OPUNTIA 411

Late April 2018

Opuntia is published by Dale Speirs, Calgary, Alberta. It is posted on www.efanzines.com and www.fanac.org. My e-mail address is: opuntia57@hotmail.com When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

CALGARIANS LOVE A PARADE

photos by Dale Speirs

Calgary is a great city for parades, with usually one or two per month for military occasions, ethnic celebrations, or sports championships (rare lately). There are various small protests about something or other in a foreign land, and of course the biggest one of the year is for the Stampede rodeo.

The photos shown here, taken April 21, are of the annual St Julien Parade, when the Calgary Highlanders marched down 8 Avenue South from the Mewata Armoury at the west end of the downtown core to the Anglican Cathedral of the Redeemer. They had a memorial service for those who died in the Battle of St Julien, Belgium, fought April 22 to 24, 1915. After the service, they marched to City Hall for a brief ceremony, then back down 8 Avenue South to Mewata.

The Calgary Highlanders are a militia (civilian reserve) who took the brunt of the fighting in St Julien. That battle was the first use of chlorine gas in war. The French and British lines on either side of them broke under the attack and fled. The Canadians held the line and stopped the Germans. It was part of the larger engagement called Ypres (pronounced 'leper', not 'wipers'). The regiment later fought in World War Two, the Korean War, and Afghanistan.

The yellow flag lists the regimental battle honours, beginning with St Julien.

The Canadians took about 1,000 fatalities and 5,000 incapacitated during the Ypres battles. The Germans used chlorine gas several times.

The next day I happened to walk past the Mewata Armoury on my way to an appointment when I saw two shiny new APVs on display at the main gate, with television crews across the street filming them and interviewing an officer. I didn't have time to stop and find out the details, so I snapped a couple of photos with my smartphone and kept going.

Checking the Internet later revealed that the APVs were newly received by the King's Own Calgary Regiment, a militia unit that shares the Armoury with the Calgary Highlanders and several other militias.

The KOCR have their own proud history very similar to the Calgary Highlanders. They fought nearby at Ypres as an infantry regiment, although not at St Julien. In 1936, they were converted into an armoured regiment and went into World War Two as such. They served in many United Nations peacekeeping missions and most recently received battle honours for Afghanistan. Unusually, they have branch squadrons in some smaller towns south of Calgary. Militia units generally recruit from within their municipality. The flatlands may have willing recruits but not enough to form a regiment.

COWTOWN COSPLAYERS
photos by Dale Speirs

[Reports of previous Comic Expo parades appeared in OPUNTIAs #276, 305, 340, and 374.]

On April 25, it was announced by the Canadian Football League that Calgary will host the 2019 Grey Cup championship in November of that year. This means lots of people dressed up in funny costumes and face paint. Not the first time we've had it; see OPUNTIAs #68.5A and 292 for my reports. The Grey Cup was first contested in 1909. As far as I can tell, it is the world's oldest continuous professional sports championship. I don't follow sports, but they will have a parade, and I do love a parade. More news in eighteen months.

Meanwhile, in the here and now, the future has arrived, viz the annual Calgary Comic Expo, which has 60,000 to 100,000 paid attendees, depending on which source you read. I don't go to the event, which is a mob scene that takes over the entire Stampede grounds except the race track. I'm not certain about the livestock barns.

They have a Parade of Wonders down 8 Avenue South on the Friday of the event, this year on April 27. I like to watch it and observe the people dressed up in funny costumes and face paint. No, not football fans, but cosplayers.

Above: Go ahead. Take a guess as to which one is which.
Below: Bishop Grandin is a Catholic school. Maybe they mean the Holy Ghost.

I thought that Star Trek clubs were extinct in Calgary, but apparently not.

Above: Batman with a big grin on his face. I don't blame him. If I got to drive a cool vehicle like that, I'd be grinning too.
Below: This was one of two different DeLoreans in the parade.


CALGARY
IS GEEKY,
AND WE
LOVE IT
OPENING CEREMONIES
@ OLYMPIC PLAZA
simons
EXHIBITOR

Above: The Calgary SCA club.
Below: A wounded stormtrooper. He limped the whole way too.

MERCURIAL FICTION
by Dale Speirs

Even in the early days of science fiction it was known that Mercury was probably too hot to sustain life, so it seldom featured in stories. In wending my way through SF as a young lad, the only Mercury story I ever remembered was one of Isaac Asimov's robotics puzzles, where a robot goes haywire on the planet. Beyond that, there are these, a few other stories spotted along the way.

The stories about Mercury standardized a few beliefs. It was accepted that one side of the planet was always to the Sun and thus melting hot, while the other side was always in darkness and frozen down to near absolute zero. A thin line between them was a twilight zone where temperatures were habitable. There may or may not be inhabitants on science fictional Mercury. The only possible reason for colonizing the planet would be minerals.

Old Mercury.

Homer Eon Flint (real name Homer Eon Flindt) was a science fiction writer of the post-WW1 era. He was killed in 1924 in a mysterious accident, possibly a gangland hit or a failed robbery. Had he lived into the SF pulp magazine age he would be better remembered. In 1919, he published a pair of stories, one set on Mercury and the other on Venus (which will be reviewed in a different column in this zine), which were later issued in book form as THE LORD OF DEATH AND THE QUEEN OF LIFE. The book is available as a free download from www.gutenberg.org.

"The Lord Of Death" is the account of a trip to Mercury, led by Dr Kinney, in a superscience spaceship. The story begins with an immediate infodump on how the spaceship is propelled by electricity drawn from the ether. The four astronauts are off to the hottest planet, where they quickly find an abandoned city. There is no atmosphere, and everything inside the buildings is covered with dust, with no sign of inhabitants. There are statues of big creatures with neckless giant heads but no evidence as to what killed them off and how fast

The explorers work their way through the city. Flint missed out on the idea of radio communications, because the explorers are linked to each other by telephone wires so they can talk to each other. Walking in a group of three, the wires mean that they cannot separate and cover more territory. To be fair, radio was still being born, and Flint evidently didn't keep up with the literature.

A search of the city library finds recordings made by a vanished Mercurian. After long hard work in decoding the language, the translation is then inserted into the story, a narrative by Strokor, son of Strok. This is a stereotypical fantasy epic of deeds of valour and the sort, including a wise man with a device that can see life on other planets. Strokor knows the planet is dying and wants to outlive everyone else. He then embalms himself (it is explained) and sits on his throne for eons.

All in vain, for the explorers accidently destroy his mummy. On that note, the story ends and it's off to Venus for the sequel. A bizarre story, cutting-edge in a way.

Short Stories.

