

# OPUNTIA 432





## Hogmanay 2018

**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.

### AULD LANG SYNE CALAGHEARRIDH

photos by Dale Speirs

Calgary, Alberta, was named after Calgary Bay, Isle of Mull, Scotland. The name comes from the Gaelic as spelled above and means “the farm by the bay”. Robbie Burns would have written it as above, assuming that he ever heard of it, as even today it is only a manor house and sheep farm.

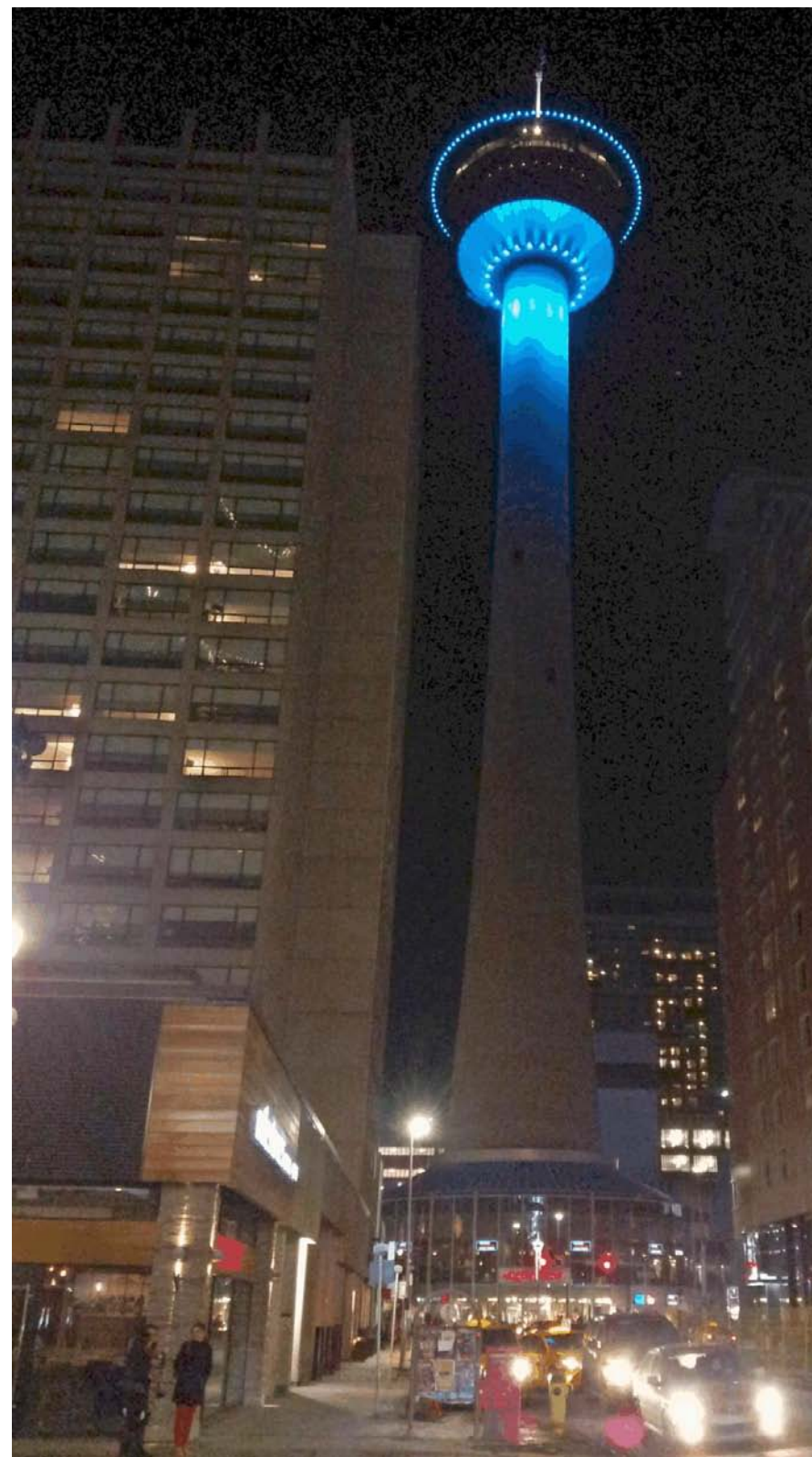
Last year we had a spell of -30°C cold weather that moved in just before Christmas and hung on until December 31. Calgary’s biggest New Year’s Eve party, downtown at Olympic Plaza, was canceled. Many Calgarians, myself included, instead had a quiet night at home listening to our furnaces running full speed and trying not to think what the next month’s natural gas bill would be.

This year, the weather was much better, staying in the -10 range. Alberta has no humidity to speak of, so it is a dry cold. In eastern Canada, -10 would feel more like -20 here because Ontario has the lake effect and humidity. So it was heigh ho and off I go.

In previous years the fireworks were launched from behind the stage at Olympic Plaza. This year they were launched from the top of the Calgary Tower. That made them visible to a wider part of the city, but diluted the fun for the crowds on the plaza. The visual effects were smaller, and instead of thrilling BANGs, we only heard faint pops. The tower is behind the plaza, screened by other buildings.

Next year I shall instead try to find a better viewing position on Centre Street, which terminates at the base of the Calgary Tower. But it was all free, so I can’t complain too loudly.

The front cover shows one of several firepits on the Olympic Plaza. At right is a photo of the Calgary Tower from Centre Street, a block from the plaza.





But first, the partying on Olympic Plaza. The skating rink was packed, and I could hear the thumpa-thumpa-thumpa of the DJ on the stage a block away.





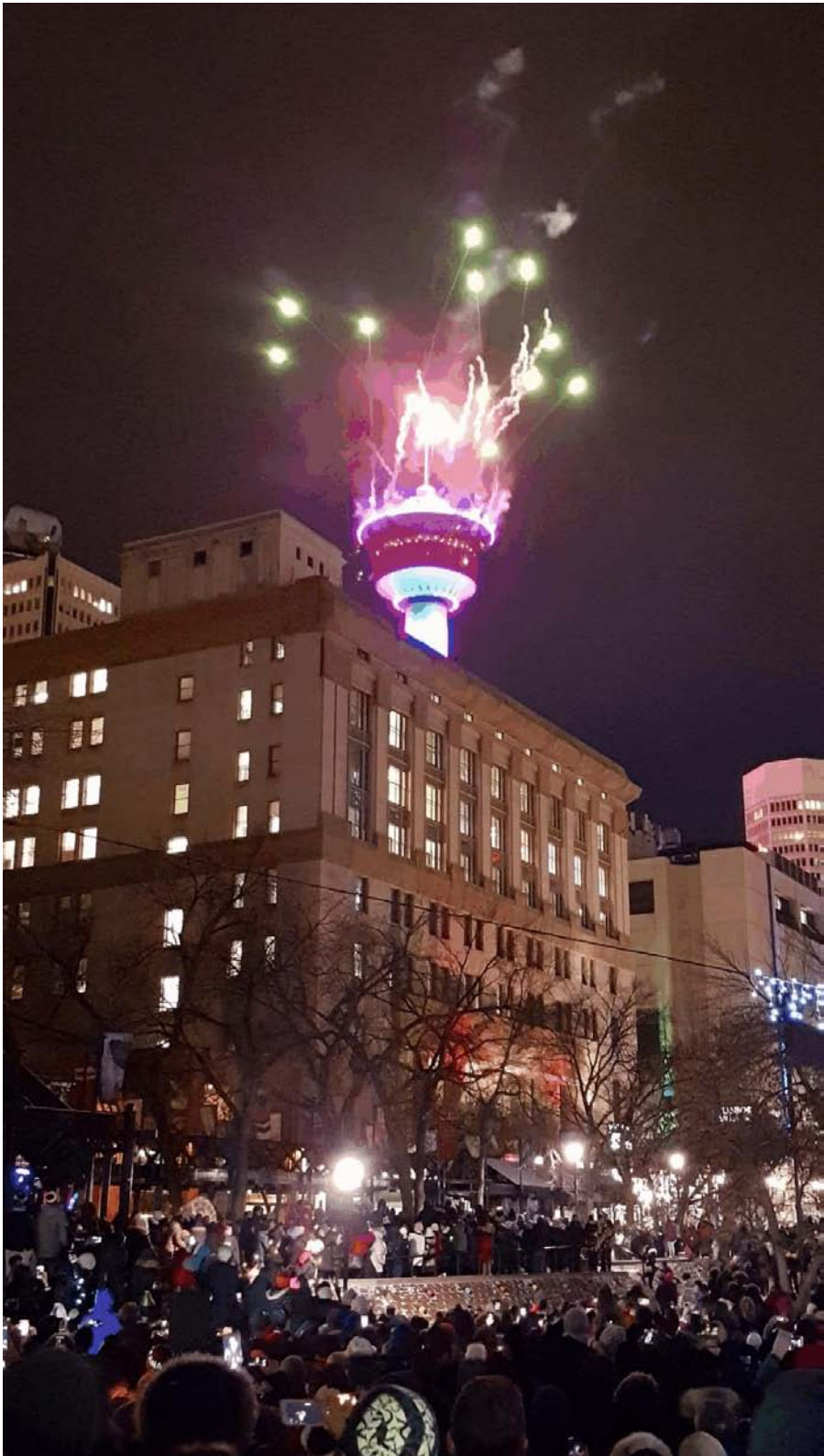


Ice sculptures provided a selfie opportunity.





The first shot, and so to the fireworks.











## TEMPUS FUGIT: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #401.]

### New Year's Eve.

Time flies, and as we get older we become more conscious of that, particularly on December 31.

The old-time radio series THE JACK BENNY SHOW, written by his stable of regular writers, made use of New Year's Eve. (This and hundreds of other OTR series are available as free downloads at [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org))

Benny played a tightwad, vain about his blue eyes, but not hiding the fact that he wore a toupee. Not quite his girlfriend was Mary Livingstone, played by his wife Sadie Marks. She had mild dyslexia and occasionally mis-read words in the script. Her most famous garble was on another episode where, in a diner, she ordered a chiss sweeze sandwich. Her cousins were the Marx brothers.

Benny's announcer Don Wilson was a tall and rotund man who participated in the script. He enthusiastically touted the sponsor's products, particularly when it was Jello. The band leader at this time was Phil Harris, who played himself as a heavy drinker and party man. Most of his musicians were on parole or had past records, and dressed like street bums because Harris was too cheap to buy them uniforms.

Benny's Negro valet Rochester van Jones wasn't the clichéd "yes massa" type that Hollywood took as a standard. He was sarcastic and poked fun at his boss's cheap ways. The two men were closer to friends than a master-servant relationship. This occasionally got Benny into trouble with his Southern audiences, who thought Rochester was a little too uppity at times.

"No Date For Jack" was broadcast on December 31, 1939. After a jolly Jello pitch by Don Wilson, a man everyone was prepared to believe ate lots of the stuff, the episode opened with numerous gags as Benny and the cast discussed all the different 1940 calendars they had received from local businesses. This is something that the Internet generation may not understand, but in the days before smartphones, people used paper calendars, either desk sets or hanging on the wall.

