

OPUNTIA 460



Remembrance Day 2019

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.

REMEMBRANCE DAY 2019

photos by Dale Speirs

Up until the 1990s, Remembrance Day ceremonies in Canada were dwindling as the old men died off and the younger generation had no experience of war. Then came the Balkan wars of the 1990s, followed by Canadian troops deploying into Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks. Since then, the crowds have gotten bigger and much younger.

Calgary has dozens of Remembrance Day ceremonies on November 11, and I try to visit a different one each year. See OPUNTIA's #358, 397, and 429 for three different sites I attended in previous years. Each location has a different military unit parading there, whether regular or militia. Several locations specialize in a particular war because the site was associated with it or there is a monument for it.

In the southwest corner of Calgary, where CFB Calgary was until its closure in 1997, there are several ceremonies. Most of the base was redeveloped as housing, including a section called Lincoln Park, named after the bomber plane. It has a Peacekeeper's Park, where the ceremony honours personnel of the 1990s Balkan Wars and Afghanistan.

Nearby in North Glenmore Park, on the northern shore of Glenmore Reservoir, is a monument to World War Two veterans who trained where the park is now.

Overlooking Lincoln Park and the reservoir is Signal Hill, one of the Rocky Mountain foothills. During World War One, it was far out in the country from Calgary, but by the turn of the Millennium became covered with suburban development. That was one of the reasons why CFB Calgary, along the eastern base of the hill, was closed, since the military could no longer carry out live fire exercises surrounded by houses.

Signal Hill got its name because various signals units trained at its southern end, where the high ground made radio traffic much easier. The northern end of the hill became known as Broadcast Hill in the 1950s because the local television stations set up their antennas to beam up and down the Bow River valley and Calgary. The Elbow River flows past the south end of the hill, of which the Glenmore Reservoir is simply a flooded canyon that provides the city with much of its drinking water and some of its electricity.

The personnel of the signals units didn't have much to do off duty, as there was no transportation into town, assuming they had leave. What they did for fun was to dig out huge trenches on the south slope in the shape of their unit numbers and fill them with white-washed rocks. The numbers could be seen from far away. The officers didn't mind, as it was good exercise for the men and kept them out of trouble when off duty.

The numbers are still maintained, and the slope was preserved as Battalion Park. I decided to take in that ceremony this year. It snowed about 15 cm the day before, so I couldn't get a good photograph of the numbers. I took the photo below in summer 2014. The ceremony was held at left of photo, next to the 151 number. Look closely and you can see the flagpoles and cairn.

The cover photo shows a small fraction of the thousand or so people attending. I was there early enough to get a good place. The four flags, from left to right, are Canada, Alberta, the Union Jack which thousands of Canadians fought under before Canada got its own flag, and the City of Calgary.



More crowd views. It was a beautiful day, about -5°C under clear blue skies. The mountains were absolutely spectacular.

At right was the crowd behind me. There were loudspeakers along the pathway so everyone could hear the ceremony.





At left: It is the custom in Canada that after the ceremony has concluded, the audience will take off their lapel poppies and lay them with the wreaths.

Below: The traffic jam as the crowd departed the hill.



AROUND COWTOWN
photos by Dale Speirs

I saw this vehicle during the summer but held the photos for this issue. Obviously a proud veteran. In Alberta, veterans are entitled to use vanity licence plates with the poppy. The Royal Canadian Dragoons are one of Canada's three armoured regiments.





