

OPUNTIA 454



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

ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: CANMORE

photos by Dale Speirs

On August 21, I had to run a business errand out at Canmore, a town which straddles the Trans-Canada Highway just outside the eastern gates of Banff National Park. About an hour's drive from my house in southwest Calgary.

As long as I was out there, I did some touring. The cover shows Mount Yamnuska, which is actually just outside the highway entrance into the mountains. I took the photo because of the strange ripples in the sky, where high-level winds wobbled as they crossed Yamnuska.

Below: The Opuntiamobile is parked on the opposite side of the Trans-Canada Highway from the old town district of Canmore, which is hidden by all those spruce trees. Behind the camera are a multitude of townhouses under construction or recently completed.

At left in the distance is Three Sisters Mountain. Taking up the right half is Mount Ebagay Nakoda, named after the aboriginal tribe whose Reserve is adjacent to Mount Yamnuska. Its westernmost peak, at the righthand edge of the photo, is Ha Ling Peak, named after the first man to climb it.



A view of Mount Ehagay Nakoda from a different angle, looking southeast from the Canmore Nordic Centre where the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics staged the cross-country ski events. The reservoir hangs above Canmore Old Town and if the dam ever breaks, the town will be washed down the Bow River past Calgary. The signage didn't show well in the full image, so a close-up at right.





At left: Self-explanatory. In the summer, the cross-country ski trails are used by marathon runners in training, who have one additional hazard that skiers never worry about.

Below: Looking south at Mount Ehagay Nakoda from the New Town on the far side of the valley. Cougar Creek only flows during the spring snowmelt, and the rest of the year is dry. When it does flow, it fills up the entire waterway.



WHEN SOMETIME LOFTY TOWERS I SEE: PART 5

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #284, 343, 369, and 423.]

There's Trouble At The Skyscraper.

"The Ghost Building" was a 1941 episode of the old-time radio series THE SHADOW, some episodes of which are available from www.otrr.org. No writer credits were given. Do I need to explain who The Shadow was?

Well, okay, for the benefit of the two readers of this zine who never heard of him, The Shadow was in reality Lamont Cranston, a wealthy young man about town. His girlfriend, the lovely Margo Lane, was the only one who knew his secret.

Her function was to be the person to whom Cranston explained the plot, plus to scream whenever she saw a dead body. After about 500 bodies or so by the time this episode was made, she should shrug her shoulders and tell Cranston that here was another one.

The episode opened with Jerome Veen's construction company about to build the tallest skyscraper in the world, to be known as the Coast Building. He was threatened by a man he didn't recognize, who told Veen he was from his past and would take revenge if the skyscraper was built. Nonetheless, the building was completed, with a toll of fatal accidents which disrupted operations but did not halt them.

Lamont Cranston, Margo Lane, and Police Commissioner Weston were among the guests at the dedication of the completed skyscraper. As Veen was speaking, the voice from the past cut into the public address system and overrode him. It told the audience that the ghosts of the dead construction workers would haunt the skyscraper.

Tenants in the building were stabbed, an elevator sabotaged, and a window worker fell to his death. The vacancy rate soared. Weston, being the blithering idiot he was, tried to arrest Veen for murder. Cranston and Lane did a break-and-enter in the skyscraper looking for evidence in the office of the architect, Robert Lewis. They tangled with the man from the past, but he escaped through a secret passage.

They did find enough evidence to The Shadow to call upon Lewis in his home. Lewis was in reality Veen's grandson, unbeknownst to the latter. Veen had a son many decades ago but abandoned him to an orphanage. That son was Lewis's father. The two were now taking revenge. The father was doing the killing, and the son had infiltrated the Veen organization and designed the secret passages.

Cranston rushed back to the skyscraper to prevent a final set of murders. Weston was standing guard at the boardroom where the company directors were meeting and were about to be murdered. Cranston had to fight him to get in and save the directors.

Pause for a moment of wonder. Veen must have real political power if he could make a Police Commissioner stand guard duty. Not a uniformed officer in sight. After saving lives, Cranston then turned himself invisible (no one noticed he was suddenly gone) and as The Shadow entered the secret passages and chased down the father and son. Justice was ultimately served, and the organ player who did the music for the show played a jolly calliope tune.

The old-time radio mystery series BOSTON BLACKIE aired from 1944 to 1950. (These and hundreds of other OTR shows are available as free mp3s at www.otrrlibrary.org) There were also movies and books. Blackie was not a detective, private or police, but was always barging into crimes.

Boston Blackie, real name Horatio Black, was a former jewel thief. He now lived the life of a supposedly honest citizen, although his source of income was never specified. He lived well in a nice apartment, squired a girlfriend named Mary Wesley about town, and always had time to interfere in the casebook of NYPD Inspector Faraday.

"The Simmons Construction Matter" was a 1945 episode, no writer credited. It opened on the twentieth floor of a skyscraper under construction, where the day-shift foreman was talking to his men when he was suddenly shot dead by a rifle. The crew couldn't agree what position the victim had been standing in when he was shot because everyone was moving around during a concrete pour. There were dozens of skyscrapers within rifle range, so police couldn't identify the source of the shot.

Faraday, annoyed as always by Blackie, determined the victim led a blameless life. A few days later, the night foreman was shot dead by the same rifle, again

while pouring concrete. As Faraday hounded widows and other innocent suspects, Blackie arranged for samples of the concrete to be sent to a laboratory for analysis.

As he believed, the concrete was substandard. Someone was shaving costs the wrong way. Blackie set up a J'accuse! meeting in his apartment. John Simmons, the owner of the construction company, was there along with Faraday and Mary Wesley.

To cut the explanation short, Simmons had hired the night foreman to kill the day foreman, who was threatening to expose the matter of the concrete. Simmons loaned the night foreman a rifle with a telescopic sight. After the deed had been done, the night foreman tried to blackmail Simmons, who then used his rifle to despatch him the same way.

None of that was provable in law, but Blackie bluffed a confession out of Simmons. It was all stretched out the hard way but no more sillier than other plots in the series.

“The Statement Of Jared Johnson” by Geraldine Bonner (1899 June, THE BLACK CAT) made use of the spread of newfangled skyscrapers. In an older building adjacent to a new skyscraper, a woman was murdered in a locked room mystery. The janitor was charged with her murder, although no one could explain how he did it.

The victim had died while sitting underneath a skylight. It was winter and a cold one at that, which produced large icicles on all the buildings. Eventually it was proven that the woman died from giant icicles that fell off the adjacent skyscraper and were traveling at speed when they cut through the skylight and mortally speared her. Her body wasn't immediately discovered, so the ice had melted away by the time others entered the room.

Above right: I took this photo in August 2013 and ran it in a previous issue of OPUNTIA but thought it tied in perfectly with the above story.



Missing Floors.

Many North American high rises do not have a thirteenth floor, supposedly because no tenant would rent it. Fiction writers have tried plots where the floor of a building went missing. Consider these stories.

“Disappearing Fourth Floor” was a 1949 episode of BOSTON BLACKIE, no writer credited. Blackie was helping a friend who had been cheated out of \$20,000 at a crooked roulette wheel in an illegal gambling club. They went to the building where the con men had their club on the fourth floor.

This was in the days, dear Millennials, when elevators were operated manually by humans, not just a matter of touching a button for what floor you wanted. The operator took them up to the fourth floor. That was what the annunciator light said, but when the door opened, the two men found themselves on a vacant dusty floor. The club had vanished, though it had been there only a few hours before.

The gamblers had accepted a cheque for \$20,000, so Blackie went to the bank the next morning and lay in wait for them to cash it. He planned to follow them out and then steal the cash, but the idea didn't work.

There was a silver lining though. In consequence, the gamblers had a falling out over dividing the cash. One of them was shot dead by the other. The dead man was the one who figured out how to make the fourth floor disappear. Blackie returned to the building where a variety of alarms were played out.

Eventually Blackie stumbled across the method, that is to say, he beat the truth out of the elevator operator. The annunciator lights were rigged. The one that said '4' was actually the third floor, while the real fourth floor, with the club, was unmarked. Only the elevator operator knew how to take the car up to it.

The old-time radio series MURDER AT MIDNIGHT was an anthology series broadcast from 1946 to 1947. Despite its name, it included many science fiction, weird fiction, and fantasy stories. The series was quite well done and is worth listening to.

"The Thirteenth Floor" was a 1946 episode written by Winifred Wolfe. The story was narrated by Kitty Owen, who had betrayed her boyfriend Mickey Carstairs for a \$5,000 reward and sent him to Death Row. She was now living in a cheap hotel in room 1407. Nobody at the hotel liked her.

The elevator operator let her off on the thirteenth floor one night. She didn't notice until she reached the end of the hallway and discovered she was trying to get into room 1307. The door opened, and she found herself staring at Carstairs. He escaped and figured they couldn't hang him twice if he killed her.

She managed to knock him unconscious and fled to the elevator. She watched the indicator as it slowly climbed, stopped at floor 12, and then jumped to floor 14. Only then did she remember that, like so many other buildings, there was no thirteenth floor.