From there to Christmas gifts. Benny had given everyone the same gift, a single golf ball. This set up a running gag whereby throughout the show every character Benny met would first thank him for the golf ball. "*In a few hours, the old year will pass out.*", said Benny. "*And I won't be far behind.*", replied Harris.

Benny announced that once that night's show was over, he would be stepping out for New Year's Eve with his girlfriend Gladys Zybisco. (Contrary to what the audience commonly believed, Mary Livingstone was not his girlfriend, only a friend who was a girl.) Just then the telephone rang. It was Gladys cancelling the date because she had to work, crushing Benny's hopes.

Everyone else urged him to come along with them and celebrate, but he preferred to go home and pout. Along the way he stopped at a coffee shop and talked to the waitress who had to work the graveyard shift. The big laugh was at the end of the conversation when he said "*Thanks Gladys*" and walked out.

AMOS AND ANDY was the most successful old-time radio series ever, running from 1928 to 1955 in its recognized form. It began in 1927 as SAM AND HENRY but its creators Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll got into a dispute with the radio station that owned it. When their contract expired, they moved elsewhere and changed the name because the station owned the original. After OTR died in 1955, they continued as a 15-minute disk jockey show until 1960 but it died unlamented.

The series was a sitcom with a cast of regular characters. The male voices were all done by Gosden and Correll. The female voices were done by black actresses. During its zenith, the two main characters were Andy Brown, a gullible mark, and George "Kingfish" Stevens, a sharp-practice man who was always trying to skim money out of Brown or someone else in preference to actually going out and getting a job. Stevens's wife was Sapphire, a battleaxe who justifiably always thought the worst of her husband.

"New Year's Eve" was originally broadcast on December 31, 1943. Andy was looking for a tuxedo to rent for the occasion but wasn't having any luck. Kingfish offered to find him one and did, charging him \$18, a stiff rent for the night.

While waiting to leave for the gala, Andy fell asleep and a dream sequence began. An escaped criminal barged in, played by Edward G. Robinson, and told



Andy he had to hide out for a few hours. The prison was due to execute him at midnight. Only then did Andy notice the prisoner's number, 1943. It was the outgoing year personified.

Prisoner #1943 was particularly upset that he was being blamed for all the bad things that happened. That year was not a good one to have lived through. It wasn't obvious yet that the Allies would win the war. Andy talked with him and tried to calm him down. Just as things came to a climax, he was woken up by his friends. As they left for the party, Andy found \$35 in the tuxedo pocket that Kingfish had forgotten about, so all was well.

This episode was more propaganda than humour. It was an attempt to encourage citizens to look ahead to a brighter future, even if the gloom hadn't yet lifted. The series didn't do such episodes often, certainly not like the Fibber McGee comedy show, whose sponsors devoted every fourth episode to the war effort. We complain about how hard our lives are today, and forget our grandparents went through much worse with much less.

The following year, on December 29, the AMOS AND ANDY show wasn't as gloomy. D-Day had been a success, and it was evident that the Allies were winning, even though they still had a long slog to victory. The episode was titled "Jackson's New Year's Eve", about the most exclusive gala being given that night, at the Charlie Jackson family residence in Harlem.

Andy had dated the Jacksons' daughter, but his invitation to the party hadn't arrived in the mail. Kingfish, Amos, and everyone else had gotten theirs. Andy moped a bit and then went over to the Jackson house.

Being the idiot in the idiot plot, he didn't give them a chance to explain that his invitation was accidentally overlooked and he was in fact invited. He went into a huff and invented an excuse about what he was doing that night. The plot complicated itself as Andy got in and out of trouble with assorted friends because he wouldn't shut up and let them finish what they are saying.

Eventually matters were sorted out, and there was a maudlin finish to the episode. Misunderstandings and miscommunications were a popular device in the series to spin out into a half-hour show what would have been a two-minute plot if people had paid attention to each other. To be fair, after a couple of decades of script writing for the series, it was increasingly difficult to come up with anything new.

"Rain On New Year's Eve", written and directed by Wyllis Cooper, was an episode of the OTR series QUIET PLEASE that first aired on December 29, 1947. It was narrated by a screenwriter complaining about the movie he was currently working on, which had a director who kept changing the lines and had stretched production past Christmas. The front office had ordered him to finish the movie by New Year's Eve or else.

The basic plot of the movie was about a monster that roamed about terrorizing the countryside and had immense force in the hour before midnight. The director decided to add in an extra monster. If one was good, then two must be double the value. The screenwriter was fed up with constant rewrites, and under immense pressure. He was working long hours without respite and felt exhausted.

The episode was a half hour long. After twenty minutes of complaining, the screenwriter fell asleep. He dreamt that he was the monster and was roaming the set killing people, the director among them. He woke up and found it wasn't a dream. He really had gone berserk in a somnolent state, one hour before midnight. Happy New Year.

THE MISFORTUNE COOKIE (2013) by Laura Resnick is part of a fantasy series about Esther Diamond, a struggling New York City actress who kept running into odd-lot supernatural beings. In this novel, she was working as a waitress at a Little Italy restaurant when her ex-boyfriend NYPD Det. Connor Lopez raided the place and ran her in. It was New Year's Eve, and not a good start to the new year.

Eventually Diamond landed a part in a low-budget film set in Chinatown. Diamond, while not a moll, had friends in the Mafia, and met up with one of them, Luciano "Lucky Bastard" Battistuzzi, hiding out from the restaurant raid. Then the real excitement began.

Fortune cookies were being delivered to people, the recipients of which died under strange circumstances after they cracked open the cookie and released a curse. Lopez got one, which suited Diamond fine because she was still angry at him. The Lunar New Year was about to begin, to add its noise and confusion to events.

The plot threads were tangled but eventually unraveled. The movie was funded by a local tong leader who unfortunately also got a fortune cookie. The death



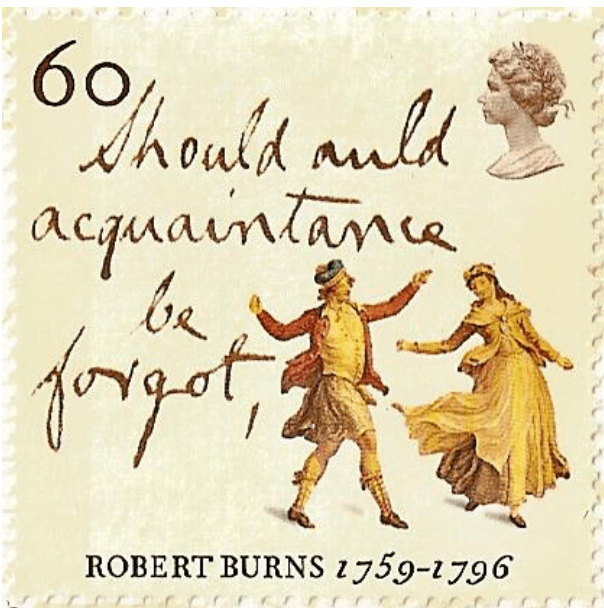
toll steadily increased. The producer’s mother wanted him to come home and take over the family business. She was using the cookies to hex his movie. The good news was that he gave up on the film. The bad news was that instead of taking on the family business, he wanted to open a comic book store.

The novel concluded by first tying off all the loose threads, then throwing out a few new ones, plus an ominous foreboding. Obviously the next novel’s plot was being set up. A mildly humourous book, worth reading.

A TOAST TO MURDER (2017) by Allyson K. Abbott (pseudonym of Beth Amos) is a novel in a cozy mystery series set in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, about saloon keeper Mackenzie Dalton. She had synesthesia, which apparently helped in her amateur sleuthing.

It was December, and someone was sending her threatening letters and taunting her with clues. She began investigating but ran afoul of the police. They were picky about things such as chain of custody of evidence, contaminating crime scenes, and obstruction. Her synesthesia helped her investigate but that method is not admissible in court.

Dalton eventually decided on a suspect and invited her to a New Year’s Eve party in the saloon. The event did not go well, as many of the guests were antagonists or strangers not in the mood to make new friends. The suspect of choice was found dead at the bottom of the basement stairs. Did she fall or was she pushed?



The clock struck midnight, but no one was in the mood to sing “Auld Lang Syne” while gathered around the corpse.

Dalton once again used her synesthesia to expose the murderer, who was jealous of her crime-solving skills. He forgot everyone now has smartphone

cameras these days, and his confession was recorded by other guests to the party. They will be brought to mind at the trial.

The epilogue weaved the loose threads of the story into a tangled web. The plot was mundane, but the synesthesia angle made it interesting.

**The Year After The Night Before.**

CORNER GAS, was a comedy television series which appeared from 2003 to 2009 on the CTV network, and is available on DVD. It was created by stand-up comedian Brent Butt, a small-town flatlander from Tisdale, Saskatchewan. It was set in the fictitious village of Dog River, down south in the flattest and driest part of Saskatchewan.

Butt played Brent Leroy, the proprietor of the Corner Gas service station and convenience store, a placid man secure in the knowledge that he had the only gas station within sixty kilometres and thus a monopoly (as he stated). His clerk was Wanda Dollard, who liked to wear push-up bras to boost the business (as she so stated). She had a degree in linguistics with a minor in comparative religion, which ideally suited her for a job in the convenience store.

The next-door neighbour was the Ruby Café, run by Lacey Burrows. The village idiot was Hank Yarbo, a local handyman who always had lots of time to lean on the counter at Corner Gas and waste it with Brent. They were at school together. Karen Pelly was half of the village police force, an athletic young woman who couldn’t get hired by a better police force in a city.

“American Resolution” (2009) was a Season 6 episode written by Mark Farrell. It opened on New Year’s Eve, with the characters at a party making resolutions just before the calendar ticked over. Brent resolved not to eat chili cheese hot dogs in the coming year. He was a plump man who scarfed two or three of them per day, which probably explained his weight problem. However, he broke his resolution a few seconds after the New Year’s Eve countdown. As everyone else sang “Auld Lang Syne”, he happily chowed down on a chili cheese hot dog.

His companions were made of sterner stuff. Yarbo said he would not buy or read comic books. Dollard would not eat red licorice Twizzlers, which Corner Gas sold and which she nibbled on constantly on the job. Pelly said she would jog every day. Burrows resolved to give up chewing gum.



Flash forward to July. Nerves were starting to fray. Since Brent disqualified himself in the first few seconds of the year, he was calm and easy-going. Dollard, however, was hallucinating that the Twizzlers in the store were talking to her. She constantly argued with them, a one-sided conversation that made the others wonder about her sanity.

Yarbo wasn't too bad off without his comics, but became edgy because Brent was always reading comic books at the counter while waiting for customers. Since Yarbo had nothing better to do than lean on the counter at Corner Gas, it was unnerving to see the comic books in Brent's hands.

Pelly was stiff and sore from running every day. There is such a thing as too much exercise. The three began scheming to sabotage each other's resolutions, but their plans gang aft agley. Finally they conceded defeat and signed an agreement that all of them will break their resolutions simultaneously, thus making it a tie.

