

# OPUNTIA 436





**Middle February 2019**

**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.

**GLOW FESTIVAL 2019**

2019-02-14

photos by Dale Speirs

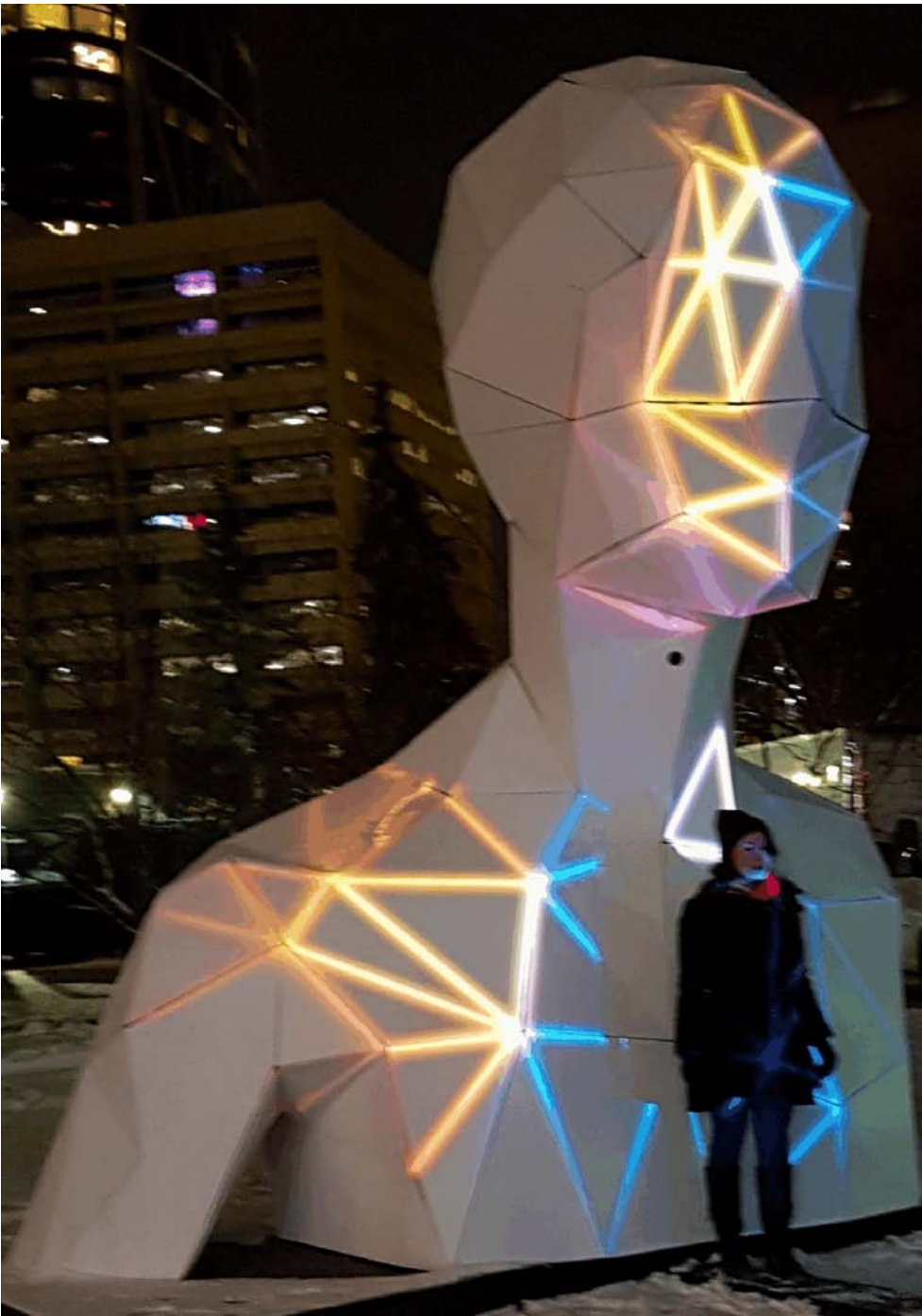
In 2017, the inaugural Glow Festival was held in downtown Calgary. The idea was to break up the long darkness between New Year’s Day and Easter by having a festival of lights on the Family Day weekend in February. I wrote that up in OPUNTIA #368. The organizers weren’t able to get funding for 2018, but came back this year with a fresh set of sponsors.

We had a mild winter from November to January, with temperatures ranging from -5° to -15°C. However, it turned chillier in February and has been averaging -20° to -25°C as the winter returned to normal. Nonetheless, Cowtowners were out and about without the hysteria that Americans get into over these things. They called it the polar vortex; we called it winter as usual.

I went downtown to see the Glow Festival. I’ll start with the Olympic Plaza, the heart of the city, although my actual route was in a different order. The cover and the photo below show “Rhizome” by Tom and Lien Dekyvere.



“The Face” by Illuminart. The lights reacted to whomever was standing in front of it.







“The Luminuits” by La Camaraderie was a set of three black sculptures. In available light they were dull black. If, however, they were photographed with a flash camera, they lit up as seen here.



Human curling is a popular activity at the Olympic Plaza skating rink, although normally people use inner tubes. Glow Festival provided giant luminescent ice cubes to keep the kids busy.



The next few pages are displays on Stephen Avenue Mall, although not in geographical order because the photos wouldn't fit properly on the page that way.



The Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall (8 Avenue South) begins at the Olympic Plaza and runs west to 4 Street SW. Below are planters on the avenue at the plaza.







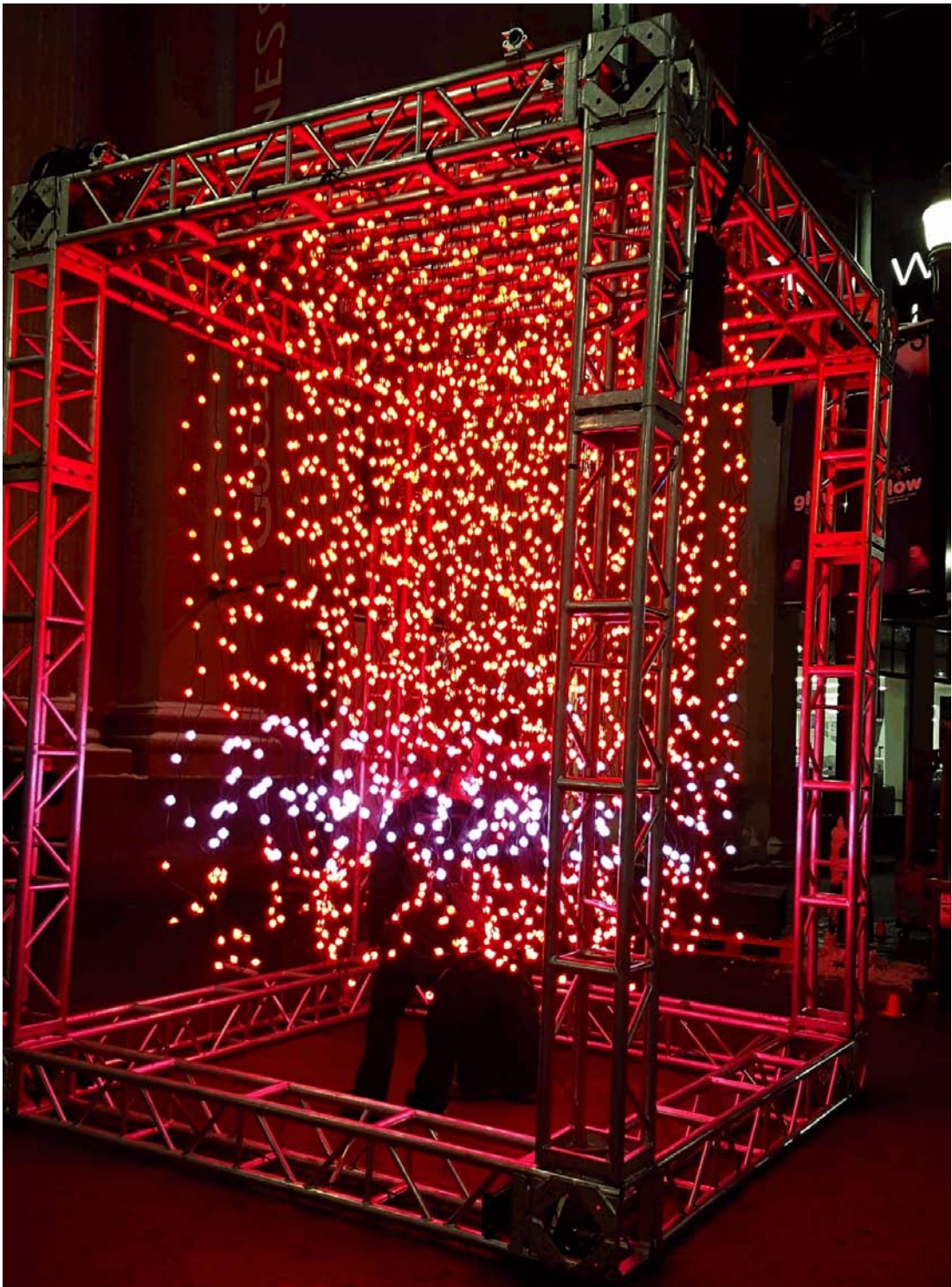
Along one block of Stephen Avenue were numerous teeter-totters. These were giant LED poles. They look like they are painted white but they are actually luminescent and flicked the white light on and off as people rode them. Unfortunately the camera shutter speed was just too slow in the darkness and wouldn't give me any photos of the white lights flashing.