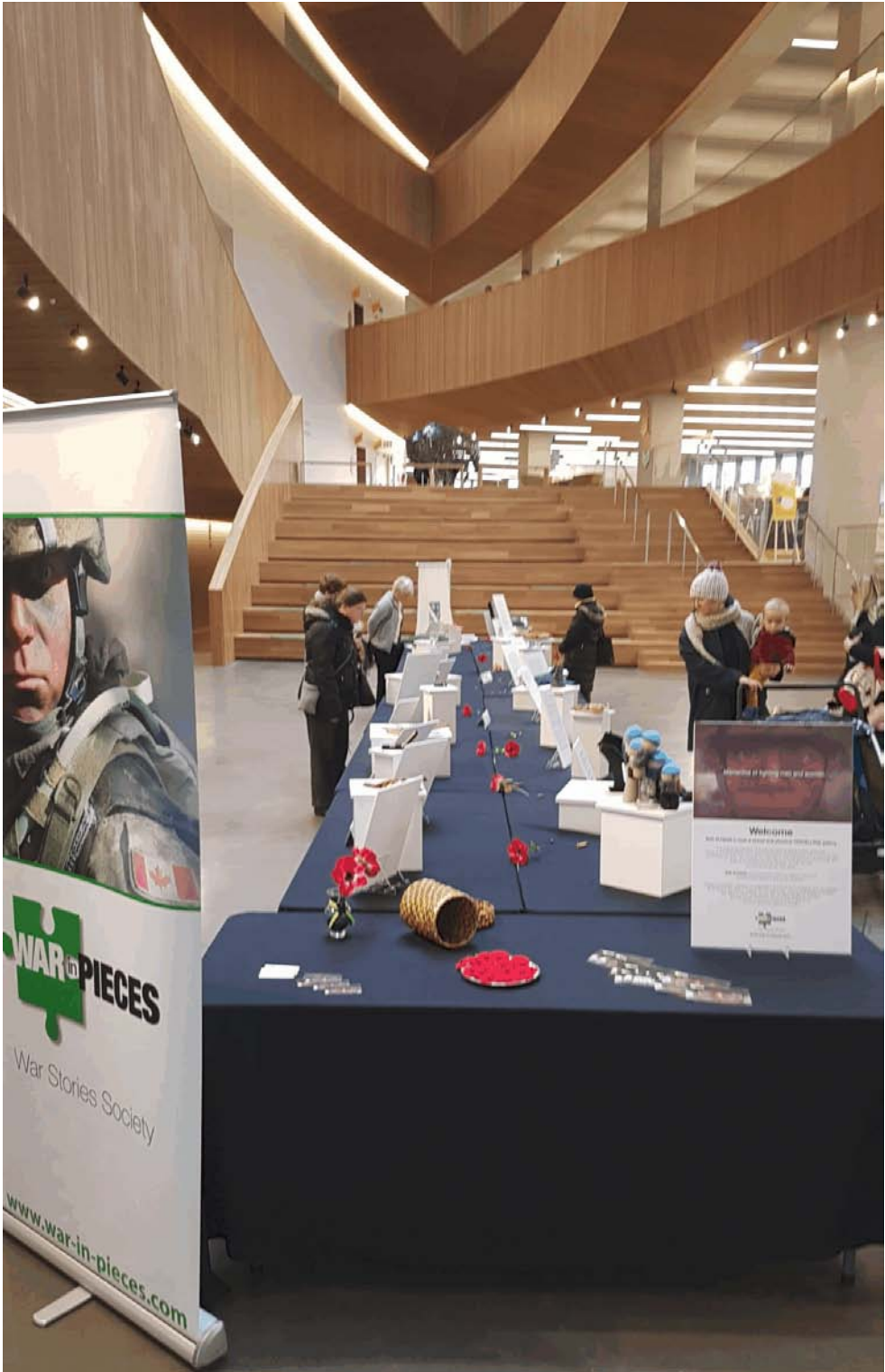
They don't hand out white feathers anymore, but immediately after Halloween we are expected to wear red poppies in our lapels. I do wear one, if only to avoid being guilting by fresh-faced cadets at the entrances to shopping malls.

Not so much a Remembrance Day item but commonly seen year-round are lapel pins in support of Canadian troops fighting in Afghanistan. These are usually sold next to cash registers in stores. I never wear mine but I bought one for my lapel pin collection.



Below: Purdy's Chocolates in the TD Square atrium downtown.