Burrows watched them sign the papers, then break their resolutions. She reminded them that she had also made a resolution to quit chewing gum and had held to it. She won, nyah, nyah.

**Time For An End.**

“The End Of Time” by Wallace West (1933 March, ASTOUNDING) opened with resident mad scientist Dr Manthis lecturing his young protégé Jack Baron (who was also courting Manthis' daughter Jane) about how time was slowing down and would bring an end to the world at 06h00 tomorrow morning.

Manthis had prepared injections for the three of them that would make them immune. After taking it, they sped up to counteract the slowing time. They went out onto the street and saw pedestrians slowing down. The end was nigh.

A pause for a digression which I will tie into this story. On October 17, 2018, cannabis became legal in Canada. Canuck drivers can now kill or cripple people under the influence of cannabis rather than alcohol. This is mentioned because the story explained how Manthis made his time-accelerating drug:

*“I recalled that such drugs as hashish greatly speed up the time sense. An addict is able to review his entire past life or plan an elaborate crime between two heartbeats. So I collected a small supply of the stuff.”*

[Baron replies:] *“But hashish in large doses is deadly, and I've heard that users of it sooner or later develop homicidal mania, run amuck as they say in India.”*

*“True enough”, admitted the chemist, “but Andrev, the Russian, you know, recently worked out a formula to neutralize the deadly effects of the drug but retain its time-expanding effect for medical purposes. I've added that to the pure drug. There isn't enough of it in New York to keep all these people normal for five minutes. Why should I have frightened the poor things?”*

All the other citizens were frozen as statues. Inanimate objects were not affected. Manthis and Baron debated the issue and concluded it must be caused by someone emitting radio vibrations that slow down subjective time for animals. Another thought occurred:

*“It looks as if the only persons alive, in New York at least, are hashish addicts, the most debased and murderous of drug fiends.” The doctor stopped, his eyes dilating with horror. June crept close to him and threw an arm around his shaking shoulders.*

*“Can't you see? Their time-sense expanded too. Like us they were unaffected. But unlike us they use the pure drug. Hashish smokers are without exception homicidal maniacs, vicious criminals.”*

The three worked unceasingly to counteract whomever was causing the effect. They located a radio transmitter operating on centimetre wavelengths. There were some citizens alive and unaffected. The villain of the piece, a really, really mad scientist had immunized his followers and intended to rule the world and all that.

It came down to the final battle between Good and Evil, and you know who won. The world was restored, and Baron got Jane. The hashish fiends were dispelled. No more bwah-ha-ha-ing, except in Canada.

“The Day Time Stopped Moving” (1940 October, AMAZING) is a short story by Bradner Buckner (pseudonym of Ed Earl Repp). The protagonist was Dave Miller, a failed pharmacist who committed suicide with an old handgun. He found himself instantly transported behind the counter of his drug store. Customers and everything else were frozen in time like statues.



Miller made his way out into the world, where everything was frozen in an instant of time, the split second after he had pulled the trigger. He couldn't get into his house where he had killed himself because the door was also seized shut. Wandering about, he met one living creature, a dog. It followed him and they roamed about until they found John Erickson, the man who created the problem.

Erickson had created a device to freeze time but hadn't thought through the consequences. They all made their way to his laboratory, and after some difficulty managed to get inside. The men cobbled together a crude jury-rig to snap them out of the time lock.

At that instant, Miller found himself back in his house, lying on the floor with a head wound. The gun had misfired and he had survived. *He went like one that hath been stunned, and is of sense forlorn: A sadder and a wiser man, he rose the morrow morn.*

**Spacetime Is The Simplest Thing.**

“The Clock That Went Backward” (1881) by Edward Page Mitchell was reprinted in the anthology FRANKENSTEIN DREAMS (2017), edited by Michael Sims. This was possibly the first story that considered time loops or the grandfather paradox in time travel.

The narrator and his cousin inherited a clock that had been made in Leyden, Netherlands, in 1572. It did not run and never had, so the two men took it to Leyden in hopes of finding a clockmaker who could fix it. They found instead Professor Van Stopp, who got it working, albeit the hands turned backward and sent them into the past.

When they stopped, the three men found themselves centuries in the past, just as Leyden was besieged by the Spanish. The siege had been lifted by an inadvertent incident, and it happened that incident was caused by the arrival of the men.

If they had not gone into the past, Europe's history would have been substantially different. The men would not have existed in the modern era, therefore they could not have gone back. The narrator contemplates the time loop they established, an early consideration of time travel paradoxes.

“De Marigny's Clock” (1971) is a short story by Brian Lumley, reprinted in his 2008 collection HAGGOPIAN AND OTHER STORIES. It was about Titus Crow, who had just come into possession of a strange grandfather clock shaped like a coffin. It had four hands that moved in no discernable pattern, and the face was covered with strange hieroglyphs.

Two robbers broke into the house and began ransacking it. They figured the clock was a hiding place for loot. One of them managed to open a panel and discovered a black empty space. He stuck his hand inside to feel around for any stashed valuables.

Something inside began pulling him in. The accomplice tried to rescue him but was also yanked in by whatever lived in that space. Loud shrieks and screams of agony, suddenly cut off. The panel swung shut by itself. Crow had a spacetime portal to a world no human would want to enter, not a clock. It did make an excellent self-defence system.

Back to CORNER GAS on a more humourous note from Season 5 in 2008. “No Time Like The Presents”, written by Kevin White, was based on the fact that Saskatchewan is the only province that does not go on Daylight Saving Time in summer. (Good for them; DST is a nonsensical idea.)

Hank Yarbo, village idiot that he was, decided to go on DST by himself, nevermind the rest of Dog River or the province. He began by annoying Brent Leroy when he phoned him an hour before the gas station opened and demanded service. “*Stop living in the past*”, he told Leroy.

The next morning Yarbo woke up at 07h00 YDT (Yarbo Daylight Time) but wanted to sleep in. He therefore set his watch ahead another two hours, which meant that he actually slept in until 09h00.

Satisfied with that logic, he went to the Ruby Café and tried to order the sandwich special. Lacey Burrows informed him that the breakfast menu was still being served and sandwiches weren't available until the lunch hour. He countered that it was the lunch hour by his time, against which Burrows could not argue further.

From there, Yarbo went about confusing everyone in the village. He decided to set his watch 12 hours ahead of local time so he could sleep all day, and then



party at night while the sun was shining. This caused problems when Constable Karen Pelly gave him a parking ticket at 11h00. By his watch, it was 23h00. Since parking was free after 18h00, he should not have received the ticket. Somehow the traffic court judge wouldn't see it that way.

Leroy convinced Yarbo to move his watch ahead another 12 hours. They were sitting in the Ruby Café when Burrows came out with a plate of fresh doughnuts straight from the oven. Yarbo refused them because he didn't like day-olds.

The episode was a zero-reset story. Eventually Yarbo made the trip around the clock and came back on local time. It was the simplest thing.

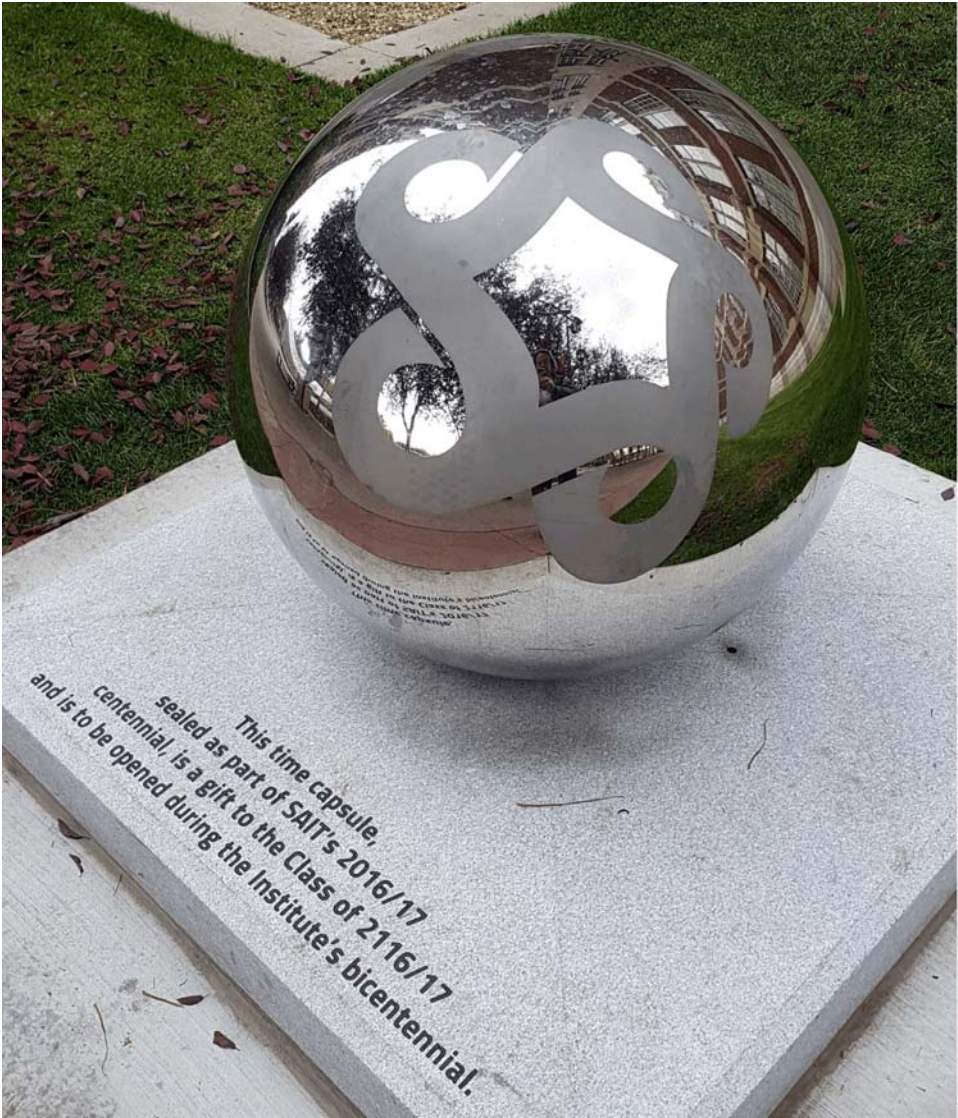
LETHAL LETTERS (2014) by Ellery Adams (pseudonym of Jennifer Stanley) is about one of the oldest methods used to send a message into the far future, the time capsule. This was a cozy mystery set in Oyster Bay, North Carolina, where restaurant owner Olivia Limoges is the resident Miss Marple.

Busy, busy, busy, what with catering to two weddings and a high-society soiree, the Secret Garden Party. At the latter, the contents of a 1917 time capsule from the local church were opened. Not long after, one item from the capsule vanished. And not long after that, Limoges found the body of a young woman.

Oyster Bay was plagued by drug smugglers, the younger generation who came back from college with useless degrees but no job possibilities other than serving coffee. A second murder was done. Limoges learned that two local families were intertwined by the missing item, a will that would have made one of them rich and the other poor had it been properly probated a century ago.

