed them all. My reports of previous conventions appeared in OPUNTIA's #71, 253, 266, 282, 318, 350, and 387. Membership is capped at 750. Each year this convention, and the hotel, are booked up solid by June, so don't delay.



## **BWAH HA! HA!: PART 8**

by Dale Speirs

### **Build A Better Monster.**

One thing I've noticed in watching a lot of B-movie science fiction is that those produced in the 1940s have better production values in general than movies produced a decade later. In the 1940s, the studios at least tried. The movies of that era may have primitive SFX but are reasonable for their time. It is important to judge movie SFX against the standards of their time, not against our modern world of CGI.

During the 1950s, a lot of schlock was churned out by Poverty Row studios who didn't give a damn. They just wanted to get enough product out to keep the theatres busy and the rentals flowing in. The sad part is that many of the failures would have cost nothing to fix in the script or by better directing that suggested a monster rather than showed a rubber suit.

THE DEVIL BAT (1940) has a screenplay by John Thomas Neville, based on a story by George Bricker. It is available on the 50 Mad Scientists DVD box set from Mill Creek. Bela Lugosi has the part of mad scientist Dr Paul Carruthers. This one is a twist, as he is a cosmetics and perfumes chemist, rather than trying to rule the world with a superscience invention.

The company that employs him is chintzy with his remuneration. He feels he should be getting more money and eventually decides on revenge. Nothing to do with cosmetics, he has a secret laboratory hidden in behind his regular lab. In it, he uses electrical charges pulsed through bats to enlarge them into giant devil bats, big enough to slash a man's throat in seconds. Lots of electricity arcing up Jacob's ladders, the standard equipment of every mad scientist's laboratory.

Carruthers then trains the devil bats to attack and kill anyone who has the scent of a limited-edition aftershave he has produced. Not sold in stores, but only given by him to his enemies, real or perceived, in the cosmetics company.

The bats go out at night, or at least what passed for night in Hollywood B-movies. The night sky is bright grey when the devil bat is flying outdoors, and pitch black on the sound stage.

The deaths attract the attention of the press. A handsome young news reporter is on the case, to provide the love interest with the cosmetics company owner's daughter as well as to find out why their staff are dying with slashed throats. Eventually he discovers that all the victims had used the same experimental aftershave.

Carruthers is congenial to everyone and is above suspicion. Other biologists believe the devil bat is a rare species that somehow wandered into the neighbourhood. The first bat is brought down by the reporter with his revolver, guaranteeing him a scoop.

The loss of his devil bat is only a mild inconvenience to Carruthers. He creates a fresh devil bat with the usual buzzing arcs of electricity. He makes a few mistakes and others make a few connections. The net begins to close in. From there the end is inevitable.

Carruthers's secret laboratory is discovered by the reporter, who then sets a trap and splashes Carruthers with his own aftershave. The bat takes him out. There being nothing else to say, the movie abruptly terminates.

The SFX are reasonably well done for their time, other than the annoying night-for-day scenes. And so to the closing credits. The movie is good watching, not at all like what would follow a decade later.

THE MAD MONSTER, written by Fred Myton, is a 1942 movie on the 50 Mad Scientists DVD box set from Mill Creek. It is about mad scientist Dr Lorenzo Cameron, who has developed a serum from wolf blood that can turn a human into a lycanthrope. He works out of a laboratory in his mansion after being expelled from the university. All the other scientists laughed at him, and he has sworn revenge.

As per standard plot, Cameron has a beautiful young daughter but there is no sign of her mother. She has a handsome boyfriend who will prove to be the hero in the closing scenes. The laboratory has the usual array of bubbling retorts and dry-ice fuming beakers, although surprisingly there are no Jacob ladders or spark interrupters. Cameron doesn't need fizzing electricity to produce his serum.

The test subject is the gardener Petro, big and dumb, but loyal to his master. In between injecting Petro with the serum that turns him into a raving wolfman,



Cameron takes the opportunity to rant at the ghostly figures of the professors who were responsible for his expulsion from the university. He can see them sitting at his laboratory workbench as if they were real.

The SFX are well done for the early 1940s. Petro's change from human to wolfman is done by stop-motion photography, and the ghostly professors by double exposure. Both work well.

Cameron's one-sided lectures to them help fill in the details for the audience. He is not an evil mad scientist, at least from his point of view. His purpose in creating the serum was to turn Allied infantry into unstoppable fighters, all the better to defeat that other madman in Europe.

Petro goes for a stroll in the neighbourhood after becoming a wolfman, getting the local inhabitants riled up and loading their shotguns. He kills a little girl, which doesn't particularly bother Cameron but makes him realize he can use Petro to eliminate those nasty professors.

So it's off to the university, with the wolfman killing the professors one by one. Petro comes back to the house but is having trouble reverting, and is dangerous enough to cause trouble. He goes after Lenora, and the regular sort of screaming and rushing about follows before her boyfriend can rescue her.

A lightning bolt strikes the house and sets it on fire. The wolfman, for Petro is not coming back, turns on his master and kills him. Meanwhile the fire is burning. Lenora and her boyfriend escape in the nick of time but the wolfman and Cameron die together in the fire.

Pretty much a standard black-and-white horror movie, the kind that would be poorly imitated in the 1950s by Grade-B movie producers. Nothing original about it, but it was decently done, compared with later movies whose producers just didn't care.

An example of a movie whose producers didn't care was BELA LUGOSI MEETS A BROOKLYN GORILLA (1952), with screenplay by Tim Ryan. It featured Lugosi in his declining days, long after he had sunk to a drug addict and seldom worked. A sad end, given how awful the movie was, worse than anything Ed Wood Jr or Roger Corman ever churned out. This movie is on the 50 Mad Scientists DVD box set from Mill Creek.

The movie opens with a narration about jungle wildlife, most species of which shown are savanna species. Then a tribe of jungle savages was introduced, all of them middle-aged pot-bellied white men wearing caveman outfits and hats. They must have been dying from the heat in those clothes.