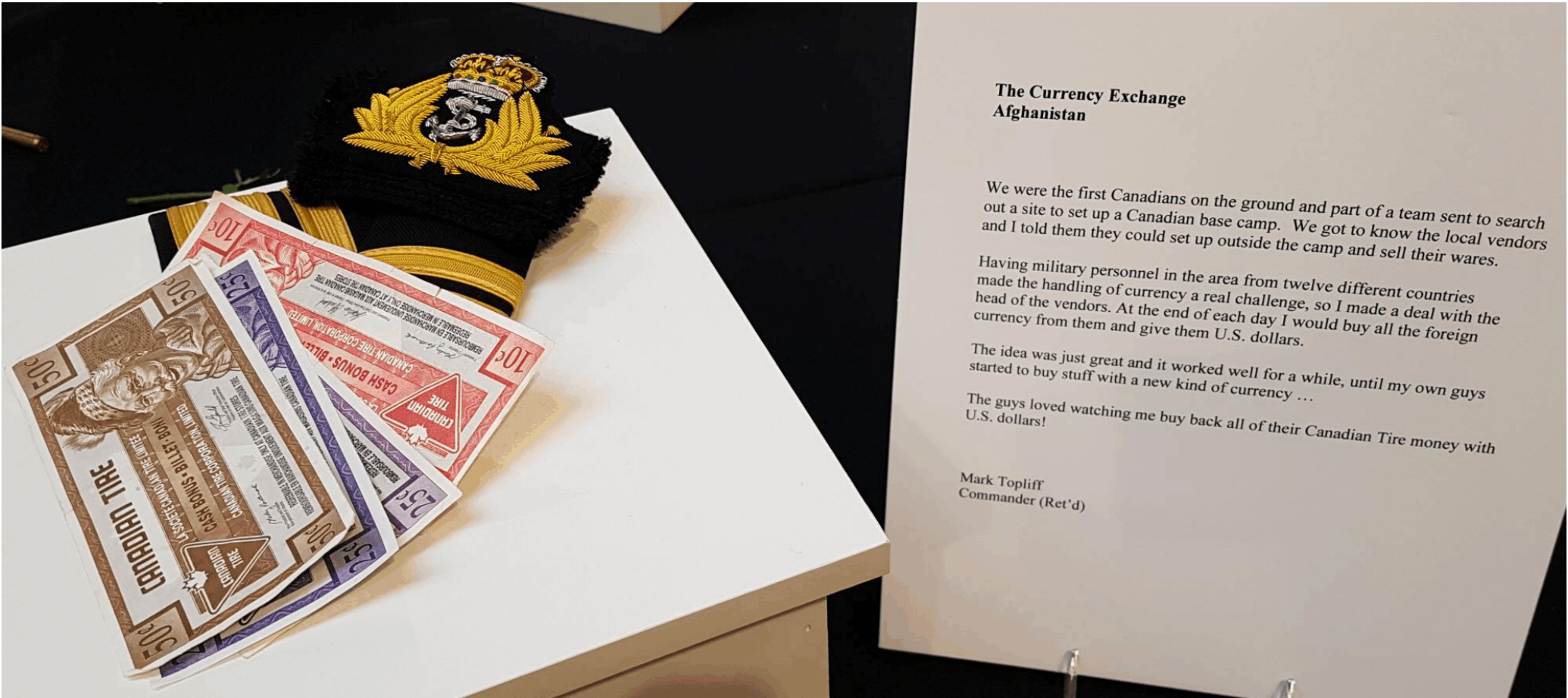
At right and next page: This was a display at the New Central Library called War In Pieces. It showed not the standard type of war relics but little items from modern wars such as Bosnia and Afghanistan where Canadian troops served.



This will require explaining to my non-Canadian readers. One of the most successful chain stores in Canada is the automotive/hardware/gardening department store Canadian Tire.

When you buy from them, the cashier gives you x amount of Canadian Tire dollars per amount purchased. They can be spent at face value on your next visit. Some other stores will accept them at face value if the owner does a lot of shopping there.

They are an unofficial second currency in Canada. And, as it turned out, in Afghanistan.



**The Currency Exchange
Afghanistan**

We were the first Canadians on the ground and part of a team sent to search out a site to set up a Canadian base camp. We got to know the local vendors and I told them they could set up outside the camp and sell their wares.

Having military personnel in the area from twelve different countries made the handling of currency a real challenge, so I made a deal with the head of the vendors. At the end of each day I would buy all the foreign currency from them and give them U.S. dollars.

The idea was just great and it worked well for a while, until my own guys started to buy stuff with a new kind of currency ...

The guys loved watching me buy back all of their Canadian Tire money with U.S. dollars!

Mark Topliff
Commander (Ret'd)

Below: TD Square atrium in the downtown core.



ALIEN INVASIONS: PART 3

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA #407 and 424.]

Riding The Beam.

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. This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.otrrlibrary.org

The 1947 episode “Terror Out Of Space”, written by Robert Newman, made use of cutting-edge science. The year before, Project Diana succeeded in bouncing radar beams off the Moon, the first time it was done and which represented the dawn of radio astronomy.

The episode was about a similar experiment which went awry. Energy creatures rode the reflected beams back down to Earth and then took over the scientists’ minds. It was the prelude to an alien invasion. It was obvious the writer didn’t understand the nature of a radar beam, but let that pass.