One of those families was in the drug smuggling business. Combined with jealousy over the will from the time capsule, it made for a bloody ending, far more so than usual for cozies.

The man who put his will into the time capsule in 1917 didn't trust his wife not to forge a will that would give her a better deal. He couldn't stop her since he would be dead, but tried and succeeded in striking a blow for the truth from beyond the grave. The discovery of the will wouldn't change the inheritance, for after a century no probate court would order a re-set. It could and did set off a chain of violence.



*Time capsule in Calgary at Southern Alberta Institute of Technology*

**Clocked.**

Barbara Allan is the pseudonym of husband and wife Barbara and Max Allan Collins. They write a cozy series about Brandy Borne and her mother Vivian, who had an antiques shop in the village of Serenity, Iowa. It was anything but serene when the duo are involved. Vivian was on lithium and Brandy on Prozac.



The novels are annoyingly self-referential, mentioning previous novels in the series by name in a manner that broke the flow of the narrative. The narrator was mostly Brandy, but sometimes Vivian, which was jarring, especially when the reader was addressed directly.

ANTIQUES KNOCK-OFF (2011) was an installment in the series involving murder triggered by antique clocks. Brandy Borne was the Miss Marple of the series but realistically it was her life that should be investigated. As this novel began, she was single and pregnant, having agreed to be a surrogate mother. Vivian was battier than ever and off her medications. Brandy had recently learned that her much older sister Peggy Sue was actually her biological mother and Vivian, who had raised her, was therefore her grandmother. A life guaranteed to mess up anyone.

But all that was just by way of background information in the opening chapter. Vivian had gotten into a nasty argument with unlikeable busybody Connie Grimes, who had been threatening to expose the Borne family secrets. Grimes didn't make it past the second chapter and was little mourned. Vivian was accused of the murder and insisted on pleading guilty despite attempts to get her to accept an insanity plea.

While Brandy investigated, Vivian organized a jailhouse theatrical group. Brandy was hampered by having to earn a living in the antiques store while enduring morning sickness. The details began to emerge about a shifty clock repair shop that had been substituting parts in antique clocks brought in for repair, including those of Grimes and Vivian.

The stolen parts were then used to fabricate a 'genuine' clock. This is a common practice in the antiques trade. Take a set of six authentic chairs from a dinner table. From each chair, take off one leg or part of a seat or back and substitute a fake part. With the removed genuine parts, one can then assemble a fully authentic chair. The clock store owner was doing the same thing.

The deceased was in the blackmail business and, combined with her noticing that her clock had been altered, created a deadly situation. It ended in the usual type of confrontation with the killer, but since Brandy et al were needed to continue the series, not to mention her giving birth, the conclusion was obvious.

GRACE AGAINST THE CLOCK (2014) by Julie Hyzy is part of a cozy mystery series about Grace Wheaton, manager of Marshfield Manor, near the

village of Emberstowne, North Carolina. The stately pile now served as a small convention centre.

The plot of this novel began with the town clock, which needed serious repairs. An ex-couple, Joyce Swedburg and Leland Keay put aside their acrimony to organize a benefit for the restoration of the clock, held in Marshfield Manor. Wheaton was doing some restoration of her own, renovating the basement of her house.

The Promise Clock, as it was officially called, was set in the middle of an arch spanning two lanes of traffic in what was once the main entrance of the village. Emberstowne was too small to have a slum, but the clock district was half-abandoned and as worn out as the clock itself. Revitalizing the clock was the first step to revitalizing the neighbourhood.

The novel took a while to gear up as all the characters and their relationships were introduced. Lots of hissy-fit types to provide motives for the inevitable murder. The benefit, at \$1,000 a plate, would have gone well had not Keay fallen over from poisoning, his life's seconds numbered by a person unknown.

One of the detectives examining the body came down with similar symptoms and was rushed to hospital. This was a red herring and a pointless one at that, since he wasn't mentioned again until near the ending when it was casually remarked that he was recovering well. One gets the impression that the author was going to do more with him, but forgot until three-quarters of the way through the manuscript, then hastily cobbled in a note so as not to leave that thread dangling.

The Wheaton house renovations had their surprises too. Contractors found a secret passageway in the basement, probably a century old, that was hidden behind a fake wall. It led to the neighbour's house, a man whose ex-wife was a mistress of Keay.

That twist was soon overshadowed by another, documents found hidden in the Promise Clock indicating that someone else had a different reason to murder Keay. The murderer was one of the contractors, who used the tunnel to frame the other homeowner. He then put Wheaton in dire peril, and headed out to the Promise Clock, against which he had a grudge because it brought back painful memories.



There was another final crisis, one of many final crises that extended the book and which were used to keep introducing twists that made the middle half of the novel irrelevant. More hostage taking, and the murderer blew apart the clock with explosives. An elaborate plot that required quite a bit of untangling. Too elaborate, but worth reading once.

**CLOCK AND DAGGER** (2016) by Julianne Holmes is a novel in a cozy series about Ruth Clagan, who inherited her grandfather's clock shop, the Cog & Sprocket. It was set in Orchard, Massachusetts, once a peaceful village slumbering out in the hills, but after her arrival now experiencing a murder rate as bad as Cabot Cove.

The plot of this novel began with the town clock, which needed serious repairs. If that sentence seems familiar, it is because there is no plot that several cozies won't reuse. Clagan had assorted problems.

Bookstore owner Beckett Green was trying to steal business from all the other village shops by carrying their specialty items. Not sufficient unto the day, he singled out Clagan by trying to hire away her watch repairman Mark Pine and also interfered with her proposal to renovate the clock tower. Matters went from bad to worse when Pine was murdered.

Clagan went into sleuthing mode, not only the murder but Green's activities, which included selling fake antique clocks. Lots of people with troubled pasts appeared, which most preferred to bury in the past.

Keeping up with the times, if you'll pardon the expression, there was a lot of texting and voicemails, which no one ever answered if it would instantly resolve a plot point. Clagan uncovered an entire gang of clock fakers, who were making good money selling replicas at the price of genuines.

Green turned out to be an innocent dupe and repented. He agreed to let the town clock tower renovation go ahead. The bad guys were rounded up after the usual trapped-in-a-basement scene. The novel ended on New Year's Eve. The party was an infodump on who did what to whom and why. The explanation finished just as the clocks struck twelve and the new year began. No one sang "Auld Lang Sine".

**MURDER ON THE HOUR** (2016) by Elizabeth J. Duncan was the seventh novel in a cozy series about Penny Brannigan of Llanelen, Wales, a village

which could match any Maine village in murder statistics. Brannigan operated a spa but had plenty of time for private enquiries and discovering bodies.

The television road show **ANTIQUES CYMRU** was in town, and residents trotted out their prized treasures. Sheep farmer Hayden Williams brought in a long-case clock, while Catrin Bellis had a quilt. She was dead within a few hours and the quilt stolen. The appraiser found half of a hand-drawn map hidden in the clock, which became a focal point.

Lots of social melodrama, secrets hidden for generations, and a surfeit of clues but no resolution just yet. Another family had the other half of the treasure map, which had ended up hidden in the quilt. Someone else knew that, and that cost Bellis her life.

The treasure, twelve pearls of great price, had been hidden in the grave of the clockmaker who had created the Williams clock. Two epilogues finished the novel. One was how the map and pearls came to be hidden in Llanelen, and the other about the ancient Romans who had collected the pearls in the first instance. A good read. Everything tied up, both past and present.

## **MISCELLANEOUS SCIENCE FICTION**

by Dale Speirs

**CAT PICTURES PLEASE AND OTHER STORIES** (2017) by Naomi Kritzer is a collection of her science fiction and fantasy stories, a few of which I review here.

The lead story "Cat Pictures Please" is based on the very plausible surmise that the first artificial intelligence might not be created in the laboratory but form spontaneously within the Internet. In this case, it was spawned by a synthesis of search engines, and was trying to learn and grow without humans becoming aware of it. A humorous story, as it tried to help people and found that some individuals simply could not be helped; their behaviours are too self destructive.

“Ace Of Spades” considers what would happen if military drone technology made it easier to start wars, since the soldiers would be safe at home. The story would have been better with a different setting, as it is difficult to believe that the USA could overrun China with drones. Notwithstanding that, the effects on people oppressed by a faceless invader are worth exploring.

“The Golem” is set in Prague in 1941, and is a variation of the traditional story. The golem’s creators are a pair of lesbians, and the golem thinks of itself as female. It also wants to live, and not be sent back to oblivion. Nor can it singlehandedly defeat the Nazis, as its creators wanted.

Most of the stories I found to be average. Not bad, and not a waste of time to read, but neither were they exceptional.

ESCAPE VELOCITY (2017) is a thematic collection of short stories by Ron S. Friedman, a future history of humans in the Solar System. The blurb by Robert J. Sawyer described Friedman as an up-and-coming Larry Niven, which is a fair description. It has become increasingly difficult to find hard-core SF, as the bookshelves and airwaves are swamped by space opera and sword-and-sorcery fantasy.

The first story is “LUCA”, an acronym, not a name. In biology it means “last universal common ancestor”, before life on Earth branched into bacteria, plants, animals, and fungi. The story is set on Enceladus, a moon of Saturn, which is covered in a thick layer of ice which may shelter liquid water deep below and possibly life. Two explorers have landed, and found RNA in one of the geysers blowing through the ice. Artificial RNA, not natural, for it contains nucleotides encoding mathematical sequences that could not possibly be due to random chance. The RNA contained a message from the progenitor of life on Earth, which once blanketed our planet as a single organism before genetic diversification began. An interesting concept.

“Game Not Over” at first seems to be a story of demons from their point of view and the annoyance they have at forever being yanked out of Hell to do the bidding of human wizards. The demons were actually characters in a computer game, but the third twist was that the software had inadvertently promoted artificial intelligence and made the characters real as sapient computer programmes. Now one of them is determined to seek its Maker, and not for friendship.

“Escape Velocity” began to develop the theme of artificial intelligence, now called Roguers, taking over Earth. This story is about the losing war against them, as they take over the planet. The Roguers developed from video game software, so they were well schooled in military tactics. Humans are madly rushing to the exits, but only one was left, a spaceport at Mount Kilimanjaro, where the last spaceship would launch. A soldier of fortune had to decide what kind of sacrifice to make so that either he or his wife could make it off planet.

“Kraken Mare” took place on Titan, and seemed unrelated to the narrative of this collection. A colony will die unless they can get a supply of uranium. The man hired for the job had very valid grudges against them. Assorted alarms and excursions follow. The uranium is found, but so are newly discovered life forms. All was well. John Campbell would have bought this story for ANALOG.

“The Long March, Dry Run” continued the Roguer war, set in China where resistance fighters were still struggling. There was a new hope, as a new artificial intelligence had formed in opposition to the Roguers, ready to fight from Titan.

“Amber Sky” combined the narratives of the two previous stories. Earth was quarantined by all the space colonies, so the arrival of a ship from China stirred up Titan. The moon had its own internal disputes. The arrival forced them to remember what was going on elsewhere.