They find two young American men prostrate in the jungle and take them back to the village. Much palaver in gibberish, as the tribesmen argue with each other in boola-boola, wonga-wonga dialect. The chief's daughter Nona wants them alive. Her concern is understandable. They are in good physical condition, and certainly better marriage prospects than any man in the village.

The Americans are Sammy Petrillo (playing himself), who was a Jerry Lewis impersonator in both looks and speech, and Duke Mitchell (also as himself) who was the crooner, although not so blatant an imitator of Dean Martin. When the movie came out, Lewis threatened to sue but had to settle for getting Petrillo blacklisted in Hollywood. It was the only movie Petrillo and Mitchell did together, and afterwards they faded away.

Meanwhile, back in the jungle, Nona is able to speak English and thus talk to the two men. They explain they are USO entertainers who were flying over the Pacific Ocean to a gig in Guam. By mischance they ended up parachuting onto the savages's island, called Kola Kola.

Wait a minute, then. The opening narration showed lions, hyenas, and other African wildlife from the plains of eastern Africa. What are they doing in Polynesia? You may well ask, but you'll get no answer. Later on in the movie some more supposed jungle scenes are inserted, with the characters watching herds of giraffes and gazelles go by.

Once settled in the village, the plot stops for a big production number of Nona and the natives dancing. Mitchell croons a song to the accompaniment of the native drummers. A loud brass section plays along, leading one to believe there must be a 16-piece orchestra hidden behind the potted plants that make up the jungle background. Certainly none of the natives have trumpets or trombones.

The boys want to get back to civilization, notwithstanding Nona's charms. She leads them across the island to the lair of mad scientist Dr Zabor, who may be able to help. His castle is high atop a European-style mountain, that is, made of sedimentary strata, whereas all mountains in Polynesia are volcanic.



Zabor does not have a beautiful daughter, strange to relate. He has the hots for Nona, but she has no interest in him. He is doing experiments on applied evolution, such as turning men into apes to prove something or other. When he sees that Nona and Mitchell are getting cozy, he decides to kill two birds with one stone. He injects Mitchell with a serum that turns him into a gorilla, which hopefully will free up Nona for himself.

Petrillo finds Mitchell and figures out he is a gorilla. The two must discover a remedy. At this point, a real gorilla comes wandering out of the jungle, having apparently fallen through a space-time warp in its African home. There follows a series of farcical mixups, chase scenes, and other assorted excursions.

The movie suddenly stops. A jump cut shows Petrillo waking up in a hotel room. It was all a dream and never happened. That must have been where the television series DALLAS got the idea for its reboot. Not worth watching even as a drinking game.

KONG ISLAND (1968) is another gorilla movie, written by a committee. The venue is Kenya, so at least they got the correct continent. There is no island or King Kong, although there are gorillas. To be fair, this is an Italian movie originally released under the title EVA, LA VENERE SELVAGGIA (Eve, the wild woman). The title was changed by the American distributors after it was dubbed into English.

The movie begins with a payroll robbery of \$300,000 from a mining company. From there the movie jumps to a different plot, and the heist is forgotten. Albert Muller is a mad scientist headquartered in a cave somewhere in Kenya. He implants radio transmitters into gorilla brains to control them, eventually hoping to do the same with humans.

His band of merry gorillas kidnaps a woman named Diana. A rescue team led by hunk Burt Dawson goes in to extract her. En route they meet a female Tarzan named Eva. She is an orphan who grew up in the jungle, can communicate with animals but not speak human languages, and is very nubile. However, she is relegated to a supporting role as Dawson wants Diana, who speaks English (or Italian, depending on which version you watch) and is just as nubile.

The movie's pacing is tedious at times. People endlessly traveling through jungles, driving jeeps or motorboats hither and yon, and lots of stock shots of

wildlife help pad out the footage. The gorilla suits are the phoniest I have seen. They appear to be suffering from mange, or else the seamstresses weren't very good at matching rabbit fur samples.

While Muller has Diana in captivity, he does some bwah-ha-ha-ing and explains to her how the brain implants work. He uses a large drawing of a brain longitudinal section, which also doubles as a intruder alert warboard, as lights start blinking in the brain when someone tries to sneak into the cave.

Eventually everyone congregates in the cave for the grand finale. After a shootout prunes the cast list, Dawson disables the gorilla control computer. The released animals go after Muller and he goes to his just reward. Dawson gets the girl, Eva goes back to the jungle, and all ends well for the survivors.

THE INDESTRUCTIBLE MAN is a 1956 B-movie, with original screenplay by Vy Russell and Sue Bradford. This movie was on the 50 Horror Classics DVD box set from Mill Creek. It begins with Charlie "The Butcher" Benton being executed in the gas chamber. Just before his death he vowed revenge against the rest of his gang, who turned stool pigeons and testified against him.

The others, meanwhile, are trying to find out where Benton hid the loot from their last job, \$600,000 in currency. He won't tell them because he doesn't want the satisfaction of them enjoying it while he rots in the grave.

A cancer researcher named Bradshaw receives Benton's body fresh out of the gas chamber, courtesy of a local Burke & Hare undertaker who supplements his income. Bradshaw goes to work in his laboratory. An injection of serum here, 250,000 volts there, and Benton is revived. Not intentionally, because Bradshaw only wanted to test cells in Benton's body, but the deed is done.

Benton not only rises from the dead but was made incredibly strong, nearly invulnerable, and thirsting for revenge. He kills Bradshaw and his lab assistant on general principles, then goes out into the world seeking blood and the loot.

The finale takes place in the Los Angeles storm sewer system where the loot was hidden. Benton versus half the police force, a fair fight given his powers. The police use bazookas and flamethrowers but still can't stop him. The chase continues into a shipping dock where Benton meets his end the same way he was created, by electrocution.



