

# OPUNTIA 447



O! PUNTIA!  
OUR ROAMIN' NATIVE PLANT!  
TRUE PRICKLY PEAR,  
LET ALL THY SONS NOW CHANT!  
WITH GROWING PARTS,  
WE SEE THEE RISE,  
GREEN CACTI STRONG AND FREE!  
O! PUNTIA!  
WE STAND ENBARBED FOR THEE!  
O! PUNTIA!  
WE STAND ENBARBED FOR THEE!

# Canada Day 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.

**About The Cover:** In 1996, the late Ian Gunn of Australia sent me this artwork and lyrics, which I printed in the original black-and-white as the cover of OPUNTIA #28.1B. I liked it so much that I received his permission to have a rubber stamp made of it. In 1999, I used this rubber stamp with red ink to handstamp the cover of OPUNTIA #43.1A, back in the days when this zine was only available on paper. These and all other back issues of OPUNTIA are now available as scanned pdfs at either [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) or [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org).

While checking for something else, I stumbled across this and felt that it deserved renewed attention. A good way to celebrate Canada Day, and to honour the memory of Ian Gunn. He was a credit to science fiction fandom. Gone but not forgotten.

## STANDING ON GUARD FOR THEE

photos by Dale Speirs

This and next page: Earlier this year I was walking through the New Central Library when I saw this array of cupcakes set out by the auditorium at a citizenship ceremony for new Canadians being sworn in that day.















Above: Cheetos shaped like maple leaves, offered in my local supermarket as a Canada Day special. I might have bought a packet but I thoroughly detest nacho cheese.



Upper right: Giant flag in the atrium of TD Square mall in the downtown core.



Normally fireworks close off Canada Day but these were launched the night before at the Centennial Twin Arenas at Crowchild Trail SW and Flanders Avenue. The fireworks were at 23h00 just after sunset. It might have been better to wait until midnight to allow the sun to go all the way below the horizon, but since it was a free show, who was I to complain?



And so to the big day. Events were held city-wide but several hundred thousand Calgarians, myself included, prefer to go to the events downtown because they are within walking distance of each other. I always take the bus downtown. In Calgary, the definition of an optimist is someone who thinks he can find a parking space downtown.





The Bow River forms the northern boundary of the downtown core . In it is Prince’s Island Park, named after pioneer Peter Prince, not royalty. On Canada Day, about 100,000 people jam into the park via four pedestrian bridges.





Below: Leaving the island via a different bridge.  
Upper right: True patriots in red and white.  
Lower right: Back on the mainland at Fort Calgary. Family-friendly booze doesn't sound proper.





**SHEEP RIVER PROVINCIAL PARK**

photos by Dale Speirs

But before all of that, there was this. On June 26, I had to run a business errand to Okotoks, a half-hour drive south of Calgary. Once done with it, I figured I might as well get in my first mountain trip of the season, so I headed west from Okotoks to Sheep River Provincial Park, another half-hour drive.

Below is the entrance into the park. The river is a translation of the aboriginal name, which refers to bighorn sheep, not the domestic species. At right is a herd of the critters, mangy looking because they were still shedding their winter coats.





The great flood of 2013, which broke all records in southern Alberta, has its reminders. How bad was the flood? In this photo you see the Sheep River in normal spring flow. On June 21, 2013, it and other mountain rivers filled the valleys. See OPUNTIA's #264 to 266 for what it did to Calgary.

The highway into the park took a couple of years to rebuild, and in many cases such as this one, had to be rerouted.





Much of the Sheep River squeezes its way through canyons.





Mount Gibraltar, at the head of the park where the Sheep River rises.





# FOOD COZIES: PART 9

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 8 appeared in OPUNTIA's #432, 433, 434, 436, 438, 441, 442, and 444.]

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 are numerous specialized cozies.

Recipes are generally included, if not at the back of the book, then in between chapters or sometimes integrated into the text. Don't read these books if you have an appetite. I have learned from experience to read these novels on a full stomach.

## Food Critics.

Jean Sibelius famously said that there are no statues erected to honour critics.

LIVER LET DIE (2011) by Liz Lipperman was the first novel in a food cozy series about Jordan McAllister, an involuntary resident of Ranchero, Texas. She wanted to be a sports columnist but the only job she could find was a food columnist at a local newspaper. The difficulty was that she couldn't cook anything better than Kraft Dinner, and all her knowledge was about sports, not fine dining.

Her first assignment was a steak house called Longhorn Prime Rib. Since she was on the company credit card, she ordered foie gras, thinking it was some sort of chicken. She couldn't eat it, so she put it in a purse she borrowed from a friend so she wouldn't embarrass herself to the waiter.

Jumping ahead a bit, when she got home, she cleaned out the purse and washed it. She flushed out some rhinestones, so she dropped them into a goldfish bowl to brighten up the gravel. The reader will naturally make a guess about those rhinestones and will be correct.