Carstairs revived and came out into the hallway. She ran, he disappeared. Creeping back to the elevator, she tried the button again. This time it stopped, but Carstairs was the operator, waiting to take her for a ride. She turned and ran for the stairs, descending at full speed down to the street, only to meet him again out there.

After much dithering and running about the hotel lobby, she returned to the elevator. The operator took her up to the fourteenth floor. She went into her room but found Carstairs waiting for her. This time he finished his job. Cue the screaming and organ music.

The television series THE TWILIGHT ZONE was Rod Serling's masterpiece, aired from 1959 to 1964. "The After Hours" was a 1960 episode written by Serling. It began with a young woman named Marsha White wandering around a department store looking for a gold thimble as a present for her mother.

She got on an elevator whose operator who told her to try the ninth floor. On arrival, she found it vacant, with empty display cases and no one in sight. The elevator operator took off as soon as she stepped out, so she wandered about looking. A saleswoman appeared and told her she had something. One of the display cases held a solitary item, a gold thimble.

White, rather nervous, paid for the thimble. The elevator suddenly opened and she rushed in. The same strange operator was in it. She suddenly noticed the thimble was damaged, so the operator told her to go to the Complaints Dept on the third floor. They told her no problem, just take it back to the counter where she bought it and the clerk would remedy the matter.

They were taken aback when she mentioned it was on the ninth floor. The building only had eight floors. The impasse was broken when she spotted a mannequin that looked exactly like the saleswoman who sold her the thimble. White fainted, so the staff took her to a back room to recover. They got busy and forgot about her, and then the store closed for the day.

When White woke up, she was alone in the deserted store. After wandering about, she panicked when the mannequins began to talk to her. The elevator opened and she stumbled in, only to be taken to the ninth floor again. There she met a group of mannequins come to life. The saleswoman appeared and calmed her down.

White was one of them. Her memory came back. Each month a different mannequin got to spend the entire month as a living person before coming back, and White had been the most recent. Somehow she had suffered a memory loss. The saleswoman left to take her turn on the outside, while White prepared herself for years to come as a mannequin.

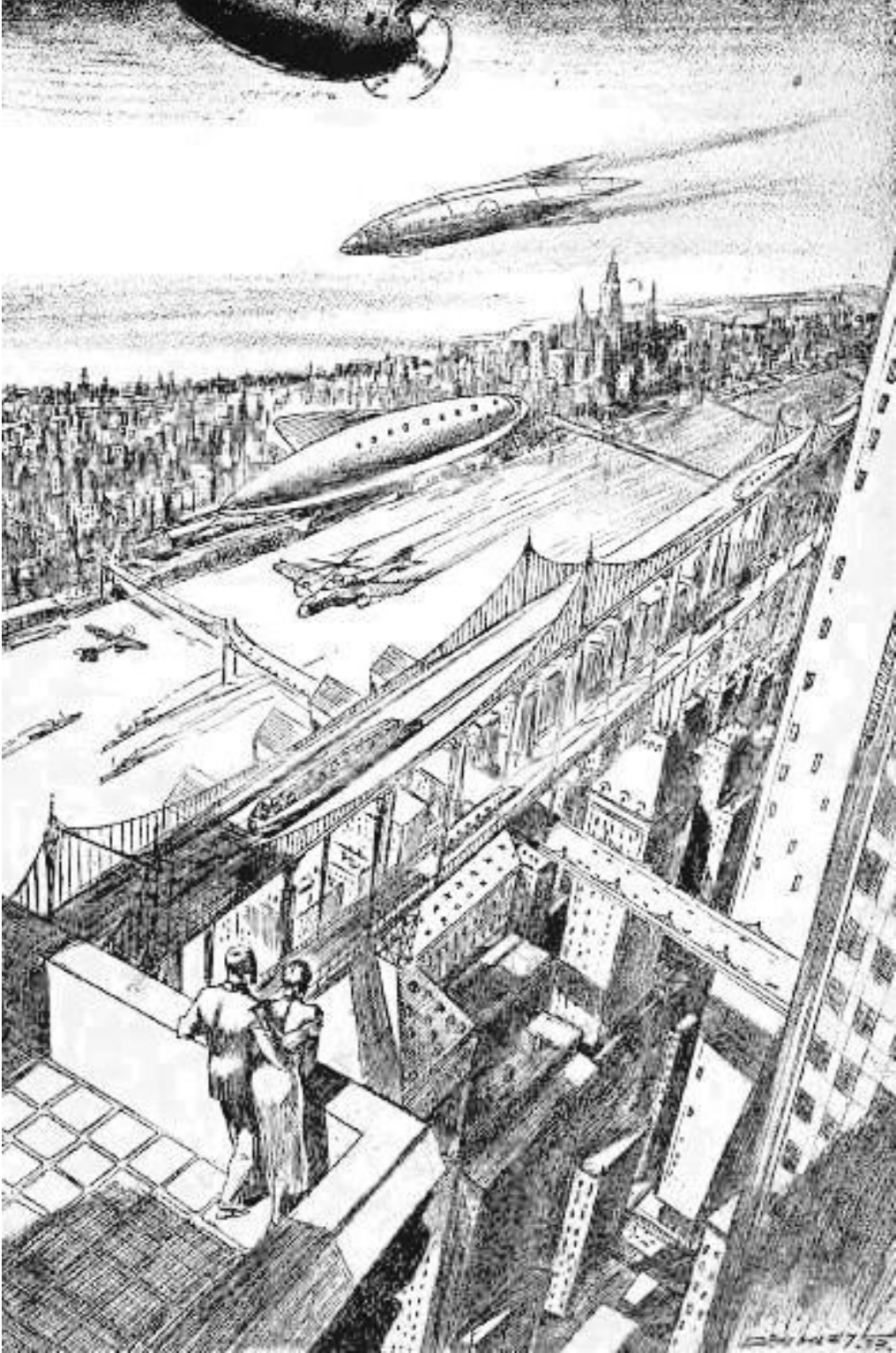
The epilogue was a camera pan over the store the next morning. White was on display in the ladies clothing department. One of the other recognizable mannequins was the elevator operator. As before, the elevator only went up to the eighth floor. There was no ninth floor.

Missing Skyscrapers.

“The Stolen Skyscraper” by Frank Lillie Pollock (1899 April, THE BLACK CAT, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org) is one of the earliest pieces of skyscraper fiction. The Morrison skyscraper, sixteen stories high, was built by a magnate of that name using non-union labour in a very bitter dispute.

The building was completed and occupied, though union men cursed it and the people in them. Not long after, there was a power blackout one night, and the skyscraper disappeared amidst sounds of an earthquake. No rubble on the site, just smooth ground, and adjacent buildings were undisturbed.

Needless to say, this was a sensation that no one could explain. Years later, the explanation came out. A group of 350 union men had learned that there was a giant cavern underneath the skyscraper, deeper than the skyscraper was tall. They spent weeks tunneling and cutting the pilings, let it fall in, and then rushed to cover it with fill. Look for the union label indeed.



At right: A couple view the city from their 200th floor balcony. From the 1933 July AMAZING STORIES.

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BERT?

by Dale Speirs

Three months after beginning your lessons
I STARTED PLAYING IN A DANCE ORCHESTRA



"NOW I HAVE
AN ORCHESTRA OF MY OWN"

writes Bert Magyar of Barnwell,
Alberta, Canada

"It has been a pleasure studying my lessons and I am well pleased with your Course. Three months from the time I began taking your lessons I started playing with a dance orchestra, and at the present time I have an orchestra of my own.

"I have understood my lessons clearly, and have always had a deep interest in them,

"Due to the rapid progress I have made playing the Saxophone, many people have asked where and how I have been taking my lessons. I can truly recommend your easy Course for any student who wishes to learn music a quick and easy way.

"Thanking you for helping me obtain this wonderful Course, I remain"

(Signed) Bert Magyar

Thousands have learned to play their favorite instrument
this quick easy way for only 7c a day . . . SO CAN YOU!

YOU'D be amazed if you could read the many letters like the one above in our files, from people who have realized their musical ambitions by taking our course . . . people who had no special gift for music, no previous training. And you'd understand why more than 750,000 folks from all walks of life have studied music this quick, easy "Print and Picture" way.

But it's not surprising when you consider that this remarkable U. S. School method ends the need for a private teacher and puts out test-our scales and exercises. In fact, it makes learning music a real pastime. You play real tunes by note from the very first lesson. You start with simple melodies. As you improve, you

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What's more, you'll be thrilled to know that you can learn your favorite instrument this simple, home-body way for less than 7c a day. That covers everything . . . printed lessons, pictures and diagrams, valuable sheet music, and our Personal Advisory Service.

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Piano	Piano Accordion	Trumpet	Flute	Harmonica
Guitar	Trumpet, Cornet	Flute	Practical	Harmon
Newman Guitar	Reed Organ	Practical	Harmon	Electricity
Violin	Tenor Sax	Violin	Harmon	Electricity
Saxophone	Saxophone	Violin	Harmon	Electricity
Piano Accordion	Clarinet	Violin	Harmon	Electricity

Name: _____ (Please Print)

Address: _____

City: _____

NOTE: If you are under 16 years of age, send \$1.00 coupon.