The remaining stories are short-shorts or rehashed concepts (what if we had immortality?). They are fillers. The main part of the collection, about what we would do against artificial intelligence, is more germane. It is no longer hypothetical, and Friedman’s book is a warning of what is to come.

The Chinese government is already using facial recognition technology to track dissidents and the cashless financial system to deny those people the right to travel on trains and aircraft. In the USA and Canada, private industry does the job. If Facebook or Google don’t think you are politically correct, you vanish from search results. In Sweden and some other European countries, all buying and selling is done with cards or online, wonderful and convenient until something goes wrong such as a failed software update, or the taxmen decide you owe them money. 1984 is not a year in the past, it is here.



**FOOD COZIES: PART 1**

by Dale Speirs

Cozy mysteries are Miss Marple style novels, very popular. Most are worth reading once if you like mysteries, although it is doubtful any of them will stand the test of time. Like zines and Websites, there numerous specialized cozies. I've included many of them in my thematic review columns, but have decided to break out the food cozies into their own column. I previously reviewed a batch of them in OPUNTIA #420.

I have learned from experience to read these novels on a full stomach. Recipes are generally included, if not at the back of the book, then in between chapters or sometimes integrated into the text. It can be very dangerous to read these books if you have an appetite, especially if you just did the grocery shopping and the pantry is packed with food.



**Cupcakes.**

I'm a sucker for cupcakes, the fancy kind with icing piled high, as witness the photos shown here of some that I have enjoyed. In Calgary, Safeway has better cupcakes than the specialty stores in shopping mall kiosks. These photos are all Safeway cupcakes.

SPRINKLE WITH MURDER (2010) by Jean McKinlay was the first novel in a food cozy series about Melanie Cooper, Angie DeLaura, and Tate Harper, who are co-owners of the Fairy Tale Cupcakes bakery in Scottsdale, Arizona. They got off to a flying start with an order for 500 cupcakes from bride-to-be Christa Stevens, Harper's fiancée. It wasn't all sunny skies in the desert, as Olivia Puckett, owner of the rival bakery Confections, deeply resented the intrusion of a competitor.

Stevens was a bridezilla but not to worry, for she didn't make it past Chapter 5. Cooper became the chief suspect because the two hadn't got along well and because Stevens may have been poisoned by a cupcake. A good way to destroy any bakery once the word leaked out, so in self-defence Cooper became a Miss Marple.

The defunct was not a popular woman. Stevens was a fashion designer who took credit for her underlings' work, and had a vicious rivalry with other design shops, similar to the cupcake feud. The police raided Fairy Tale Cupcakes because Harper was connected with it. As the troopers walked through the store, Cooper managed to defuse the situation by telling other customers that it was a private function for one of their retiring colleagues.

Puckett caused more trouble by putting up fake Wanted posters around the neighbourhood naming Cooper as the poisoner. The two met for an epic clash which was aborted when one of Stevens' underlings arrived with a gun. She had really really resented Stevens. Since you can only hang once for murder, she decided to clean up some leftover details.

With single bounds, both Cooper and Puckett were free, and so to the cupcake recipes in the appendix. Cooper came off as weak-willed in this novel, but learned how to be more strong-minded in subsequent installments of the series. For a first novel it was passable.

GOING, GOING, GANACHE (2013) began with a lifestyle magazine doing a photo shoot about Fairy Tale Cupcakes, with Cooper and DeLaura posing in 1950s-style clothing. The magazine had a new owner, Ian Hannigan, and the staff were nervous about who would stay and who would go.

Cooper and DeLaura had developed a line of cupcakes decorated with fondant and icing flowers of cacti, including magenta pricklypear blooms. The Alberta species of *Opuntia*, after which this zine is named, have yellow flowers, but there are many orange and red flowered species of pricklypears and chollas in the American Southwest.

Meanwhile, back at the photo shoot, they are interrupted by the arrival of Olivia Puckett, their rival from Confections. She tried to crash the shoot with a tray of her cupcakes. You've heard of bun fights, perhaps been in one in the school cafeteria. This turned into a massive cupcake fight as both sides flung cupcakes at each other.

Far from being upset at the ruined photo shoot, Hannigan decided to use the cupcake store for a staff bonding exercise. They would bake 1,000 cupcakes for a charity event and like it or else. The bickering among the magazine staff was even worse than between the two cupcake shops.

One of the staffers was found dead behind the FTC store, and Cooper, as the Miss Marple in charge, was the one who found the body. She had just been in a fistfight and had left to attend to a black eye. It was a race between the magazine and the cupcake store as to which could generate the most drama.

Cooper’s mother told her to sell the shop: *Well, obviously cupcake baking is a much more dangerous profession than we first anticipated. It’s like the dead bodies are lured in by your buttercream.*

Eventually the back stories were filled in. The dead man had, many years ago, written a magazine expose about a young Mafioso who was convicted and later murdered in prison. The sister vowed revenge and got it after infiltrating the magazine staff.

Cooper had the usual sort of denouement and last-minute escape. You can skip ahead to the recipes appendix, which includes the following types of cupcakes; pumpkin, gluten-free chocolate with ganache frosting, corn with honey frosting, and pistachio with fig frosting. I’ll skip that last one.

SUGAR AND ICED (2014) opened with trouble, as one of the Fairy Tale Cupcakes employees was dating Olivia Puckett, a good method of upsetting Cooper. That was a sideshow after the shop got a deal to supply cupcakes for a local beauty contest.

It is not necessary to mention the vicious nature of such competitions. Nor was it surprising when the judge of the pageant was found dead under a table of Fairy Tale cupcakes. This time it was Angie DeLaura who found the body. If you’re ever in Scottsdale, Arizona, stay away from all the cupcake shops.

Lots of motives, as many as there are of stage moms, jealous judges, and overly ambitious competitors. Dirty tricks and soap operas everywhere, with Miss Marple in the thick of it trying to puzzle out who did what to whom.

To add flavour to the mix, there was a cupcake baking contest as part of the talent section, and for variety, a brick tossed through the front window of Fairy

Tale Cupcakes. The major culprit was the father of a contestant, who resented the cost of pimping his daughter for all those beauty contests. He figured to make certain she actually won, thereby justifying the cost of his investment.

Finally to the recipes appendix, starting with Salted Caramel cupcakes. I don’t drink coffee, so the Espresso Buttercream left me unmoved.

VANILLA BEANED (2016) began with delusions of grandeur as Fairy Tale Cupcakes looked to open its first franchise operation in Las Vegas. Cooper, DeLaura, and Harper met with former showgirl Holly Hartzmark to discuss her proposal.

Not invited, but appearing nonetheless was competitor Olivia Puckett, who was being courted by Fairy Tale Cupcakes employee Marty Zelaznik. He wasn’t the one who blabbed about the franchise; Harper posted it on social media. There is a new generation of people who don’t understand KYFMS.\*\*

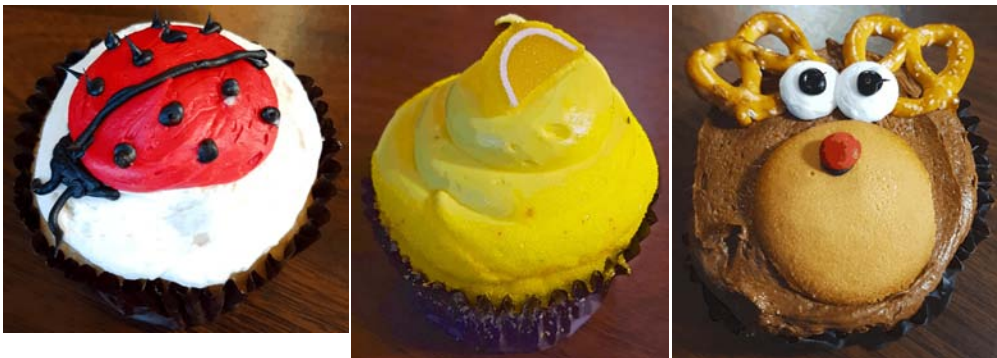
Hartzmark took a couple of realtors with her when she escorted Cooper to the proposed storefront. The agents went ahead of them to unlock, one of them smoking. The smoker opened the door, stepped inside, and the place blew up. A natural gas leak, the firemen said, as the two men were rushed to the burn ward. One later died in hospital.

The second location wasn’t any better. The landlord was deliberately run over by a car while showing the place. Someone didn’t want Fairy Tale Cupcakes to succeed. The back stories were uncovered. One of them was that that Hartzmark may not have been careful in how she chose her friends, but that didn’t matter because her family weren’t any better.

The killer was exposed, and had done so out of romantic revenge, nothing to do with the cupcake franchise. The epilogue was a humourous close that also had nothing to do with the main story. A leading character decided to marry her boyfriend. The venue being Las Vegas, the minister was an Elvis impersonator. The chapel was raided by police just before the “I do”s were about to be exchanged. From there to the cupcake recipes, one of which was The Elvis, a banana bread cupcake with peanut butter frosting. If I ate one of those, I’d be all shook up.

\*\* We used it when I was working in the Parks Dept. Keep Your F\*\*king Mouth Shut meant that you don’t have to tell everybody about everything.





DYING FOR A CUPCAKE (2015) by Denise Swanson was set in Shadow Bend, Missouri, where Devereaux Sinclair operated a five-and-dime store. She had agreed to host a cupcake competition staged by Kizzy Cutler’s Cupcakes, a regional chain of fast-food bakeries. Cutler was originally from Shadow Bend and had now returned as a conquering hero.

Before the event even began, her assistant was taken mysteriously ill and died. The Medical Examiner deemed the death suspicious. Cutler was then targeted by a series of near misses, and Sinclair leapt into the Fray as the resident Miss Marple.

Sinclair came from a broken family and had her own emotional issues to work out, but on she went. Cupcake Weekend gave her an opportunity to sell T-shirts and souvenirs. Even better, a television crew arrived from the Dessert Channel. So sorry about the murder, but life must go on.

Her sleuthing convinced Sinclair that the murderer was from Cutler’s past, not from present-day circumstances. She was proven correct in the denouement. The killer’s long-deceased sister had created the cupcake recipes that were making Cutler a rich woman. Revenge is a dish best served cold.



DEATH OF A CUPCAKE QUEEN (2015) by Lee Hollis (pseudonym of siblings Rick Copp and Holly Simason) is part of a series about Hayley Powell, the Miss Marple of Bar Harbor, Maine. She was the food columnist for the local newspaper, and to prove this is a food cozy, cake or cookie recipes are inserted into the text at intervals, always preceded with a cocktail mix, usually vodka and some kind of fruit juice.

In this novel, Powell is dreading her high school reunion since some of the mean girls from her class will be there. One of them was Ivy Foster, now a success in the cupcake business, with ambitions of expanding nationally. Her success abruptly ended at the reunion when someone bashed her with a blunt instrument while she was arranging her cupcakes on a table.

Besides Foster’s marital problems and her talent for making enemies, there were lots of back stories amongst the high school alumni. Pausing only for recipes whenever someone mentioned a food item in passing, Powell kept everybody and everything stirred up with her snooping. Matters were not helped by one of her newspaper associates, who wanted to write a true-crime book about the bloody reunion.