The movie is narrated by the police detective chasing Benton, which saved the studio money by not having to film scenes, instead just having them narrated. It was, however, annoying in many respects. The pacing was slow since the plot had to be stretched to make a full-length movie. Not as bad as most B-movies, which is damning with faint praise. Routine potboiler. Watch it on a rainy Sunday afternoon when you have absolutely nothing else to do.

THE PHANTOM FROM 10,000 LEAGUES (1956) had a screenplay by Lou Rusoff, based on a story by Dorys Lukather. This movie was on the 50 Mad Scientists DVD box set from Mill Creek. The 10,000 leagues is an obvious exaggeration, whether in horizontal distance or vertical depth. The phantom lurks just offshore and close enough to the surface that scuba divers can easily reach its lair. It is revealed in the opening scene and is among the phoniest rubber suit monsters of the B-movies.

It snatches a fisherman off his rowboat and kills him, for no apparent reason since the body washes ashore intact, although it does have serious radiation burns. Mark that rowboat, for everyone who goes out to sea uses it; good guys, bad guys, or innocent bystanders.

Three men, about whom more later, independently find the body. It is bright daylight, but one of them asks another why he is on the beach on such a dark night. Ah yes, the old night-for-day camera filter trick so beloved of B-movie producers. Well it would be, except the cameraman forgot to put a dark filter on the lens. Conversely, a few moments later, one of them enters a beach house. All the room lights are on when he enters, and the windows are black. What puzzles me is why they bothered. It made no difference whatsoever to the plot whether it was day or night.

One of the men is handsome Dr Ted Stevens or just plain Ted Baxter, depending on who he introduces himself to. He has come to the Pacific College of Oceanography to see what resident mad scientist Professor King is fiddling about with. There is, as per studio contractual obligation, a beautiful daughter who will be Stevens's love interest. No sign of the mother, as usual.

The monster has killed three people, as we learn from a conversation at the college between a secretary and a janitor. Stevens is interested to hear that, and dives out at the site. He finds the monster guarding a radioactive rock blazing with light. The Feds are interested as well, as are a batch of foreign spies.

Assorted underwater scenes follow, which were well done until Rubber Suit pops into view and once again destroys any suspension of disbelief. A couple more people die at its hands. Assorted abovewater action scenes then follow, which were not as well done since the cameraman still hadn't learned how to film night-for-day scenes.

Professor King keeps trying to bluff Stevens/Baxter, saying that the monster and radioactive source are a hoax. Stevens doesn't believe him, and suspects King is at the bottom of it. He's right, as King used the radioactive source to create the monster, it being too big to fit into the laboratory.

Events come to a head where a freighter sails overtop the source and blows up. King is overcome with remorse. He dives alone with an explosive charge to blow up the source. After setting the charge, he gets into a fight with the monster. They are still struggling when the explosives detonate and kill them both. Finis. The good news is that Stevens gets the daughter.

Another B-movie from the 50 Mad Scientists DVD box set from Mill Creek is THE MANSTER, a 1959 Japanese-American collaboration. The screenplay was by Walter J. Sheldon, based on a story by the producer-director George P. Breakston.

The movie has poor sound synchronization. It is not a matter of dubbing problems. Half the characters were Americans speaking English and their lip movements do not correspond with their speech. Sometimes the sound was ahead, sometimes it was behind, so it wasn't a defective machine. The clincher is a scene near the end when a handgun is fired, and the sound of the shot comes two seconds after the flash from the barrel.

Be that as it may, the story is about American news correspondent Larry Stanford, who has been in Japan for several years. He goes to interview Dr Suzuki, who has a laboratory near the top of an active volcano, so right away you know he is a mad scientist.

A sane scientist would build his laboratory in the industrial district of a city, where there would be better logistics. The privacy would be greater as well, because rural inhabitants gossip about the weirdo up in the big house, but no one pays attention to an ordinary-looking warehouse. On the other hand, the lava pit in the crater makes a handy garbage disposal, particularly of human bodies.



Suzuki's laboratory is modern and wholly up-to-date. So is his assistant Tara, who is a Caucasian woman. No Jacob's ladders crackling with electricity, or retorts steaming with dry ice in coloured solutions. Instead, there is a central gizmo with two small particle beams aimed vertically, wardrobe-sized computers, and panels with assorted levers and dials.

Suzuki decides Stanford will make an excellent test subject and gets him drunk. While he is passed out, Suzuki injects him with a serum in the right shoulder. Tara is not happy about it, but Suzuki tells her: *This is for science, for human knowledge*. I'm betting that he doesn't publish in peer-reviewed journals though.

After that, it is a matter of waiting a few weeks. Stanford is horrified to find an eye growing on his shoulder. It turns him psychotic, as well it might, and he goes out at night killing random strangers. Then a head emerges on his shoulder, that of a hairy ape. That drives him back to Suzuki's laboratory to kill him. Even as he staggers up the slope, the volcano begins erupting, although it quiets down during the climax.

Stanford stumbles behind a tree and splits in half. A violent hairy ape emerges from one side and Stanford's normal body is the other half. There is no sign of a suture; his skin is unbroken after the split. The obvious comparison is Jekyll and Hyde. The ape grabs Tara and throws her into the lava. An angry Stanford shoves the ape into the lava after her.

And so to the end credits. Judged as a B-movie, it was slightly better than average, setting aside the sound problems. There are some things we were not meant to know and all that.

## COUNTERFACTUALS

by Dale Speirs

Alternative history is fiction, while counterfactuals are non-fiction speculations about what might have happened otherwise, based on logical reasons. Historians and military instructors commonly use counterfactuals as teaching aids. They are standard procedure in the legal system, viz: *If the plaintiff had not sped through the stop sign, my client would not have suffered his injuries*.

WHAT IF? (1999) is an anthology of counterfactuals edited by Robert Cowley. This book is of military battles that were turning points in world history. I won't list all twenty counterfactuals but will pick out a few examples.