I've been reading through the vast number of pulp magazines that have been posted as free pdfs at www.archive.org and www.gutenberg.org. While looking at the 1945 Fall issue of STARTLING STORIES, I spotted the display ad shown here.

The ad caught my eye because the testimonial was by Bert Magyar of Barnwell, Alberta. After the 1956 revolution in Hungary, a large number of Hungarians settled in Alberta. I knew quite a few of them as friends of the family or coworkers. I knew that Magyar is what the Hungarians call their country in their own language. I also knew the hamlet of Barnwell, located in southern Alberta on Highway 3 east of Lethbridge, having driven past it on occasion.

Just to verify this was a legitimate endorsement by the U.S. School of Music, I ran a Google search and it was indeed true. There really had been a Bert Magyar of Barnwell. His obituary was published at the Martin Brothers funeral chapel Website (www.mbfunerals.com) and mentioned that he had an orchestra.

Bert Magyar (1923-2007) was four years old when his family emigrated from Hungary and settled in the Barnwell area. He was a farmer most of his life, with various side jobs and excursions. His obituary mentioned how many different correspondence courses he took to improve himself.

Bert went on to study music at the U.S. School of Music and formed a dance orchestra in 1945. He joined the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in 1949 and played with the RCMP bands in Regina and Ottawa. From 1954 to 1956 he attended the Law-LaSalle Extension University ...

LaSalle was a well-known correspondence school which closed in 1982 after it was bought out by a publisher and later, after several more transfers, was absorbed into Simon & Shuster. The U.S. School of Music was founded in 1898 as a correspondence school and still exists today as an online school.

The obituary showed that Bert had a good life as a farmer, and was active in many local and provincial charities and organizations. He traveled to all the states, provinces, and territories of the USA and Canada, plus eleven countries (presumably including Hungary). He was survived by his wife, two children, and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

I wonder if he read science fiction?

MY CUP RUNNETH OVER

photos by Dale Speirs

I eat in fast-food outlets, notwithstanding all those food cozies I review with their original recipes. In Canada, all nationally distributed products must have bilingual labels. This has led to what is known as cereal box bilingualism, where even the least educated anglophone knows that ‘croustilles’ are potato chips, ‘avec’ means ‘with’, and ‘gagnez’ means you could win something.

For straightforward terms, the translations seem reasonably accurate, but problems arise when idiomatic phrases are used. This article was prompted by a recent visit to a Harvey’s outlet. The two sides of their cups are shown below (aren’t smartphone cameras wonderful?).

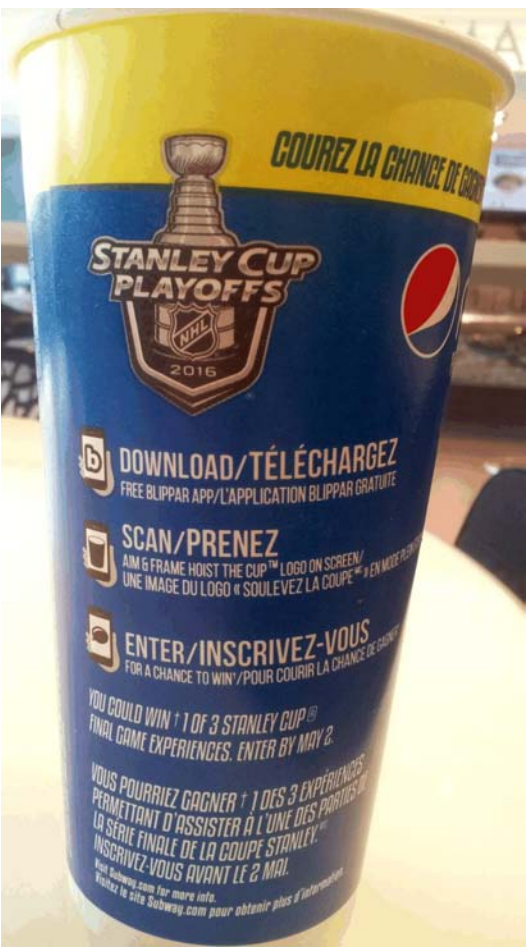
Now I had problems with the English text, nevermind the translation. The original phrase, one that I’m sure my readers know, is “Do it my way or the highway”. It is a rude expression, used as a peremptory order.



It is used in the sense of get it done as I dictate or else get out of here and don’t come back. The altered text “Your way or the highway” doesn’t make much sense. The implication is that your hamburger will be garnished the way you like it.

But if not, then who exactly is supposed to take the highway? The outlet won’t. They’re invested in bricks and mortar, so they’re not going anywhere. They seem to be saying that if you can’t get the hamburger your way, then get out of here. That doesn’t seem like good customer relations.

Because this is an idiomatic translation, the French translation simply doesn’t work. The first half of the phrase has the same meaning in both languages, but the second part brought me to a dead stop. For that is, in fact, what “point final” means. You don’t have to know French to guess that it translates as “end point”. So if I understand this correctly, if you are francophone, you are being told that if it isn’t your way, tough luck, that’s as far as things go.



I’ve been photographing cups for several years now with my smartphone, thinking I might get an article out of them someday. That someday has now come, so here is another cup.

Some companies get themselves into a bind because they have too much text on their cups. This example shows the hazards of compulsory bilingualism when the packaging designer didn’t think things through. I’m sure Subway could have simplified the information.

FOOD COZIES: PART 11

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 10 appeared in OPUNTIA's #432, 433, 434, 436, 438, 441, 442, 444, 447, and 450.]

Putting my cups away, I now segue into food cozies. I like them as a guilty pleasure, quick and easy reads. What else is there to say?

The Road To Trouble.

ENGLISH TRIFLE (2009) by Josi S. Kilpack was part of a cozy series about Sadie Hoffmiller who, unlike regular American Miss Marples who operated shops, spent her time traveling the world and being a foodie. This novel began with her visiting England with her daughter Breanna, whose boyfriend Liam was returning after working as a zookeeper in America.

He brought them to his manor house. Not actually his just yet. His father, the 9th Earl of Garnett, wasn't well. It seemed likely that Liam would become the 10th Earl sooner rather than later.

That this novel was a food cozy was made evident in the first few pages as Sadie and Breanna discussed scones and clotted cream. They mentioned that famous oxymoron "English cuisine" as they nibbled in the drawing room of the big house.

While taking a turn around the room, they were given a turn when they found a body behind a tapestry. (Manor houses don't have curtains, they have tapestries.) The man had been skewered with a fireplace poker. After a brief pause for an English Trifle recipe, the defunct was identified as the 9th Earl's nurse. Someone removed the body before the police arrived, which rather hindered the investigation.

Stopping only for High Tea Lemon Cookies, the two women had their work cut out for them. Constantly eating as they moved about, the better to justify the recipes at the end of the chapters, Sadie worried as much about gaining weight as she did about the murder. She never met a cookie she didn't like, and the big house had them all over the place.

Sadie used Chocolate-Dipped Coconut Macaroons to bribe some of the manor staff. Someone locked her in the vegetable pantry, among other alarums and

excursions. The strife traced back to Liam's legitimacy and therefore his inheritance. One of the family wanted to shorten and detour the line of succession.

Shots were fired. There was so much excitement that 100 pages went by without a recipe. Finally matters were straightened out, and Liam's legacy was preserved. Everyone could settle back and enjoy the Scumptulicious Scones. Jolly good.

Specialty Shops.

FILLET OF MURDER (2015) by Linda Reilly was the first novel in a food cozy series about Talia Marby of Wrensdale, a village in the Berkshire hills of Massachusetts. She left the big city to return home and work in a fish and chips outlet located in a shopping plaza where blood flowed like vinegar.

A comic book store had been proposed for the plaza. One of the other tenants, Phil Turnbull, opposed it and stirred up all kinds of trouble. Someone opposed him even more and terminated the debate by terminating him. The police suspected Marby's boss, who owned the shop. That got her Marpleing away, in between frying fish and chips, for the business still had to operate.

The reader will learn more than expected about haddock and how to fry it, but then again this is a food cozy. For once, the Miss Marple was in a viable business for a rural village, as people have to eat.

For comparison, the shop's neighbour in the plaza sold clocks, hardly a high-turnover business in the Berkshires. Usually the Miss Marples run ridiculously specialized shops that would struggle in the big city, nevermind a rural village.

Once all the snooping was done, the murderer was unveiled as a woman whose daughter had been trifled with by Turnbull. She confessed at great length, instead of keeping her mouth shut. She would have been acquitted because Marby had contaminated enough evidence to make it reasonable doubt.

Since the making of fish and chips was used to pad out the novel, the recipes appendix had only two items, Coleslaw and Deep Fried Pickles.

NO GRATER DANGER (2018) by Victoria Hamilton (pseudonym of Donna Lea Simpson) was a novel in a cozy series about Jaymie Leighton Muller of

Queensville, Michigan. She dealt in vintage kitchen cookware, which proved once again that there is a market for everything.