Foster and others had in their teenaged days been mixed up with a suspicious death. The son of that victim, born out of wedlock, came back for revenge. Powell once again got herself trapped with the murderer but survived. She made it to the Pink Frosted Cupcake recipe on the very last page. It was doubly surprising because that was the only cupcake recipe in the novel.

THE DIVA FROSTS A CUPCAKE (2013) by Krista Davis (pseudonym of Christina Ryplansky) is set in Alexandria, Virginia. The main protagonists were event planners Sophie Winston and Nina Norwood, who were producing the Cupcakes and Puppies fund raiser for animal shelters. The bakeries participating in the event were vicious competitors. Too vicious.

Just before the fund raiser began, Joy Bickford, a partner in Sugar Baby Cupcakes, left that shop and started her own bakery across the street, Sugar Mama Cupcakes. The third combatant was Cake My Day, who basically hovered on the fringes and every so often snuck in a rabbit punch by sabotaging someone’s cupcakes. There was war in heaven and Muffin Pruitt (yes, really) a shopgirl at Sugar Baby Cupcakes, became the first casualty.

The cupcake fund raiser had more than the usual alarms and excursions. Those attending as guests or foot soldiers in the cupcake business had their past histories. Plenty of suspects to go around.

How vicious the cupcake could be was revealed when someone spiked Bickford with hallucinogens. One shop had its cupcakes sabotaged with foul-tasting ingredients, several had break-ins, and adultery was not unknown between some of the bakers. It transpired that one prize several bakers were searching for was a gold cupcake, and not just figuratively.

I had difficulty keeping all the relationships straight. There were two different villains, the murderer and a would-be murderer who didn't succeed at it, although she managed to put several people in hospital. It was all about the cupcake war. If you like military action-adventure, then this novel is for you.

A later novel in this series, the ninth one, was THE DIVA STEALS A CHOCOLATE KISS (2015). By now, Sophie Winston was well established as a murder magnet. The Amore Chocolates company executives failed to Google her name, as a result of which they hired her to produce their 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. There was a chocolate tasting at the mansion of CEO Joe Merano, and a recipe contest. Would it be that simple.

Winston had been getting small boxes of chocolates from an unknown admirer, for a start. The contest didn't go well, with examples of recipes being submitted such as chocolate dill cream roll, and blue cheese brownies. A local celebrity was dissing Amore Chocolates on the Internet because they didn't treat her like a star.

The chocolate tasting was even worse. The table centerpiece, an elaborately carved statue of chocolate, was sabotaged. Joe Merano went missing, and a competitor, Annaud Turnebe of Celebration de Chocolat, was found dead in the mansion. The Meranos might be the best of families, but they could match any white trash when it came to sordid pasts and vengeful relatives. Turnebe had an illegitimate daughter he refused to recognize. It was almost a case of last-man-standing in the chocolate industry.

For those who did remain standing, there was the recipe appendix with Chocolate This and Chocolate That. I think the Chocolate Walnut Zucchini Cake would be better if the zucchini was deleted. Just because zucchini is legal to grow doesn't mean it should be used as food.



**Competitive Baking.**

A PEACH OF A MURDER (2006) by Livia J. Washburn is the first novel of a cozy series about retired schoolteacher and widow Phyllis Newsom of Weatherford, Texas. She ran a boarding house but cooking competitions were the main thing in her life.

As the novel opened, she had her heart set on winning at the Parker County Peach Festival and Sheriff's Posse Rodeo. She had high hopes for her spicy peach cobbler and beating her enemy Carolyn Wilbarger, who had won the competition two years in a row.

The death toll commenced when Newsom and Wilbarger (friendly enemies, not the hate-your-guts type) were picking peaches at the orchard of Newt Bishop. After giving them some bushel baskets, he wandered off to the barn to do some repair work under his car. When next they saw him, he was crushed to death underneath it. Did the jack slip or did someone kick it? The police were suspicious.

Next up was Donnie Boatwright, who sat down at the fair to enjoy Newsom's peach cobbler and promptly dropped dead. Poison it was, boiled out from peach pits to produce a crude cyanide solution, then added to Boatwright's bottled water. As the death toll mounted, Newsom went into the amateur detective business to clear her name and cooking ability.

Sleuthing revealed that Bishop was an abusive father and Boatwright was a date rapist. One of the latter's victims had a brain tumour and decided to cleanse the village before she died. She made a full confession but didn't live to stand trial.



From the funeral to the recipes, beginning with the Spicy Peach Cobbler and then Peaches and Cream Cheesecake. As an old cowhand from the Red Deer River, I was insulted by the cola-baked beef. It is obscene to ruin a perfectly good piece of meat by pouring Coca-Cola over it. Beef was meant to be grilled or broiled to seal in the taste, not covered in sickly sweet sauce.

MURDER BY THE SLICE (2007) is the second installment in the series. The local PTA was raising funds for scholarships and decided to have a baking contest for healthy low-calorie low-fat snacks. This gave pause to Newsom, whose baking usually started at 1,000 calories a piece for appetizers and went up from there.

There was a killer, who stabbed the PTA president Shannon Dunston through the heart using one of Newsom's knives. Dunston was not a popular woman but being a battleaxe shouldn't be reason for murder. However, her ex-relations and family were white trash, some with police records, and many holding grudges that dated back years.

Newsom sorted all that out, although it took a couple of chapters in the denouement to cross off the usual suspects and narrow it down to a thief who specialized in school office equipment. Dunston had found him out and paid for it with her life. The bake sale was disrupted, but for those who really do want low-calorie snacks, there was the recipe appendix. Peanut Butter and Banana Cookies, Low-Fat Pizza Rolls, and Jack-O'Lantern Cake didn't seem especially low-calorie to me.

In particular, the cake recipe called for 3 cups sugar, 1.5 cups butter, 6 eggs, and 1.5 cups milk. That didn't seem right. It didn't include the frosting recipe, which had 8 cups of sugar and 2 sticks of butter. Whew! If that is low-calorie in Texas, no wonder morbid obesity is epidemic.

WEDDING CAKE KILLER (2012) began with the marriage of Eve Turner and Ray Porter, both boarders in Newsom's house. Porter did not long survive the honeymoon. The couple had moved after the ceremony, so the death was not counted against the toll at Newsom's house.

Newsom had prepared a three-tier coconut wedding cake, but then had to prepare a defence for Turner, suspect #1. Newsom was assisted by a fellow Miss Marple, also a boarder, Carolyn Wilbarger. Since this was the seventh novel in the cozy series, Turner reacted strongly, with justification:

*Eve stared wide-eyed at her for several seconds, as if she couldn't comprehend what Phyllis had just told her. Then she said, "You! This is all your fault!"*

*"Eve!" Carolyn exclaimed in horror as Phyllis recoiled from the accusation, just as she would have from a physical slap in the face. "How can you say something like that? Phyllis didn't have anything to do with this. None of us did!"*

*"She did! She's a jinx! She's cursed! Think about all the murders. Did you ever know anybody who had anything to do with murder until people started dropping dead around her?"*

Well said. This time the Marpleing was more difficult. The police brought Newsom into custody for obstruction of justice and interfering with an investigation. She escaped trial but even so it was no fun being booked and brought out into the courtroom as a prisoner.

Porter had been a professional lothario, scamming elderly women of their money. The daughter of one victim took the law into her own hands and was eventually caught. A downbeat ending for Turner, and a rough ride for Newsom, who did little baking. From there to the recipes, most of which involved lots of bacon, cheese, and salt. In other words, typical Texan meals.

Further on in the series was BLACK AND BLUEBERRY DIE (2016), set in a Texas summer. Danny Jackson had just been sent in for 30 years for murdering his wife Roxanne, and asked Phyllis Newsom to help exonerate him. She agreed but her greater concern was getting her central air conditioner repaired. Not a joke in Texas.

Roxanne had a tangled life and had been in the midst of quite a few secrets that people preferred not to be revealed. She took advantage of that with blackmail. As the Marpleing proceeded, another murder occurred. The homicidal mess was only resolved when Newsom worked out that there were two different murderers. Jackson was freed on appeal and it all ended with a slice of pie.

This was a straightforward Miss Marple mystery. Every so often, the author seemed to suddenly remember this was supposed to be a food cozy, and inserted a scene of someone baking a pie. There were recipes though. The Black and Blueberry Pie, of course, and several items such as Chocolate Cherry Slab Pie and Bacon Tomato Pie (more like a Texas version of quiche).

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Lüdecke, T., et al (2018) **Dietary versatility of Early Pleistocene hominins.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:13330-13335

[There are three types of photosynthesis, C<sub>3</sub> (most plants in moist habitats), C<sub>4</sub> (dryland plants, especially grasses), and CAM (desert plants and aquatic plants in nutrient-poor water). Most human food plants are C<sub>3</sub>.]

Authors’ abstract: *Clumped and stable isotope data of paleosol carbonate and fossil tooth enamel inform about paleoenvironments of Early Pleistocene hominins. Data on woodland- vs. grassland-dominated ecosystems, soil temperatures, aridity, and the diet of Homo rudolfensis and Paranthropus boisei ca. 2.4 Ma show that they were adapted to C<sub>3</sub> resources in wooded savanna environments in relatively cool and wet climates in the Malawi Rift.*

*In contrast, time-equivalent Paranthropus living in open and drier settings in the northern East African Rift relied on C<sub>4</sub> plants, a trend that became enhanced after 2 Ma, while southern African Paranthropus persistently relied mainly on C<sub>3</sub> resources. In its early evolutionary history, Homo already showed a high versatility, suggesting that Pleistocene Homo and Paranthropus were already dietary generalists.*

*New geochemical data from the Malawi Rift (Chiwondo Beds, Karonga Basin) fill a major spatial gap in our knowledge of hominin adaptations on a continental scale. Oxygen (d<sup>18</sup>O), carbon (d<sup>13</sup>C), and clumped isotope data on paleosols, hominins, and selected fauna elucidate an unexpected diversity in the Pleistocene hominin diet in the various habitats of the East African Rift System (EARS).*

*Food sources of early Homo and Paranthropus thriving in relatively cool and wet wooded savanna ecosystems along the western shore of paleolake Malawi contained a large fraction of C<sub>3</sub> plant material. Complementary water consumption reconstructions suggest that circa 2.4 Ma, early Homo (Homo rudolfensis) and Paranthropus (Paranthropus boisei) remained rather stationary near freshwater sources along the lake margins.*

*Time-equivalent Paranthropus aethiopicus from the Eastern Rift further north in the EARS consumed a higher fraction of C<sub>4</sub> resources, an adaptation that*

*grew more pronounced with increasing openness of the savanna setting after 2 Ma, while Homo maintained a high versatility. However, southern African Paranthropus robustus had, similar to the Malawi Rift individuals, C<sub>3</sub>-dominated feeding strategies throughout the Early Pleistocene.*

*Collectively, the stable isotope and faunal data presented here document that early Homo and Paranthropus were dietary opportunists and able to cope with a wide range of paleohabitats, which clearly demonstrates their high behavioral flexibility in the African Early Pleistocene.*

Xhang, X.L., et al (2018) **The earliest human occupation of the high-altitude Tibetan Plateau 40 thousand to 30 thousand years ago.** SCIENCE 362:1049-1051

Authors’ abstract: *Human colonization of the high-altitude Tibetan Plateau has generally been thought to have been confined to the past few thousand years of the Holocene. Zhang et al. report an investigation of the Nwya Devu archaeological site in central Tibet, 4600 meters above sea level, with Paleolithic occupation dates of ~40 thousand to 30 thousand years ago.*

*The site has yielded a range of stone tools, indicating the adaptive ability of early modern humans to the harsh environment of the “roof of the world.” The findings also suggest that people from Tibet and Siberia may have interacted at this time.*

*The Tibetan Plateau is the highest and one of the most demanding environments ever inhabited by humans. We investigated the timing and mechanisms of its initial colonization at the Nwya Devu site, located nearly 4600 meters above sea level.*

*This site, dating from 40,000 to 30,000 years ago, is the highest Paleolithic archaeological site yet identified globally. Nwya Devu has yielded an abundant blade tool assemblage, indicating hitherto-unknown capacities for the survival of modern humans who camped in this environment. This site deepens the history of the peopling of the “roof of the world” and the antiquity of human high-altitude occupations more generally.*



Kletetschka, G., et al (2018) **Cosmic-impact event in lake sediments from Central Europe postdates the Laacher See eruption and marks onset of the Younger Dryas.** JOURNAL OF GEOLOGY 126:561-575.