Jason Spencer, the waiter who served her, failed to make it past Chapter 3, murdered on her doorstep. That made her the prime suspect in the opinion of the Deppity Dawgs. McAllister was sent back to the steak house by her editor for another review, this time of Rattlesnake Pasta. On her return home, she found her apartment trashed.

The story eventually brought out the motive, that blood diamonds were being smuggled into Texas via Canadian foie gras. McAllister had accidentally been given a batch that had diamonds hidden in it. Those rhinestones were diamonds. The scheme seemed rather elaborate, since the diamonds would have to be smuggled past two sets of Customs officers, even if hidden inside foie gras the second time.

At that point in the novel, with that crime solved, the book still had a quarter of the pages to go. The plot then made a right-angle turn and McAllister began investigating an abusive college football player. He had nothing to do with the diamonds but had intersected the plot by making a cameo appearance at the steak house.

That set of events provided a second denouement, that made the novel feel like it was two unrelated novellas jammed together to make up the word count.

Once everything was settled, the conclusion of the book was a new assignment to the cattlemen's annual barbecue, but that would be a later story. The recipes appendix began with Strawberry Mandarin Salad, mentioned repeatedly in the novel. Other recipes were for chicken, pork, and desserts, but strangely none for beef.

There was a recipe for Rattlesnake Pasta, but that was revealed to be burnt chicken meat mixed with pasta and vegetables. I had wondered about that. In my life I've seen many snakes in the Alberta countryside: garter, bull, and rattle. When reading the text it didn't seem to me that there was enough meat on a snake to make it worthwhile to cook. Sort of like eating roast sparrow; possible but a lot of work for all the meat you'd get.

Being food critic didn't pay well but it had its fringe benefits. MURDER FOR THE HALIBUT (2012) sent Jordan McAllister on a free Caribbean trip on board the Carnation Queen cruise ship. Her only duty was to judge a cooking competition of professional chefs who were vying for the sponsor's \$500,000 endorsement contract.

One of the chefs was Stefano Mancini, a pain in the frying pan, who soon ended up face-planting into his halibut dish. He was a masher who had groped McAllister, but also had many other enemies. He was not mourned by anyone who knew him, and there was no shortage of suspects. The competition went on, and was vicious behind the scenes.



McAllister was the first to admit she was an incompetent judge, on whom all the fancy ingredients were wasted. Marpleing in the intervals, she didn't come up with much at first, but subsequent alarms and excursions brought her close to the solution.

Mancini had been an innocent victim, as the killer was trying for one of the other chefs and there was a mixup. It was all a matter of revenge being best served as a cold dish. Events decades ago had festered in the murderer, who wanted to clean his plate of enemies in an old family feud.

And so to the recipes appendix, with only one fish selection, Grilled Halibut Caribbean Style With Pineapple And Mango Salsa.

DEATH OF A COUPON CLIPPER (2013) by Lee Hollis (pseudonym of siblings Rick Copp and Holly Simason) is from a cozy series about Hayley Powell, food critic for a Bar Harbor, Maine, newspaper. Blood flowed like tomato sauce wherever she went.

A reality show about coupon clipping had come to the village. Since Powell needed the money, she signed on as a contestant. A heavy snowfall had collapsed the garage roof onto her car and the furnace quit beyond repair. Bad things come in threes, it is said, so there was an easy guess as to what the third thing will be.

Powell's opponent was Candace Culpepper, a nasty rhymes-with-witch. The third thing made its appearance on cue when Powell found Culpepper's body out in the snow. A pair of scissors were deep in her back, so she didn't just slip and fall.

Culpepper liked to invite men into her bedroom where she taped the scenes with hidden cameras. While snooping through her house, Miss Marples being well known for break-and-enter, Powell came across quite the collection of homemade DVDs, the most recent of which starred Drew Nickerson, host of the coupon reality show and unknowingly hosting his tryst with Culpepper.

Blackmail immediately came to mind. Well not immediately, but the second thought after viewing the DVDs.

The police investigation settled on an impersonator who specialized in defrauding rich folk by posing as a long-lost relative who needed money.

Powell found the real culprit, a neighbour who resented Culpepper for stealing coupon flyers out of her mailbox.

Powell finished on a high note when she won the coupon contest, receiving enough prize money for a new car, garage, and furnace. All's well that ends well, except for Culpepper. Recipes are scattered throughout the book but alas, no coupons.

Another Hayley, another day. TOPPED CHEF (2013) by Lucy Burdette (pseudonym of Roberta Isleib) was a novel in a cozy series about Hayley Snow, a food critic for a pretentious magazine published in Key West, Florida. Blood flowed like salsa wherever she went.

Someday I'll have to sit down, cross-reference all the food cozy series, and draw up a chart of which author was imitating whom. It's almost as bad as ten-volume fantasy trilogies with a young boy/girl who is the rightful heir to the throne and has to fight their way past wizards and monsters while searching on a quest for the Sacred Knickknack of Qwerty. But I digress.