Lois Perry was a grande dame whose ancestors founded the village. A developer named Fergus Baird was pressuring her to sell her property for redevelopment. Someone else was harassing her with thefts and physical attacks, so Muller went Marpleing on her behalf. Unlike Perry, Muller had to earn a living, so she was more often in her emporium selling cookware. You may ask what the police were doing, but since this is a cozy, you need not ask.

There were several suspects for several crimes. Suspicion was strewn about like road salt on an icy highway. The first murder was not Perry as the reader might anticipate but Baird. He was not only a developer but also a womanizer who specialized in cuckolding husbands. Baird was strangled and then a cheese grater stuffed down his throat. The author evidently wanted to reinforce the cookware theme of this series.

The murderer was someone who put Baird out of the way so he could kill Perry, let his wife inherit her aunt's estate, and then kill her. Muller was added to the list because of her snooping, but of course that didn't come to fruition. There was the standard held-at-gunpoint denouement, when the culprit bragged at great length about his foolproof plan, followed by the standard last-second rescue by police.

The good news was that Muller got two segments on the radio show TALKING ANTIQUES, one about the history of Pyrex and the other about vintage cookbooks. She was going to be a star someday. The conclusion of the book was a recipe for vintage meatloaf. I'll skip the obvious joke.

Sit-Down Restaurants.

It's not easy owning a restaurant in a rural village. Unlike a fast-food outlet in the big city, single women who move back to their home villages and open shop have to become private investigators in addition to all the regular duties of cooking and serving to the general public.

Take, for example, WHO MOVED MY GOAT CHEESE? (2018) by Lynn Cahoon. It was the first novel in a food cozy series about Angie Turner of River Vista, once a rural village in Idaho but now a commuter suburb of Boise.

As the story began, she was three weeks from the opening of her restaurant The County Seat. It was to be a farm-to-table eatery, supplied directly from local farmers.

Turner was busy running about setting up suppliers. She had some problems. The operator of the farmers' market didn't like her, which mattered because it would be more convenient to buy the restaurant's food at one place instead of driving about farm to farm.

One farm she did drive out to was a goat dairy operated by Gerald Moss. He was a cantankerous old coot who didn't survive past Chapter 3. Turner found herself helping to look after Moss's herd until other arrangements could be made. There was trouble with the local veterinarian, plus she still had to run about getting the restaurant ready.

Moss didn't leave a will nor were any heirs evident. Rumours abounded there was treasure on his property. Turner managed to get in sufficient sleuthing to be caught by the murderer in a held-at-gunpoint scenario. The killer, not a relative, had been expecting to inherit from Moss and was upset at the lack of a will. The old man wouldn't listen to reason, so the murderer killed him.

There was only one recipe, for Potato Soup. Well of course, since the novel was set in Idaho.

RED DELICIOUS DEATH (2010) by Sheila Connolly was part of a cozy series about Meg Corey, who operated an apple orchard near Grandford, Massachusetts, when not active as a murder magnet. The novel began with Corey helping some newcomers who were opening a restaurant. They were come-from-away, having graduated from a Boston cooking school.

The young chefs were hoping to make their fortune with locally sourced food, which for some reason is considered a big thing by city slickers. Corey could supply them with apples, and was assisting them with other food sources as best she could.

She helped them buy an old mansion that had been vacant for years to refurbish into a restaurant. A local villager, an old biddy to put it impolitely, didn't like that. She wanted everything to stay as it was. Pay attention to her, because she would be there at the climax.

Alas, Samuel Anderson, one of the young chefs, didn't make it to the grand opening. He was found murdered in a farmer's field. Anderson might have had trouble follow him from Boston, but the way he was killed suggested a local citizen who knew the terrain.

Corey did some investigating but had an orchard to manage on paying terms. Like any farm, there were always chores to do. The surviving two chefs had to jump through the hoops getting permits for their restaurant and trying to source food from local farms. Starting up an eatery was a lot more work than it first looked.

The murderer was the old biddy, who didn't like incomers changing the village with newfangled restaurants and all that liberal Boston lifestyle. Surprisingly there was no final confrontation. Before Miss Marple could make a move, the old lady swallowed a handful of sleeping pills. Certainly a different ending, for it saved the State of Massachusetts the cost of a trial.

The recipes began with Apple Slaw, which was a new one on me that I've never even heard tell of. I'll skip the Goat Cheese Mini Cheesecakes, but the Strawberry Muffins were a winner, if a bit fattening.

Massachusetts, Maine, Ohio, and upstate New York seem to be the preferred habitats of Miss Marples, so it is always a mild surprise to have a series set elsewhere. A DEADLY ECLAIR (2017) by Daryl Wood Gerber was the first novel in a food cozy series about Mimi Rousseau of Nouvelle Vie, a village in the Napa Valley of California. She was a widow whose late husband had left her massive debts and nothing else.

Rousseau began a new life in a place with an appropriate name. She managed to buy a bistro and inn. The mortgage was held by Bryan Baker, who didn't survive Chapter 3. He was found dead in the bistro with an éclair stuffed into his mouth, although that was obviously not the murder weapon. Rousseau was a suspect because her mortgage would be forgiven upon his death.

The bistro had been open three months. Baker had lined up its first wedding party, that of his niece Angelica Edmonton. At the rehearsal party the bride's father Edison, half-brother of Baker, had gotten drunk and made a fool of himself. To protect herself, and the profit from catering to the wedding, Rousseau had to take up Marpleing.

Baker had been a ruthless real estate operator. His family was dysfunctional and there were bad debts aplenty. Baker's will was not what some people imagined, so the possibility existed that he might have been killed for the wrong reason. Meanwhile the bistro and inn demanded Rousseau's attention. Food still had to be ordered, and guests were still checking in and out.

The final confrontation was fought with an X-Acto knife (the murderer) and a blowtorch (Rousseau). Edison had acted out the resentments he held against both his brother and daughter. As mentioned, it was a dysfunctional family.

The recipes appendix was lengthy, doubled because many of the recipes had gluten-free alternatives. The list began with Eggs Benedict and ended with Chocolate Eclair. French names for all the menu items because this was, after all, a bistro.

A SOUFFLÉ OF SUSPICION (2018) was the sequel. The bloodshed at Bistro Rousseau carried on when chef Camille Chabot's sister Renee was found dead in Camille's kitchen at home. At least it wasn't the bistro, which could not operate if its kitchen were a crime scene.

Crush Week was underway in the Napa Valley, when tourists swarmed the area as the grape crop was being harvested. Rousseau was promoting a Sweet Treats Festival for which Renee had been in charge. The defunct had not been a diplomatic person, made worse because the pastry chefs she dealt with had no better personalities.

Rousseau's main worry was keeping the bistro going without Camille as its head chef. She was in no condition to work, so Rousseau had to run about planning menus and buying food. She did some sleuthing, which turned up romantic entanglements, family problems, and sharp business practice.

Besides running the bistro, Rousseau had to take over the Sweet Treats Festival, which included baking contests. The muffin contest was particularly vicious, with losers leaving the dais in tears. But hey, if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen. After a few alarums and excursions, the J'accuse! meeting revealed the killer had been embezzling and was found out by Renee.

The recipes appendix included three soufflés: Orange, Chocolate And Brandy (don't eat and drive), and Salted Caramel. I realize that all foods sound better with French names, but Creme Anglaise was carrying it a bit too far.

EGGS ON ICE (2018) by Laura Childs (pseudonym of Gerry Schmitt) was a novel in a food cozy series about the proprietors of the Cackleberry Club restaurant in the blood-soaked village of Kindred, Tennessee. Suzanne Dietz, who was the chief Miss Marple, was in business with partners Toni and Petra, all three being murder magnets.

The villagers were rehearsing A CHRISTMAS CAROL. Local attorney Allan Sharp was playing Scrooge, a role for which the villagers agreed he was perfectly suited, that being his normal behaviour. Nonetheless it was rather surprising when the Ghost of Christmas Past stabbed him dead before the end of Chapter 1. The Ghost fled and since he was in disguise, no one knew who the murderer was.

Sharp left a long trail of disgruntled suspects who had suffered because of him, so motive was not the thing to investigate. The Cackleberry Club swung into action, rotating between serving food and sleuthing. The restaurant was promoting their latest recipe, Elvis French Toast, which was French toast stuffed with peanut butter and bananas. It seemed to me the wrong crime was investigated.

Be that as it may, the three women did much of their investigating eavesdropping on customers or interrogating them as they were served. That brought forth much gossip about feuds and family melodramas, plus another murder. Suzanne took part in the usual trapped-with-the-murderer scene. Since she was needed for the series, she prevailed.

A variety of recipes in the appendix, including, regrettably, Elvis French Toast. The Peach Cobbler Pancakes were more redeeming, but were canceled out by the Three Little Pigs Breakfast Hoagie (3 sausages, hash browns, and fried eggs stuffed into a hoagie roll).

Tea For Tragedy.

Another food cozy series by Gerry Schmitt qua Laura Childs was about Theodosia Browning, proprietor of the Indigo Tea Shop in Charleston, South Carolina. Not a village of course, which does set it apart from most cozies, but the bloodshed was much the same.