"The Great Dome On Mercury" by Arthur Leo Zagat (1932 April, ASTOUNDING) starts off with a rush, not just figuratively. Earthlings have established a mine on Mercury, above which a giant silvered dome was erected to protect against the sunlight and provide an atmosphere for the colony. Only three Earthlings are there, the miners being Venusians working down, down, down (insert rest of mining song if you know the words).

A hole opened up in the dome and the air is rushing out. It is patched in the nick of time with a metal sheet. The hole was not created by accident or metal fatigue. The Martians have just declared war on Earth and the entire Solar System is in flames. They have brought the Mecurian tribes onto their side, not a difficult task considering how Earth treated them. It looks bad for the isolated mine, or at least the Earthlings.

Much trouble and strife, culminating in the destruction of the Dome. There is a saving grace, as the calvary arrives in the nick of time, or at least a spaceship from Earth. They had to destroy the village, pardon me, the Dome, in order to save it. I got to thinking as I read this story that by judiciously substituting names and places of the French Vietnam War, this would have been a remarkably prescient story.

"The Weather On Mercury" by William Morrison (1953 July, GALAXY) is about a rescue team landing in the twilight zone to rescue Kalinoff, a lone explorer. The captain of the ship has his hands full. He has a dumb lout of a crewman who shoots first at the Mercurian inhabitants and doesn't ask questions later. The captain also has a secret agenda, to sign a contract with

Kalinoff for his mineral rights, he having discovered a treasure trove of rare elements. There is also a spy on board for a rival mining company.

The success of everyone's plans eventually depends on an unexpected occurrence in the twilight zone. Since the bright side is baked dry and the dark side is frozen, there is no weather because the air is so pure that rain or snow cannot fall. On Earth, the atmosphere is constantly mixing, so it has sufficient dust to cause water to condense around the particles. That is why we have rain or snow. If our atmosphere were absolutely pure, we would not get either.

Kalinoff teaches the natives how to make rain and snow in the twilight zone around the rescue spaceship. That enables him to find the spaceship in the vast area of the twilight zone, as all he has to do is look for a storm. It does seem a bit farfetched. I suspect that the author read somewhere about how precipitation occurs and decided to work it into the story.

"Brightside Crossing" by Alan Edward Nourse (1956 January, GALAXY) is about explorers who want to travel across the surface of Mercury's bright side at perihelion, not for any real scientific purpose but just because it's there. Perihelion is when an planet swings closest to the sun; aphelion is when it is furthest away in its orbit. The twilight zone between Brightside (410° C at perihelion) and Darkside (-245° C all the time) is the only habitable area of Mercury.

The maps and photos of Brightside are said to be fuzzy and low-resolution, which puzzled me because presumably if humans had settled in the twilight zone then they would have the technology for high-resolution satellite photography. To be fair though, the planet's surface would be active due to volcanos and earthquakes, so a clear route would not be immediately obvious. The crossing was to be pole to pole, with the group reaching the centre of Brightside exactly at perihelion so they could claim a record.

The expedition is the sort that polar explorers on Earth once planned. Stripped-down buggies instead of dog sleighs, but men still towing sleighs and backpacking. Scouting the way ahead on foot to avoid crevasses that don't show up on the aerial photos.

Others had tried the crossing before but didn't make it. *It was the wreck of a Bug; an old-fashioned half-track model of the sort that hadn't been in use for years. It was wedged tight in a cut in the rock, an axle broken, its casing split wide open up the middle, half-buried in a rock slide. A dozen feet away were two insulated suits with white bones gleaming through the fiberglass helmets.*

There are various other alarums along the route. A buggy bogs down in a mixture of molten lead and volcanic ash. A junior member of the expedition loses his nerve and becomes hysterical, screaming they're all going to die. He's not far wrong. After many diverse incidents, a rockslide eventually kills all but one of them. The lone survivor aborts the trip and manages to get back to tell the tale.

But now, years later, someone else is going to try. The story is a predictable action-adventure but reads well. It only is missing the man who tells the others that he is going outside and may be some time.

"Sunrise On Mercury" by Robert Silverberg (1957 May, SCIENCE FICTION STORIES) begins with a crewman on a spaceship becoming suicidal just as the ship is preparing for a landing on Mercury. The expedition comes down in the twilight zone, safe so they think. All's not well, though.

Something is fogging human brains. They can't do their scientific calculations properly or set the navigational coordinates. After some close calls, the crew identifies the problem as an apparently sentient pool of liquid metal on the Sun side of the planet.

It is not malign in itself, just unaware of how the solid creatures live and think. It can detect any kind of electromagnetic activity, including human thoughts, although it doesn't know how to decode them properly. Eventually most of the crew manage to get the ship off Mercury and back into space. One stays behind because he wanted to learn more about the alien, but the creature misunderstood what he wanted. That the alien exists is not mentioned to the folks back home. They forgot.

"A Map Of Mercury" by Alastair Reynolds (2013, from the anthology PANDEMONIM, edited by Anne Perry and Jared Shurin) is about a trader who arrives on Mercury to do business with nomadic cyborg artists. They circle the planet, leaving behind a string of installation pieces, and mining a few ores to pay their way. A schism has occurred and a splinter group of artists want to turn themselves into full robots, living on the hot side of the planet. One of the latter tangles with the trader and sends him a gift of her last flesh before fully becoming a robot. Reminiscent of a New Wave story from back in the 1960s.

THE SHADOW KNOWS
by Dale Speirs

Not that one, the one who lurks about clouding men's minds and making certain that crime bears bitter fruit. While browsing through www.gutenberg.org, I stumbled across an 1883 novel titled SHADOW, THE MYSTERIOUS DETECTIVE by Police Captain Howard. He narrates how Mat Morris was trying to find his kidnapped ward Helen Dilt. The first sentence begins, and I am not making this up: "*It was a dark and stormy night.*"

After the introduction of characters and the circumstances of Dilt's disappearance, Howard meets a strange lurker on the mean streets of Manhattan: *I hastened forward, was about to turn the corner, when a slight thing brought me suddenly to a halt. It was nothing more nor less than a simple shadow, cast on the walk by a gaslight. It was the shadow of a slender figure, in male attire, a cap on the head, one hand raised, while the index finger was being shaken after somebody in the distance.*

Simple as the circumstance was it impressed me, and I stood still and waited. My eyes wandered from the shadow for an instant, and when my eyes sought the spot where it had been, it was gone.

He later meets the man again, and this time has a conversation: *"And now, who are you?" and I bent closer to the mysterious being, and then discovered that I did not see a real face, but a closely-fitting mask, which defied all but the closest scrutiny.*

"I am Shadow."
"A detective?"