Leading off the anthology is "Infectious Alternatives" by William H. McNeill, about the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BC by the Assyrians. It failed because disease broke out in the Assyrian forces, probably due to contaminated drinking water. The Assyrians had already subdued most of Israel, and decided that one more walled city in Judah wasn't cost effective. They moved on to easier targets. The Jews were convinced that God had delivered them, although why he didn't save the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel was something later glossed over.

Had the Assyrians won, the Jews would have been extinguished along with their religion, which would suffer no other gods. General religious thought at the time among most nations was that military success was due to the local gods. Jews insisted that their God was not tied to a single place or kingdom, a belief that ensured the survival of their religion during the diaspora.

They became the People of the Book, which is what allowed their religion to survive in subsequent years when Judah was finally overrun by Babylon and the Jews dispersed. Since Christianity was an offshoot of Judaism and Islam partially so, they would not have come into existence. had Jerusalem fallen.

"No Glory That Was Greece" by Victor Davis Hanson considers the Battle of Salamis, Greece, where in 480 BC the Greek navy defeated a superior force of Persians and stopped the advance of eastern Asian empires. Had the Persians won, Greek democracy would have been extinguished. The world would have reverted to a permanent kleptocratic monarchical system where the king and his nobles owned everything and citizens were property.

“The Death That Saved Europe” by Cecelia Holland is about the unstoppable invasion of Europe by the Mongols, who razed every city they attacked. Their success was due to a disciplined army that attacked according to a plan and whose warriors followed orders. In European armies, generals basically moved their troops to the battle zone, after which it was every man for himself.

In 1242, the Mongols were at the gates of Vienna when their Khan Ogadai (son of Genghis) died. Their political structure required election of a new Khan in person by the warriors, so they withdrew.

The Mongols would have destroyed the newborn mercantile class and nascent universities, leaving behind a village economy of peasants. The Europeans were fighting each other when the Mongols arrived. A house divided cannot stand. Civilization would have easily been set back a millennium.

“If Only It Had Not Been Such A Wet Summer” by Theodore Rabb looks at what would have happened had the Ottoman Empire successfully taken Austria in 1529. The Reformation and the Habsburg empire would have fallen. Europe would not necessarily have become Muslim, as the northern Christian nations were strong enough to resist when they united after the fall of the Habsburgs.

There are several counterfactuals for the American Revolution and the War Between The States, which is not surprising given how many turning points there were in each war.

The Battle of Bunker (Breed’s) Hill was lost to the British because their naval commander was too timid to back up the redcoats on land. The Brits almost trapped George Washington’s army on Long Island and again on Manhattan. Later in the war, Washington was almost replaced by a lesser commander due to political intrigue, not once but twice in two separate conspiracies. He had to spend as much time protecting his back as he did facing the British.

The Civil War had numerous turning points. Someone lost orders issued by Robert E. Lee detailing his battle plan, and they were found by a Union soldier. Many other battles hinged on whose general was the most incompetent or whose soldiers panicked first and broke the line.

Most historians agree that World War One was an accidental war. “The What Ifs Of 1914” by Robert Cowley looks at a number of possible turning points in the first year of the war, which could easily have ended it quickly.

One of the biggest divergences was the German failure to stick to their battle plan, the Schlieffen Plan. It would have won the war quickly for them had not lesser generals deviated from it by stripping away units to other fronts and taking the wrong route through France. Matters were not helped when a French patrol met up with a German courier vehicle and won the firefight. Searching through the wreckage, the French found a copy of the German battle plan, which they made good use of.

The British government wasn’t much better, waffling about whether or not to be dragged into the war. Their decision to do so bankrupted them and set the Empire on a long slow decline. Had they stayed out of Europe, it would have been a continental war, not a world war. Britain would not have lost the flower of its manhood, for the bureaucrats allowed great scientists to volunteer for action and thus be chewed up in No Man’s Land instead of working in laboratories to better benefit.

World War Two was a continuation of World War One, with a two-decade truce in between. It was really two separate wars with overlapping combatants, a Pacific Ocean war and a European war.

John Keegan writes “How Hitler Could Have Won The War” and agrees with most historians that the turning point of the European war was Operation Barbarossa in 1941. The invasion of USSR was the fatal mistake because the Germans ended up fighting on one front too many.

Had Hitler instead chosen to drive into the Middle East to capture the oil wells, the Nazis might well have been able to negotiate peace on their terms. Keegan points out why Hitler probably did not do so. The Germans had only two routes to Iraq, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. If by sea, they had a serious shipping shortage and would have had trouble moving their troops and equipment. By land, they would have had to go through Turkey, which was neutral in the war but would have quickly become yet another battlefield.

Theodore F. Cook looks at the turning point of the Pacific war in “Our Midway Disaster”. The Battle of Midway on June 4, 1942, was decided in a 6-minute period when several random factors came together all at once. Had any of them been earlier or later by only a few minutes, the Imperial Japanese Navy probably would have won the battle and taken Midway Island, instead of losing three aircraft carriers within six minutes.



Cook discusses the Japanese plans for what would have happened next had they won at Midway. Their intent was to island-hop to Hawaii, reduce its defenses by battleships, and use it as the eastern frontier of their empire.

From there, Cook believes, the tide of history would have come into effect. The war would have been prolonged a couple of years because it took time for the USA to ramp up industrial production and rebuild its Pacific fleet. The counterattack would have been along the Aleutian Islands, following the Great Circle route to the Japanese homeland. By that time there would have been a larger stockpile of atomic bombs instead of just two, and numerous Japanese cities would have been obliterated.

The book concludes with several what-ifs about the Cold War, which might have turned hot in Europe the way it did in Korea. Surprisingly, the construction of the Berlin Wall is one of the events that in the long run helped calm Europe.