AGONY OF THE LEAVES (2012) began with Browning catering a private function at the grand opening of a new aquarium. Tea, scones, sandwiches, and

a dead body floating in one of the tanks. The seafood appetizers were a success, although some people questioned whether those were appropriate for the venue. The deceased was Browning’s ex-boyfriend Parker Scully. Surprisingly no one suspected her. The opinion of the police and medics was accidental death, so she had to go out investigating on her own.

Scully had been working on a deal with a sharp-practice man for a restaurant specializing in gourmet Southern cooking, if such a thing could be said to exist. Menu items mentioned were Blackened Catfish With Caviar, Crab Tacos, and Short Ribs With Grits.

The Marpleing turned up more than one shady deal in progress in the Charleston restaurant trade. Scully seemed to have been connected with half of them, sometimes backstabbing people, figuratively that is.

The aquarium function done with, Browning turned her attention to the Coffee and Tea Expo, where she had a booth. All that caffeine was getting on the nerves, for various alarums and excursions took place. Someone ran her off the road, and she had the usual confrontation with the murderer.

The ending was contrived. The murderer came out of the plot at a right angle to the narrative, a fraud artist who had a walk-on part. Not quite a cheat, but certainly a waste of pages spent on red herrings. The recipes appendix will take out the bad taste of the ending, first with Apple Scones, then assorted pecan foods, and various tea sandwiches.

SWEET TEA REVENGE (2013) began with Theodosia Browning as a bridesmaid at the wedding of Delaine Dish. A foolish woman was Dish to invite a known Miss Marple to her wedding, for it cost her the life of her groom Dougan Granville.

Browning was serving peach and ginger tea with miniature cream scones when the deed was done. The murder happened minutes before the ceremony was to begin. Instead of watching the bride walk down the aisle, the guests found themselves giving their names and addresses to police officers.

All sorts of back stories and subplots appeared as Browning and the police raced each other to solve the crime. In every chapter, everyone ate scones while discussing the murder and who might have done it. Surprisingly, when the funeral took place, Browning did not cater the wake.

Assorted alarums followed, including a gurney set on fire and hurtled toward Browning. Not to worry, as she put out the flames with a flask of sweet tea she was carrying. A good Miss Marple in a food cozy is always prepared.

The ending wrapped up in a hurry after that. The murderer was an ex-girlfriend of Granville, a woman scorned. Since the sweet tea was a critical plot point, it led off the recipes appendix. Other items were Peach Scones and a variety of baked goods. I strongly disapproved of the Tea-Simmered Chicken, which ruined a perfectly nice piece of meat by boiling it in tea for a half hour.

STEEPED IN EVIL (2014) was the next novel in the series. Theodosia Browning went slumming to a wine tasting at the Knighthall Winery, a short drive from Charleston. The proprietor was Jordan Knight, whose day was spoiled when his son Drew's body was found in a cask of wine. Shot in the head, not drowned. Another funeral that Browning didn't get to cater.

The list of suspects included the owner of a rival winery, a nasty food reviewer, a stepmother, and a real estate developer who wanted to convert the vineyards into a golf course. Browning hardly got a look-in at her tea shop because she was so busy investigating.

She did take the opportunity to stage a Downton Abbey tea at her restaurant. One of her friends was an art dealer who wasn't doing well in business, and had gone into the wine counterfeiting business with Knight's wife. He killed Drew to keep the conspiracy quiet.

The finale was certainly different. It was a food truck chase and fight to the death as they careened down the road. The Hollywood studios would love to film that kind of chase scene. The recipes appendix had a wide selection of sandwiches, soups, and the always obligatory scones.

MING TEA MURDER (2015) began with Theodosia Browning attending a swanky reception at a local museum with her boyfriend Max Scofield, who was handling publicity. The occasion was the museum's accession of an entire antique Chinese teahouse, peg-fitted lumber and all, reassembled as an exhibit. Scofield had the idea of bring in a photo booth for guests to pose for selfies.

Browning found in the booth the body of Edgar Webster, and screamed her head off. The real mystery wasn't the murder but why she screamed like a leading lady from a 1950s B-movie. This book was #16 in the series, so she had seen

more bodies in the last few years than an average state trooper. It was simply unbelievable that she would scream. Being an experienced Miss Marple, she would have taken some smartphone pictures, then called Homicide, which number she would have on her speed dial.

Webster was both a philanthropist and a philanderer. His wife Charlotte wasn't much better in morals. He had just dumped his latest mistress. Browning was busy both sleuthing and operating her tea shop. Halloween was near, and she had events planned such as the Titanic Tea (the ship, not the size of the portions) and the Tower of London Tea.

Scofield was blamed by the museum director and suspended. The Marpleing suggested skullduggery at the Webster business. Alarums and excursions alternated with teas in the quiet intervals.

Browning's restaurant hosted the funeral wake. It wasn't all tea and cakes, if you'll pardon the expression. Webster's mistress showed up and got into a cat fight with the not very bereaved widow. Not long after, police detectives came by and quizzed Browning about Scofield. She was miffed that her boyfriend was a suspect. They were miffed because she wouldn't serve them blueberry muffins.

The culprit came out of nowhere, having been caught out by Webster for fiddling the books at the museum and skimming funds off the Chinese teahouse deal. After he was hauled away, it was time for the recipes appendix, leading off with Sausage And Gnocci Soup, then a variety of sandwiches and baked goods. I'll skip the Green Tea Donuts but the Honey Scones looked good.

The next novel in the series was DEVONSHIRE SCREAM (2016). Theodosia Browning was catering a high-end jewelry trade show. So high end that a gang of masked robbers crashed the event, grabbed what they could or wanted, and left a dead body behind. The scones were good though, jeweled with bits of candied fruit and served with Devonshire cream.

The gang smashed their way in by driving a large SUV through the display windows and then departed the same way. In doing so, they ran over and killed a young woman. Browning was there, knew the victim, and set out on the case with grim determination. What was worrisome was that a local museum was expecting the imminent arrival of the loan of a Fabergé egg.

The FBI showed up at Browning's tea shop. They annoyed both the local police and the Miss Marples alike, neither of whom wanted them barging into the case and getting credit for the collar. That the gang had a second target was obvious, so the race was on to expose them.

The conclusion was an actual race, down to the docks and onto a getaway boat. The leader of the gang was a local socialite who got what she deserved. All that running about made people hungry, so on to the recipes. Lots of scones and sandwiches, with plenty of Devonshire cream for dipping or spreading.

PEKOE MOST POISON (2017) began with Theodosia Browning attending a high-society tea hosted by grand dame Doreen Briggs. It ended in flames, not figuratively, but with the dais centrepiece set on fire. Moments after, Beau Briggs, the husband, died of poisoning. It might have been the glass of water or the tea.

The good news was that Browning hadn't catered the affair. She was there only as a guest. Since this was the eighteenth novel in the series, Browning was now well known as a Miss Marple and was hired by the grieving widow. The police? What of them?

There were the usual suspects. A business partner who might have been embezzling, family problems, old feuds, and all that. More good news was that Browning was asked to cater the funeral reception. Nobody died there, although a second murder happened later on. Nothing to do with the tea shop, which was thriving despite Browning's inattention to business. She had good staff.

The murderer was a family relation who was acting out and who knew how to sneak cyanide into just about anything. The final confrontation was one-sided and the culprit was trapped splashing about in a swimming pool. Browning stood guard on the deck until the police arrived.

The recipes began with Lemon Tea Bread, followed by a variety of baked goods and sandwiches. All fattening.

PLUM TEA CRAZY (2018) continued the bloodshed. At the Gaslights and Galleons parade, banker Carson Lanier got a crossbow bolt in the back. Theodosia Browning was more concerned with catering a fashion show that was part of the event. Nonetheless she was quickly in deep, compiling a list of suspects a full page long.

The fashion show was a humdinger. Yet another catfight (see also under MING TEA MURDER) when Lanier's ex-wife Sissy and his mistress Betty Bates got into a brawl, demolishing the displays in the process. Fortunately they didn't get to the tea table. Dresses knocked to the floor can be dry-cleaned but spoiled sandwiches and scones are a dead loss.

After working her way through all the other suspects, Browning got into a gunfight with the murderer. A real gunfight with pistols drawn, but she was faster than the killer and got off the first shot. Browning's thought processes as she took aim and pulled the trigger were described in detail. Very unusual for a food cozy. The times, they are a-changing.

The culprit had embezzled millions from the Laniers and killed Carson because he was about to expose her. One needs energy after blowing someone away, so on to the recipes. They began with Plum Crisps, the only item which matched the title. Greek Meatloaf doesn't belong in a tea shop but the Apple Yogurt Chicken Bake looked good.

To Market, To Market, To Die A Fat Hog.

CROPS AND ROBBERS (2011) by Paige Shelton was a novel in a food cozy series about Becca Robins, a market gardener specializing in jams and preserves. She operated a stall in Bailey's Farmers' Market, located in Monson, South Carolina. Once a peaceful village before her arrival, it now had a murder rate that would horrify a Chicago gangster. Miss Marples do that.