"Yes. Now go. Leave me alone, cease your questioning. And, as you value my friendship (which may be worth much to you) never speak to me again, but act simply as I shall write. You have compelled me to break an oath, be satisfied and go; and never cause me to break a new oath, which I now again make, or I swear solemnly that you shall regret it."

Thus spoke Shadow, and then he went swiftly away, with the most noiseless steps of any human being I ever saw. I took a few steps in the same direction, but I paused when he turned and shook that index finger at me in that peculiar way. He was a deep mystery to me.

Howard and Shadow cross paths from time to time, the latter helping the former escape from dire straits or to solve cases. The story alternates between them and the tribulations of Dilt in her captivity. At first, the reader presumes that Mat Morris is the Shadow, but the final chapter reveals the true identity. The Shadow is a woman who wanted to avenge herself against criminals who killed her fiancé.

All works out well in the end. Dilt had been kidnapped by an uncle who wanted her inheritance. The guilty, thanks mainly to the Shadow, are sent up the river for life. Dilt and Morris are betrothed, and the Shadow vanishes for good, her work having been done.

Five decades later, in 1930, the Shadow was reborn, and lived multitudinous lives in pulp magazines, novels, radio, and movies.

The Avenger.

THE AVENGER was an old-time radio series that copied THE SHADOW to the point where lawsuits might have occurred were it not for the fact that both were produced by the same people. Paul Ernst and Walter B. Gibson wrote for both characters, and neither had any hesitation in re-using plots and dialogue. Both series overlapped on the air.

The Avenger said, into a crystal microphone: *The road to crime ends in a trap that justice sets. Remember, crime does not pay.* The Shadow, of course, was different: *The weed of crime bears bitter fruit. Crime does not pay.*

Both characters had their own pulp magazines, published by Street & Smith. THE AVENGER wasn't as successful as its parent, and only had two brief runs on the radio in the 1940s. If you missed the opening of THE AVENGER radio show, you would think it was THE SHADOW. The problem was that by the time THE AVENGER appeared, the market for such characters was saturated, especially such a blatant copycat.

There were two OTR series of THE AVENGER. No recordings are known of the 1941-42 series and only six scripts survived. In that series, The Avenger's real persona was Richard Henry Benson, who had a sidekick named Fergus MacMurdie.

There are recordings available of the second series, which ran for the 1945-46 season. In that one, The Avenger was in reality Jim Brandon, a biochemist who clouded men's minds with gas capsules, something that made more sense than The Shadow's method. His girlfriend was the lovely Fern Collier, the only one who knew his secret.

The voice of The Avenger was identical to The Shadow, and he paraphrased the same tag lines. The stories are brisk, full of logic holes, and often cheat the listener with hidden information, but nonetheless interesting to listen. (This and hundreds of other OTR shows are available as free mp3s at www.archive.org)

"Death Meets The Boat", written by Ruth and Gilbert Braun, was a 1945 episode of THE AVENGER. In the opening scene, Brandon and Collier are at the pier waiting to meet a friend returning from Australia via steamship. They notice a newspaper photographer taking pictures of Claire Austin, an heiress who has come from Down Under to claim her fortune.

A chauffeur takes Austin out to a remote country lodge where she learns that she has just been kidnapped. They substitute a double named Thelma, who will meet the estate's lawyer, Neil Hayden. He has never seen the real Austin. The chauffeur mentions he saw the newspaper photographer taking photos. Mr Big realizes that although Thelma has a strong resemblance to Austin, she won't pass with the lawyer if he sees the photos in the morning newspaper.

The gangsters rush down to the newspaper office, kill the photographer, and steal the photos. They arrange the murder to look like an accident, which the police accept. Brandon is a friend of the editor and doesn't believe it, so he begins investigating.

Brandon and Collier go out to the Hayden's mansion where Thelma now is. Collier goes in alone, posing as a reporter. Having seen Austin at the boat pier, she immediately realizes Thelma is not the real Austin. They approach Hayden separately. He needs proof, so Brandon is invited to a reception party to meet Thelma. Collier can't go because that will blow her cover.

Brandon chats up Thelma and tests her knowledge about Australia. He mentions Australian wildlife, specifically the dodo, emu, and wombat. Thelma misses the obvious mistake, so Brandon and Hayden know they're on to something.

Eventually Brandon tracks down the hideout where Austin is being held prisoner. He visits it in his capacity as The Avenger, and with a few fisticuffs neutralizes the kidnappers and rescues Austin. The epilogue ties up a few loose ends, and Austin goes on to count her new-found money. An average action-adventure show.

Another 1945 episode was "Death Counts To Ten", about a boxing match that was supposed to be fixed. There was a double-cross, and the fighter scheduled to take a dive instead won, paying off bets at 8 to 1. The winner doesn't get to celebrate too long; he dies in the ring just after the fight is over.

Somebody somehow administered a whiff of poison gas to him. As per usual in murder mysteries, the most obvious suspect becomes victim #2. The Boxing Commission had heard rumours of a fix, so they hired Brandon and Collier to investigate. The death of the fighter brings in the police. It also brings in the Mafia, who had put the fix in, and were very annoyed at losing their big bet.

Brandon watches the game films to spot when the gas was administered and narrows it down to a few minutes before the end, when the fighter went to his corner groggy and had some smelling salts applied. From there he goes to the training camp, first as himself and the second time as The Avenger. He halts a third murder by the gas, and brings the culprit to justice.

Again there is an epilogue to sort out any missed details that the writers could think of, in more detail than The Shadow ever bothered with. The two shows ran together. If you liked one, you'll want the other as well. The only difference, and I mean only, is the characters change names.

RADIO FICTION: PART 10
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 9 appeared in OPUNTIAs #301, 302, 310, 319, 330, 353, 370, 377, and 394.]

Palaeo Radio.

At the dawn of radio, Rudyard Kipling turned his hand to what was then science fiction, in his short story "Wireless" (1902 August, SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE). Set in England, it is about a young radio experimenter, nephew of the village squire, who has set up a transceiver antenna, ready to receive a message from another experimenter elsewhere.

It is a dark and stormy night. The transceiver is in the village apothecary's house, with about a half dozen people awaiting the results. They listen in to a conversation between two warships off the coast of England while waiting for their own conversation. One member of the group occupies his spare time trying to write poetry or remember Keats, no one is sure. A new world is aborning, and nobody knows anything.

The story is a vignette with no plot. The interest is in the mood of those present, some still living in the past and not long for this world, and others eagerly awaiting the wonders that will be.

Cozy Radio Listening.

Cozy mysteries are those with amateur sleuths a la Miss Marple. A popular subgenre even today.