The green bicycles are rentals by a company called LimeE, the two-wheeled equivalent of Car2Go. Just tap a smart card on the rear basket and the bicycle will unlock its wheels for the ride. They can be left anywhere in central Calgary and are tracked by GPS. Calgary has a network of bike lanes, so people ride bicycles, theirs or LimeE, all year round.





“Cube” by Steve Burak. Walk inside it and the light strings began changing colour.



No, not the Time Tunnel, but “The Passage” by Serge Maheu. Walk along it and the colours followed.

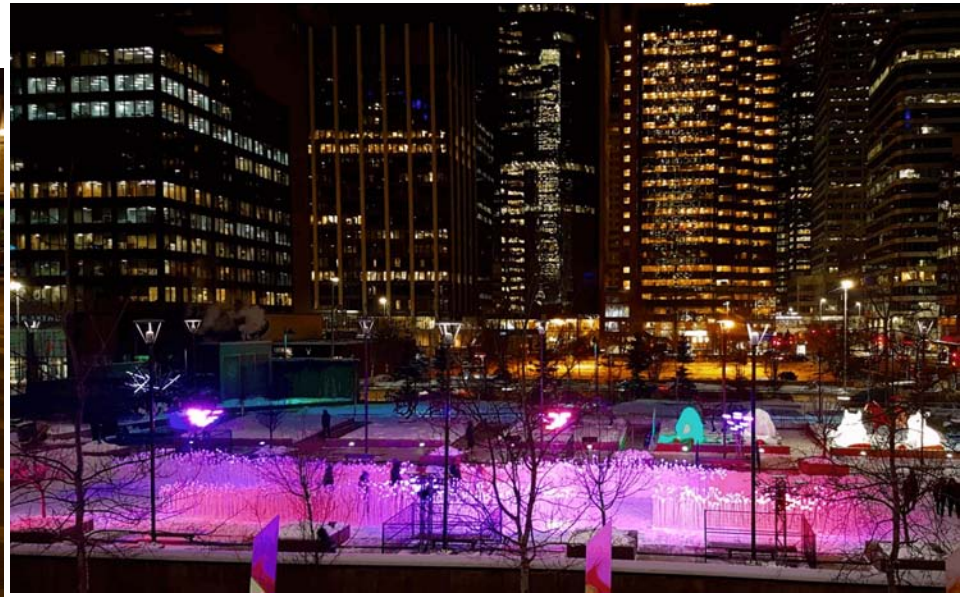




From there to 7 Avenue South. At the Brookfield Place skyscraper plaza was “Winter Oasis” by the Phi Collective. The green plants were real, but the flowers were LEDs. The temperature at the time was -20°C.



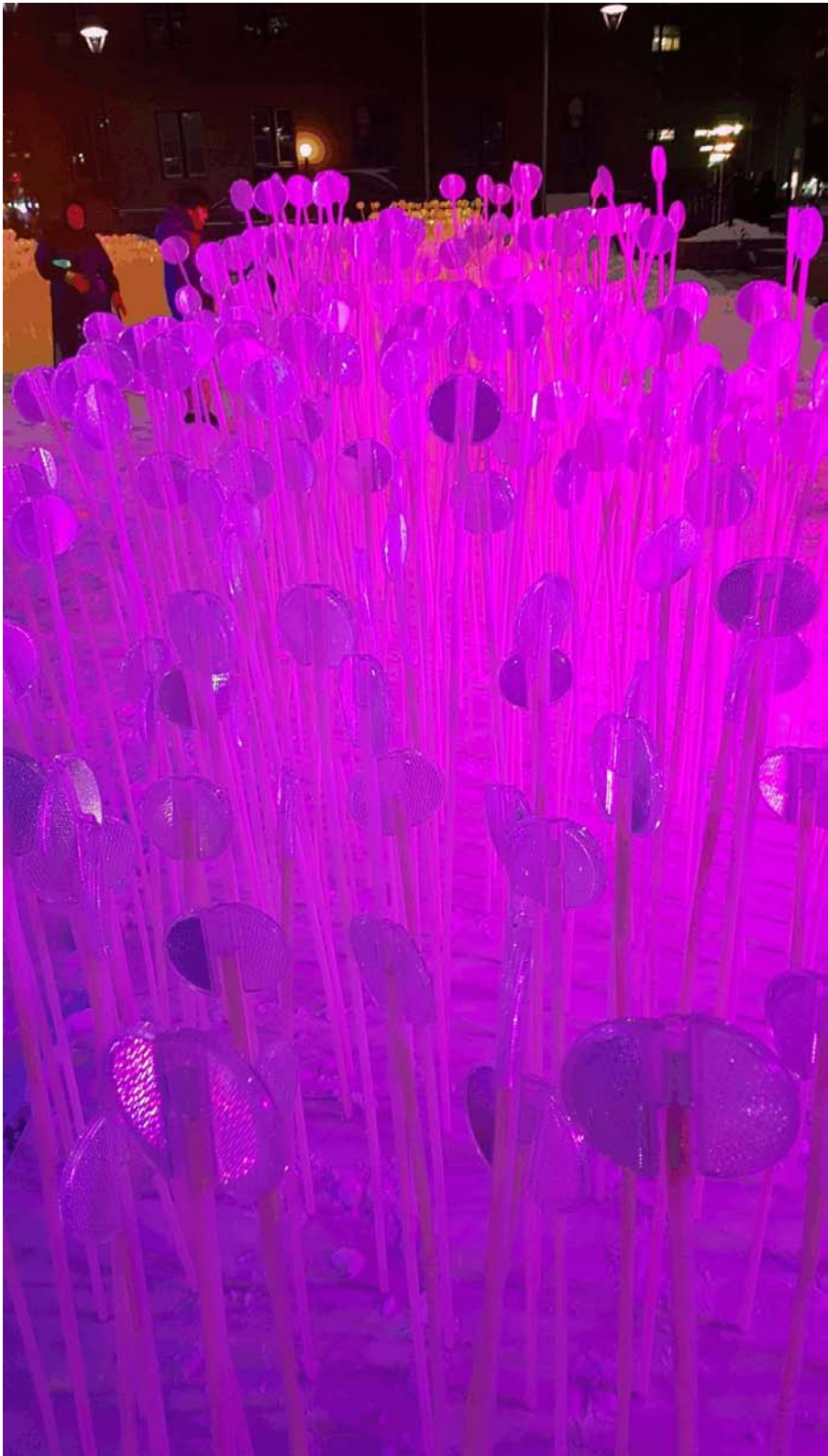
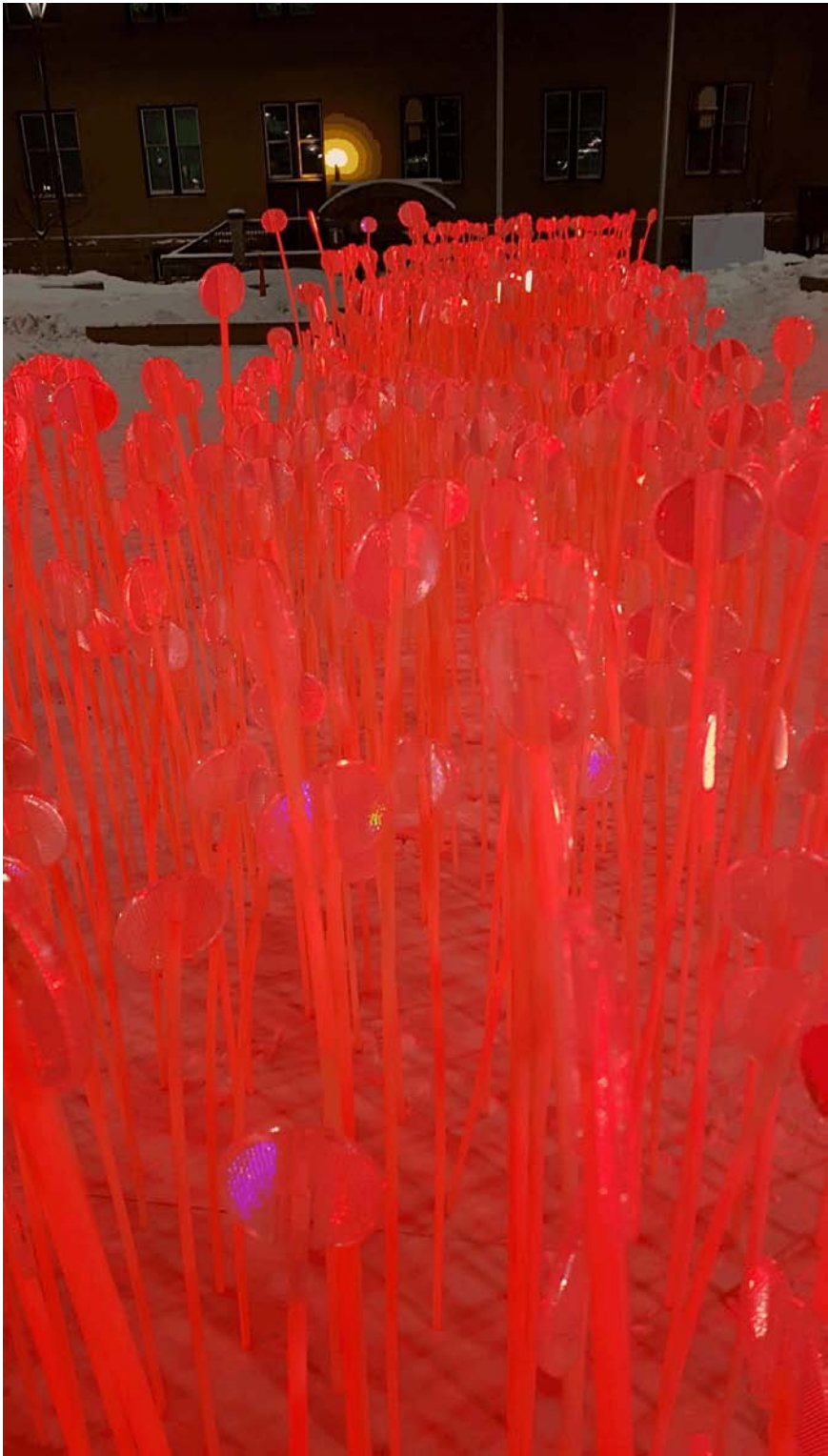
Further down the avenue, photographed from the 4 Street SW LRT station, is Harley Hotchkiss Park. Below and next page were some of its exhibits.