The market was all in a tizzy about the visit of Joan Ashworth, president of the Central South Carolina Restaurant Association. Her inspection tour would give the seal of approval, or not, to association members buying wholesale from the market vendors. Unfortunately Robins' jams failed Ashworth's taste test.

The worst was yet to come. Returning home much later, Robins found she had been preceded by Ashworth, whose body lay on the kitchen floor with one of her knives in it. Her mother was a suspect to the police. Not to Robins, who did a lot of sleuthing. A local restaurant worker became the second murder victim but no one knew why.

All trails led to the CSCRA, which turned out to be a stewpot of feuds and politics. Some members were unhappy over the dues structure. A few were investigating or involved in embezzlement or fraud.

In the end, that was what it came down to. Follow the money, as the saying goes. The murderer did, then had to clean things up, or so he felt. One of the loose ends, from his point of view, was Robins, so he did his best to tie her off and almost succeeded. She did make it to the recipes appendix, none of which used jams or preserves.

BUSHEL FULL OF MURDER (2015) was an account of a war between the vendors of Bailey’s Farmers’ Market and a fleet of food trucks visiting the village as part of a national tour called Keep On Eating. Needless to say, the two groups did not like each other.

Becca Robins was caught in the middle. As a vendor, she had an opinion, but one of the food trucks was operated by her young cousin Peyton, trying to make a living with gourmet hot dogs (an oxymoron if ever I saw one).

The town manager Robert Ship started the plot by the manner of his leaving it, killed by a blunt instrument. He had been troublesome to both market vendors and food trucks over business licences and regulations. Peyton was a suspect because she had been involved in trouble back home in Arizona, and because she was operating her food truck without a bank account or business licence.

Peyton had been accused of stealing a recipe from an Arizona restaurant, which was subsequently found on Ship’s body. That may not sound like much but in the trade, stolen recipes often trigger lawsuits or assaults.

The murderer came out of nowhere, another food truck operator who was obsessed with her. If he couldn’t have her, nobody could. He didn’t have the heart to kill her directly, so he thought to have her sent to prison and then play the hero by getting her released on appeal, thereby earning her love. So he thought.

The book wrapped up with assorted recipes, including different types of hot dog toppings. The Asian Dog topping was grilled pineapple and teriyaki sauce. The Wine Tasters was gouda cheese and grilled grapes. I had no idea that it was possible to grill grapes.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2019-08-23

OPUNTIA #447: It’s been a long time since that Ian Gunn illo graced your front cover. I am still in touch with KRin Pender-Gunn, Ian’s widow. Ian is much missed, and I wish I’d had the chance to actually meet him. As you say, gone, but definitely not forgotten.

The big Fan eXpo Toronto is on right now in the downtown area. Many of our friends are surprised that we will not be going, in spite of the fact I have told them many times in the past that it is too big and too expensive, and it doesn’t really cater to our current interests. Still, they are down there, chasing \$100 autographs and \$75 photographs.

A citizenship ceremony was held in downtown Toronto, and keeping the officials company were about 30 members of the 501st Imperial Forces, the huge Star Wars group. I admit that of the 30, I know about 10 of them.

On Canada Day, we were vending in Thomson Park in Scarborough for the Canada Day celebrations. A great day in the park and shade under our gazebo tent, but people were there to enjoy the day, and not buy much off the vendors scattered through the park. Our sales were less than \$50, but we did spend a day in the park, which was pretty good. (Seeing all those doughnuts in this issue are making me hungry...)

OPUNTIA #448: Looks like the Stampede was another great time. We saw ads for television coverage of some of the events on the CBC. I like the black GMC truck with the caterpillar tracks [in the parade]. Right now, the Canadian National Exhibition is on, probably with much the same food stalls as the ones you illustrate in this issue. I imagine the butterbeer was non-alcoholic.

From years ago, I do remember MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE. I was never inclined enough to take down an issue from the shelf and have a look through it, but it is something I remember. I have no idea who published it. ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE, too.

[SHAYNE was 1930s pulp even when it was being published in the 1960s. ELLERY QUEEN was better fare although not too imaginative.]

OPUNTIA #449: Nik Wallenda was still wire walking? Guess he was going after another brand of pizza. Bacon flapjacks sounds really good, and is so bad for you, like so many other foods.

[Alexander Woollcott famously remarked: *Everything I like is either illegal, immoral, or fattening.*]

If I recall, I think the Saddledome hockey arena is being torn down, and the Calgary Flames will be getting a new arena? I am sure whatever is built, the Stampede will be able to make full use of it.

[It's never been the same since it was swamped during the great flood of 2013 up to Row 8 of the seats. The new design is unimaginative and dull, and could be in any city. Nothing like the saddle shape of the old arena, which will be torn down once the new one is built beside it.]

The Liberal government here did run up quite a debt, but the Ford government, after stating the Liberals were spending like crazy, has been proved to be spending at about three times the Liberal rate of spending. Ford and his MPPs aren't too popular right now.

OPUNTIA #450: [Re: Sam McGee burial site] Interesting cemetery. I have never seen the first name Theophel.

OPUNTIA #451: [Re: Dale's cowboy shirt] That's a great shirt! I have a collection of Hawaiian and Hawaiian-style shirts. I don't wear them that often, mostly because it just creates more work for Yvonne when it comes to laundry and ironing.

[My fancy shirts and ties are worn only on special occasions such as Canada Day and the Stampede. I keep my eyes open when I go into a clothing store and look for designs that are dignified, not crude or jokey.]

Kananaskis looks like a great place to visit.

[More mountains coming up in this and future issues from the Bow River valley, into which the Kananaskis River empties.]

The presentation "The Nerds Of 1900" sounded to me like a steampunk presentation. Such would be right at home at some of Calgary's older buildings. I should check to see if there is a Steampunk Calgary or Steampunk Alberta online.

[Nothing to do with steampunk, just H.G. Wells and Jules Verne. There is a group called the Calgary Steampunk Assemblage which I see occasionally. They are cosplayers. When I first met them a few years ago, I astonished them by saying that there was a subgenre of literature which originated the word. They thought it came from manga and comics, and had no idea it was invented by science fiction writers. I usually see them every September at the Beakerhead Festival.]

Mad scientists? They're not mad, just slightly perturbed. Many mad scientists seem to have daughters, but never mention their wives. How do mad scientists get girlfriends in the first place, anyway?

[And why do they never have sons? Is there some sort of sex-linked gene?]

OPUNTIA #452: [Re: cover photo of Saskatchewan car with 'Author' licence plate] I wonder if that was Edward Willett's car on the cover.

[I forgot to mention it but I did ask Willett at the convention and he said he didn't know whose car it was. For readers of this zine who don't know who Willett is, he is Saskatchewan's most famous current author, with numerous science fiction and young adult books. He does a lot of screenplay writing for television. Willett is a very good public speaker and a very funny man. If anyone reading this is a convention committee member looking for new Guests of Honour, I highly recommend him.]

When Words Collide always seems to be a manageable event with its 750-member cap. I don't know if CanCon in Ottawa does the same; I haven't been to that convention in a long time. Next year will be Canvention 40? Amazing. Astounding!

[The tenth annual When Words Collide will return to the Delta South Marriott Hotel on the weekend of August 14 to 16, 2020. It will incorporate the Aurora Awards and Canvention 40. WWC always sells out by June, as do the banquet and hotel. Details from www.whenwordscollide.org]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

[You may have noticed that in most of these papers I cite author names using the format ‘name, et al’. The reason is that most papers published these days have dozens or even a hundred names. “et al” is a standard Latin abbreviation meaning “and others”. A typical example is shown below.]

Frantz, L.A.F., et al (2019) **Ancient pigs reveal a near-complete genomic turnover following their introduction to Europe.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1901169116

Authors’ abstract: *Archaeological evidence indicates that domestic pigs arrived in Europe, alongside farmers from the Near East ~8,500 y ago, yet mitochondrial genomes of modern European pigs are derived from European wild boars. To address this conundrum, we obtained mitochondrial and nuclear data from modern and ancient Near Eastern and European pigs.*

Our analyses indicate that, aside from a coat color gene, most Near Eastern ancestry in the genomes of European domestic pigs disappeared over 3,000 y as a result of interbreeding with local wild boars. This implies that pigs were not domesticated independently in Europe, yet the first 2,500 y of human-mediated selection applied by Near Eastern Neolithic farmers played little role in the development of modern European pigs.

Archaeological evidence indicates that pig domestication had begun by ~10,500 y before the present (BP) in the Near East, and mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) suggests that pigs arrived in Europe alongside farmers ~8,500 y BP. A few thousand years after the introduction of Near Eastern pigs into Europe, however, their characteristic mtDNA signature disappeared and was replaced by haplotypes associated with European wild boars.

This turnover could be accounted for by substantial gene flow from local European wild boars, although it is also possible that European wild boars were domesticated independently without any genetic contribution from the Near East.