Hayley Snow had been signed up by her boss at KEY ZEST magazine as one of the judges for the Key West Topped Chef cooking contest. Sam Rizzoli was another judge but he didn't see the contest through on account of someone hanging him from the yardarm of a sail boat. They do things differently down there. He owned a restaurant to which Snow had just given a bad review. Fortunately he had many enemies so she wasn't the only suspect.

The contestants were going at it hot and heavy, and not just with stoves. The television producers filming the contest loved it, not surprising since they were approaching it as a reality show. The chefs were used to fawning comments about their food, not the nasty truth from the judges, so that was good footage.

Assorted alarms followed the assorted dishes, the most improbable of which was someone who was allergic to star fruit. One of the television crew was the murderer. He had put a fix in on the contest and was extremely annoyed when Rizzoli wouldn't stick to the bargain. "May the best person win" didn't apply to this show.

Recipes in the appendix included Mediterranean Cod Soup, Lime Cupcakes With Lime Cream Cheese Frosting (since it was Key West), Granola, and the author's grandmother's Chocolate Cake.



MURDER WITH GANACHE (2014) had Hayley Snow busy writing restaurant reviews, an article on the Hemingway cats, and baking 200 cupcakes for her friend’s wedding. Her parents and stepbrother Rory arrived on the island to provide her with lots of family melodrama.

Rory provided the main impetus for the plot when he went out partying with the wrong kind of people. A short while later, the body of a teenaged girl named Mariah was found floating in the water. Found by Hayley, who should have been reviewing restaurants and counting how many toes Hemingway’s cats had.

Mariah was connected with Rory, so his stepsister had to do some fancy Marpleing to save him. Mariah was in deep with drugs and felony thefts. She stole jewels from the wrong man, who made certain she would never do a thing like that again.

Hayley didn’t get in much food reviewing, what with all her detecting. The wedding was called off, so that saved work on the cupcakes. The recipes section once more included Lime Cupcakes With Lime Cream Cheese Frosting.

FATAL RESERVATIONS (2015) had Hayley Snow covering several controversies for her magazine KEY ZEST. A floating restaurant called For Goodness Sake was protested by land restaurants.

Performance artists were feuding with each other for busking space on the town square. One of them, Bart Frontgate, didn’t get past the first chapter.

Snow went into Miss Marple mode, interspersed with her regular restaurant reviewing. Off she went to the docks where For Goodness Sake was moored. It turned out to be a Japanese fusion restaurant, the very thing Key West needed.

In between bites of Flambéed Grouper With Seaweed, Snow interrogated her friends for background information and just plain gossip. Returning home, she fed her cats some kibble, then spent a half-page preparing an omelet for herself. She seemed hypocritical to me, giving the cats dried food out of a bag while she had the freshest ingredients for her meal.

Much was dragged out of the water, metaphorically speaking. The murderer was working out issues from years ago. After some near-fatal splashing around, he was brought to justice. It was ugly.

A nicer topic was the recipes appendix, which began with Raspberry Cake. Then there was a strange leap to Utah Blueberry Pancakes With Cinnamon Butter, followed by a variety of items not particularly associated with Florida. Nothing about Flambéed Grouper With Seaweed, but that seems like a recipe for professional chefs, not to be tried at home.

Following on was KILLER TAKEOUT (2016) which took place during Key West’s Fantasy Fest celebration. Hayley Snow was slumming, having been assigned by her editor to write a piece on grab-and-go food.

The magazine’s receptionist Danielle Kamen was elected Queen of the festival. There was controversy, and she got into a public cat fight against runner-up Caryn Druckman. It was a physical brawl, hair pulling and all that. Later on during the zombie parade, Druckman collapsed and died from a poisoned drink.

The prime suspect was obvious, and the citizens of Key West did not hesitate to say so, or rather blog or tweet in this day and age. Snow leaped to the defence of her coworker. Interrogating those who knew the defunct, she did a lot of meeting and greeting at food events. She rhapsodized over fish tacos while listening to the gossip.

Kamen was poisoned next but since she was a major supporting character and good friends with Snow, she survived. Meanwhile, a hurricane was bearing down on Key West, as they often do. Citizens and tourists alike were dithering whether they should ride out the storm or run for it and possibly be caught on the bridge.

Two storms hit simultaneously, the hurricane, and the murderer taking two hostages, neither of whom was Snow. A rush of facts late in the novel revealed that Druckman soured a restaurant deal and made life difficult for a chef. Some people take their food seriously.

Once more to the recipes, with Key West Boiled Dinner (shrimp and potatoes), Strawberry Cake, Shrimp Salad, Mango Hot Dog (I’ll pass; fruit and meat should never be mixed), and Coconut Cake. Finish all that off with Knockoff Painkiller Cocktail (pineapple juice and rum) and you’ll forget what it was you just ate.



DEATH ON A PLATTER (2011) by Elaine Viets was a novel in a cozy series about Josie Marcus, who worked as a mystery shopper in Saint Louis, Missouri. She was sampling the toasted ravioli at the Off The Hill restaurant when another customer, an alcoholic named Clay Oreck, was poisoned by the dipping sauce. The owner, Tillie Minnelli, asked Marcus to help her after the police charged her with murder.