“Wish Tree” by Pitaya



“Entre Les Rangs” by Kanva was rows of wands constantly changing colour.





# FOOD COZIES: PART 4

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA's #432, 433, and 434.]

## Doughnuts (Krapfen If You Want Them In Germany).

Before beginning this section, a comment about nomenclature. I use the Canadian spelling ‘doughnut’. In the novels reviewed here, the American spelling ‘donut’ is used only when I am quoting directly from their text.

SINISTER SPRINKLES (2010) by Jessica Beck is a novel in a cozy series about Suzanne Hart of April Springs, North Carolina, who operated a doughnut shop in the village. She had a complicated life and, being a murder magnet, could be relied upon to find a corpse faster than any police sniffer dog.

The novel opened with the famous joke by stand-up comedian Mitch Hedberg: *“I bought a donut and they gave me a receipt. When will I ever need to prove that I bought a donut?”*

This time around, Hart’s ex-husband Max had cheated on her with Darlene Higgins, who then left him. Nonetheless, when Higgins was murdered, Hart leaped into the fray. The village was hosting its Winter Festival, so in addition to her shop, she was also operating a booth in the street fair.

Higgins died in Chapter 1, wearing another woman’s coat. Everyone wondered which woman was the intended target. Unsettling it was, which is probably why the novel suddenly stopped for a recipe, Apple Cider Donuts, before proceeding to Chapter 2.

As the chapters and recipes alternated with each other, Hart managed to get in some Marpleing while standing behind the shop counter. She interrogated her customers as they stepped up for doughnuts and coffee. The Deppity Dawgs returned the compliment, making it clear she was a suspect. It didn’t help that Max dropped out of sight and they thought she was sheltering him.

Higgins had been stealing from a shop owner she worked for, who then took the ultimate revenge. The trail was muddled by a fraud artist running assorted scams in town. He got his comeuppance as well.

TRAGIC TOPPINGS (2011) began with the disappearance of local resident Emily Hargraves. Suzanne Hart was apparently the last to see her, supplying a special order of a blueberry doughnut with chocolate icing, sprinkles, and a gummy on top. Ex-husband Max went missing again but he did that regularly so you can ignore that part of the plot.

Pausing only for the Buttermilk Donut Variation recipe at the end of Chapter 2, Hart got herself mixed into the investigation. Taking a stroll through the park, she found the body of Tim Leander, the village handyman, swinging on a rope from a tree branch. Three squad cars plus the Chief of Police responded to her 9-1-1 call. That might seem excessive for a crossroads village until one remembers they have a Miss Marple in their midst.

The usual melodramas were played out. One was unusual, when the doughnut shop ran an advertisement with an error that offered a dozen doughnuts for a dollar. That flooded the shop with customers, but Hart got off lucky because with sales tax the actual amount was a bit over a dollar, and many customers told her to keep the change. Nor did everyone buy a full dozen. If you can eat a dozen doughnuts in one sitting, you’re probably a science fiction fan.

In any event, the chapters and recipes came and went. After a pause for a Chocolate Donut recipe, the bloody denouement began. The murderer was a cuckolded man who almost got Hart, but she was faster with a knife. Tim Horton never had this sort of trouble in his day.

KILLER CRULLERS (2012) certainly lived up to its title. Suzanne Hart’s doughnut shop had a stranger come in and buy a box of a dozen crullers with extra topping. He then took them next door to a secondhand shop owned by Gabby Williams, and began throwing them at her and the storefront. The man, Desmond Ray, accused Williams of stealing family valuables.

After a timeout for an Eggnog Donut recipe, the action resumed with Ray’s body being found in the strip of grass between the two shops. Williams was an obvious suspect, but given Hart’s record as a murder magnet, the police included her name on the list.

The next of kin and friends of the Ray family were obvious suspects to Miss Marple, pardon me, Suzanne Hart. She did her investigation while running the doughnut shop. She got complaints from customers about poor service, not surprising since she wasn’t giving her full attention to the job. It all came



down to a family acquaintance who had been stealing from them. The traditional confrontation with the killer took place in a corn field.

The final recipe was for a Bacon Donut Burger. The author, no doubt on advice of the publisher's legal counsel, prefaced the recipe with a health warning. I'm surprised they even let the recipe stand. The ingredients were a glazed doughnut sliced horizontally as a bun, 1.5 pounds of grilled hamburger, two slices of processed cheese, and two slices of bacon. If that doesn't give you a gall bladder attack, nothing will.

DROP DEAD CHOCOLATE (2012) had those who survived eating a Bacon Donut Burger all atwitter over the upcoming mayoral election. Suzanne Hart's mother was running against the incumbent mayor Cam Hamilton. It was a dirty campaign.

After a brief pause for a doughnut recipe called Chocolate Sugar Bombs, the real bomb went off when Hamilton's body was found bludgeoned to death inside a building Momma owned. Her plan to win voters by handing out free Chocolate Sugar Bombs to voters was stymied.

Hart's investigation turned up suspicious real estate dealings of the mayor. Her ex-husband Max showed up to annoy her but as usual he was superfluous to the plot. Once a recipe for Apple Yeast Donuts was out of the way, the action moved to its climax as a corrupt contractor who really resented the mayor tried to clear away loose ends with his handgun. One of those loose ends was Hart.

There was a struggle, etcetera and all that, and so to the election night. That produced a surprise winner, and no, not Momma.

POWDERED PERIL (2012) continued the bloodshed with Suzanne Hart in the middle of it as always. Her friend Grace Gauge found out her boyfriend Peter Morgan had been cheating on her. He became the next victim in April Springs, which by now had a murder rate that would frighten Chicago gang members. He dragged in Hart by splashing yellow paint on her storefront, some of which was found on his feet and clothing.

The two women began sleuthing, behaving as if they were licenced private investigators. Snooping about in one house, they found a wad of banknotes, \$3,000 in total. Taking a quick break for Fried Apple Raisin Donuts, they continued contaminating evidence and antagonizing witnesses.

The killer was one of Morgan's many ex-girlfriends, who wanted in on his blackmailing operations. After the held-at-gunpoint scene, justice was served. There was a cameo appearance in the middle of the book by the village blacksmith James Settle. He had a bit part when he clashed with Hart over the way his business interfered with hers. Pay attention to him.

ILLEGALLY ICED (2013) opened with the murder of James Settle (see? I told you so.) The poor fellow died on page 2 without a speaking part. Since he and Suzanne Hart had just been feuding, she was a suspect. Page 7 had an unbelievable line when Hart said: "*Murder didn't visit our sleepy little town every day.*" Not much it didn't, although she was technically correct since the murders happened once a month, not every day. Chapter 1 concluded with a recipe for Fried Cinnamon Toast. What, no doughnuts?

During their investigation, Hart and Gauge learned that Settle had been heir to a family fortune. All sorts of melodramas were uncovered along the way, with frequent stops for all sorts of fried doughy food. The gunpoint ending was particularly idiotic. The murderer was a woman jilted by Settle.

All the evidence against the killer was unusable in court thanks to Hart and Gauge, but the woman solved the problem by blubbering a confession. At least the Cherry Bomb doughnuts were good.



*Salted caramel (left) and s'more doughnuts, from the Jelly outlet in downtown Calgary.*



**SURVIVAL OF THE FRITTERS** (2018) by Ginger Bolton (pseudonym of Janet Bolin) was the first novel in a new cozy series about Emily Westhill of Fallingbrook, Wisconsin. She was a widow in partnership with her father-in-law, a retired police chief. They operated Deputy Donut, named after her cat.

A regular customer Georgia Treetor went missing at the start of the book, but was found dead that evening in her home, surrounded by stale doughnuts. It was the fifth anniversary of her son's murder. Westhill began tracing the connections between the two murders and the histories of several families, in between serving fritters and dealing with obnoxious customers. Every business has them.

The murderer had killed the son from jealousy over a mutual girlfriend, then his mother because she might have new evidence. The killer had the usual confrontation with Miss Marple, or rather the Widow Westhill, only with a rolling pin instead of a handgun.

And so to the recipes appendix, starting with Cranberry Orange Walnut Fritters and then Fudge Drizzle Donuts. Pardon me while I make a quick run to the nearest Tim Hortons doughnut shop.

**GOODBYE CRULLER WORLD** (2018) was the next novel in the series. (The Timmies were delicious, by the way.) Emily Westhill was asked by Jenn Zeeland, a bride to be, to supply a doughnut wall for the wedding reception, where the doughnuts were hung on dowels on the wall.