"Feuding Radio Comedians", writer uncredited, was a 1947 episode in the old-time radio series MYSTERY IS MY HOBBY. (This and hundreds of other OTR shows are available as free downloads at www.archive.org) The lead character was Barton Drake, an author at loose ends who barged into police investigations and solved the crime for the Inspector, a man who should never have been promoted from the foot patrol.

The story involves two radio comedians named Hardy and Fairfax, who carried on a feud over the airwaves, all in good fun. This was obviously patterned after the real-life radio feud between Jack Benny and Fred Allen. Each week Benny would make jokes about Allen's previous show and vice versa; sometimes they appeared on each other's show to carry on the feud. In private life they were good friends, and the jokes were used to boost each other's show.

Hardy and Fairfax are momentarily off stage during their radio show when a shot is heard backstage. Fairfax is dead, and Hardy is the prime suspect. Drake and the police inspector investigate very sloppily.

All the witnesses are herded together and interviewed in each other's presence, not standard police procedure. Nor is anyone patted down for weapons, and it transpires that many of them are packing heat. Why so many radio actors and production crew members feel the need for protection is not addressed.

The main suspect, a crew member named Gabby, pulls a gun when he is identified, but is brought under control. Just then someone arrives from the Medical Examiner's office with the news that Fairfax was already dead from poisoning before he was shot. Whatever charges may be laid against Gabby, murder won't be one of them.

Drake and the Inspector are forced to start over again. The poisoner is identified because Fairfax's tea was spiked, and she had a handkerchief stained with tea. She pulls out her gun and aims it at the Inspector before being disarmed. She blabs all in the usual "*Yes! I did it! And I'd gladly do it again!*" manner. The revelation is that Fairfax had been her first husband, kept a secret from everyone else, and wouldn't give her a divorce so she could marry Hardy.

The plot can be forgiven as it wasn't too wildly implausible for a cozy, but the failure of police to follow even basic rules of law enforcement can't. Even the dumbest Deppity Dawg knows that the first thing an officer should do when taking suspects into custody is to frisk them for weapons.

EVIL ECLAIRS (2011) by Jessica Beck is a novel in a cozy mystery series set in the village of April Springs, North Carolina's answer to Cabot Cove. Suzanne Hart owns a doughnut shop but not all is sweetness and icing. Local radio shock jock Lester Moorefield, broadcasting on WAPS, has launched a crusade against pastries, and has named Hart on the air as an evil peddler of toxic dough. He urges his listeners to boycott her shop for a week.

Hart goes down to the radio station to confront him, to no effect. After a pause for a recipe for Peanut Butter Drop Donuts, this being a food cozy, the next chapter reveals the death of Moorefield. Someone got him in a back room at the

station and suffocated him by ramming an eclair down his throat. Indeed. There are no prizes for guessing where the eclair came from.

Since Hart is the #1 suspect, the police give her a hard time. Their investigation parallels her investigation, both of which are interrupted every few chapters for another doughnut recipe. Moorefield was not a popular man and was little mourned. There were a myriad of people with motives.

Along the way he had embezzled money, but was stymied when another WAPS employee discovered it and stole the money. He could hardly complain to the police. The other employee drugged his coffee, then stuffed the eclair into his throat to finish him off.

Hart shifts into idiot mode and gets herself trapped with the murderer. She is saved at the last second by the Deppity Dawg. There are enough loose threads left over to weave a plush towel. Don't read this book on an empty stomach. The doughnut recipes scattered through the text will have you raiding the refrigerator.

Aaaar, Me Mateys.

PIRATE RADIO is a 2009 movie written and directed by Richard Curtis about a pirate radio ship anchored in international waters of the North Sea off the coast of England. The movie is a dramatization of Radio Caroline and other pirate broadcasters who operated in the 1960s. I picked it up for $1.99 in the bargain bin, which was about fair market value for it.

The movie opens with some explanations and infodumps about the history of broadcast radio in Britain. Unlike Canada and the USA, there were no commercial radio stations, and British listeners had only the stodgy BBC, which played little or no rock-and-roll music in the 1960s. This resulted in the peculiar situation that at a time when Britain led the world in rock music, its citizens could only hear it on the radio on pirate or foreign stations. They could buy vinyl records of course, but did not have the luxury of tuning to any part of the AM or FM dial and hearing the Beatles or Herman's Hermits throughout the day as we did in North America.

The movie is overplayed, with too many trendy DJs and jump cuts to British listeners tuning in to pirate radio. The listeners are always just so happy, happy, happy, usually gathered around a radio in groups. Conversely, what at first seems wild exaggeration about the stuffed-shirt cabinet minister trying every means to suppress pirate stations is fairly close to reality. An astounding number of repressive measures were attempted to prevent the British people from hearing the music they wanted.

The "don't we live a cool lifestyle?" scenes on board are constantly overdone. I nitpicked one anachronism, where one of the DJs says, in 1966, that they had to "*think outside the box*". As entertainment, the movie was mediocre. It tries to get laughs, but fails. As an historical document for the modern generation, it provides useful value about how governments can suppress information, even a nominally democratic government like Britain.

The Ugly Death Of Old-Time Radio.

Mass-market broadcast television didn't get going until after World War Two. By 1948, it began to have a noticeable effect on old-time radio. The networks put up a fight through the earliest years of the 1950s, but by 1955 OTR was essentially dead.

A few shows straggled on but were shadows of themselves. AMOS AND ANDY, the top-rated OTR show of all time, dwindled from a packed theatre audience to a 15-minute disc jockey show with no studio audience. FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY suffered the same fate, finally ending up as a 4-minute routine on a general news show.

As part of the initial response to television, game shows spread through the radio networks like cancer in the late 1940s. There had been such shows prior but not as fabulous as the prizes given by STOP THE MUSIC (1948 to 1952), which telephoned randomly selected listeners at home and asked them to identify the music that had just been played. Prizes were in the $20,000 range. Add an extra zero to get today's equivalent.

Fred Allen, considered the greatest stand-up comedian of the era, had his #1 show on opposite STM when it began. Allen's show crashed to single-digit ratings and his radio career was over.

The regular OTR shows went out fighting. A 1948 episode of THE FRED ALLEN SHOW was titled "Break The Contestant", a parody of BREAK THE BANK, a quiz show that routinely gave out prizes in the $3,000 to $9,000 range.