To conform to both the series and episode titles, the possessed humans did a lot of head-bashing. The chief scientist, under the control of an alien, decapitated one of his assistants with a hacksaw. Plenty of humming generators and screaming humans as the aliens flooded down a single radar beam. It all ended in tears.

UFOs.

1947 was the year that flying saucers became famous, and for the next several years reports of them flooded the news media, fueled by the nascent Cold War. Invasion was a real fear at the time.

Which brings us to FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY, an old-time radio comedy series that ran from 1935 to 1953 as a half-hour show. The episodes were mostly written by Don Quinn. Fibber McGee and his wife Molly lived in Wistful Vista, state never specified, and did not seem to have gainful employment yet always had money to be doing things.

The series was sponsored by the Johnson Wax Company. The announcer of the show was Harlow Wilcox, who had bit parts within each episode but whose main duty was to barge into the plot at intervals and extol the merits of Johnson's floor wax, car wax, and furniture polish. The format of each episode was standard, as various recurring characters would appear in turn and do their routines.

"The Flying Saucer" was an early 1950 episode which began with an argument between Fibber (con) and Molly (pro) about whether or not flying saucers were real. One of the supporting characters was Doc Gamble, who came by to give the McGees a ride downtown. When asked about UFOs, Gamble replied he believed everything and nobody. He had an open mind about them in the absence of any real evidence.

The three of them walked out to the front sidewalk. Just as they reached the car, a strange object roared in low over the trees and crashed into the yard. A genuine flying saucer! Fibber gloried in being the centre of attention of the crowds that subsequently gathered. He spent much of his time thinking how to make money from it. USAF officers and the town mayor arrived for a look.

So did Harlow Wilcox, who immediately began wondering if Johnson Wax Company would give him the sales territory for Mars. The mention of the red planet allowed him to work in a commercial about how Johnson Wax prevented mars on hardwood and linoleum floors.

A little girl next door named Teeny arrived. She was amazed at the crowd. In talking to Fibber, she told him that she and a school friend had tied a bunch of skyrockets to garbage can lids and launched it. They lost sight of it as it cleared the trees, so she was delighted to discover it had crashed into the McGee yard. So much for Fibber's fifteen minutes of fame.

Invaders Of The Purple Twilight.

"The Burning Swamp" by Morrison Colladay (1931 August, AMAZING STORIES, available as a free pdf at www.archive.org) began in the manner of H.G. Wells's WAR OF THE WORLDS, when meteorites began falling in the American South. The narrator and his friends were on a scow drifting down the Mississippi River as the excitement began.

The newspapers were surprisingly uninformative, almost as if the news was being suppressed. The good ole boys made their way to one impact site and found not a crater but a metal-lined excavation going deep down below. Crawling about it were giant intelligent insectoid aliens, obviously up to no good. A few Arkansas towns got scorched and Memphis was completely toasted.

At that point the story abruptly cut off, leading the reader to suspect a sequel was in the works. One would suspect correctly, for in the 1931 December issue, "The Blattids" carried on the story. The government had taken official notice and sent an army engineers unit to the excavation.

The aliens had ray guns but the army had poison gas. That worked out alright for the humans. Nothing was said about bacteria but presumably the author didn't want to be accused of stealing from Wells.

From the modern era was a 1961 episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE television series. "The Invaders", written by Richard Matheson. It was set in a remote farmhouse where lived a middle-aged spinster. No electricity, just wood fires, oil lamps, and candles. She heard a high-pitched whining that hurt her head. It came from the roof of her house, so she climbed up and found a flying saucer about the size of a dining room table.

Two miniature bipeds, dressed like toy robots because the props staff bought them at a toy store, pointed tiny lasers at her. The beams hurt her and gave her small boils. She fought back with what she had, a piece of scrap lumber, a kitchen knife, and finally a hatchet. It was like chasing mice around the house; the little creatures were difficult to corner. During the entire episode she never said a word (a brilliant piece of acting by Agnes Moorehead).

She managed to squash one of the little critters. The other ran back to the flying saucer and tried to take off. She hacked at the ship with her hatchet and crippled it. The creature sent out a warning to its people back home, which was heard in English, telling them the planet was inhabited by giants and should be quarantined.

Only then did the camera dolly up to the saucer where the viewer could see markings indicated that it was a space probe from Earth. The woman was the alien defending her house from an invasion by the Earthlings. A twist ending but not believable.