Jenn's half-sister Suzanne didn't approve of the wedding. Matters were not helped when Jenn invited an ex-boyfriend to the wedding. Alas, the groom died of poisoning on the wedding night. Someone sugared the groom's doughnut with arsenic, but Westhill had to scramble to prove that so her shop wouldn't take the blame.

The plot alternated between exposing people's pasts, eating doughnuts, or preparing them. The villagers seem to have an unhealthy diet. No wonder morbid obesity is rampant. Suzanne was proven to be the one who did the foul deed but her beau also had some explaining to do about himself. A convoluted history behind it all, but the Honey Glazed Crullers straightened out matters.



**Sit-Down Dining.**

**DO OR DINER** (2013) by Christine Wenger is the first novel in a cozy series about Trixie Matkowski, set in the village of Sandy Harbor, New York State, on the shore of Lake Ontario. She left the big city and an ex-husband, and moved to the village for what she hoped was a better life. From her aunt she bought the Silver Bullet Diner and a bed-and-breakfast house.

She got off to a rough start. The first visit by the health inspector Marvin P. Cogswell ended with him face down in a plate of her pork and scalloped potatoes. Someone had added poisonous mushrooms to his plate, so it was a targeted attack.

Matkowski had other problems. Good staff were hard to find, and the book work in the back office took a lot of time. Nonetheless she had to investigate in order to save the diner. Customers shy away from eating in places where people died of poison.

Assorted soap operas were exposed, and it all came down to Cogswell dallying with married women he ought not to have been with. Especially when the jealous husband was a Mafioso who knew something about wild mushrooms.

**DINERS, DRIVE-INS, AND DEATH** (2015) carried on the saga of the Silver Bullet Diner. Matkowski's friend Antoinette Chloe Brownelli, ACB for short, owned vacant land next to the diner.



ACB wanted to build a drive-in theatre. Riight. Are there any left in North America? Probably a few, but they're not a growth industry. She had another problem. Her biker boyfriend Nick Brownelli, who was also her brother-in-law, had gone missing. His brother Sal, her husband, was doing life up the river for murder. Nick didn't stay disappeared for long, as his corpse was recovered during the ground-breaking for the drive-in.

Matkowski was very busy herself. She had a big rambling house and foolishly agreed to host out-of-town contestants for the Miss Salmon competition. They would be doing a dance number "Run of the Salmon", quite possibly the worst act ever inflicted on the village audience.

The diner demanded a lot of Matkowski's time, but that crimped her sleuthing only a bit. She uncovered several love triangles, sharp practice, and vendettas from long-ago grudges. Nonetheless, she still had to sling food across the counter and maintain the diner's reputation.

It was ACB who was trapped with the killer, who hadn't liked Nick courting her, but Matkowski arrived in the nick of time and saved her. The epilogue should have come with a chart to detail who was doing whom. Thence to the recipes. The Broccoli Creamed Corn Casserole is one that I will skip, but the Potato Cheese Soup looked good.

INHERIT THE WIND (2014) by Daryl Wood Gerber is a cozy novel in a series about Jenna Hart of Crystal Cove, California. She helped her Aunt Vera run a combination bookstore and café. The Cookbook Nook Café was hosting the village's Grill Fest, a competition for local amateur cooks. The theme this year was grilled cheese. Matters were just as hot offstage as in front of the grille.

Where else would the body be found except behind the café? There was little love lost between the eight contestants, now seven. *And then, before anyone could stop her, Mitzi grabbed a fistful of shredded cheese, hurled it at Lola, and shrieked, "I will not lose. Do you hear me? Not to you. Not to Natalie. Not to anybody."* By comparison, television wrestling is a sedate tea party.

Hart had the bookstore café to look after. For once, a cozy author acknowledged that specialty shops in small towns can't stay in business without the Internet. Hart had to keep the café Website updated but managed some sleuthing. There might have been an inheritance theft, or it might have been a romantic triangle. Then again, someone had been fiddling the books at another business nearby.

It came down to the usual trapped-with-the-murderer scenario, spiced up by a cellphone that chose that moment not to work. The motive was a love triangle, but flavoured with embezzlement and blackmail. Ah, for the quiet life in the city. The novel ended on an upbeat note with recipes such as Brie, Apple, and Turkey Grilled Cheese, and for dessert, Caramel Macchiato Ice Cream.



FETA ATTRACTION (2015) by Susannah Hardy (pseudonym of Jane Haertel) was the first novel in a cozy series about Georgie Nikolopatos of Bonaparte Bay, in the Thousand Islands district of upstate New York. She worked in a Greek restaurant owned by her mother-in-law. Georgie just found out that her husband Spiro was secretly gay. After siring a daughter with her, he left for parts unknown.

The complications of the moment included a television crew roaming the house doing a feature on it. The place was built in the 1800s by a genuine Bonaparte, one of Napoleon's ne'er-do-well relatives. Georgie decided to take an excursion on the Saint Lawrence River to relax. She didn't get the chance, as a body floated by, none other than Domenic DiTomasso, a rival restaurant owner in Bonaparte Bay. The police understandably didn't believe it was coincidence, so Georgie had to become a Miss Marple.

She began to receive threatening letters. There was a gang of rural no-goods with whom Spiro might have been involved. Some people thought there was treasure hidden in the restaurant building. Smugglers were busy working the river. It was a busy life up there in the islands.



Spiro re-appeared just in time for the denouement. All the threads converged. The restaurant, its history, and the Bonaparte family were all part of the mix. Plus Greek food, which the recipes appendix described in detail. Bring your own feta.

The sequel was OLIVE AND LET DIE (2015), which took place a few weeks later. Lots of messy family melodramas on all collateral lines. Georgie was divorcing Spiro for good and sufficient reason. He opened his own restaurant with his new boyfriend. Georgie’s mother, who abandoned her decades ago when she was a child, came into town. She was now a soap opera actress named Melanie Ashley. The real trouble began when the body of Doreen Webber, a cousin Georgie never knew existed until she found her corpse, was discovered next to Spiro’s restaurant.

The convoluted plot had more melodrama than any soap opera Ashley ever acted in. A second body had police wondering out loud if Georgie had “*some kind of corpse-dar*”. There’s a thought. At the next big disaster or terrorist attack, use Miss Marple instead of sniffer dogs.

Ashley was shot by a sniper but survived. It all came down to a complicated family trust that was about to be dissolved and the fortune dispersed. The explanation of the trust, founded by a bigamist a century ago, took a couple of chapters and kept Georgie busy with genealogical research. There is such a thing as over-plotting a story.



The killer thought he was in line for the inheritance, but was exposed.

In a switch from the usual scenario where Miss Marple was held at gunpoint but escaped with a single bound, it was the killer who fled.

He committed suicide after being cornered, which cleared the way for a big fat Greek dinner, where the ouzo flowed like water.

FLIPPED FOR MURDER (2015) by Maddie Day (pseudonym of Edith Maxwell) is set in South Lick, Indiana. It was the first novel in a series about Robbie Jordan, who left behind her old and unhappy life on the Pacific coast to begin anew as a storekeeper in rural Indiana. She converted an old country store into Pans ‘n Pancakes, a combination café and cookware store. With help from her Aunt Adele, the grand opening had arrived.

It wasn’t easy. The town clerk Stella Rogers tried to stifle the place by delaying the planning applications but didn’t succeed. However, someone succeeded in stifling her in Chapter 3. Jordan was one of the suspects, although Rogers’s nasty disposition had generated many others as well. Rogers had also cruelly named her son Roy, now a grown man of uncertain income.

The Miss Marple routine began, in between Jordan’s need to mind the store and flip pancakes. Lots of family melodramas, with the case confused by two different culprits. The successful one was a respectable citizen being blackmailed by Stella because he couldn’t keep his hands off his female employees. The unsuccessful one was her son Roy, who resented Jordan stirring up trouble and sullyng the memory of his mother.

All ended well except for the dead and their next of kin, but as a consolation there were recipes for Cheesy Biscuits and Kahlua Brownies. Skip the Whole Wheat Banana Walnut Pancakes unless you’re a New Ager.

The second novel in this series was GRILLED FOR MURDER (2016). It began with the transformation of Robbie Jordan into a murder magnet. Events began innocently enough with a catered party at Pans ‘n Pancakes.

Erica Shermer was the guest of honour, recently widowed but not grieving too much about her loss. It transpired she was next in line at the county morgue. She was found dead in the store, her head bashed in with a sandwich press from the kitchen.

The body was in the kitchen but Jordan was inattentive when she first opened the store in the morning. It wasn’t until after she set the biscuits into the oven and began frying the bacon that she noticed the corpse.



In what has to be the funniest CSI scene ever, she convinced the police and forensic investigators to let her keep cooking while they did their job a couple of metres away. No point in wasting good food. Once the techies zipped Shermer into a body bag, they sat down at a table next to it for a hearty breakfast of bacon, sausages, and pancakes. Laugh, I thought I'd die.

Getting back to more serious matters, Jordan did her Marpleing when not serving up hot biscuits a la mort. The family of the deceased behaved like they were living on Tobacco Road. It all came down to the murderer taking personal offence at how Shermer had carried on like a hussy.

Next up was the recipes appendix, beginning with Apple Spice Muffins. This is why you should read these books on a full stomach.

WHEN THE GRITS HIT THE FAN (2017) brought a fresh crop of potential victims to South Lick, as the Sociology Department of Indiana University were making occasional drives out to the village for breakfast meetings. They obviously liked the food. On page 3, Prof Zenobia Brown gushed about the Whole Wheat Banana Walnut Pancakes. Well, she was a sociologist.