Among the other meanwhiles, a casino developer was trying to buy out the restaurant. It was mentioned that the vacant lot next door had weeds growing in it such as poison ivy and castor beans. This wasn't just a foreboding, it was the author jumping up and down, waving a red flag, and blowing on a trumpet to attract the reader's attention. Thus it was not a surprise when the autopsy came back that the dipping sauce had ground-up castor beans in it, enough to kill.

Yet another meanwhile was that Marcus had to keep working. Her boss sent her to another restaurant to test what was described as a Saint Louis delicacy, a pig ear sandwich. I'm glad I don't live there. Bacon and pork sausages are as far as I go. The job after that was much better, a place that sold sea-salt caramels with honey and vanilla, dipped in chocolate.

The second murder victim was a nearby shopkeeper. The villains, who had complicated reasons for the murders, were exposed during a dumpster trawl that ended in a bloody knife fight in a kitchen. A very messy finish, and not just figuratively. No food recipes, but an appendix did provide a tourist guide to Saint Louis restaurants. I'm surprised the cow brain sandwiches were legal.



Creme brulee



Peanut butter chocolate

**Doughnuts.**

I use the spelling 'doughnut' except when quoting from the cozies, which use the American spelling 'donut'. All illustrated doughnuts are from the Jelly chain in Calgary.

ASSAULT AND BATTER (2013) by Jessica Beck was part of a food cozy series set in April Springs, North Carolina, about Suzanne Hart, proprietor of Donut Hearts. The novel opened with her friend Emily Hargraves marrying Hart's ex-husband. Hargraves' ex-boyfriend Jude Williams was murdered soon after. As this was the eleventh book in the series and given all the personal interconnections, it was natural that Hart should investigate.

That was in between running the doughnut shop of course. She was trying to come up with recipes for diet doughnuts, an oxymoron if ever there was one. Health food eaters do not instinctively think of doughnuts as a snack food.

There were many romantic entanglements in the village. Williams was murdered because he scorned one woman too many. Hart got herself trapped with the killer at gunpoint, as Miss Marples often did, but the police arrived in the usual nick of time. *"Officer Grant, my friend and a loyal donut customer, came rushing in with his gun drawn."* Well he would, wouldn't he? He was probably anticipating the Chocolate Cranberry Cinnamon Donut recipe in the appendix.

SWEET SUSPECTS (2014) was the next novel in the series, which began at Suzanne Hart's high school reunion. Since most of the attendees came from away, they weren't aware of Hart's reputation as a murder magnet. One who found out the hard way was alumnus Zane Dunbar. He was stabbed to death in a park across the street from the doughnut shop.

*The police chief shook his head in sadness. "It seems to occur all too often around here these days. I don't know what happened to the quiet of small town life."* Really?

Hart was full of herself as the official Miss Marple of the village. She barged around town raising lots of hackles with her interrogations. Her doughnut shop only operated from 06h00 to 11h00, so that gave her plenty of time to snoop. She found plenty of back stories, from business deals gone wrong to romantic entanglements. The deceased was not a nice man either.



No held-at-gunpoint denouement in this book. It was a held-at-knifepoint denouement and took place in the doughnut shop kitchen. There was a fight to the death, but Hart had a doughnut dropper machine. She knew how to use it as a blunt instrument as well as for making doughnuts.

Thence to the recipes, which included Lemon Magic Donuts. I foolishly read this book on an empty stomach, so I went to the nearest Jelly doughnut shop and had a Lemon Blueberry doughnut.



*Glazed jelly*



*Lemon blueberry*

CUSTARD CRIME (2014) put the police chief under the microscope this time around when his ex-wife was murdered in a building near the doughnut shop. When the body was discovered, not by Suzanne Hart amazingly, the rush of first responders made Hart wonder about selling more doughnuts to them after the initial crisis was over and they were packing up. But that would be wrong.

Hart did much of her investigating from behind the counter of her shop, picking up juicy bits of gossip. That wasn't enough, so she utilized a standard Miss Marple tactic, break-and-enter while searching for evidence. There was a new angle on her Marpleism; she thought of herself as a facilitator, not a snooping old biddy.

In the final confrontation with the murderer, he told Hart that the dead woman had rejected his advances, plus she owed him money. With a single bound Hart was free and all that.

In the appendix, the first recipe was for Cow Spots And Moose Donuts. That was a single doughnut, not several. It involved chocolate glaze, drops of white icing, and mini-pretzels. Next was the Reverse Cow Spots And Moose Donut, but I'm sure you can figure out that one for yourself.



*Madagascar vanilla*



*London fog*

**Caffeine.**

Pausing only to loosen my belt, let us proceed to what is commonly associated with doughnuts. I don't drink coffee or tea myself, not liking the taste of either, and generally get my caffeine fix from those two southern remedies, Coke Cola and Dr Pepper.