WHAT IF? VOLUME 2 (2001) looks at 25 counterfactuals, non-military as well as the usual single-point turns in wars. Again, I will just pick out a few to review.

Carlos M.N. Eire considers “Pontius Pilate Spares Jesus”. This would have cut Christianity off at the knees since its basic principle is that Jesus died for our sins and was the way to God. Instead, Jesus is left to continue his missionary work. Over time the Jewish faith diverges into many competing branches. Jesus lives to a ripe old age, but his impact is diffused. He becomes yet another prophet trudging up and down the roads, with nothing extraordinary to separate him from all the other rabbis.

In the early 1400s, the Chinese, under Admiral Zheng He, sent massive fleets of ship to explore as far west as Africa and south to Australia. Suddenly the Emperor recalled the ships and established a policy of isolationism as he diverted resources to fighting off barbarians invading from the north.

Theodore F. Cook Jr considers “The Chinese Discovery Of The New World, 15<sup>th</sup> Century” had the ships not been recalled. The Chinese would have traveled around Africa and pre-empted the Portuguese along the western coast. From there, they would have sailed west and discovered South America. Less probable would be that from China they took the Great Circle route past Japan, along Alaska, and down the Canadian coast to California and points west.

The Americas settled by Chinese or at least the native tribes made allies by trading would have changed the balance of power in Europe. North America’s east coast would still have been European, but the rest of the Atlantic coast would not have gone the same way.

“Martin Luther Burns At The Stake, 1521” by Geoffrey Parker considers that Luther succeeded because, unlike similar apostates of the past, he had the printing press. Previously, doctrines spread slowly by word of mouth and hand copying manuscripts, and since the vast majority of hand copying was done by monks, religious heresies were not successful on a wide scale.

Luther made good use of the printing press. He not only produced the first vernacular Bible that any literate German could read, he flooded Europe with tracts and broadsides addressing the issues of the moment. His writings were so ubiquitous that he inadvertently helped standardize the German language and made his dialect the majority dialect.

At the Diet of Worms, where he was called to account, he could very easily have been ordered to be burned at the stake. He was saved because of political maneuvering between kings and princes that had little to do with theology.

Parker believes that had Luther gone to the stake, Protestantism would still have existed but in a much diminished and very fragmented form. The little heresies would have formed pockets of resistance throughout Europe that the Pope could never have extinguished. The Protestants would not have had a pan-European leader as Luther was, so they would have only ever been an irritant to the Catholic monarchs.

A few too many of the remaining counterfactuals are military, but others are based on politics or science. The anthology is worth reading.

**DBO ZPV SFBE UIJT NFFTBHF: QBSU 2**  
by Dale Speirs

**Puzzling Crimes.**

Parnell Hall has been publishing a series of cozy mysteries about Cora Felton, the Puzzle Lady. She lives in the small but murderous town of Bakerhaven, Connecticut, and is a nationally syndicated crossword columnist.

Her dirty secret is that she is no good at solving puzzles, much less constructing them. Her secretary and niece is Sherry Carter, who actually constructs the crosswords. Carter uses her aunt as a shield to protect herself against an abusive ex-husband. Felton herself has been through a half dozen marriages, so she understands.

The novels are replete with puzzles, first as blanks and then a few pages further on as solved puzzles. They are integrated into the storyline. Bakerhaven is the only place in the world where criminals are cruciverbalists who deliberately leave puzzles as misleading clues or to taunt the law.

In every other jurisdiction in the world, criminals leave footprints, fingerprints, or DNA traces, but in Bakerhaven they instinctively sit down and compose a crossword puzzle after the murder. Jessica Fletcher never gets this kind of trouble in Cabot Cove.

Felton is, of course, the village Miss Marple, although she isn't necessarily the one who discovers each body. Since she is no good at solving puzzles, she relies for help on Harvey Beerbaum, who not only is very good at it but is a national competitor. The village Deppity Dawg is Police Chief Dale Harper, who regularly asks Felton for assistance because with only a couple of men on his force, not the brightest thinkers in the county, he needs all the help he can get.

LAST PUZZLE AND TESTAMENT (2000) is about the will that wealthy spinster Emma Hurley left behind. It includes a puzzle to be solved by the heirs. Whichever of them solves it first inherits the entire estate, and tough luck to the rest. Felton is named the referee but since she can't solve crosswords, her niece has to help.

Carter's life is a mess. She is caught in a love triangle, plus one of the heirs is making unwanted advances. Felton has her own problems. A magazine wants

to do a photo spread about her, showing the Puzzle Lady in her elegant house and enjoying her hobbies. Her hobbies are drinking and gambling. The yard is an overgrown mess, so she has one week to get a gardener and freshen up the place with flowers.

Just after Hurley died, her empty mansion was broken into by the town drunk, who was caught after he passed out in the middle of the burglary. His lawyer bails him out but he doesn't have long to enjoy his freedom, becoming murder victim #1.

The reading of the will, during which the heirs learn they will have to work for their inheritances, is a real barn-burner. They all get copies of the crossword but the clues are incomplete. Only one quadrant of the puzzle can be solved, but on doing so that provides a suggestion as to where the clues for the next quadrant are hidden.

The author helpfully includes the stages of the crossword as each quadrant is solved, enabling the reader to keep up and possibly guess ahead. The heirs race to solve the puzzle. One of them has an idea to simplify probate by reducing the number of claimants. A Hurley niece becomes victim #2. An outsider almost becomes victim #3 but barely survives the assault.

Felton discovers the crossword is a fake because it has anachronisms that Hurley would not have used. The deceased had composed a different puzzle that someone had substituted it for. It becomes irrelevant because there is a dramatic twist ending.

A letter is found in Hurley's handwriting that her father's will by which she inherited was forged in her favour. One more killing, this time by Hurley's brother, takes out the murderer. The action ends and the rest is epilogue. A clever story, and well recommended.