[The Younger Dryas period was a mini-ice age caused by an asteroid impact in the northern hemisphere, just after humans developed agriculture. The Laacher See is an extinct volcano in central Germany that last erupted 12,800 years ago and wiped out the local human population.]

Authors' abstract: *The Younger Dryas (YD) climate episode (~12,850 to 11,650 calendar years before present [cal BP]) is an event recorded widely across the Northern Hemisphere. We conducted multiple analyses at high resolution of a YD-age sedimentary sequence from Stara Jimka, a paleolake in the Bohemian Forest, Czech Republic.*

*Age-depth modeling indicates that a central European warming trend was interrupted at about  $13,020 \pm 110$  cal BP by the sudden onset of cooling (<20 y) known as the Gerzensee climate oscillation and marked by the deposition of fine-grained sediment at this location.*

*That cooling episode ended at cal BP and was followed by a ~121-y-long warming trend. After that, the Laacher See tephra depositional event, dating to  $\sim 12,820 \pm 20$  cal BP, continued an overall warming trend.*

*The composition of Laacher See volcanic tephra in this section likely corresponds to the middle eruption sequence. Finally, the deposition of glassy microspherules marked the onset of the YD climate change at  $12,755 \pm 92$  cal BP.*

*The sequence across the YD onset is marked by*  
*(1) a peak in glassy microspherules ( $>17,000/\text{kg}$ ),*  
*(2) a peak in framboidal spherules ( $>4,000/\text{kg}$ ),*  
*(3) significant changes in the lake's weathering proxies, and*  
*(4) major changes in fauna and flora, showing a shift to unfavorable environmental conditions (decrease in temperature and lake trophic status).*  
*Collectively, this evidence is consistent with the YD impact hypothesis and evidence of one or more cosmic airburst events occurring at this time.*

Igor V. Chechushkov, I.V., and A.V. Epimakhov (2018) **Eurasian Steppe chariots and social complexity during the Bronze Age.** JOURNAL OF WORLD PREHISTORY 31:435-483

Authors' abstract: *This paper aims to examine some societal principles that underlie the development of horse-drawn chariots in Inner Eurasia during the Middle and Late Bronze Age (cal. 2050 to 1750 BC). Analysis is based on an evaluation and re-examination of the archaeological evidence for horse-drawn chariots, and the social constructs they entail.*

*Chariots were developed in the zone of the Northern Eurasian steppes before c. 2000 BC in the context of complex but stateless societies. Because chariots depend on a set of developed skills, valuable resources, and complicated technologies, which involve several outstanding improvements to previously known solutions, they require specific conditions for their development and maintenance in social life.*

*Most fundamentally, they require a group of people with an interest in this complex technology: a class of military elites characterized by aggrandizing behavior. The competition between collectives of military elites for resources, power and prestige brought into life the earliest chariot complex in the world.*

Jeong, C., et al (2018) **Bronze Age population dynamics and the rise of dairy pastoralism on the eastern Eurasian steppe.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1813608115

Authors' abstract: *Since the Bronze Age, pastoralism has been a dominant subsistence mode on the Western steppe, but the origins of this tradition on the Eastern steppe are poorly understood. Here we investigate a putative early pastoralist population in northern Mongolia and find that dairy production was established on the Eastern steppe by 1300 BCE.*

*Milk proteins preserved in dental calculus indicate an early focus on Western domesticated ruminants rather than local species, but genetic ancestry analysis indicates minimal admixture with Western steppe herders, suggesting that dairy pastoralism was introduced through adoption by local hunter-gatherers rather than population replacement.*

*Recent paleogenomic studies have shown that migrations of Western steppe herders (WSH) beginning in the Eneolithic (ca. 3300 to 2700 BCE) profoundly transformed the genes and cultures of Europe and central Asia. Compared with Europe, however, the eastern extent of this WSH expansion is not well defined.*

*Here we present genomic and proteomic data from 22 directly dated Late Bronze Age burials putatively associated with early pastoralism in northern Mongolia (ca. 1380 to 975 BCE). Genome-wide analysis reveals that they are largely descended from a population represented by Early Bronze Age hunter-gatherers in the Baikal region, with only a limited contribution (~7%) of WSH ancestry.*

*At the same time, however, mass spectrometry analysis of dental calculus provides direct protein evidence of bovine, sheep, and goat milk consumption in seven of nine individuals. No individuals showed molecular evidence of lactase persistence, and only one individual exhibited evidence of >10% WSH ancestry, despite the presence of WSH populations in the nearby Altai-Sayan region for more than a millennium.*

*Unlike the spread of Neolithic farming in Europe and the expansion of Bronze Age pastoralism on the Western steppe, our results indicate that ruminant dairy pastoralism was adopted on the Eastern steppe by local hunter-gatherers through a process of cultural transmission and minimal genetic exchange with outside groups.*

Kistler, L., et al (2018) **Multiproxy evidence highlights a complex evolutionary legacy of maize in South America.** SCIENCE 362:1309-1313

*Authors' abstract: Maize originated in what is now central Mexico about 9,000 years ago and spread throughout the Americas before European contact. ... The origin of modern maize cultivars likely involved a "semidomesticated" lineage that moved out of Mexico. Later improvements then occurred among multiple South American populations, including those in southwestern Amazonia.*

*Domesticated maize evolved from wild teosinte under human influences in Mexico beginning around 9000 years before the present (yr B.P.), traversed Central America by ~7500 yr B.P., and spread into South America by ~6500 yr B.P. Landrace and archaeological maize genomes from South America suggest*

*that the ancestral population to South American maize was brought out of the domestication center in Mexico and became isolated from the wild teosinte gene pool before traits of domesticated maize were fixed.*

*Deeply structured lineages then evolved within South America out of this partially domesticated progenitor population. Genomic, linguistic, archaeological, and paleoecological data suggest that the southwestern Amazon was a secondary improvement center for partially domesticated maize. Multiple waves of human-mediated dispersal are responsible for the diversity and biogeography of modern South American maize.*

*Speirs: Maize is what Canadians and Americans call corn, scientific name *Zea mays*. It is a cultigen, a human-created species that never existed in nature, and was bred by Mexican aboriginal farmers who noticed a freak form of teosinte grass with large seeds that did not drop away from the cob when ripe. This made it easy to harvest and encouraged further artificial breeding that eventually produced modern corn.*

Zarrillo, S., et al (2018) **The use and domestication of *Theobroma cacao* during the mid-Holocene in the upper Amazon.** NATURE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 2:1879-1888

[Everyone likes chocolate, even 5,300 years ago.]

*Authors' abstract: *Cacao* (*Theobroma cacao* L.) is an important economic crop, yet studies of its domestication history and early uses are limited. Traditionally, cacao is thought to have been first domesticated in Mesoamerica. However, genomic research shows that *T. cacao*'s greatest diversity is in the upper Amazon region of northwest South America, pointing to this region as its centre of origin.*

*Here, we report cacao use identified by three independent lines of archaeological evidence, cacao starch grains, absorbed theobromine residues and ancient DNA, dating from approximately 5,300 years ago recovered from the Santa Ana-La Florida (SALF) site in southeast Ecuador. To our knowledge, these findings constitute the earliest evidence of *T. cacao* use in the Americas and the first unequivocal archaeological example of its pre-Columbian use in South America. They also reveal the upper Amazon region as the oldest centre of cacao domestication yet identified.*



Karatzas, K., et al (2018) **Google Trends reflect allergic rhinitis symptoms related to birch and grass pollen seasons.** AEROBIOLOGIA 34:437-444

Authors' abstract: *Google Trends (GT) describes the variation of the relevant interest of Internet searches toward medical conditions and related symptoms. Allergic rhinitis symptom levels result from the intensity of exposure to aeroallergens in combination with relevant medication use. We analyze data from Germany to examine the relationship between hay fever-related Google search terms, symptom levels, medication use, and pollen count levels.*

*For doing so, we also employ the new definitions on pollen season and peak pollen period start and end as proposed by the European Academy of Allergy and Clinical Immunology in a recently published position paper. We extract GT data for a number of search terms related to allergic rhinitis for Germany. We use total nasal symptom and medication scores as reported by patients via a patient hay fever diary in the Berlin and Brandenburg areas in Germany for 3 years (2014-2016), accompanied by pollen data. Then a Pearson and Spearman correlation analysis is performed between symptom data and GT data. A graphical analysis is conducted, and the identification of pollen season and peak pollen periods is done based on the EAACI criteria.*

*The analysis reveals that GT data are highly correlated with symptom levels and follow peak pollen period start-end, concerning grass and birch pollen-induced allergic rhinitis symptoms. GT data can be used as a proxy for the identification of the onset and variation of nasal symptom and medication score for allergic rhinitis sufferers.*

Burke, K.D., et al (2018) **Pliocene and Eocene provide best analogs for near-future climates.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:13288-13293

Authors' abstract: *As the world warms due to rising greenhouse gas concentrations, the Earth system moves toward climate states without societal precedent, challenging adaptation. Past Earth system states offer possible model systems for the warming world of the coming decades. These include the climate states of the Early Eocene (ca. 50 Ma), the Mid-Pliocene (3.3-3.0 Ma), the Last Interglacial (129-116 ka), the Mid-Holocene (6 ka), preindustrial (ca. 1850 CE), and the 20th century.*

*Here, we quantitatively assess the similarity of future projected climate states to these six geohistorical benchmarks using simulations from the Hadley Centre Coupled Model Version 3 (HadCM3), the Goddard Institute for Space Studies Model E2-R (GISS), and the Community Climate System Model, Versions 3 and 4 (CCSM) Earth system models.*