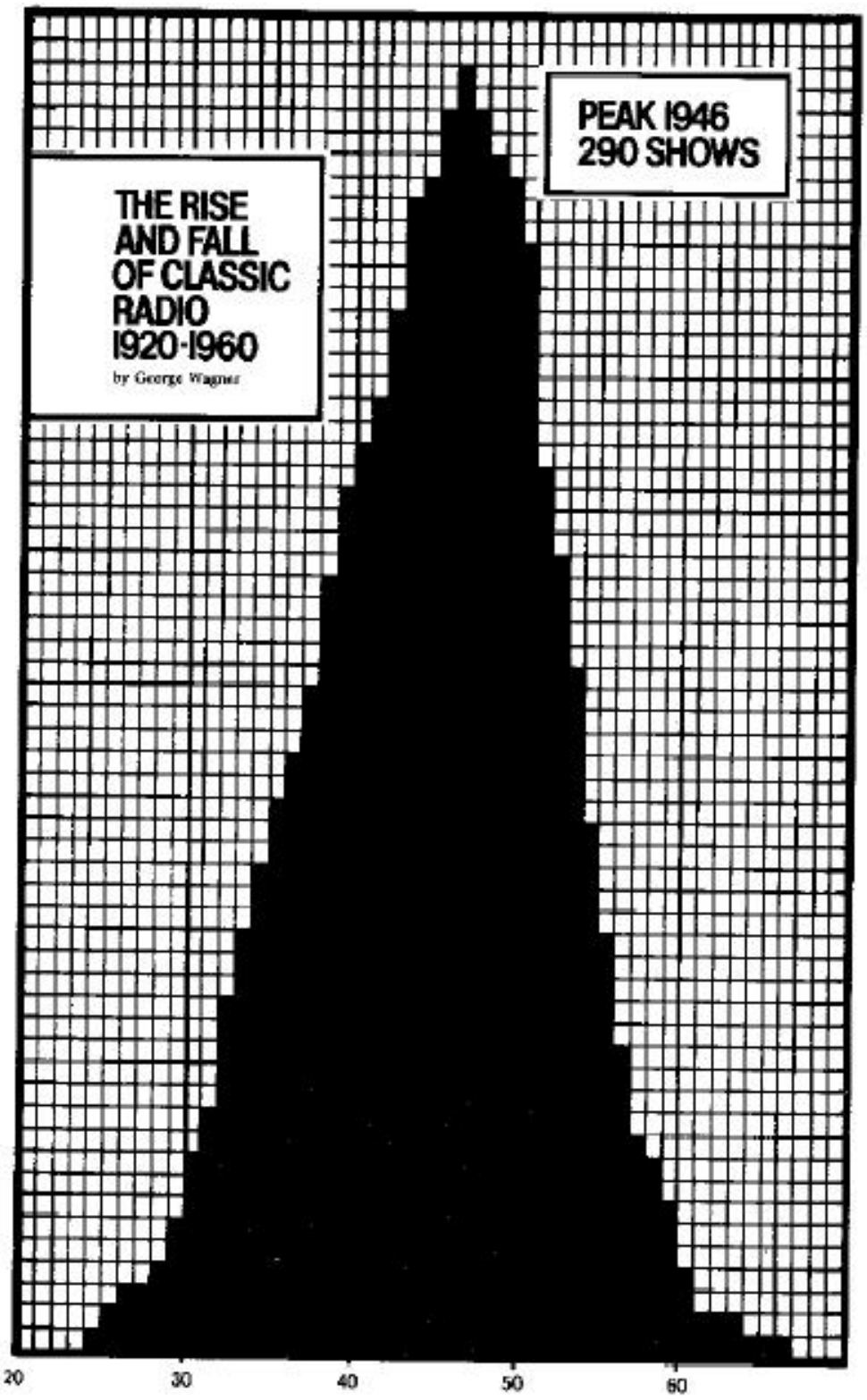
The contestant's had to play with their own money and were evicted from the show if they lost all of it. Allen portrayed a contestant who had no money left but was allowed to bet his clothing. He lost his jacket and pants, and judging from the screams and laughter of the audience, he actually did take off his pants.

THE JUDY CANOVA SHOW ran from 1943 to 1953 on old-time radio. Canova was a Florida singer who was typecast as a rural hick from Cactus Junction somewhere in the South, with a hillbilly accent thick enough to cut with a knife.

Each episode was partly a sitcom about her supposed life, but she sang two songs each time, a novelty or comedy song and a serious ballad. She was a good singer but had trouble getting people to take her seriously. Her sister Annie played piano. Regular characters in the series were her Aunt Aggie, with whom she lived, their Negro maid Geranium, and the Mexican gardener Pedro.

"Preparing For A Quiz Show", written by Fred Fox and Henry Hoople, was a 1946 episode about a quiz show where listeners could submit questions. If used, they got $300. In between songs, Canova went shopping for a set of encyclopedias to prepare for her appearance on the show as a contestant.

Then down to the studio, where she fluffs every question but the final $30 consolation prize. A singer sang a single musical note, and Canova was asked to identify which opera it came from. Since not even a maestro could answer the question, everyone is surprised when she gets the correct answer. It turned out that she had submitted the question. She wins $330. A neat trick if you can get away with it.



This graph of OTR shows is by George Wagner, OTR DIGEST, 1984-05.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to opuntia57@hotmail.com]

FROM: Lloyd Penney 2018-04-17
Etobicoke, Ontario

Thank you for OPUNTIA #408 Re: Paleo 2018 fossil conference. More and more, I see mention online of various events that seem to take the old-fashioned SF convention format of registration area, panels, and other areas to wander through. I am not saying the fans invented this format, but it certainly seems to work for us, and I am somehow glad that other groups use it, too. Looks like the assorted seminars brought lots of folks up to date on the latest discoveries.

[Lots of non-SF conventions used those methods long before fandom. Stamp collectors, for example, have had conventions in that style since the late 1800s.]

You mention the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology. When I was first looking for a school to take journalism studies at, I looked at the University of Western Ontario, Ryerson Polytechnical (as it was at the time), and SAIT. All had their advantages, but Ryerson offered a B.A.A. (Bachelor of Applied Arts), while the others offered just the B.A. I went for Ryerson, and no regrets there.

THE LIBRARIANS is a series I tried to start watching when it first premiered. Like the various other times I've tried to do that, I lost interest fairly quickly. Oh, well, that allows for more reading time and more creative time, too.

[I have the first three seasons on DVD. Not a bad show.]

My previous letter: It is spring, but only on the calendar. The ground here is white, a leftover from the ice storm that went through southern Ontario and southern Quebec, and it is still fairly cold outside. However, we may be on the brink of spring, if forecasts are accurate.

We go to so few movies these days. We have a coupon for two free entries at our local Cineplex, and they are in danger of expiring.