THE KENKEN KILLINGS (2010) introduces a new type of puzzle that I hadn't heard of before, the KenKen. It is a simplified and modified form of sudoku, designed by its Japanese inventor as a method of teaching basic arithmetic to young children.

The novel begins with Felton inheriting \$10,000 from Chester T. Markowitz as his beloved wife. Trouble is, she was never married to such a man, although she isn't entirely certain because there are a couple of decades she doesn't



remember too well, what with her riotous and drunken youth. Nonetheless, she cashes the cheque.

It turns out to be a booby trap to enable her last ex-husband, Melvin Crabtree, to begin legal proceedings to terminate the alimony she has been getting from him. A not entirely unrelated matter involves Roger Randolph, banker about town, who has a break-in at his house. The burglar, as they do nowhere else in the world, leaves a blank KenKen puzzle in the opened safe. Felton is called in to consult but there isn't much she can do.

Meanwhile, the alimony hearing gets nasty, as such cases normally do. Crabtree and Felton are not on their best behaviour, and the lawyers tangle things up. Randolph was a witness but the next day someone put a bullet through his head and left another KenKen as a calling card. The murderer then placed a blank crossword puzzle in Felton's mailbox.

Both the puzzles and the legal wrangling keep flowing. So do the bodies. Crabtree's current wife is not the bimbo she appears to be, and neither is his mistress. Hell hath no fury like two women scorned. Everything is sorted out in the end amidst a blizzard of puzzles. An interesting read that fleshes out some of Felton's past.

THE PUZZLE LADY VS. THE SUDOKU LADY (2010) is exactly that when Minami, the Sudoku Lady, shows up in Bakerhaven to annoy Felton. Their sudoku books are nudging each other on the Japanese bestseller lists. The author makes fun of the commonplace event in his novels: *You can't turn around without someone knocking on the door wanting you to solve a puzzle found at the scene of a murder.*

The police chief then visits Felton. He is greatly perturbed. There has been a suspicious death in Bakerhaven, yet no crossword puzzle was found at the scene. Not to worry, dear reader, that will soon be remedied.

Minami arrives in town from Japan, accompanied by her niece Michiko. They are a mirror image of Felton and Carter. The poor police now have two Miss Marples tripping them up. The ladies begin feuding on sight, when not busily interfering with the investigation and contaminating the evidence. Felton's reputation precedes her. One suspect she talks to says: *You're the Puzzle Lady. When you show up, people die.*

The second body is not long in appearing, and this time there is a sudoku left at the scene. Minami is arrested for murder, and Felton for smoking in a public place. The two women find themselves together in the same jail cell. Felton is soon released and not long after discovers the third body, with sudoku of course. Rinse and repeat. It does get Minami out of jail though.

More puzzles and much legal wrangling, but there is little progress in finding the murderer. The court proceedings, not a trial but a hearing, reveal the killer. Even a non-legal like me has to wonder how a conviction could be obtained. What with all the violations of court procedure, contamination of evidence, and obstruction of justice, an appellate court could make quick work of it.

ARSENIC AND OLD PUZZLES (2013) starts off with an elderly guest keeling over at the Guildford sisters' bed-and-breakfast in Bakerhaven. He had swallowed a hearty glass of elderberry wine flavoured with cyanide and spiced with arsenic and strychnine. The deceased had a sudoku puzzle in his pocket. Then a blank crossword puzzle is found under the doormat. The murderer is teasing the police, or perhaps trying to lay down a smokescreen.

The Guildford sisters later have a second corpse on their hands when the town drunk sneaks through an open window in their house at 03h00 and steals a different bottle of elderberry wine that the police had overlooked. It too was spiked, and he too is found with a sudoku puzzle in his pocket. There is no surprise when the police find an old newspaper outside the window, folded open to one of Felton's crossword puzzles.

By now, the reader will recall one of Agatha Christie's plays, or perhaps the Cary Grant movie. Sure enough, in Chapter 20 their names are mentioned. A copycat killer seems to be using Christie's work as inspiration. The themes of the crossword puzzles have a vague connection to the case, although the sudokus are confusing since the numbers are irrelevant.

The clues, including all the puzzles, keep piling up, all following the theme of the movie. The bodies also pile up, including two more guests and one of the Guildford sisters. Two nephews of the aunties are on the list of suspects because they inherit.

The twist ending comes when the fiancée of one of the nephews is discovered to be an impersonator who had stolen a different fortune. All the deaths at the B&B but one were decoys designed to divert attention away from her. The

ultimate intended target could have exposed her other crimes, and thus the murderous rampage. A good novel with a surprising ending that ties together all the loose threads.

PUZZLED INDEMNITY (2014) has Cora Felton investigating a liquor store robbery for the police and a philandering husband for Brittney Wells, a client of her lawyer friend Becky Baldwin. In Chapter 3, the author pokes fun at cozy mysteries, including his own. Felton says to the village Police Chief: *For a small-town police department, you've certainly had your share of murders. Hell, it's like living in Cabot Cove.*

The Chief gets an anonymous crossword puzzle in the mail, but since it doesn't seem connected to any recent crime, he doesn't worry about it. As per standard practice in these novels, the blank puzzle is shown and the solution given a few pages later.

A liquor store robbery brightens up the day for both Felton and the police but there isn't much to go on. A masked man produced a handgun and cleaned out the cash register. The better prospect for Felton is being hired by Baldwin to investigate infidelity on the part of Hank Wells and the fear of Brittney that he might try to cash in on a double-indemnity life insurance policy by cashing her out.

The investigation does not go smoothly. Wells works in Manhattan. Felton discovers the main problem of being a private investigator in New York City is finding a parking space. Her car is towed while she is tailing Wells on foot. After another trip, she finds Wells's love nest.

Matter develop from there. Hank is killed by a car bomb but it was in Brittney's car, which was an identical make and model. In the aftermath, someone keeps leaving crosswords and sudokus here, there, and everywhere. A twist is that the insurance policy isn't what Brittney thought it was, as a result of which she is arrested for murder.