*Under the Representative Concentration Pathway 8.5 (RCP8.5) emission scenario, by 2030 CE, future climates most closely resemble Mid-Pliocene climates, and by 2150 CE, they most closely resemble Eocene climates. Under RCP4.5, climate stabilizes at Pliocene-like conditions by 2040 CE. Pliocene-like and Eocene-like climates emerge first in continental interiors and then expand outward.*

*Geologically novel climates are uncommon in RCP4.5 (<1%) but reach 8.7% of the globe under RCP8.5, characterized by high temperatures and precipitation. Hence, RCP4.5 is roughly equivalent to stabilizing at Pliocene-like climates, while unmitigated emission trajectories, such as RCP8.5, are similar to reversing millions of years of long-term cooling on the scale of a few human generations. Both the emergence of geologically novel climates and the rapid reversion to Eocene-like climates may be outside the range of evolutionary adaptive capacity.*

Thaker, M., et al (2018) **Wind farms have cascading impacts ecosystems across trophic levels.** NATURE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 2:1854-1858

Authors' abstract: *In the biodiversity hotspot of the Western Ghats in India, we find that wind farms reduce the abundance and activity of predatory birds (for example, Buteo, Butastur and Elanus species), which consequently increases the density of lizards, Sarada superba. The cascading effects of wind turbines on lizards include changes in behaviour, physiology and morphology that reflect a combination of predator release and density-dependent competition.*

*By adding an effective trophic level to the top of food webs, we find that wind farms have emerging impacts that are greatly underestimated. There is thus a strong need for an ecosystem-wide view when aligning green energy goals with environment protection.*

Van Arsdale, R.B., et al (2019) **Quaternary uplift in the Lower Mississippi River valley.** JOURNAL OF GEOLOGY 127:1-13

[“Isostatic” means the sinking or lifting of a continent as continental ice sheets grew and weighted down the bedrock or melted away and released the pressure. North America is currently lifting up as the glaciers melt away, which is why no sea level rises have afflicted it. As the continent rose, readjustment of the bedrock caused the New Madrid earthquake of 1811. The Quaternary period is the era of the ice ages.]

Authors’ abstract: *Discontinuous high-level terrace remnants of the ~3.1 Ma ancestral Mississippi River floodplain, locally called the Upland Complex (UC), are mapped from Louisiana into Illinois. We interpret the UC to be the basal sand and gravel erosional remnant of a much thicker Pliocene floodplain. The Pliocene Mississippi River, at the latitude of Tennessee, has a base-of-terrace elevation 70 m higher than the base of the Holocene Mississippi River floodplain.*

*This difference cannot be attributed solely to changes in sea level and suggests Quaternary uplift that may be ongoing. Borehole data reveal that the base of the UC and that of the Mississippi River alluvium have been tilted southeast. The geomorphology of the central Mississippi River Valley also supports regional Quaternary uplift. Mississippi and Ohio/Mississippi river terrace distribution reveals that these rivers shifted away from the down-valley axis during the Wisconsin, and basin asymmetry analysis also indicates Quaternary tributary valley migrations away from this axis.*

*Pliocene sea level is estimated to have been at +25 m, requiring that the UC has risen 45 (70 - 25) m within the past ~2.4 My. We believe this 45-m uplift may be isostatic. However, 15 m of overlying Pleistocene loess deposition would result in 8 m of isostatic subsidence, suggesting an original isostatic uplift of 53 (45 + 8) m. A 53-m isostatic uplift response indicates that 141 m of the UC was eroded. Since the current average thickness of the UC is 10 m, its original thickness was 151 m.*

*This proposed isostatic response to Pleistocene erosion of the Mississippi River Valley supports the denudation model for Quaternary reactivation of the underlying Reelfoot rift faults and its New Madrid seismic zone and suggests that uplift mechanisms should be considered in the denudation model.*

Piecuch, C.G., et al (2018) **Origin of spatial variation in US East Coast sea-level trends during 1900 to 2017.** NATURE 564:400-404

Authors’ abstract: *Identifying the causes of historical trends in relative sea level, the height of the sea surface relative to Earth’s crust, is a prerequisite for predicting future changes. Rates of change along the eastern coast of the USA (the US East Coast) during the past century were spatially variable, and relative sea level rose faster along the Mid-Atlantic Bight than along the South Atlantic Bight and the Gulf of Maine. Past studies suggest that Earth’s ongoing response to the last deglaciation, surface redistribution of ice and water, and changes in ocean circulation contributed considerably to this large-scale spatial pattern.*

*Here we analyse instrumental data and proxy reconstructions using probabilistic methods to show that vertical motions of Earth’s crust exerted the dominant control on regional spatial differences in relative sea level trends along the US East Coast during 1900-2017, explaining most of the large-scale spatial variance.*

*Rates of coastal subsidence caused by ongoing relaxation of the peripheral forebulge associated with the last deglaciation are strongest near North Carolina, Maryland and Virginia. Such structure indicates that Earth’s elastic lithosphere is thicker than has been assumed in other models.*

*We also find a substantial coastal gradient in relative sea-level trends over this period that is unrelated to deglaciation and suggests contributions from twentieth-century redistribution of ice and water. Our results indicate that the majority of large-scale spatial variation in long-term rates of relative sea-level rise on the US East Coast is due to geological processes that will persist at similar rates for centuries.*

Xu, H., et al (2018) **Flight of an aeroplane with solid-state propulsion.** NATURE 563:532-535

Authors’ abstract: *Electroaerodynamics, in which electrical forces accelerate ions in a fluid, has been proposed as an alternative method of propelling aeroplanes, without moving parts, nearly silently and without combustion emissions. However, no aeroplane with such a solid-state propulsion system has yet flown.*



*Here we demonstrate that a solid-state propulsion system can sustain powered flight, by designing and flying an electroaerodynamically propelled heavier-than-air aeroplane. We flew a fixed-wing aeroplane with a five-metre wingspan ten times and showed that it achieved steady-level flight. All batteries and power systems, including a specifically developed ultralight high-voltage (40-kilovolt) power converter, were carried on-board.*

*We show that conventionally accepted limitations in thrust-to-power ratio and thrust density, which were previously thought to make electroaerodynamics unfeasible as a method of aeroplane propulsion, are surmountable. We provide a proof of concept for electroaerodynamic aeroplane propulsion, opening up possibilities for aircraft and aerodynamic devices that are quieter, mechanically simpler and do not emit combustion emissions.*

Klein, N., and E. O'Brien (2018) **People use less information than they think to make up their minds.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:13222-13227

*Authors' abstract: People readily categorize things as good or bad, a welcome adaptation that enables action and reduces information overload. The present research reveals an unforeseen consequence. People do not fully appreciate this immediacy of judgment, instead assuming that they and others will consider more information before forming conclusions than they and others actually do.*

*This discrepancy in perceived versus actual information use reveals a general psychological bias that bears particular relevance in today's information age. Presumably, one hopes that easy access to abundant information fosters uniformly more-informed opinions and perspectives.*

*The present research suggests mere access is not enough: Even after paying costs to acquire and share ever-more information, people then stop short and do not incorporate it into their judgments.*

*A world where information is abundant promises unprecedented opportunities for information exchange. Seven studies suggest these opportunities work better in theory than in practice. People fail to anticipate how quickly minds change, believing that they and others will evaluate more evidence before making up their minds than they and others actually do.*

*From evaluating peers, marriage prospects, and political candidates to evaluating novel foods, goods, and services, people consume far less information than expected before deeming things good or bad. Accordingly, people acquire and share too much information in impression-formation contexts.*

*People overvalue long-term trials, overpay for decision aids, and overwork to impress others, neglecting the speed at which conclusions will form. In today's information age, people may intuitively believe that exchanging ever-more information will foster better informed opinions and perspectives, but much of this information may be lost on minds long made up.*

Zwick, A., and Z. Spicer (2018) **Good or bad? Ridesharing's impact on Canadian cities.** CANADIAN GEOGRAPHER 62:430-436

*Authors' abstract: Ridesharing, and Uber specifically, has experienced phenomenal growth in the last five years, which has upended the taxi industry in Canadian cities. Zwick argues that ridesharing has been detrimental to Canadian cities because it compromises safety standards, increases precarious labour, and intensifies congestion. Spicer argues that ridesharing has been a positive for Canadian cities because it generates consumer surplus, creates new employment opportunities, and disrupts a broken market.*

Speirs: A definite maybe.

Akerlof, G.A., and P. Michailat (2018) **Persistence of false paradigms in low-power sciences.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:13228-13233

*Authors' abstract: It is believed that a lack of experimental evidence (typical in the social sciences) slows but does not prevent the adoption of true theories. We evaluate this belief using a model of scientific research and promotion in which tenured scientists are slightly biased toward tenure candidates with similar beliefs.*

*We find that when a science lacks evidence to discriminate between theories, or when tenure decisions do not rely on available evidence, true theories may not be adopted. The nonadoption of heliocentric theory in the 16th century, the*

*persistence of bloodletting in the 19th century, the nonadoption of underconsumption theory in the early 20th century, and the persistence of radical mastectomy in the 20th century illustrate such risk.*

*We develop a model describing how false paradigms may persist, hindering scientific progress. The model features two paradigms, one describing reality better than the other. Tenured scientists display homophily: They favor tenure candidates who adhere to their paradigm. As in statistics, power is the probability (absent any bias) of denying tenure to scientists adhering to the false paradigm.*

*The model shows that because of homophily, when power is low, the false paradigm may prevail. Then, only an increase in power can ignite convergence to the true paradigm. Historical case studies suggest that low power comes either from lack of empirical evidence or from reluctance to base tenure decisions on available evidence.*

**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  
Etobicoke, Ontario 2018-12-30

OPUNTIA #430: [Re: recent mass media reports of Alberta separatism] I lived in British Columbia when the Western Canada Concept party was in operations. The separatist nonsense sounded more and more like children have a massive temper tantrum. I hope Doug Christie has found his well-deserved anonymity. I’ve already seen the term Alberexit, from the latest generation of children.

[There is no real separatist movement in Alberta, just a few noisy publicity hounds who know how to get quoted in the national news as if they were a genuine movement.]

Yea, the Stamps won the Grey Cup! Excellent. The Cup moves about most years, and I am sure the Argos will be in better shape to win it in a few years. I have heard the idea of an expansion franchise somewhere in the Maritimes.

[Re: cozy mysteries] We always watched MURDER SHE WROTE, but we figured that Jessica Fletcher was a murder magnet, and it wasn’t safe to be around her, or she was actually responsible for every murder she investigated, making her the world’s worst serial killer.

OPUNTIA #431: Our Christmas Eve tradition is to drive around some of the adjoining neighbourhoods nearby, and see what light displays there are. Close to us is a fairly rich area called Markland Woods, and once again, they did not disappoint. One house seemed coated in lights, as did his property surrounding the house. I wouldn’t want his electricity bill. I noticed only the bare minimum decorations at the local malls.

Christmas was great fun, and tomorrow night is New Year’s. I never hear about local New Year’s Eve parties, and we might go out to our favorite local, or simply stay home. We always hear about the parties after they happen, that’s how it works around here.