[I haven't set foot in a movie theatre in a decade, after I realized that the cost of admission, a regular soda, and a small popcorn, could buy me the DVD when it came out. There is no movie that can't wait for the DVD, which allows me to watch it at my own convenience, with no need to fight the traffic or put up with the glow of cellphones in the theatre. I can re-watch it again anytime at no extra cost, and pop my own popcorn at considerably cheaper cost (God bless Orville Redenbacher).]

The METRO free newspaper I mentioned has been rebranded to STAR METRO, available in many cities including Calgary, I think.

[The Calgary STAR METRO, as it now is, is the only newspaper I bother with, mainly because it has a daily sudoku puzzle.]

We're having some fun, even if the spring is very late. Yvonne is enjoying her retirement, and I am enjoying my time with her, even if I am still hunting for some more work. The full-time job seems unknown around here, it's all short-term engagements. Maybe I will win 6/49, the odds of the lottery and the job seem about the same. We find more and more events to take part in, and we are seeing more of the province as a result.

[Every big city has lots of free events, places to go, and things to see. Other than conventions and the Stampede rodeo, I pay nothing for my sightseeing around town, and just gas money out in the mountains. I'm enjoying my retirement because I do what I want to, not what I have to, as when I was working.]

ZINE LISTINGS

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

THE FOSSIL #375 (US$10 per year from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) Zine history, with a biography of an amateur printer, and a look at zines published by women mill workers in New England during the 1800s.

Konstantinov, K.K., and A.F. Konstantinova (2018) **Chiral symmetry breaking in peptide systems during formation of life on earth.** ORIGIN OF LIFE AND EVOLUTION OF BIOSPHERES 48:93-122

[Most organic molecules have identical chemical formulas but come in two forms known as chiral enantiomers; left-handed and right-handed, depending on which way they rotate a beam of light shone through them. At first glance, it would seem that equal proportions of each should exist. Instead, amino acids, which are the building blocks of proteins, are almost entirely left-handed. Nucleotides, the building blocks of RNA and DNA, are mostly right-handed. No one knows why this should be so.]

Authors' extracts: *The problem of chiral symmetry breaking during formation of life on Earth has been puzzling researchers for over 150 years starting from the discovery of enantiomers by Louis Pasteur.*

Earth is not a thermodynamically closed system as it constantly receives light (high frequency photons) from the Sun and emits heat (low frequency photons) into the outside space. This is most likely the most important factor influencing chiral symmetry breaking on Earth, as it places its chemical system into far from equilibrium state. The importance of far from thermodynamic equilibrium states for chiral symmetry breaking was considered previously in and they require a constant inflow of energy to operate.

It was argued that the number of substances and possible reactions among them must have been very large on prebiotic Earth and, therefore, that resulted in effective averaging over similar reaction channels, including the reactions related to chiral symmetry breaking in amino acids. Effective averaging for catalytic synthesis of amino acids, epimerization, polymerization, depolymerization, and sedimentation was considered.

It was shown that such averaging results in weak effective enantioselectivity of forward catalytic synthesis, does not affect sedimentation, and needs additional research to assess the effect on epimerization, polymerization, and depolymerization.

Citron, R.I., M. Manga, and E. Tan (2018) **A hybrid origin of the Martian crustal dichotomy: Degree-1 convection antipodal to a giant impact.** EARTH AND PLANETARY SCIENCE LETTERS 491:58-66

Authors' abstract: *The Martian crustal dichotomy is the stark ~5 km difference in surface elevation and ~26 km difference in crustal thickness between the northern lowlands and southern highlands that originated within 100s of Myr of Mars' formation. The origin of the dichotomy has broad implications for the geodynamic history of Mars, but purely exogenic or endogenic theories so far cannot explain all of the large scale geophysical observations associated with dichotomy formation.*

A giant impact can produce the shape and slope of the dichotomy boundary, but struggles to explain Mars' remanent crustal magnetic signatures and the ultimate formation of Tharsis. Degree-1 mantle convection can relate the crustal dichotomy to the formation of Tharsis, but does not explain the elliptical dichotomy shape and must be initiated by a large pre-existing viscosity jump in the mantle.

We propose a hybrid model of dichotomy formation in which a giant impact induces degree-1 convection with an upwelling antipodal to the impact site. In this scenario, a giant impact in the northern hemisphere excavates crust, creating an initial difference in crustal thickness and possibly composition between the two hemispheres. Over 10s to 100s of Myr, the dominant upwelling(s) would migrate to be under the thicker, insulating crust in the southern hemisphere, generating melt that further thickens the southern crust.

We examine this process using 3-D mantle convection simulations, and find that a hemispherical difference in crustal thickness and composition caused by a giant impact can induce degree-1 convection with the upwelling(s) antipodal to the impact site in <100 Myr.

Cantine, M.D., and G.P. Fournier (2018) **Environmental adaptation from the origin of life to the last universal common ancestor.** ORIGINS OF LIFE AND EVOLUTION OF BIOSPHERES 48:35-54

Authors' abstract: *Extensive fundamental molecular and biological evolution took place between the prebiotic origins of life and the state of the Last Universal Common Ancestor (LUCA). Considering the evolutionary*

innovations between these two endpoints from the perspective of environmental adaptation, we explore the hypothesis that LUCA was temporally, spatially, and environmentally distinct from life's earliest origins in an RNA world.

Using this lens, we interpret several molecular biological features as indicating an environmental transition between a cold, radiation-shielded origin of life and a mesophilic, surface-dwelling LUCA.

Cellularity provides motility and permits Darwinian evolution by connecting genetic material and its products, and thus establishing heredity and lineage. Considering the importance of compartmentalization and motility, we propose that the early emergence of cellularity is required for environmental dispersal and diversification during these transitions. Early diversification and the emergence of ecology before LUCA could be an important pre-adaptation for life's persistence on a changing planet.

Zamudio, G.S., and M.V. José (2018) **Phenotypic graphs and evolution unfold the standard genetic code as the optimal.** ORIGINS OF LIFE AND EVOLUTION OF BIOSPHERES 48:83-91

Authors' abstract: *In this work, we explicitly consider the evolution of the Standard Genetic Code (SGC) by assuming two evolutionary stages, to wit, the primeval RNY code and two intermediate codes in between. We used network theory and graph theory to measure the connectivity of each phenotypic graph.*

The connectivity values are compared to the values of the codes under different randomization scenarios. An error-correcting optimal code is one in which the algebraic connectivity is minimized. We show that the SGC is optimal in regard to its robustness and error-tolerance when compared to all random codes under different assumptions.

Speirs: In other words, evolution removed the genetic codes of DNA and RNA that didn't work. With billions of years to process the changes, the selection of the current nucleotide bases that make up DNA and RNA was a trial-and-error process that succeeded.