But before that, on the opening page, Prof. Charles Stilton (good thing Robbie Jordan didn't have a cheese shop) got into a public argument with his graduate student Louise Perlman. She accused him of stealing ideas from her dissertation.

Apparently it gets cold enough in southern Indiana to go ice fishing. Jordan and Perlman went out on the ice. They noticed an apparently abandoned fishing hole and walked over to it. Floating under the ice was Stilton, now a corpsicle. The police arrived on snowmobiles. They got snowmobiles down there? Don't tell me cozies aren't educational.

The middle two-thirds of the novel filled out several local family histories, a convoluted mess of legitimate, illegitimate, and adopted daughters. One of them wanted revenge on Stilton, who was at the centre of the mess. There was also an unresolved death from a couple of decades ago that was accidental, suicide, or murder, depending on which character you believed.

I'm not certain the epilogue combed out all the tangled plot threads, nor was the recipes appendix of much interest. Tortilla omelettes to Pork Chops With Sorghum Sauce. Sounds like what people in southern Indiana would eat.

The next novel in the series was BISCUITS AND SLASHED BROWNS (2018), another sticky situation set during the Brown County Maple Festival. The sap was rising in the trees, and a climatic change conference was in town, while the locals poured maple syrup on all their food.

Robbie Jordan's contribution was a breakfast cook-off. The contribution of Prof. Warren Connolly, a delegate to the climate conference, was to be stabbed to death at a sugar shack on an outlying maple farm. He had it coming, if only for being an ill-mannered boor.

Jordan's search for clues alternated with her search for a blue ribbon for her Maple Curry Biscuits. After all, murders come and go for Miss Marples, but a blue ribbon made for great advertising over the front counter. She got herself trapped with the murderer, surprise!, but fought her way free.

The motive came out of nowhere. When the killer was a boy, his family had been evicted from their apartment by Connolly. The boy grew up homeless, and was the father to the man seeking revenge. Recipes began with Maple Curry Biscuits and ran the gauntlet from bland (Cracked Wheat Bread) to avoid at all costs (Eggplant Bake).

DEATH OVER EASY (2018) took place three months later during the Brown County Bluegrass Festival. Robbie Jordan had now opened a bed-and-breakfast on the second floor of Pans 'n Pancakes. A few musicians performing at the festival, none of whom Googled the store or Jordan, were foolish enough to book rooms.

The musicians were tangled up in various romantic and other liaisons and break-ups, one of which happened live on stage. Pia Bianchi was a banjo-playing diva with a temperament that got her strangled with a steel banjo string. Several of Jordan's friends were on the suspects list, so it was heigh-ho and a-Marpleing she would go. Other complications arose when it was discovered that Bianchi had a distant connection to Jordan's family.

A second murder by a second murderer made up the penultimate alarum. From there to confrontations and revelations, not to mention figuring out who was killing whom. Jordan, having the master key, did some snooping in her guests' rooms. She hardly had time to bake for the café. The novel actually ended with the phrase "*All's well that ends well*".



IRISH STEWED (2016) by Kylie Logan (pseudonym of Connie Laux) was the first novel in a food cozy series about Laurel Inwood, a failed Hollywood chef. She wound up in Hubbard, Ohio, working in the diner of her aunt, Sophie Charnowski. The place was run down as Auntie was getting on in years, so as part of a plan to revitalize it, Inwood convinced her to have ethnic cuisine specials.

There was a setback in Chapter 1. Local news reporter Jack Lancer was found dead in the restaurant, slumped over a table with a receipt spike driven into his back. Poor fellow never had a speaking part. Inwood went Marpleing, assisted by her neighbour Declan Fury, who operated an Irish gift shop next door. (The very thing a rural village needs.) The two of them ran interference with the Deppity Dawgs, as to be expected in cozies.

There were suspects. Lancer had ruined several lives with his fake news stories. Auntie had some problems in her life. Everyone had a past, including Inwood. The plot peaked up when another reporter, Kim Kline, a colleague of Lancer, was murdered. The body was found, as per cozy tradition, by Inwood and Fury.

In lieu of a J'accuse! meeting, Inwood staged a party at the diner, with an Irish menu and lots of green decorations. The finale was a right-angle turn that suddenly brought in a burglary ring that had been using the diner as a message drop. They were afraid of exposure by Lancer, and blackmail by Kline.

The appendix had one recipe. Go ahead, guess what it was.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN (2013) by Robin Allen is a novel in a cozy series about Poppy Markham, a health inspector out of Austin, Texas. She was attending Feast In The Field, a foodie event at an organic farm. An organization of supporters used the occasion to elect a new president, Dana White. It was a hotly contested election. When White died in her kitchen from poisoning, that got the plot going.

The politics among the vegans, farm workers, restaurant owners, and food suppliers were vicious. They provided a plentitude of suspects. Markham, as befitted her occupation, spent a lot of time snooping around kitchens.

The murderer did it from a combination of jealousy about White stealing her lover and a desire to cut costs by converting the farm from organic to conventional. The final battle was done with farm machinery and implements,

and justice prevailed. The killer blabbed a confession, which was good because the evidence was mostly missing or ambiguous. Had she kept her mouth shut, she probably would have escaped conviction.

The book read well but the plot was convoluted. It might also put you off eating fresh vegetables in restaurants, as this novel illustrated how they are really prepared. As Bismarck said, if you enjoy either food or the law, don't watch either being made.

EGGS BENEDICT ARNOLD (2009) by Laura Childs (pseudonym of Gerry Schmitt) is a novel in a cozy series about three women who opened the Cackleberry Café in Kindred, Louisiana. They did it for mutual survival. Suzanne was a young widow, Petra's husband was in a nursing home with Alzheimer syndrome, and Toni's husband left her for a waitress. The café specialized in breakfast menus.

This novel opened with Suzanne delivering a cherry pie to a nearby funeral home, where she found a body. The surprise was that the body was that of funeral director Ozzie Driesden. A few seconds later, the murderer ambushed her from behind and knocked her out with a chloroform rag held over her face.

The three Miss Marples went into action, interviewing people over the lunch counter as they came in for their breakfasts. The Deppity Dawg was an incompetent good-ole-boy. He was a blabbermouth, so for a plate of sausages and pancakes he gave out plenty of details to the women. Fortunately the state police were doing most of the investigation.

Lots of melodramas and illicit trysts emerged. So did a second body, that of the undertaker's assistant. The final confrontation was implausible. The murderer held Suzanne at gunpoint. It was a dark and stormy night, and lightning knocked out the power in the café. The killer picked up what she thought was a flashlight, but was actually the business end of a Taser. Bzzzt!

As for the motive, the murderer had killed her husband with arsenic. Driesden became suspicious while preparing the body, and was eliminated, then his assistant just to be certain.

Lots of breakfast recipes in the appendix, beginning with Eggs Benedict Arnold. Skip the Brown Sugar Meatloaf. The Upside-Down French Toast was just plain weird (broiled pineapple rings on ordinary French toast).



Carrying on was a later installment in the series, SCORCHED EGGS (2014). It began with arson, when the County Services Building was torched with an accelerant. A government worker died in the blaze. She had been a friend to the Cackleberry Club staff, so they got involved.

As per usual, they did a lot of their investigating just gossiping in the café with customers. The back stories were nastier, including domestic abuse. The County computer system was toasted in the fire, including its backups, carefully stored in a separate room in the building. The murderer was one of their bureaucrats who had been embezzling public funds to pay off his gambling debts at the local casino.

Constant cooking in the café, so remember to read this book on a full stomach or else the food descriptions will get to you. A rather unusual turn of plot had Suzanne riding in a rodeo. The Deppity Dawg showed signs of intellectual growth. At the end of it all, Suzanne found herself engaged to her boyfriend. The recipes were mediocre but you can't have everything.

MURDER WITH CINNAMON SCONES (2018) by Karen Rose Smith was a cozy novel set in Willow Creek, a village in the Amish country of Pennsylvania. Daisy Swanson and her Aunt Iris operate a tea shop therein.

One of their employees, Tessa Miller, was dating Reese Masemer, an art gallery owner. She was the tea shop chef and kitchen manager. When Masemer was murdered she came under suspicion, which started Swanson a-Marpleing. Good chefs are difficult to come by. Masemer had his secrets, both family and business. The culprit was an evil real estate developer who resented Masemer helping farmers save their land against development.

The village's annual Quilt Lovers Weekend was underway, which meant good business for the tea shop. Gotta move those cinnamon scones to pay the bills. The tea shop was inordinately busy. The author nodded toward real-world economics by having Swanson acknowledge how shaky small businesses could be. Nonetheless, the shop did good business, even on cold days.

The recipes appendix began with cinnamon scones, you will not be surprised to read. Wash them down with the following recipe for Beef Barley Soup, and cleanse your palate with Lemon Pepper Tomato Mozzarella Salad.

SEEN IN THE COWTOWN NEWS

CALGARY HERALD

# Council postpones 'Working Together' session due to lack of participation

SAMMY HUDES

Updated: February 10, 2019



If Calgary's 15 members of city council are ever going to hold hands and sing Kumbaya, it won't be happening Monday as previously scheduled.

A confidential meeting about how council members can better get along has been postponed for a second time after some indicated they wouldn't be attending.



# THE ORIGINAL AVENGERS

by Dale Speirs

A long time ago, when it were all fields around here and Harold Wilson smoked his pipe at #10 Downing Street, the title THE AVENGERS referred to a British television series that aired from 1961 to 1969. Nothing to do with young American actors prancing about in brightly-coloured Spandex.

The British series was a spy show. John Steed was the leading man, a secret agent for MI5. He had a succession of leading ladies who knew martial arts and were quite capable of holding their own against enemy agents.