DEATH BY COFFEE (2015) by Alex Erickson (pseudonym of Eric S. Moore) was the first novel in a cozy series about Krissy Hancock and Vicki Patterson, who opened a bookstore café in Pine Hills, Ohio. The place was called Death By Coffee, after a mystery novel published by Hancock's father James. He had bankrolled the shop, so his daughter wanted to butter up the old man. Little did the village know what fate had waiting for it in the future. Today a bucolic settlement, the day after tomorrow declared a federal disaster area.

The shop lived up to its name on its first day of business. Brendon Lawyer (his name, not his occupation) was the local ne'er-do-well who bought a coffee, gulped it down, walked across the street to his office, and died as soon as he sat



down at his desk. Cause of death was peanut allergy. Fortunately the coffee shop didn't have any, but unfortunately that didn't stop the gossips.

The writing was rough in the opening third of this book. Hancock kept dropping things whenever she was startled, such as coffee cups, cleaner bottles, and food orders. No one drops that many things that many times. It got annoying real fast.

Be that as it may, Hancock went sleuthing, ostensibly because people might think Lawyer was poisoned by her coffee. The defunct had been a womanizer, was in the middle of a nasty divorce, and was a sharp practice man. Hancock had her own problems, such as an ex-boyfriend stalking her, obnoxious customers, and an even more obnoxious competitor who owned a diner down the street.

The murderer was one of Lawyer's mistresses. He had been a busy man indeed. There was the usual gunpoint confrontation and, since Hancock was needed for the sequel, a last-second rescue. The only real surprise was the lack of a recipes appendix.

DEATH BY ESPRESSO (2018) kept Krissy Hancock busy helping her partner Vicki Patterson with her wedding plans, such as being the maid of honour and meeting Patterson's parents Gina and Frederick at the airport. Her father James was on the same flight. He brought a date, and the Pattersons brought their entourage (they were actors).

Vicki was marrying Mason Lawyer, younger brother of the unfortunate Brendon. Gina brought along Cathy Carr, the world's most famous wedding planner in her mind. To sum up, all sorts of drama queens were about to rend the social fabric of Pine Hills.

Carr continually munched on chocolate-covered espresso beans and always had a large coffee in her hand. She instantly became the best customer of Krissy's coffee shop. Unfortunately she didn't make it past Chapter 4, not from caffeine poisoning but from a blunt instrument.

Krissy did some of her investigating from chatting with customers in her shop, and some from break-and-enter, long a favoured method of Miss Marples. The latter activity got her run in to a jail cell. The Deppity Dawg was quite justified. After being sprung from the hoosegow, Krissy carried on unimpeded.

The traditional J'accuse! meeting was in Vicki's house, where the killer blubbed all instead of shutting up. Unrequited love and a stolen necklace were the motives. Pine Hills settled back to await the next murder, for as long as Krissy and her coffee shop were there, so would be the bodies.

TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT (2014) by Amanda Cooper was the first novel in a cozy series about Sophie Taylor, late of Manhattan but after her restaurant career there failed, now of Gracious Grove, upstate New York in the Finger Lakes district. She had ended up working in her grandmother Rose Freemont's shop, Auntie Rose's Victorian Tea House.

The villagers really liked tea, for there was a competing establishment La Belle Epoque. It was also run by a grandmother, Thelma Mae Earnshaw. Part of the reason for the popularity of tea houses was that the village was in a dry county, so there were no beer parlours to steal business. The tourist trade to the Finger Lakes also helped.

The two grannies had been feuding since they were school girls together. Pouring gasoline on the fire was Earnshaw's granddaughter Cissy Peterson, who decided to have her bridal shower at Auntie Rose's because she and Taylor were good friends. It was just as well, for Peterson's future mother-in-law Vivienne Whittaker tried the cupcakes at La Belle Epoque and died from poisoning.

Earnshaw had other problems, such as discovering her grandson Philip was storing booze in the tea house storage room and using the place as a speakeasy. The poison was established as a food allergen to which Whittaker was sensitive. It was introduced into a cupcake. Since no one else had allergies, they ate them without difficulty.

Earnshaw's family was white trash, straight out of Tobacco Road. The murderer was acting out on family feuds and illegal activities, of which the bootlegging was the least. Whittaker, dear old lady that she was, had been mixed up in political corruption involving her kinfolk. Someone wanted to prevent her from exposing him and knew about her food allergy.

The J'accuse! meeting staged by Taylor was a tea party like no other. Nero Wolfe couldn't have done it better. Taylor did very well for her first excursion as a Miss Marple. After the shouting and arrests were over, on to the recipe. There was only Cranberry Pecan Yogurt Scones, plus a few pages on how to make tea for those who don't know how to boil water.



**BROKEN BONE CHINA** (2019) by Laura Childs (pseudonym of Gerry Schmitt) is a novel in a long-running cozy series about Theodosia Browning, proprietor of the Indigo Tea Shop of Charleston, South Carolina. This was the twentieth book in the series, and since some had more than one murder, let us say that Browning was an experienced Miss Marple by now.