Blättler, C.L., et al (2018) **Two-billion-year-old evaporites capture Earth's great oxidation.** SCIENCE 360:320-323

Authors' abstract: *Two billion years ago, marine sulfate concentrations were around one-third as high as modern ones, constituting an oxidizing capacity equivalent to more than 20% of that of the modern ocean-atmosphere system. ... Major changes in atmospheric and ocean chemistry occurred in the Paleoproterozoic era (2.5 to 1.6 billion years ago). Increasing oxidation dramatically changed Earth's surface, but few quantitative constraints exist on this important transition.*

This study describes the sedimentology, mineralogy, and geochemistry of a 2-billion-year old, ~800-meter-thick evaporite succession from the Onega Basin in Russian Karelia. The deposit consists of a basal unit dominated by halite (~100 meters) followed by units dominated by anhydrite-magnesite (~500 meters) and dolomite-magnesite (~200 meters).

The evaporite minerals robustly constrain marine sulfate concentrations to at least 10 millimoles per kilogram of water, representing an oxidant reservoir equivalent to more than 20% of the modern ocean-atmosphere oxidizing capacity. These results show that substantial amounts of surface oxidant accumulated during this critical transition in Earth's oxygenation.

Speirs: When the first microbes developed photosynthesis (aerobic), they set off major changes to this planet. Oxygen is toxic to non-aerobic life, so they were almost completely wiped out, surviving today only as microscopic life huddled around chemical vents deep in the ocean.

The free oxygen generated by photosynthesis reacted with Earth's water and rocks, changing the planet's geology dramatically. Iron (symbol Fe, see the following abstract) was precipitated out of seawater in huge beds kilometres thick, wherefrom our modern-day iron mines are located.

After hundreds of megayears, all the water and atomic elements that were going to react had done so, and laid down massive beds of ironstone, limestone, and so forth. At that point, oxygen began accumulating in the atmosphere and made it possible for land life to begin.

Canfield, D.E., et al (2018) **A Mesoproterozoic iron formation.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:E3895-E3904

Authors' abstract: *Iron formations (IFs) are common before 1,800 million years ago (Ma) and again at ~750 Ma, but are remarkably absent for the billion years in between. We report on a 1,400-Ma IF of ~520 gigatons Fe from the Xiamaling Formation on the North China Craton. Biomarker analyses suggest that anoxygenic phototrophic bacteria were involved in Fe(II) oxidation, and further geochemical analysis shows that IF sediments supported active microbial Fe reduction that rivaled oxic respiration in its efficiency of organic matter oxidation.*

We describe a 1,400 million-year old (Ma) iron formation (IF) from the Xiamaling Formation of the North China Craton. We estimate this IF to have contained at least 520 gigatons of authigenic Fe, comparable in size to many IFs of the Paleoproterozoic Era (2,500 to 1,600 Ma). Therefore, substantial IFs formed in the time window between 1,800 and 800 Ma, where they are generally believed to have been absent.

The Xiamaling IF is of exceptionally low thermal maturity, allowing the preservation of organic biomarkers and an unprecedented view of iron-cycle dynamics during IF emplacement. We identify tetramethyl aryl isoprenoid (TMAI) biomarkers linked to anoxygenic photosynthetic bacteria and thus phototrophic Fe oxidation. Although we cannot rule out other pathways of Fe oxidation, iron and organic matter likely deposited to the sediment in a ratio similar to that expected for anoxygenic photosynthesis.

Fe reduction was likely a dominant and efficient pathway of organic matter mineralization, as indicated by organic matter maturation by Rock Eval pyrolysis combined with carbon isotope analyses: Indeed, Fe reduction was seemingly as efficient as oxic respiration.

Overall, this Mesoproterozoic-aged IF shows many similarities to Archean-aged (>2,500 Ma) banded IFs (BIFs), but with an exceptional state of preservation, allowing an unprecedented exploration of Fe-cycle dynamics in IF deposition.

McMahon, W.J., and N.S. Davies (2018) **Evolution of alluvial mudrock forced by early land plants.** SCIENCE 359:1022-1024

Authors' abstract: *Mudrocks such as slate and shale are rarely found in stratigraphy older than about 500 million years. ... Mudrocks appeared at the same time as did deep-rooted land plants. The interplay between plants and sedimentary rocks suggests that a change in erosion rate and the chemistry of sediments delivered to the oceans occurred around 500 million years ago.*

Using original and published stratigraphic data from all 704 of Earth's known alluvial formations from the Archean eon (3.5 billion years ago) to the Carboniferous period (0.3 billion years ago), we prove contentions of an upsurge in the proportion of mud retained on land coeval with vegetation evolution.

We constrain the onset of the upsurge to the Ordovician-Silurian and show that alluvium deposited after land plant evolution contains a proportion of mudrock that is, on average, 1.4 orders of magnitude greater than the proportion contained in alluvium from the preceding 90% of Earth's history. We attribute this shift to the ways in which vegetation revolutionized mud production and sediment flux from continental interiors.

Morris, J.L., et al (2018) **The timescale of early land plant evolution.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:E2274-E2283

Authors' abstract: *Establishing the timescale of early land plant evolution is essential to testing hypotheses on the co-evolution of land plants and Earth's system. Here, we establish a timescale for early land plant evolution that integrates over competing hypotheses on* bryophyte [mosses]-*tracheophyte* [veined plants] *relationships.*

We estimate land plants to have emerged in a middle Cambrian-Early Ordovician [542 to 480 megayears ago] *interval, and vascular plants to have emerged in the Late Ordovician-Silurian* [480 to 416 megayears].

This timescale implies an early establishment of terrestrial ecosystems by land plants that is in close accord with recent estimates for the origin of terrestrial animal lineages. Biogeochemical models that are constrained by the fossil

record of early land plants, or attempt to explain their impact, must consider a much earlier, middle Cambrian-Early Ordovician origin.

The establishment of plant life on land is one of the most significant evolutionary episodes in Earth history. Terrestrial colonization has been attributed to a series of major innovations in plant body plans, anatomy, and biochemistry that impacted increasingly upon global biogeochemical cycles through the Paleozoic.