The actual history is more convoluted than that. The first season had an entirely different premise, where Steed helped Dr David Keel settle personal grudges. Only three episodes survived and a fragment of another, thanks to the habit of BBC in wiping videotapes of shows after the initial runs were over. Later seasons survived on black-and-white and then colour film.

The second season promoted Steed to the lead character and Keel disappeared. His first assistant was Dr Cathy Gale. She went off to Fort Knox, specifically mentioned in a throwaway line during a later episode in the Emma Peel series. (The actress who played her, Honor Blackman, was a villainess in the James Bond movie GOLDFINGER, set in part at Fort Knox, Kentucky.)

Next up was Mrs Emma Peel, who lasted the longest, then Tara King. Eventually there was THE NEW AVENGERS, aired in 1976 for a few years, of which I have no DVDs or books, so it won't be mentioned further.

## Television.

I've reviewed some episodes as part of thematic reviews, which see in the cumulative index of this zine. But I'll throw in a few more here.

From the black-and-white Emma Peel era was "Silent Dust" (1966), written by Roger Marshall. Birds fell out of the sky dead in a rural county, and Mrs Peel went to investigate. Steed came into the case and learned that a compound called Silent Dust had been used as an experimental fertilizer at a research farm years earlier. Not only did it not fertilize, but it sterilized the ground for decades.

The two agents, and the two sets of facts, came together when it was realized that someone had a supply of Silent Dust and meant to use it. Who it was did not remain a secret long, it being the local squire and friends, who were hoping to earn, just to start, £40 million in ransom, considerably more money back then than today. They intended dusting England county by county if necessary.

Steed and Peel were invited to the squire's fox hunt. It was no secret to either side that somebody was going to die in a hunting 'accident'. There was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing, not just figuratively, as the hunt and the hunters trampled the countryside. You know who won.

The plot was predictable, but there were some good moments. When Steed visited the experimental farm to see the sterilized land, he was accompanied by the Minister of Agriculture, who was suffering from hay fever. The squire's hunt was not only plagued by Steed and Peel, he had to put up with protestors waving picket signs at the horses as the hunt assembled. It's not easy being a supervillain.

"The Thirteenth Hole" was a 1966 episode written by Tony Williamson. An agent disappeared while investigating at a golf club believed infiltrated by spies. The plot was opaque for most of the episode, but involved the head spy and a traitor scientist golfing each day at the same time but never going further than the 13<sup>th</sup> hole, at which point they mysteriously vanished.

The plot was also slow for most of the episode. There were a number of scenes taking place at night. Interior scenes showed pitch black conditions through the windows, but when the characters stepped outside they were in daylight. There was no pretense at trying to make the outside scenes dark with a smoked filter on the camera or by under-developing the film. The television production company always spared every expense in making the episodes.

The final scenes contained most of the interesting bits. There was an underground bunker at the 13<sup>th</sup> hole, hidden in the sand bunker. It held a television communications centre, which used the flagpole of the 13<sup>th</sup> hole as both a transmitter and a periscope.

The scientist betrayed his country by a video conference each day with his Soviet counterparts, when he gave them details of his work. It had to be done at the same time each day when a Soviet communications satellite passed overhead.



Steed tried to approach the hole inconspicuously by playing a round of golf. The spies booby trapped the 12<sup>th</sup> hole with a land mine, so that when Steed sank a putt he would be blown apart. Didn't work. Peel was captured and taken into the bunker, then handcuffed to a wooden chair to keep her out of the way. Didn't work. In fact, when the big fight came during the denouement, she used the chair as a weapon to take out her opponents.

It all ended well for MI5. With some jocular remarks, Steed and Peel drove off into the sunset. As with the other episodes, we have to presume that they made a telephone call to the office to have some of the lads come by the villains' lair to haul away the dead and clean up the mess.

The final episode of the Emma Peel series, by now in colour, was "The Forget-Me-Knot" (1967), written by Brian Clemens. It provided a transition to the Tara King series. Peel's departure was explained by the return of her husband, who had disappeared several years prior when his airplane had crashed in the Amazon jungle. He had finally made his way back to civilization.

King was introduced as a trainee. Also introduced was Mother, the code name for Steed's controller, a man in a wheelchair after being wounded by enemy agents. Not in this episode but who appeared later was Mother's assistant Rhonda, a silent and spectacular Amazonian woman. Mother and Rhonda were recurring characters through the Tara King series.

Getting back to the episode at hand, someone had been dosing MI5 agents with an amnesia drug. One of those agents had just been about to expose a traitor within the organization. Between those two plot threads, plenty of action was provided. The villain, unlike previous villains, had not one but two kick-ass women on his trail, ready and able to chop-socky their way through his henchmen.

Plus Steed, of course, although he was hampered by a whiff of the amnesia drug. In the final scene, as Peel exited Steed's apartment, she met King on the staircase and told her that he liked his tea stirred counterclockwise, an obvious joke about James Bond's martinis.

The Tara King series had a fair number of science fiction plots. A 1968 episode "All Done With Mirrors", written by Leigh Vance, was set at the Carmadoc Research Establishment, which was leaking secrets left, right, and centre. No one could figure how.

Mother sent King out to investigate on her own because Steed was not acceptable to the Establishment due to a previous incident. King was accompanied by another MI5 agent who provided comic relief and generally got in her way. She managed to ditch him and get on with serious counterespionage.

Steed was forced to stay at a luxurious manor, sitting by a pool and sipping champagne with Mother, both attended to by Rhonda and other beauties in bathing suits that accentuated their best features. It was a hard life but someone had to do it.

The method of espionage was soon revealed to the viewer, although it took a while for King to figure it out. Enemy spies, Soviets because it was the Cold War era, had a device that used sunlight reflecting off mirrors (no lasers) which could pick up sound waves. Pointing a beam through the windows of the Establishment, or some other line of sight out in the field, enabled the spies to listen in on conversations.

Steed finally roused himself and came out to the field. Assorted alarums and excursions followed, and the spies were suitably dealt with. All was well, Steed and King went on their way, and Mother had Rhonda to comfort him.

### **Paperback Novels.**

Merchandising of a successful broadcast series is nothing new. It was frequently done during the golden age of old-time radio, and carried forward from the very beginning of television. Among the toys, action figures, lunch boxes, and comics were books, sometimes novelizations but often originals.

THE AVENGERS was no exception. A series of paperbacks, with a complicated history of different publishers and versions was issued in both Britain and North America. I only have four of the paperbacks, bought decades ago when Calgary still had secondhand bookstores. I reviewed MOON EXPRESS in issue #396 of this zine.

HEIL HARRIS was paperback #4 in the series, written by John Garforth and published in 1967. In those days, conspiracy theorists could yet do something with Adolf Hitler and claim he was an elderly man in hiding somewhere. Elvis was still in the building, so that one didn't arrive until a few years later.



In this novel, John Steed was rusticated in the countryside writing his war memoirs. He witnessed the accidental death of an Army despatch motorcycle rider and was drawn into a conspiracy. A group of right-wing men, fascists but not Nazis (there is a difference), were plotting to take power. Some were civilians and others were from a local Army base.

Their fantasy was that from a rural base they could somehow take over the country. Not a chance, but because they had military weapons and personnel, they could have done a lot of damage before being suppressed. Their leader was Herr Harris, first name never given, but his wife was Eva. Harris was 78 years old and bore a startling resemblance to Hitler as he might have been at that age.

Emma Peel infiltrated the organization from within, while Steed moseyed around from the outside. It all ended in tears for the fascists, as might be expected. The novel was written in a jokey style as if to say not to take it seriously, although a number of characters died horribly.

Paperback #6 was THE DROWNED QUEEN (1968) by Keith Laumer. In keeping with the change in the television series, Steed was now ably assisted by Tara King. They were assigned to infiltrate the crew of the Atlantic Queen on its maiden voyage. This was a giant submarine luxury passenger liner.

Laumer wrote the novel as farce, with characters such as Miss Goldspangle and Mr Funfinger. There were a plethora of spies and saboteurs aboard, which is why Steed and King had been sent. The submarine had a variety of alarms and excursions until the big one, that of being hijacked by pirates through an excessively elaborate plot. The pirates lived in an underwater city of 100,000 which had gone undetected by all those American and Russian submarines roaming the North Atlantic ocean.

Pause for digression. I have always wondered how supervillains build their elaborate secret hideaways without anyone observing. Whether it is a rocket launch pad inside an active volcano or a large underwater city, someone had to notice.

Such facilities need thousands of tradesmen and labourers, many of whom would mention it to friends and relatives. The material required for the facility had to be brought in by large ships and air freighters, which are not inconspicuous. Factories had to build the equipment.

The cost would require a fortune that few had. Hiding such a place is not easy. The Germans in World War Two and the Soviets in the Cold War could not hide major bases or facilities from the other side. An analogy is the V-2 construction and launch facilities. The Allies didn't know all the details, but once they spotted them, they bombed them unmercifully.

Meanwhile, back at the ocean, the plot was foiled amidst a flurry of witticisms and deft martial arts. The story was only mildly humorous, precisely because it was overwritten with too many slapstick routines. Worth reading once.

THE MAGNETIC MAN (1968) was paperback #8. John Steed was in Hong Kong to act as a courier to bring back to England a suitcase full of important documents. He was on his way to the airport when he was waylaid in a staged riot and rendered unconscious.

Upon recovering, he still had the suitcase. Suspicious of what might have happened, he picked its lock and opened it against orders. The papers had been substituted with \$250 million in very large denomination American banknotes.