The shop was catering a tea out in the field for the Top Flight Balloon Club. They should have Googled her name, for in the first chapter a drone was used to attack a balloon, dropping it from the air and killing its three occupants. Police believed the intended target was Don Kingsley, CEO of the software company SyncSoft and not a nice guy by all accounts.

The balloon plummeted onto the tea tables, so there wasn't much left to pack up. Browning saw the whole thing. Kingsley's widow Tawney was bright and cheerful, not what one would expect from a grieving wife. One of his employees was a whistleblower at SyncSoft and therefore a suspect. Don owned a Revolutionary War flag worth millions. It went missing in the aftermath.

All that having been set up, Browning went Marpleing, being careful to touch base with the local police from time to time. Tawney was setting up a luxury bed-and-breakfast at the time of Don's murder. She wanted Browning to teach her basics of running a tea house. *"That way I'll be able to serve afternoon tea to all my guests at my fabulous B and B."*

She wasn't so bubbly at the Nancy Drew Tea staged by Browning in her own tea shop. In walked a flag collector who had been pressuring Don to sell his flag. Tawney attacked him with a knife, accusing him of the murder. A high-society tea party it wasn't. Subsequent tea parties were more sedate, in the sense that no troopers had to be called in.

The murderer was a flag collector who used another drone to try and silence Browning. Didn't work. From there to the recipes, starting with Walnut And Cream Cheese Sandwiches, Lemon Scones, Eggnog Scones, Cheddar And Pimento Sandwiches, and many more. The Scone Sliders seemed to me to be better suited to a barbecue food cozy.

## **ACTION ADVENTURE ON THE AIR: PART 2**

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #426.]

### **Freebooting Diplomats.**

GHOST CORPS was an old-time radio series, no writers credited, that aired in 1934 and 1935 as 15-minute episodes in two 13-episode series. It concerned the activities of K.C. Smith and other espionage agents circulating through the Middle East and beyond, trying to keep the world safe for their empires. Smith was assisted by his sidekick Mohammed Ali and the beautiful Ameria, daughter of a local sheik. Each episode ended with a cliffhanger to be continued in the next installment. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrlibrary.org](http://www.otrlibrary.org).)

85 years ago, in 1934, the first series aired, "The Knives of El Malik". The first episode was titled "Arrival, Assignment, And Attempted Assassination" and set up the story line. Smith reported to his controller in Cairo for a briefing. He was told that Islamic terrorists who objected to foreign powers in their land had declared a jihad. So as you see, there is indeed no new thing under the sun. This series could air today with little or no change and still be considered as contemporary fiction.

The 13<sup>th</sup> and final episode of this story brought me up short with its title "The Big Bang Theory". The episode itself did not use this title, but simply announced the series name. I suspect that whomever prepared these mp3s provided the titles, as many of the other episodes are titled in a modern manner that would not have been used in 1934.

The phrase "big bang" was invented by astronomer Fred Hoyle in 1949 to describe a newly developed theory that the universe originated from a singularity and then suddenly inflated. It was not in use in 1934 among astronomers and certainly not by Hollywood producers.

Large numbers of old-time radio episodes never had titles because they were meant to be one-off shows, performed once, the script tossed into a wastebasket, and then forgotten. Subsequently, OTR fans began labeling their tapes and mp3s with made-up names, which caused considerable chaos when the same episode was circulated under a dozen different names.



Getting back to this episode, it culminated the first serial. Smith had been running around Arabia constantly being trapped by the bad guys from a tribe that had the idea it was their land, not to be ruled by Europeans. The terrorists/freedom fighters (take your pick) had stockpiled huge quantities of gunpowder, rifles, pistols, and ammunition in a cavern.

Smith and company found their way in, and set about preparing to blow up the munitions dump. Much of the episode was taken up with sound effects of them breaking open casks of gunpowder, pouring out trails of it to the cavern entrance as a fuse line, and stacking casks and ammo boxes in a big pile. They tricked the tribesmen into coming into the cave just as the fuses detonated the munitions with a big bang. Not a theory either.

The second series aired in 1935, titled “The Prayer Rug Of Nana Syeeb”, began with Smith and his controller out for a stroll through the Cairo market. They observed an auction where a small prayer rug had attracted a high bid.

Smith thought that strange, especially after noticing the rug was not decorated with the usual symmetric patterns but oddly divergent lines, crosses, and circles, as if it could be a map. He outbid the Hindu buyer, Ram Das, took it home, and determined that it was indeed a map.

Ram Das and his cohort were most annoyed, so from there the usual sort of mayhem developed. He was from a forbidden city in the Himalayas and needed the map to locate great treasure to finance his ambitions. The serial traversed Asia as everyone chased after the MacGuffin. There was a beautiful princess, it almost went without saying.

The final episode was in the treasure cave, with several twists. Ram Das thought he had won but discovered he had collected worthless fake treasure. The real treasure was hidden further back where Smith and the princess were. There was a water-filled shaft in the treasure room. When Ram Das and Smith fought, it was obvious which one would take the plunge.