In some models, an increase in biomass over the continents, firstly by cryptogamic [fungi, algae, lichens, mosses] *ground covers followed by larger vascular plants, enhanced rates of silicate weathering and carbon burial that drove major perturbations in the long-term carbon cycle, resulting in substantial drops in atmospheric CO_2 levels and increased oxygenesis. It also led to new habitats for animals and fungi, major changes to soil types, and sediment stability that influenced river systems and landscapes.*

Puttick, M.N., et al (2018) **The interrelationships of land plants and the nature of the ancestral embryophyte.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 28-733:745

Authors' abstract: *The evolutionary emergence of land plant body plans transformed the planet. However, our understanding of this formative episode is mired in the uncertainty associated with the phylogenetic relationships among bryophytes (hornworts, liverworts, and mosses) and tracheophytes (vascular plants). Here we attempt to clarify this problem by analyzing a large transcriptomic dataset with models that allow for compositional heterogeneity between sites.*

Our results imply that the ancestral embryophyte was more complex than has been envisaged based on topologies recognizing liverworts as the sister lineage to all other embryophytes. This requires many phenotypic character losses and transformations in the liverwort lineage, diminishes inconsistency between phylogeny and the fossil record, and prompts re-evaluation of the phylogenetic affinity of early land plant fossils, the majority of which are considered stem tracheophytes.

Fielding, L., et al (2018) **The initiation and evolution of the River Nile.** EARTH AND PLANETARY SCIENCE LETTERS 489:166-178

Authors' extracts: *The Nile is generally regarded as the longest river in the world, stretching >6800km across the length of northeastern Africa. Its evolution has been used to date the timing of the region's surface uplift and hence constrain continental break-up tectonics.*

In addition, its runoff is proposed to have had a major influence on sapropel [sediments with high organic matter derived from rotting, such as swamp soils] *development in the Mediterranean and its delta plays host to a major hydrocarbon producing region.*

The present-day Nile has three main tributaries: the White Nile, the Blue Nile and the Atbara. Sediment supplied to the Nile trunk in Egypt is dominated by contributions from the Blue Nile (50 to 61%) and Atbara (30 to 42%). The vast majority of White Nile sediment load is trapped in extensive swamps in South Sudan (the Sudd marshes), and does not reach the main Nile trunk, thus accounting for <3% of the total sediment reaching the modern delta.

Today, detritus supplied to the Nile trunk is derived from the volcanic Ethiopian Highlands, Precambrian basement rocks of the Arabian-Nubian Shield and Saharan Metacraton, and Phanerozoic sedimentary cover that blankets much of the region, together with a contribution from aeolian [wind blown] *sources.*

The Nile river was established as a major drainage of continental proportions, reaching as far south as the Ethiopian Highlands, by the start of our studied record, in Oligocene times (circa 30 megayears).

Hemingway, J.D., et al (2018) **Microbial oxidation of lithospheric organic carbon in rapidly eroding tropical mountain soils.** SCIENCE 360:209-212

[The lithosphere is Earth's outer crust. Petrogenic means originating from crustal rocks, not to be confused with petroleum, which means rock-oil. Exhumed rocks are those exposed by erosion.]

Authors' abstract: *Lithospheric organic carbon ("petrogenic"; OCpetro) is oxidized during exhumation and subsequent erosion of mountain ranges. This process is a considerable source of carbon dioxide (CO_2) to the atmosphere*

over geologic time scales, but the mechanisms that govern oxidation rates in mountain landscapes are poorly constrained.

We demonstrate that, on average, 67 ± 11% of the OCpetro initially present in bedrock exhumed from the tropical, rapidly eroding Central Range of Taiwan is oxidized in soils, leading to CO_2 emissions of 6.1 to 18.6 metric tons of carbon per square kilometer per year.

The molecular and isotopic evolution of bulk OCpetro and lipid biomarkers during soil formation reveals that OCpetro remineralization is microbially mediated. Rapid oxidation in mountain soils drives CO_2 emission fluxes that increase with erosion rate, thereby counteracting CO_2 drawdown by silicate weathering and biospheric OCpetro burial.

Mahaney, W.C., et al (2018) **Did the Black-Mat impact/airburst reach the Antarctic? Evidence from New Mountain near the Taylor Glacier in the Dry Valley Mountains.** JOURNAL OF GEOLOGY 126:285-305

[Paleosols are fossilized soil layers. The Black Mat event was a probable asteroid or comet impact 12.8 thousand years ago in the northern hemisphere that triggered an ice age and altered human evolution.]

Authors' abstract: *Detailed microscopic investigations of horizons in a surface paleosol, part of a pedostratigraphic stack of tills at New Mountain, Antarctica, dated to the middle Miocene climatic optimum event (ca. 15 Ma), suggest not only that the paleoclimate history of the continent can be read from stratigraphic layers within paleosols but also that records of cosmic events may lie embedded in coatings on sand clasts resident in paleosols.*

Recent microscopic and chemical data from sands in the upper horizons of a surface paleosol (Ant-828), adjacent to the Taylor Glacier, contain Fe and Na coatings surfaced with cosmic signatures including welded and shock-melted grains, opaque carbon coatings, microfeature stack of cards, Fe spherules, solubilized grain surfaces with streams of melted skin, a grain carrying an Ir signature, rare earth elements elevated above crustal averages, and slightly elevated Pt/Pd ratios.

The projected link to the probable black-mat event of 12.8 ka is reinforced by the presence of fresh opaque carbon and other cosmic signatures on grain surfaces that overlie well-weathered grain features, presumably weathering from middle Miocene time near today. Evidence of CO and NO accumulations dated to 12.9 ka in the Taylor Ice Dome suggest that the black-mat impact/airburst of the same time line as the Younger Dryas boundary may have reached across South America and the Pacific Ocean to the Dry Valley Mountains of Antarctica.

Claassens, L. (2018) **An endangered seahorse selectively chooses an artificial structure.** ENVIRONMENTAL BIOLOGY OF FISHES 101:723-733

Authors' abstract: *The development of a residential marina estate within the Knysna estuary, South Africa, introduced Reno mattresses (horizontal wire cages filled with rocks) as a novel habitat for the endangered Knysna seahorse Hippocampus capensis. Consistently high seahorse densities on these artificial structures, despite the availability of seagrass habitat, begged the question of whether this habitat was chosen by the seahorse in preference to natural vegetation.*

An in situ habitat choice experiment was conducted which focused on the choice made by adult H. capensis between natural vegetation (Zostera capensis) and artificial (Reno mattress) habitat within a choice chamber. Seahorses were significantly more likely to move away from Z. capensis onto a Reno mattress structure or remain on this structure.

This study concludes that higher H. capensis densities on Reno mattresses within Thesen Islands Marina are owing to some positive feature of this habitat and the underlying processes responsible for the choice made by this species (additional food, holdfasts, protection) can now be investigated.

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.

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

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 OPUNTIAs #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. One thing that I like about this readercon is that it is small enough to provide a common experience for all, not a mob scene like the Calgary Comic Expo.

AROUND COWTOWN

photo by Dale Speirs

The new Manulife tower opened late 2017 at 7 Avenue SW and 5 Street downtown. Unlike some other new towers, no windows have yet fallen off.