Whoever did it was expecting the suitcase would not be opened, and that Steed's diplomatic immunity would get it safely to England without a Customs inspection. As Steed quickly realized, the enemy would then take it back. He therefore immediately hid it where they could never get it, after first taking out a few tens of millions in pocket money.

Steed gave some of it to Tara King and the two began spending conspicuously, attempting to draw out the enemy agents. They succeeded, and most of the novel was taken up with assorted adventures hither and yon. The agents were working for Chairman Mao, whose hold on power was shaky at the time, and who wanted the money in a safe place in case he lost the mandate of heaven.

It all came out well in the end, after lots of double crosses and backfired stratagems on both sides. This novel wasn't as flippant as earlier ones, and consequently read better.



**VANISHED WORLDS: PART 5**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #320, 338, 403, and 408.]

BLACK FLAME OF THE AMAZON was a late 1930s old-time radio show, a 15-minute daily serial aimed at children. It featured the great white hunter Harold Noice, who took two children with him, Jim and Jean Brady, into the deepest jungles, with a native bearer named Pedro. Such a thing wouldn't be allowed today. Someone would start a Twitter hashtag about it.

I just skimmed the episode titles available at [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org) and picked out one that seemed interesting. Each episode began with a bland piece of music so that local radio stations could insert a commercial, then picked up the plot from the last show. Most of each episode (I only listened to two of them) was Noice lecturing the kids about tropical flora, fauna, and anthropology. The children's lines were mostly "Golly!" or "Gee whiz!".

"Living Dinosaurs In The Jungle" was episode #39, originally aired in 1938. No credits were given for writer or actors. A rather strange episode, as they talk about the possibility of living dinosaurs somewhere in the jungle. Pedro insists he once saw a giant monster in the jungle. Noice is unbelieving, and the kids are in awe of such a wild adventure. They conclude that any dinosaurs are just a type of ghost story.

Since the whole episode was taken up by cryptozoological speculations and nothing happened to move the plot along, I thought perhaps the dinosaurs might appear in the next episode. Alas, it was only about fishing. Nothing to see here folks, please move along.



THE CRATER LAKE MONSTER (1977) was written by William R. Stromberg and Richard Cardella. My copy is in the 50-DVD set "Sci-Fi Invasion" (Mill Creek Entertainment). The locale was Crater Lake, California, not the more famous Oregon lake.

It opened with an Ominous Foreboding, when a university archaeological team was exploring an abandoned mine and found ancient aboriginal art depicting a dinosaur deep in the shaft. The obvious fallacy is not the dinosaur but why so-called ancient art would be found in a mine less than a century old. There was a sign at the entrance that specifically stated the mine was opened in 1870.

A meteorite splashed into the lake, witnessed by a Deppity Dawg. There was an underwater shot of the red-hot meteorite lying next to a dinosaur egg. The egg was bread box size but eventually produced a full-size carnosaur the size of a delivery truck. Later one of the characters mentioned that no fisherman had caught a fish for the past two months, so that rationalized how the dinosaur grew.

The critter was rendered as a stop-motion carnosaur on land. In the water, it was a model of a mosasaur head or a matted graphic of a plesiosaur. The SFX were about right for a low-budget movie.

The dinosaur, whatever it was, began picking off fishermen from their boats, campers along the shoreline, and went inland into a cattle ranch for some Hereford snacks. The pacing was slow as the victims were chomped up one by one, but finally the shouting and screaming began. The sheriff believed after the dinosaur tried to chomp on his cruiser.

The plesiosaur made its way to the village where it rudely interrupted a town hall meeting. Shotguns didn't work against it, as one Bubba found out the hard way.

The sheriff ran for a snowcat parked nearby, using it as an armoured vehicle, and its plow blade to cut the animal's throat. The creature slowly died in agony and plopped down on the beach. Cue the orchestra and closing credits.

The movie wasn't bad, a step above 1950s B-movies, the kind of television movie you'd expect to see on a cable channel. The plot was routine, but at least the producers and actors were trying hard to put on a good movie.



EXTINCTION is a 2014 movie about dinosaurs in the Amazon jungle, written by Ben Loyd Holmes and Adam J. Spinks. (Not to be confused with a 2018 movie of the same title about UFOs.) I got this DVD in the \$1.99 bargain bin and overpaid for it. In a word, it is godawful.

The movie was filmed in el-cheapo documentary style, about an expedition going deep into the jungle. The ‘cameraman’ would never have been kept on by any real documentary producers. He couldn’t keep the camera in focus and couldn’t aim it properly. Lots of shaky footage of the ground or sky because he couldn’t run and aim the camera at the same time. The producer of this movie was evidently trying for found-footage style. The Blair Witch movie has a lot to answer for.

Only a few fragmentary glimpses of dinosaurs were seen. Almost all the encounters were blurry night scenes, with people dashing madly about, screaming the dinosaurs were after them. After each incident, they then did a close-up for the camera and sobbed about how horrible it was.

It was horrible all right. I fast-forwarded any scene where they were blubbering about what they saw. It was cheaper to have an actor tell the story instead of spending money on more than a few seconds of SFX. Avoid this movie at all costs, even \$1.99.

THE DOCTOR AND THE DINOSAURS (2013) by Mike Resnick is a weird Western genre novel using as its template the true story of feuding

palaeontologists Edward Drinker Cope and Othniel Charles Marsh. In the late 1800s, they raced each other across the fossil beds of the Old West, digging up dinosaurs with more than just regular enthusiasm.

It was said that the most important position on each team wasn’t Chief Palaeontologist, it was Chief Saboteur. They fought each other not only in the scientific literature but in the field. This isn’t exaggeration; Google them and read the details.

On top of these basic historical facts, Resnick layered a story of Doc Holliday, Geronimo, and other figures from the Old West. The feuding between Cope and Marsh stirred up the Comanches in Wyoming. Holliday and Geronimo were trying to keep the peace, not an easy task.

The dinosaurs, living ones, showed up in Chapter 16. Angry medicine men objected to Cope and Marsh digging in their sacred land and disturbing human bones. They used their powers to revive other bones, the dinosaurs. The problem was, they couldn’t control the critters once revived. This led to all sorts of alarms and excursions, and not just among the white men.

Teddy Roosevelt was visiting at Cope’s camp when a live carnosaur appeared. Everyone in the camp unloaded their weapons into the great beast and eventually brought it down. The biggest game that Roosevelt ever hunted. Cope was excited beyond words, not because of the scientific value of a fresh dinosaur but because he beat Marsh to it.

Holliday convinced the medicine men that live dinosaurs would only attract tourists, and it was better to turn them into dust. The thing was done, and Cope had no believable story to tell. The novel reads well. No laugh-out-loud lines but a humorous book that made it a page turner.

“Hell Creek” (2018) by C. Robert Cargill (in his collection WE ARE WHERE NIGHTMARES GO AND OTHER STORIES) was told from the point of view of a *Triceratops* which survived the initial aftereffects of the Chicxulub asteroid impact.

She survived by hiding in a cave in the highlands, escaping the 100-metre tsunami and enduring until the fires were washed away by the waterclap that followed. An empathic story well told, as she realized she was the last of her kind.



The world's largest fossil museum is the Royal Tyrrell Palaeontological Museum in Drumheller, Alberta. It is a 2-hour drive across the flatlands to the east down in the Red Deer River badlands. I saw this ad at a Calgary LRT station. A *Triceratops* trundled across the screen to keep us commuters amused while waiting for the train.



The phrase along the bottom of the screen "Times Temporarily Not Available" usually means a car driver tried to beat a train across a level crossing somewhere out in the suburbs and didn't succeed.



**SEEN IN THE LITERATURE**

Toohey, M., et al (2019) **Disproportionately strong climate forcing from extratropical explosive volcanic eruptions.** NATURE GEOSCIENCE 12:100-107

Authors’ abstract: *Extratropical volcanic eruptions are commonly thought to be less effective at driving large-scale surface cooling than tropical eruptions. However, recent minor extratropical eruptions have produced a measurable climate impact, and proxy records suggest that the most extreme Northern Hemisphere cold period of the Common Era was initiated by an extratropical in 536 CE.*

*Using ice-core-derived volcanic stratospheric sulfur injections and Northern Hemisphere summer temperature reconstructions from tree rings, we show here that in proportion to their estimated stratospheric sulfur injection, extratropical explosive eruptions since 750 CE have produced stronger hemispheric cooling than tropical eruptions.*

*Stratospheric aerosol simulations demonstrate that for eruptions with a sulfur injection magnitude and height equal to that of the 1991 Mount Pinatubo eruption, extratropical eruptions produce time-integrated radiation forcing anomalies over the Northern Hemisphere extratropics up to 80% greater than tropical eruptions, as decreases in aerosol lifetime are overwhelmed by the enhanced radiative impact associated with the relative confinement of aerosol to a single hemisphere.*

Pardo, J.D., et al (2019) **Carboniferous-Permian climate change constrained early land vertebrate radiations.** NATURE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 3:200-206

Authors’ abstract: *The Carboniferous-Permian transition (CPT) was Earth’s last pre-Quaternary icehouse-greenhouse transition, recording major shifts in late Palaeozoic climate regimes and increased continental seasonality over approximately 40 Myr. Its parallels to Quaternary climate change have inspired recent investigations into the impacts of purported rainforest collapse on palaeotropical vertebrate diversity, but little is known about how the protracted spatial dynamics of this transition impacted the emergence of modern tetrapod lineages.*

*Here, we apply ecological ordinance analyses on a dataset of 286 CPT fossil vertebrate localities binned across four physiographic regions forming a palaeoequatorial transect. Our results clarify the spatiotemporal expansion of land-living vertebrates, demonstrating that the reduction of tropical wetlands accommodated emerging dryland adapted amniote faunas from a western Pangaeon epicentre.*

*By combining our ecological analyses with a phylogenetic approach, we demonstrate that this pattern also applies to some co-occurring total-group amphibians, suggesting that there was pervasive selection for such dryland adaptations across the crown tetrapod tree, in contrast with stem tetrapods and ‘fishes’.*

Speirs: The end-Permian mass extinction was the greatest of the five mass extinctions recorded in Earth’s history. 97% of all species became extinct as a result of massive flood lavas that covered Asia and India, and overheated the planet. The vertebrates that survived on land were drought adapted, and eventually gave rise to reptiles that formed the base of mammal evolution.