To test these hypotheses, we obtained mtDNA sequences from 2,099 modern and ancient pig samples and 63 nuclear ancient

genomes from Near Eastern and European pigs. Our analyses revealed that European domestic pigs dating from 7,100 to 6,000 y BP possessed both Near Eastern and European nuclear ancestry, while later pigs possessed no more than 4% Near Eastern ancestry, indicating that gene flow from European wild boars resulted in a near-complete disappearance of Near East ancestry.

In addition, we demonstrate that a variant at a locus encoding black coat color likely originated in the Near East and persisted in European pigs. Altogether, our results indicate that while pigs were not independently domesticated in Europe, the vast majority of human-mediated selection over the past 5,000 y focused on the genomic fraction derived from the European wild boars, and not on the fraction that was selected by early Neolithic farmers over the first 2,500 years of the domestication process.

[Now here is the screenshot from this paper. Nor is this unusual. Most astrophysics papers easily run to 100 co-authors. The problem has to do with the publish-or-perish problem in academia. Scientists and professors are judged by the number of papers they publish, so getting credit for a paper is extremely important. There is even a service that tracks what is called impact factor, measured as how many times a paper is cited in other papers. The impact factor is one of the tools used by universities in deciding whether a candidate professor should get tenure.]

Ancient pigs reveal a near-complete genomic turnover following their introduction to Europe

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Gerrish, P.J., and C.P Ferreira (2019) **A thermodynamic limit constrains complexity and primitive social function.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 18:329-335

Authors' abstract: *The evolutionary trend toward increasing complexity and social function is ultimately the result of natural selection's paradoxical tendency to foster cooperation through competition. Cooperating populations ranging from complex societies to somatic tissue are constantly under attack, however, by non-cooperating mutants or transformants, called 'cheaters'.*

Structure in these populations promotes the formation of cooperating clusters whose competitive superiority can alone be sufficient to thwart outgrowths of cheaters and thereby maintain cooperation.

But we find that when cheaters appear too frequently, exceeding a threshold mutation or transformation rate, their scattered outgrowths infiltrate and break up cooperating clusters, resulting in a cascading loss of social cohesiveness, a switch to net positive selection for cheaters and ultimately in the loss of cooperation.

Our findings imply that a critically low mutation rate had to be achieved (perhaps through the advent of proofreading and repair mechanisms) before complex cooperative functions, such as those required for multicellularity and social behaviour, could have evolved and persisted.

When mutation rate in our model is also allowed to evolve, the threshold is crossed spontaneously after thousands of generations, at which point cheaters rapidly invade.

Probing extrapolations of these findings suggest:
(1) *in somatic tissue, it is neither social retro-evolution alone nor mutation rate evolution alone but the interplay between these two that ultimately leads to oncogenic transitions; the rate of this coevolution might thereby provide an indicator of lifespan of species, terrestrial or not;*
(2) *the likelihood that extraterrestrial life can be expected to be multicellular and social should be affected by ultraviolet and other mutagenic factors.*

Nakayama, A., et al (2019) **Runaway climate cooling of ocean planets in the habitable zone: a consequence of seafloor weathering enhanced by melting of high-pressure ice.** MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY 488:1580-1596

Authors' abstract: *Terrestrial planets covered globally with thick oceans (termed ocean planets) in the habitable zone were previously inferred to have extremely hot climates in most cases. This is because H₂O high-pressure (HP) ice on the seafloor prevents chemical weathering and, thus, removal of atmospheric CO₂. Previous studies, however, ignored melting of the HP ice and horizontal variation in heat flux from oceanic crusts.*

Here, we examine whether high heat fluxes near the mid-ocean ridge melt the HP ice and thereby remove atmospheric CO₂. We develop integrated climate models of an Earth-size ocean planet with plate tectonics for different ocean masses, which include the effects of HP ice melting, seafloor weathering, and the carbonate-silicate geochemical carbon cycle.

We find that the heat flux near the mid-ocean ridge is high enough to melt the ice, enabling seafloor weathering. In contrast to the previous theoretical prediction, we show that climates of terrestrial planets with massive oceans lapse into extremely cold ones (or snowball states) with CO₂-poor atmospheres. Such extremely cold climates are achieved mainly because the HP ice melting fixes seafloor temperature at the melting temperature, thereby keeping a high weathering flux regardless of surface temperature.

We estimate that ocean planets with oceans several tens of the Earth's ocean mass no longer maintain temperate climates. These results suggest that terrestrial planets with extremely cold climates exist even in the habitable zone beyond the Solar system, given the frequency of water-rich planets predicted by planet formation theories.

Holder, R.M., et al (2019) **Metamorphism and the evolution of plate tectonics.** NATURE 572:378-381

Authors' abstract: *Earth's mantle convection, which facilitates planetary heat loss, is manifested at the surface as present-day plate tectonics. When plate tectonics emerged and how it has evolved through time are two of the most fundamental and challenging questions in Earth science. Metamorphic rocks,*

rocks that have experienced solid-state mineral transformations due to changes in pressure (*P*) and temperature (*T*), record periods of burial, heating, exhumation and cooling that reflect the tectonic environments in which they formed.

*Changes in the global distribution of metamorphic (*P*, *T*) conditions in the continental crust through time might therefore reflect the secular evolution of Earth's tectonic processes. On modern Earth, convergent plate margins are characterized by metamorphic rocks that show a bimodal distribution of apparent thermal gradients (temperature change with depth; parameterized here as metamorphic *T/P*) in the form of paired metamorphic belts, which is attributed to metamorphism near (low *T/P*) and away from (high *T/P*) subduction zones.*

*Here we show that Earth's modern plate tectonic regime has developed gradually with secular cooling of the mantle since the Neoarchaeon era, 2.5 billion years ago. We evaluate the emergence of bimodal metamorphism (as a proxy for secular change in plate tectonics) using a statistical evaluation of the distributions of metamorphic *T/P* through time.*

*We find that the distribution of metamorphic *T/P* has gradually become wider and more distinctly bimodal from the Neoarchaeon era to the present day, and the average metamorphic *T/P* has decreased since the Palaeoproterozoic era.*

Our results contrast with studies that inferred an abrupt transition in tectonic style in the Neoproterozoic era (about 0.7 billion years ago) or that suggested that modern plate tectonics has operated since the Palaeoproterozoic era (about two billion years ago) at the latest.

Stevenson, D.S. (2019) **Planetary mass, vegetation height and climate.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 18:477-482

Author's abstract: *The maximum height trees can grow on Earth is around 122 to 130 m. The height is constrained by two factors: the availability of water, and where water is not limiting, the pressure available to drive the column of water along the xylem vessels against the pull of gravity (cohesion tension).*

In turn the height of trees impacts the biodiversity of the environment in a number of ways. On Earth the largest trees are found in maritime temperate

environments along the Pacific Northwest coasts of northern California and southern Oregon. These forests provide a large number of secondary habitats for species and serve as moisture pumps that return significant volumes of water to the lower atmosphere.

In this work, we apply simple mathematical rules to illustrate how super-terran planets will have significantly smaller trees, with concomitant effects on the habitability of the planet. We also consider the impact of varying tree height on climate models.

Davis, L.G., et al (2019) **Late Upper Paleolithic occupation at Cooper's Ferry, Idaho, USA, ~16,000 years ago.** SCIENCE 365:891-897

Authors' abstract: *The Cooper's Ferry archaeological site in western North America has provided evidence for the pattern and time course of the early peopling of the Americas. Radiocarbon dating and Bayesian analysis indicate an age between 16,560 and 15,280 years before present.*

Humans therefore arrived in the Americas before an inland ice-free corridor had opened, so a Pacific coastal route was the probable entry route. The stemmed projectile points closely resemble those found in Upper Paleolithic Japan, also supporting the hypothesis of a coastal route.

Zhou, S., et al (2019) **Genetic architecture and adaptations of Nunavik Inuit.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:16012-16017

Authors' abstract: *The Canadian Inuit have a distinct population background that may entail particular implications for the health of its individuals. However, the number of genetic studies examining this Inuit population is limited, and much remains to be discovered in regard to its genetic characteristics. In this study, we generated whole-exome sequences and genome wide genotypes for 170 Nunavik Inuit, a small and isolated founder population of Canadian Arctic indigenous people.*

Our study revealed the genetic background of Nunavik Inuit to be distinct from any known present-day population. The majority of Nunavik Inuit show little evidence of gene flow from European or present-day Native American peoples,

and Inuit living around Hudson Bay are genetically distinct from those around Ungava Bay.

We also inferred that Nunavik Inuit have a small effective population size of 3,000 and likely split from Greenlandic Inuit ~10.5 kya. Nunavik Inuit went through a bottleneck at approximately the same time and might have admixed with a population related to the Paleo-Eskimos.

Our study highlights population-specific genomic signatures in coding regions that show adaptations unique to Nunavik Inuit, particularly in pathways involving fatty acid metabolism and cellular adhesion (CPNE7, ICAM5, STAT2, and RAF1). Subsequent analyses in selection footprints and the risk of intracranial aneurysms (IAs) in Nunavik Inuit revealed an exonic variant under weak negative selection to be significantly associated with IA.