Like serials of this nature, the action was fast and wide-ranging. If the listener missed anything, not to worry, as every so often the characters would stop and summarize the story so far.

## **I Love Adventure.**

Carlton E. Morse was a prolific old-time radio writer and producer who churned out large quantities of action-adventure series, often with overlapping characters. He knew how to keep the plot moving. His shows often changed titles and networks, but were basically one long continuous series. Sometimes they were daily 15-minute episodes and just as often were half-hour weekly episodes.

A common failing of radio shows back then was that characters referred to each other by name in every sentence so the listener could keep the dialogue straight. Morse got around this problem by giving everyone a distinctive accent. The hero and lead character Capt. Jack Packard had a eastern seaboard American voice. His sidekicks were Reggie Yorke, an upper-class twit from England, and Doc Long, whose Texas accent was so thick it could be cut with a knife.

I LOVE ADVENTURE aired in 1948 as a brief series. Originally it began with Packard and company working for a strange spy agency called The 21 Old Men Of #10 Gramercy Park, headquartered in London, England. The old men would brief the agents while sitting behind a large one-way window. For no apparent reason, in the seventh episode the 21 Old Men vanished and instead Packard began operating as a private detective in California.

“The Hundred Million Dollar Manhunt” was the search for that amount in diamonds, lost by the Dutch government to the Nazis during the war. Add an extra zero for the value of the diamonds in today’s depreciated currency. At the briefing by the 21 Old Men, they explained Doc Long was on assignment in Outer Mongolia, so Packard and Yorke would carry on.

The two men forthwith departed for Dutch Guiana, today Suriname, on the northern coast of South America. They had many adventures upon arrival, so many that they could hardly set foot outside their hotel room without being kidnapped at gunpoint or about to be thrown into the river to be eaten alive by piranhas.

The explanation became clearer when they realized there were two independent gangs seeking the diamonds, one group who spoke with bad French or Spanish accents, and der oder mit German accents, obviously Nazis left over from the war. The gangs were as busy attacking each other as they were in kidnapping Packard and Yorke. The three-cornered war ended with you-know-who



victorious and reporting back to the 21 Old Men. A snappy episode, although the constant kidnappings were monotonous until explained.

“The Kwan Moon Dagger” was a later episode after Packard had gone into business for himself as the A-1 Detective Agency of Los Angeles. Doc Long was now his sidekick and Reggie Yorke had vanished. Probably stayed on with the 21 Old Men back in England.

Packard and Long were in their office when a delegation arrived from French Indochina, as it then was, all of whom were obviously white actors speaking in very bad Oriental accents. Ah so. The leader of the group was a princess who said a valuable artifact, the Kwan Moon Dagger, had been stolen from her temple and taken to Chicago. The dagger, which was the MacGuffin of the plot, had a gold blade and was encrusted with gems.

The two detectives headed east. Their first clue was a contact who would meet them in a funeral parlour. He did, but he was one of the dearly departed. The toll of bodies began to mount, and not just at the mortuary. Basically anyone who talked to Packard and Long wound up dead moments later.

There was one person who managed to stay in the land of the living, who said he was a doctor from French Indochina. He was searching for radium that had been stolen from the hospital. Back then it was worth a fortune because of its limited availability and widespread demand for medical use.

Several more bodies later, the dagger was found. It was only gold-plated and the gems were paste. It had a large handle, inside of which was the stolen radium. After the last shots were fired, Packard explained to Long and the listeners that the princess (not a real one of course), the doctor, and a third man had stolen the radium and smuggled it to the USA in the fake dagger.

The third man double-crossed them and became that first body they viewed in the funeral parlour. He had hidden the dagger beforehand, which is why the princess had hired Packard and Long.

Reggie Yorke had been a cultured Englishman who knew how to be polite. Doc Long was a boorish Texan who couldn't keep his big fat mouth shut. Packard constantly cut him off in conversation with others, such as Long's continual hitting on the princess. There was a running gag through this episode about how if Long didn't behave himself, he'd be back in a sideshow wrestling alligators.

## **The Green Hornet.**

The Lone Ranger had a grandnephew named Britt Reid, whose secret identity was The Green Hornet. Like his illustrious relative, newspaper publisher Reid fought crime. The same writer for both series, Fran Striker, and production staff produced the two series on the radio. THE GREEN HORNET aired from 1936 to 1952. Although some people classify The Green Hornet as a superhero, he was a vigilante who operated outside the law. He did it with a customized car, fists, handguns, and what passed for high tech in that era. As an example, one episode was based on solving a crime by using polarized sunglasses, which were cutting edge in the 1940s.

The Green Hornet used a souped-up car called the Black Beauty, driven by Reid's faithful Filipino valet Kato. The emphasis was on fighting organized crime and political corruption in the big city. Newspaper reporter Michael Axford was the comic relief, a stage Irishman with the phoniest accent to come out of Boston. The Green Hornet and Kato broke the cases, which Reid then documented in his newspaper, having fed Axford the story.