Some more twists reveal that Hank didn't die in the car bomb but had faked his death with a ringer so that he could run off with a dental hygienist. A second murder is staged to distract the police, and those crossword puzzles keep appearing. The plot gets messy in the final quarter of the book, but the threads eventually tie together. A good read.

A PUZZLE TO BE NAMED LATER (2016) reveals Cora Felton to be a baseball fan. Matt Greystone is a Yankees rookie pitcher who won 17 games as a starter. He has come to Bakerhaven for rehab on a serious arm injury from a car accident. Not having been briefed by the local populace, he invites Felton to a weekend party.

The first blank crossword puzzle appears at the end of Chapter 3, which means the first murder can't be far behind. The crossword was mailed to Matt and made his wife Jackie nervous, so she asks Felton to solve it.

The first victim is a gossip columnist who had crashed the party, and who was later found dead in the sauna, his head bashed in. To no one's surprise, another blank crossword was left near the body. Murderers do things differently in Bakerhaven. Felton does her sleuthing, which includes stealing a memory card from the deceased's computer. For good measure, she goes around contaminating the rest of the evidence.

Another puzzle shows up just before someone cuts the brake line on Matt's car. Fortunately he loaned it to someone else who managed to steer it safely into a ditch. More alarums and excursions follow, one per chapter, including the second body.

Matt is arrested on suspicion of everything, later followed by Jackie, his agent, and a team mate. The Bakerhaven jail holding facility must have revolving doors. It isn't sloppiness on the part of the police. Everybody is guilty of something. The mess is more or less sorted out by the end of novel, although I'm not certain that all the loose threads were tied off. An average read.

There are yet more novels in this series but I fear that I have reviewed too many of them as it is. I like doing the sudoku puzzle in CALGARY METRO, a free newspaper. I do it in ink, just to add an extra challenge.



## ZINE LISTINGS

[I only list zines I receive from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) or [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org), then I don't mention it since you can read it directly.]

CHRISTIAN NEW AGE QUARTERLY V23#3 (US\$5 for a sample copy, from Catherine Groves, Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey 07015-0276) This issue leads off with a comparison of metaphors in STAR TREK: TNG with the use of biblical analogies. Frederick Moe writes about his former preacher whose unfortunate doctrinal attitude “My way or the highway” lost him many of his congregation.

## 25TH ANNUAL WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. 2018 will be the 25th year of the WWP.

At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of zinedom around the world. It is important to have it exactly at 21h00 your time. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. Rescheduling it to a club meeting or more convenient time negates the idea of a wave of celebration by SF fans and zinesters circling the globe.

At 21h00, face to the east and salute those who have already celebrated. Then face north, then south, and toast those in your time zone who are celebrating as you do. Finally, face west and raise a glass to those who will celebrate WWP in the next hour. Raise a glass, publish a one-shot zine, have a party, or do a mail art project for the WWP. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Adriani, A., et al (2018) **Clusters of cyclones encircling Jupiter's poles.** NATURE 555:216-219

Authors' abstract: *Jovian polar regions are not visible from Earth owing to Jupiter's low axial tilt, and were poorly characterized by previous missions because the trajectories of these missions did not venture far from Jupiter's equatorial plane. Here we report that visible and infrared images obtained from above each pole by the Juno spacecraft during its first five orbits reveal persistent polygonal patterns of large cyclones.*

*In the north, eight circumpolar cyclones are observed about a single polar cyclone; in the south, one polar cyclone is encircled by five circumpolar cyclones. Cyclonic circulation is established via time-lapse imagery obtained over intervals ranging from 20 minutes to 4 hours.*

*Although migration of cyclones towards the pole might be expected as a consequence of the Coriolis  $\beta$ -effect, by which cyclonic vortices naturally drift towards the rotational pole, the configuration of the cyclones is without precedent on other planets (including Saturn's polar hexagonal features).*

Kaspi, Y., et al (2018) **Jupiter's atmospheric jet streams extend thousands of kilometres deep.** NATURE 555:223-226

Authors' abstract: *The depth to which Jupiter's observed east-west jet streams extend has been a long-standing question. Resolving this puzzle has been a primary goal for the Juno spacecraft, which has been in orbit around the gas giant since July 2016. Juno's gravitational measurements have revealed that Jupiter's gravitational field is north-south asymmetric, which is a signature of the planet's atmospheric and interior flows.*

*Here we report that the measured odd gravitational harmonics indicate that the observed jet streams, as they appear at the cloud level, extend down to depths of thousands of kilometres beneath the cloud level, probably to the region of magnetic dissipation at a depth of about 3,000 kilometres. ... These results indicate that the mass of the dynamical atmosphere is about one per cent of Jupiter's total mass.*

Guillot, T., et al (2018) **A suppression of differential rotation in Jupiter's deep interior.** NATURE 555:227-230

Authors' abstract: *We find that the deep interior of the planet rotates nearly as a rigid body, with differential rotation decreasing by at least an order of magnitude compared to the atmosphere. Moreover, we find that the atmospheric zonal flow extends to more than 2,000 kilometres and to less than 3,500 kilometres, making it fully consistent with the constraints obtained independently from the odd gravitational harmonics.*

*This depth corresponds to the point at which the electric conductivity becomes large and magnetic drag should suppress differential rotation. Given that electric conductivity is dependent on planetary mass, we expect the outer, differentially rotating region to be at least three times deeper in Saturn and to be shallower in massive giant planets and brown dwarfs.*

Lingam, M., and A. Loeb (2018) **Physical constraints on the likelihood of life on exoplanets.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 17:116-126

Authors' abstract: *We estimate the relative likelihood of a planet's propensity towards habitability by considering key physical characteristics such as the role of temperature on ecological and evolutionary processes, and atmospheric losses via hydrodynamic escape and stellar wind erosion.*