Davis, A.L., et al (2019) **Testing Darwin’s hypothesis about the wonderful Venus flytrap: Marginal spikes form a “horrid prison” for moderate-sized insect prey.** AMERICAN NATURALIST 193:309-317

Authors’ abstract: *We used field observations, lab experiments, and a seminatural experiment to test prey capture function of the marginal spikes on snap traps of the Venus flytrap (Dionaea muscipula). Our field and laboratory results suggested inefficient capture success: fewer than one in four prey encounters led to prey capture.*

*Removing the marginal spikes decreased the rate of prey capture success for moderate-sized cricket prey by 90%, but this effect disappeared for larger prey. The nonlinear benefit of spikes suggests that they provide a better cage for capturing more abundant insects of moderate and small sizes, but they may also provide a foothold for rare large prey to escape.*

*Our observations support Darwin’s hypothesis that the marginal spikes form a “horrid prison” that increases prey capture success for moderate-sized prey, but the decreasing benefit for larger prey is unexpected and previously undocumented.*



Speirs: Darwin was so fascinated by carnivorous plants that he wrote a large book about them, still one of the standard references on the subject. INSECTIVOROUS PLANTS (1875) is available as a free download from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)

Koch, A., et al (2019) **Earth system impacts of the European arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492.** QUATERNARY SCIENCE REVIEWS 207:13-36

Authors' abstract: *Human impacts prior to the Industrial Revolution are not well constrained. We investigate whether the decline in global atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration by 7e10 ppm in the late 1500s and early 1600s which globally lowered surface air temperatures by 0.15°C, were generated by natural forcing or were a result of the large-scale depopulation of the Americas after European arrival, subsequent land use change and secondary succession.*

*We quantitatively review the evidence for*  
(i) *the pre-Columbian population size,*  
(ii) *their per capita land use,*  
(iii) *the post-1492 population loss,*  
(iv) *the resulting carbon uptake of the abandoned anthropogenic landscapes, and then compare these to potential natural drivers of global carbon declines of 7 to 10 ppm.*

*From 119 published regional population estimates we calculate a pre-1492 CE population of 60.5 million, utilizing 1.04 hectares (ha) land per capita. European epidemics removed 90% of the indigenous population over the next century. This resulted in secondary succession of 55.8 Mha of abandoned land, sequestering 7.4 Pg C, equivalent to a decline in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> of 3.5 ppm. Accounting for carbon cycle feedbacks plus land use change outside the Americas gives a total 5 ppm CO<sub>2</sub> additional uptake into the land surface in the 1500s compared to the 1400s, 47 e67% of the atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> decline.*

*Furthermore, we show that the global carbon budget of the 1500s cannot be balanced until large-scale vegetation regeneration in the Americas is included. The Great Dying of the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas resulted in a human-driven global impact on the Earth System in the two centuries prior to the Industrial Revolution.*

Kavanaugh, J., et al (2019) **A New Year's Day icebreaker: icequakes on lakes in Alberta, Canada.** CANADIAN JOURNAL OF EARTH SCIENCES 56:183-200

Authors' abstract: *Any process that causes a sudden brittle failure of material has the potential to cause earthquake-like seismic events. Cryoseisms represent an under reported class of seismic event due to their (often) small magnitudes.*

*In this paper, we document the phenomenon of some of the largest magnitude lake-associated icequakes (ML 2.0) yet reported. These events occurred nearly simultaneously (within 2 h) on geographically separate lakes in Alberta, Canada, starting 1 January 2018.*

*We conjecture that these events were caused by the sudden brittle failure of lake ice due to thermal expansion; the effects of the thermal expansion were compounded by the lack of insulating snow cover, high lake water levels, and a rapid onset of atmospheric warming.*

*These factors also contributed to ice-jacking, a repeating process in which thermal contraction produces tensile cracks (leads) in lake ice that are then filled with water that is frozen during the cooling cycle. Thus, any subsequent thermal expansion must be accommodated by new deformation or brittle failure.*

*This ice-jacking process caused creeping ground deformation after the initial brittle failure and again two weeks later following a second warming period. In many cases, the resulting ground deformation was significant enough to cause property damage.*

Speirs: There are no tectonic earthquakes in Alberta but we do have subsidence quakes, more common in recent years because of oil well fracking. Cryoseisms or icequakes are fairly common in Alberta but normally are so small that they can only be detected by scientific instruments.

As happened last year, Alberta had a week of -30°C temperatures followed by a chinook. The drastic sudden changes caused ice covering lakes to expand rapidly, piling up on shore and shoving soil layers by metres in some cases. The sound and vibrations of these exceptional cryoseisms were heard by lakeshore residents.

Chandra, A., et al (2019) **End-to-end satellite servicing and space debris management.** arXiv:1901.11121 Preprint at [www.arxiv.org](http://www.arxiv.org)

Authors' abstract: *There is growing demand for satellite swarms and constellations for global positioning, remote sensing and relay communication in higher LEO orbits. This will result in many obsolete, damaged and abandoned satellites that will remain on-orbit beyond 25 years. These abandoned satellites and space debris maybe economically valuable orbital real-estate and resources that can be reused, repaired or upgraded for future use.*

*Space traffic management is critical to repair damaged satellites, divert satellites into warehouse orbits and effectively deorbit satellites and space debris that are beyond repair and salvage.*

*Current methods for on-orbit capture, servicing and repair require a large service satellite. However, by accessing abandoned satellites and space debris, there is an inherent heightened risk of damage to a servicing spacecraft.*

*Sending multiple small robots with each robot specialized in a specific task is a credible alternative, as the system is simple and cost-effective and where loss of one or more robots does not end the mission. In this work, we outline an end-to-end multirobot system to capture damaged and abandoned spacecraft for salvaging, repair and for deorbiting.*

*We analyze the feasibility of sending multiple, decentralized robots that can work cooperatively to perform capture of the target satellite as a first step, followed by crawling onto damaged satellites to perform detailed mapping. After obtaining a detailed map of the satellite, the robots will proceed to either repair and replace or dismantle components for salvage operations. Finally, the remaining components will be packaged with a de-orbit device for accelerated de-orbit.*

Levin, S.R., et al (2019) **Darwin's aliens.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 18:1-9

Authors' abstract: *Making predictions about aliens is not an easy task. Most previous work has focused on extrapolating from empirical observations and mechanistic understanding of physics, chemistry and biology. Another*

*approach is to utilize theory to make predictions that are not tied to details of Earth.*

*Here we show how evolutionary theory can be used to make predictions about aliens. We argue that aliens will undergo natural selection, something that should not be taken for granted but that rests on firm theoretical grounds. Given aliens undergo natural selection we can say something about their evolution.*

*In particular, we can say something about how complexity will arise in space. Complexity has increased on the Earth as a result of a handful of events, known as the major transitions in individuality. Major transitions occur when groups of individuals come together to form a new higher level of the individual, such as when single-celled organisms evolved into multicellular organisms.*

*Both theory and empirical data suggest that extreme conditions are required for major transitions to occur. We suggest that major transitions are likely to be the route to complexity on other planets, and that we should expect them to have been favoured by similarly restrictive conditions. Thus, we can make specific predictions about the biological makeup of complex aliens.*

Ramírez, D.A., et al (2019) **Extreme salinity as a challenge to grow potatoes under Mars-like soil conditions: targeting promising genotypes.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 18:18-24

Authors' abstract: *One of the future challenges to produce food in a Mars environment will be the optimization of resources through the potential use of the Martian substratum for growing crops as a part of bioregenerative food systems.*

*In vitro plantlets from 65 potato genotypes were rooted in peat-pellets substratum and transplanted in pots filled with Mars-like soil from La Joya desert in Southern Peru.*

*The Mars-like soil was characterized by extreme salinity (an electric conductivity of 19.3 and 52.6 dS m under 1:1 and saturation extract of the soil solution, respectively) and plants grown in it were under sub-optimum physiological status indicated by average maximum stomatal conductance <50 mmol H<sub>2</sub>O m<sup>-2</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> even after irrigation.*



*40% of the genotypes survived and yielded (0.3 to 5.2 g tuber plant ) where CIP.397099.4, CIP.396311.1 and CIP.390478.9 were targeted as promising materials with 9.3, 8.9 and 5.8% of fresh tuber yield in relation to the control conditions. A combination of appropriate genotypes and soil management will be crucial to withstand extreme salinity, a problem also important in agriculture on Earth that requires more detailed follow-up studies.*

**SEEN AROUND COWTOWN**  
photo by Dale Speirs

The Manulife skyscraper is kitty-corner from the 4 Street SW LRT station and Harley Hotchkiss Park beyond that. I took this photo from the park. The skyscraper illuminations had nothing to do with the Glow Festival; they are part of the building design.