We identified genetic differentiations in Nunavik Inuit villages that correlate with their migration route and placed Nunavik Inuit in a population tree in relation to Siberian and Native Americans. Nunavik Inuit also had genetic footprints that reflect high levels of natural selection in functionally relevant genes, from which may arise the genetic risk responsible for their predisposition toward diseases such as intracranial aneurysm.

Stephens, L., et al (2019) **Archaeological assessment reveals Earth's early transformation through land use.** SCIENCE 365:897-902

Authors' abstract: *Humans began to leave lasting impacts on Earth's surface starting 10,000 to 8000 years ago. Hunter-gatherers, farmers, and pastoralists transformed the face of Earth earlier and to a greater extent than has been widely appreciated, a transformation that was essentially global by 3,000 years before the present.*

Environmentally transformative human use of land accelerated with the emergence of agriculture, but the extent, trajectory, and implications of these early changes are not well understood. An empirical global assessment of land use from 10,000 years before the present (yr B.P.) to 1850 CE reveals a planet largely transformed by hunter-gatherers, farmers, and pastoralists by 3,000 years ago, considerably earlier than the dates in the land-use reconstructions commonly used by Earth scientists.

Valente, L., et al (2019) **Deep macroevolutionary impact of humans on New Zealand's unique avifauna.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 29:2563-2569

Authors' abstract: *New Zealand was home to a unique bird fauna when humans arrived. Today, many of its evolutionary isolated lineages are endangered or extinct. We find that 50 million years would be needed for bird species diversity to return to pre-human levels.*

Islands are at the frontline of the anthropogenic extinction crisis. A vast number of island birds have gone extinct since human colonization, and an important proportion is currently threatened with extinction. While the number of lost or threatened avian species has often been quantified, the macroevolutionary consequences of human impact on island biodiversity have rarely been measured.

Here, we estimate the amount of evolutionary time that has been lost or is under threat due to anthropogenic activity in a classic example, New Zealand. Half of its bird taxa have gone extinct since humans arrived and many are threatened, including lineages forming highly distinct branches in the avian tree of life. Using paleontological and ancient DNA information, we compiled a dated phylogenetic dataset for New Zealand's terrestrial avifauna.

Simulating under a range of human-induced extinction scenarios, we find that it would take approximately 50 million years (Ma) to recover the number of species lost since human colonization of New Zealand and up to 10 Ma to return to today's species numbers if currently threatened species go extinct.

Barkley, A.E., et al (2019) **African biomass burning is a substantial source of phosphorus deposition to the Amazon, Tropical Atlantic Ocean, and Southern Ocean.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE USA 116:16216-16221

Authors' abstract: *The deposition of phosphorus (P) from African dust is believed to play an important role in bolstering primary productivity in the Amazon Basin and Tropical Atlantic Ocean (TAO), leading to sequestration of carbon dioxide. However, there are few measurements of African dust in South America that can robustly test this hypothesis and even fewer measurements of soluble P, which is readily available for stimulating primary production in the ocean.*

To test this hypothesis, we measured total and soluble P in long-range transported aerosols collected in Cayenne, French Guiana, a TAO coastal site located at the northeastern edge of the Amazon.

Our measurements confirm that in boreal spring when African dust transport is greatest, dust supplies the majority of P, of which 5% is soluble. In boreal fall, when dust transport is at an annual minimum, we measured unexpectedly high concentrations of soluble P, which we show is associated with the transport of biomass burning (BB) from southern Africa.

Integrating our results into a chemical transport model, we show that African BB supplies up to half of the P deposited annually to the Amazon from transported African aerosol. This observational study links P-rich BB aerosols from Africa to enhanced P deposition in the Amazon.

Contrary to current thought, we also show that African BB is a more important source of soluble P than dust to the TAO and oceans in the Southern Hemisphere and may be more important for marine productivity, particularly in boreal summer and fall.

Rebolo-Ifrán, N., et al (2019) **Drones as a threat to wildlife: YouTube complements science in providing evidence about their effect.** ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION 46:205-210

Authors' abstract: *Although drones are becoming very common in the skies, most concerns about their use are not focused on their possible impact on wildlife.*

We used the information available from the scientific literature on the effects of drones on wildlife and complement it with Internet (YouTube) information to evaluate whether recreational activities using drones produce behavioural responses from wildlife. Scientific papers specifically evaluating the effects of drones on wildlife are scarce but increasing.

Nonetheless, we found abundant videos in which many species from different taxonomic groups and multiple countries presented behavioural responses to drone overflights. Furthermore, 26% of the species that were disturbed are included in one of the International Union for Conservation of Nature categories of threat.

We found that wildlife that use aerial and terrestrial habitats are more likely to show a behavioural response than those occupying aquatic habitats. The Internet is becoming a source of evidence of disturbances to wildlife that should be considered, particularly for recreational activities.

We advocate for the use of technology, but argue that funding and effort should be devoted to evaluating drone impacts on wildlife. We call for educational programmes for laypeople who use drones for recreation and for more research and regulations on their use in sensitive wildlife areas.

Edwards, F., et al (2019) **Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race-ethnicity, and sex.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:16793-16798

Authors' abstract: *We use data on police-involved deaths to estimate how the risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States varies across social groups. We estimate the lifetime and age-specific risks of being killed by police by race and sex. We also provide estimates of the proportion of all deaths accounted for by police use of force.*

We find that African American men and women, American Indian/Alaska Native men and women, and Latino men face higher lifetime risk of being killed by police than do their white peers. We find that Latina women and Asian/Pacific Islander men and women face lower risk of being killed by police than do their white peers.

Risk is highest for black men, who (at current levels of risk) face about a 1 in 1,000 chance of being killed by police over the life course. The average lifetime odds of being killed by police are about 1 in 2,000 for men and about 1 in 33,000 for women. Risk peaks between the ages of 20 years and 35 years for all groups. For young men of color, police use of force is among the leading causes of death.

Bergmann, M., et al (2019) **White and wonderful? Microplastics prevail in snow from the Alps to the Arctic.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 6:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax1157

Authors’ abstract: *Microplastics (MPs) are ubiquitous, and considerable quantities prevail even in the Arctic; however, there are large knowledge gaps regarding pathways to the North. To assess whether atmospheric transport plays a role, we analyzed snow samples from ice floes in Fram Strait. For comparison, we investigated snow samples from remote (Swiss Alps) and populated (Bremen, Bavaria) European sites. MPs were identified by Fourier transform infrared imaging in 20 of 21 samples.*

The MP concentration of Arctic snow was significantly lower (0 to 14.4×10^3 N liter-1) than European snow (0.19×10^3 to 154×10^3 N liter-1) but still substantial. Polymer composition varied strongly, but varnish, rubber, polyethylene, and polyamide dominated overall. Most particles were in the smallest size range indicating large numbers of particles below the detection limit of $11 \mu\text{m}$. Our data highlight that atmospheric transport and deposition can be notable pathways for MPs meriting more research.

Griffin, J.M., et al (2019) **Personal infidelity and professional conduct in 4 settings.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE USA 116:16268-16273

Authors’ abstract: *We study the connection between personal and professional behavior by introducing usage of a marital infidelity website as a measure of personal conduct. Police officers and financial advisors who use the infidelity website are significantly more likely to engage in professional misconduct.*

Results are similar for US Securities and Exchange Commission defendants accused of white-collar crimes, and companies with chief executive officers or chief financial officers who use the website are more than twice as likely to engage in corporate misconduct.

The relation is not explained by a wide range of regional, firm, executive, and cultural variables. These findings suggest that personal and workplace behavior are closely related.

Vivek, S., et al (2019) **Cyberphysical risks of hacked Internet-connected vehicles.** PHYSICAL REVIEW E 100:doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevE.100.012316)

Authors’ abstract: *The integration of automotive technology with Internet connectivity promises to both dramatically improve transportation while simultaneously introducing the potential for new unknown risks. Internet-connected vehicles are like digital data because they can be targeted for malicious hacking.*

Unlike digital data, however, Internet-connected vehicles are cyberphysical systems that physically interact with each other and their environment. As such, the extension of cybersecurity concerns into the cyberphysical domain introduces new possibilities for self-organized phenomena in traffic flow.

Here we study a scenario envisioned by cybersecurity experts leading to a large number of Internet-connected vehicles being suddenly and simultaneously disabled. We investigate posthack traffic using agent-based simulations and discover the critical relevance of percolation for probabilistically predicting the outcomes on a multilane road in the immediate aftermath of a vehicle targeted cyberattack.

We develop an analytic percolation-based model to rapidly assess road conditions given the density of disabled vehicles and apply it to study the street network of Manhattan (New York City, New York, USA) revealing the city's vulnerability to this particular cyberphysical attack.

While a comprehensive investigation of city-scale traffic around hacked vehicles is an extremely complicated problem, we find that the statistical physics of percolation can provide an estimate of the number of vehicles that critically disrupts citywide traffic flow. Our upper-bound estimate represents a quantification of citywide traffic disruptions when multiple vehicles are hacked.