*From our analysis, we demonstrate that Earth-sized exoplanets in the habitable zone around M-dwarfs seemingly display much lower prospects of being habitable relative to Earth, owing to the higher incident ultraviolet fluxes and closer distances to the host star.*

*We illustrate our results by specifically computing the likelihood (of supporting life) for the recently discovered exoplanets, Proxima b and TRAPPIST-1e, which we find to be several orders of magnitude smaller than that of Earth.*

*It is worth emphasizing that the existence of a planet in the HZ does not imply life exists on the planet, or even that it will necessarily be able to support a biosphere. Most of the current assessments of habitable planets have tended to focus on superficial metrics, which can be misleading. ...*

*These metrics evaluate the degree of similarity between certain, physically relevant, parameters of a given exoplanet and the Earth, and have led to unfortunate misconceptions that planets with higher values (of the similarity indices) are automatically more habitable.*

Ramirez, R.M., and A. Levi (2018-03-14) **The ice cap zone: A unique habitable zone for ocean worlds.** MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY Preprint at [www.arxiv.org/abs/1803.07717](http://www.arxiv.org/abs/1803.07717)

Authors' abstract: *Traditional definitions of the habitable zone assume that habitable planets contain a carbonate-silicate cycle that regulates CO<sub>2</sub> between the atmosphere, surface, and the interior. Such theories have been used to cast doubt on the habitability of ocean worlds. However, Levi et al (2017) have recently proposed a mechanism by which CO<sub>2</sub> is mobilized between the atmosphere and the interior of an ocean world. At high enough CO<sub>2</sub> pressures, sea ice can become enriched in CO<sub>2</sub> clathrates and sink after a threshold density is achieved.*

*The presence of subpolar sea ice is of great importance for habitability in ocean worlds. It may moderate the climate and is fundamental in current theories of life formation in diluted environments. Here, we model the Levi et al. mechanism and use latitudinally-dependent non-grey energy balance and single-column radiative-convective climate models and find that this mechanism may be sustained on ocean worlds that rotate at least 3 times faster than the Earth. ... However, unless planets are very young and not tidally-locked, our mechanism would be unlikely to apply to stars cooler than a ~M3.*

Ritchie, R.J., et al (2018) **Could photosynthesis function on Proxima Centauri b?** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 17:147-176

Authors' abstract: *Could oxygenic and/or anoxygenic photosynthesis exist on planet Proxima Centauri b? Proxima Centauri (spectral type – M5.5 V, 3050 K) is a red dwarf, whereas the Sun is type G2 V (5780 K). The light regimes on Earth and Proxima Centauri b are compared with estimates of the planet's suitability for Chlorophyll a (Chl a) and Chl d-based oxygenic photosynthesis and for bacteriochlorophyll (BChl)-based anoxygenic photosynthesis.*



*Proxima Centauri b* has low irradiance in the oxygenic photosynthesis range (400–749 nm: 64–132  $\mu\text{mol quanta m s}^{-1}$ ). Much larger amounts of light would be available for BChl-based anoxygenic photosynthesis (350–1100 nm: 724–1538  $\mu\text{mol quanta m s}^{-1}$ ). We estimated primary production under these light regimes.

We used the oxygenic algae *Synechocystis* PCC6803, *Prochlorothrix hollandica*, *Acaryochloris marina*, *Chlorella vulgaris*, *Rhodomonas* sp. and *Phaeodactylum tricornutum* and the anoxygenic photosynthetic bacteria *Rhodospseudomonas palustris* (BChl *a*), *Afifella marina* (BChl *a*), *Thermochromatium tepidum* (BChl *a*), *Chlorobaculum tepidum* (BChl *a* + *c*) and *Blastochloris viridis* (BChl *b*) as representative photosynthetic organisms.

*Proxima Centauri b* has only ~3% of the PAR (400–700 nm) of Earth irradiance, but we found that potential gross photosynthesis (*P<sub>g</sub>*) on *Proxima Centauri b* could be surprisingly high (oxygenic photosynthesis: earth ~0.8 gC m<sup>-2</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>; *Proxima Centauri b* ~0.14 gC m<sup>-2</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>). The proportion of PAR irradiance useable by oxygenic photosynthetic organisms (the sum of Blue + Red irradiance) is similar for the Earth and *Proxima Centauri b*.

The oxygenic photic zone would be only ~10 m deep in water compared with ~200 m on Earth. The *P<sub>g</sub>* of an anoxic Earth (gC m<sup>-2</sup> h<sup>-1</sup>) is ~0.34–0.59 (land) and could be as high as ~0.29–0.44 on *Proxima Centauri b*. 1 m of water does not affect oxygenic or anoxygenic photosynthesis on Earth, but on *Proxima Centauri b* oxygenic *P<sub>g</sub>* is reduced by ~50%. Effective elimination of near IR limits *P<sub>g</sub>* by photosynthetic bacteria (<10% of the surface value).

The spectrum of *Proxima Centauri b* is unfavourable for anoxygenic aquatic photosynthesis. Nevertheless, a substantial aerobic or anaerobic ecology is possible on *Proxima Centauri b*.

## SIGNS, SIGNS, EVERYWHERE A SIGN

photo by Dale Speirs

Temperature-wise, Calgary had a mild winter averaging about -10° to -20° C, with only one cold spell from Christmas to New Year’s Day when temperatures stayed at -30° C. Snowfall, on the other hand, was at or near record-breaking, with only a few chinooks. I seem to have been shoveling my sidewalk once a week all winter long. Since my house is on a double corner lot, I have three times as much sidewalk to clear as my neighbours. The exercise was good for me, I kept telling myself.

I took the photo below on March 4, once again with my trusty smartphone, on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall in the downtown core. Anyone who couldn’t see the snow pile would hardly read the sign, but if they tried to sue for damages, the contractor could point out that they warned everyone.