“Katz With Nine Lives” was a 1945 episode about an insurance fraud and blackmail gang who set up a friend of Reid named Forrester as the patsy in a drunk driving hit-and-run. Using a doctor who was millimetres from being struck off the list, they got Forrester drunk and then staged an accident with him supposedly driving. The alleged victim was Katz, whose fake injuries were certified by the doctor.

Forrester had a prior list of driving offenses and was known to police. He was also rich, which the gang figured could produce \$10,000 in fake medical expenses initially. Once enough time had passed without him reporting the injury accident to police or the insurance company, they were going to milk him over time for another \$90,000.

Reid was asked for help by Forrester, a desperate man with no place to turn. The Green Hornet barged into the gang's activities, one member at a time, and got them to turn against each other. Katz thought his cohorts were going to kill him, so he fled to the police and blabbed all. After that, it was every man for himself and the gang broke up in disorder. The Green Hornet recovered the \$10,000 cash but Reid decided that instead of returning it, the money would go to a children's hospital. As judge and jury, Reid was sympathetic to Forrester but felt he needed to be taught a lesson.



**SEEN IN THE LITERATURE**

Melott, A.L., and B.C. Thomas (2019) **From cosmic explosions to terrestrial fires?** JOURNAL OF GEOLOGY 127:475-481

Authors’ abstract: *Multiple lines of evidence point to one or more moderately nearby supernovae, with the strongest signal at ~2.6 Ma. We build on previous work to argue for the likelihood of cosmic ray ionization of the atmosphere and electron cascades leading to more frequent lightning and therefore an increase in nitrate deposition and wildfires.*

*The potential exists for a large increase in the prehuman nitrate flux onto the surface, which has previously been argued to lead to CO<sub>2</sub> drawdown and cooling of the climate. Evidence for increased wildfires exists in an increase in soot and carbon deposits over the relevant period. The wildfires would have contributed to the transition from forest to savanna in northeast Africa, long argued to have been a factor in the evolution of hominin bipedalism.*

Giribet, G., and G.D. Edgecombe (2019) **The phylogeny and evolutionary history of arthropods.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 29:R592-R602

Authors’ abstract: *With the advent of molecular phylogenetics, arthropods were found to be monophyletic and placed within a clade of molting animals, the ecdysozoans, with nematodes and six other phyla.*

*Molecular phylogenetics also provided a new framework for relationships between the major arthropod groups, such as the clade Pancrustacea, which comprises insects and crustaceans.*

*It is now broadly recognized that extant arthropods are split into chelicerates and mandibulates, and relationships within the two mandibulate clades (myriapods and pancrustaceans) are stabilizing. Notably, the phylogeny of insects is now understood with considerable confidence, whereas relationships among chelicerate orders remain poorly resolved.*

*The evolutionary history of arthropods is illuminated by a rich record of fossils, often with exquisite preservation, but current analyses conflict over whether certain fossil groups are stem- or crown-group arthropods. Molecular time-trees calibrated with fossils estimate the origins of arthropods to be in the*

*Ediacaran [600 to 542 megayears ago], while most other deep nodes date to the Cambrian [542.0 to 488.3 megayears ago].*

*The earliest stem-group arthropods were lobopodians, worm-like animals with annulated appendages. Confidently placing some key extinct clades on the arthropod tree of life may require less ambiguous interpretation of fossil structures and better integration of morphological data into the phylogeny.*

*In all panarthropods, the body is divided at least into a head and a trunk (these structurally and functionally distinct batches of segments are known as tagmata), but more tagmata are common, such as in insects (and other hexapods) which have a head, thorax and abdomen.*

Hackworth, Z.J., et al (2019) **A growing conspiracy: Recolonization of common ravens (Corvus corax) in central and southern Appalachia, USA.** SOUTHEASTERN NATURALIST 18:281-296

Authors’ abstract: *Corvus corax (Common Raven, hereafter Raven) was historically ubiquitous throughout much of North America, but persecution and habitat loss after European settlement resulted in range reduction and population decline across much of the eastern US. Increasing numbers of confirmed sightings of Ravens in the eastern US over the past 70 years suggest rapid regional recolonization, particularly in central and southern Appalachia where, in many states, Ravens were thought to be extirpated or at least highly range-restricted.*

*We compiled 64,611 Raven observations from multiple public and private sources across Appalachia between 1950 and 2016 and performed spatial analyses to characterize regional recolonization trends. The Appalachian Mountain range has served as both a refugium for Ravens during the late 19th and early 20th centuries and a regional source population for range expansion between 1950 and 2016.*

*Ravens are now common in the mountainous areas of Appalachia and have recently expanded their range into lower elevations, including the successful recolonization of four states: Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee. Spatial analyses demonstrated a 40% increase in the Raven's apparent geographic range in central and southern Appalachia, which now spans at least 470,380 km<sup>2</sup>.*