“Black Leather Jackets” was a 1964 episode of THE TWILIGHT ZONE by Earl Hamner Jr. Three aliens rode into town disguised as bikers and rented a house in a middle-class suburb. Needless to say, the neighbours were in an uproar to find out that a bike gang was among their midst. One family more so than others, as their teenaged daughter was attracted to one of the bikers.

The aliens qua bikers set up a communications post inside their house, where they discussed and co-ordinated plans for the invasion. They were one of many such groups scattered around the country and presumably the world. Their plan was to sprinkle deadly bacteria into all the drinking water reservoirs and thus kill off the humans.

The alien dating the Earth woman became remorseful and tried to spread the alarm. The humans weren’t prepared to believe him, and the other aliens were prepared to silence him. Other aliens arrived, disguised as state troopers, and hauled their errant scout away. The plan would proceed as scheduled.

GROUND CONTROL TO MAJOR TOM: PART 4

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA’s #396, 405, and 453.]

Palaeorocketry.

“The Man Who Found Zero” by Ion Arnold (1901 September, THE BLACK CAT, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org) was a very early story about space exploration, in this case to the edge of Earth’s atmosphere. This was a mad scientist who sent one of his graduate students up in an experimental ship.

The author wasn’t well versed in chemistry. He spoke of the life-giving properties of ozone, but anyone inhaling pure ozone would be needing a lung transplant. In any event, the spaceship just made it past the edge of the atmosphere before running out of fuel and falling back to Earth. It was enough to discover that Earth was surrounded by a shell of pure oxygen at absolute zero, frozen into transparent ice. That astronomers had missed it was not discussed. It was simply a marvel with which to conclude the story.

“Shot Into Space” by Isaac R. Nathanson (1934 August, AMAZING STORIES, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org) was written at a time when Robert Goddard and German experimenters were just developing liquid fuel rockets. Their main problem was getting the rockets off the launch pad without blowing up.

This story was about the launch of the Meteor, a rocket plane (with propellers) from Long Island, New York State: *Three hours to Europe! A combination rocket-plane under full control, that was to cleave through the rarified atmosphere twenty to fifty miles above the earth’s surface at unheard of speed! It had never been tried before. Could they do it? Would they burst to pieces? Would they land alive?*

Well they did have a bit of excitement, otherwise there wouldn’t have been a story. The ship flew up into the sky, then engaged the rockets. After a few moments of burning, there was an uncontrolled burst that gave the ship escape velocity and sent it into orbit instead of just a ballistic flight.

The crew were in trouble because the ship was not designed to orbit. They did not have enough water or air, much less food. The infighting of desperate men took up most of the story.

Finally the orbit decayed enough that the spaceship re-entered the atmosphere and made a crash landing. One survivor made it back after thirteen days in orbit. The heat of re-entry was not yet understood, but the author did get some parts of the re-entry correct.

He was moving through the silence with frightful speed. Any moment he would begin to feel the retarding pressure of the outposts of the planet’s atmosphere. He must be careful . . . careful . . . descend lower slowly, when resistance against the body and wings shall have reduced his terrific velocity to within safe limits; then proceed under his own controlled power to a safe landing place . . . life and happiness. . . .

At last he began to feel the cushioning effect of the resisting atmosphere. Moving as he was at the residual enormous velocity, the wings of the Meteor met sufficient resistance, even in the all but empty space, to control his rate of descent. As the friction against the body and wings gradually reduced his velocity, he allowed the vessel to settle lower and lower.

Slowly he settled; still going at five thousand miles an hour, three thousand—two thousand, steadily decreasing. Lower and lower, slower and slower; the now cloudless vistas beneath drawing near. Thank God!

He was over land ; too weak and dizzy to care where; anywhere so it was a safe place to land. Green fields, trees, roofs of houses, the landscape melting and swimming before his eyes. His knees sagged. . . . Ah, a large open field. He must land, land. . . .

A heavy thud. As if in a dream he felt the Meteor bump along the ground and come to rest . . . blessed land!

And so to bed.

Doing The Math.

Stories about stowaways on spaceships were pretty much silenced by “The Cold Equations” by Tom Godwin in 1954. The premiere issue of WORLDS OF IF (1952 March, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org) had a different take in a story by Alvin Heiner titled “The Stowaway”.

It was the dawn of the space age, and an experimental but highly secret rocket was to be launched at the Moon. Joe Spain, a worker on the project, didn’t know what it was really about but wanted to make the trip. He concocted an elaborate plan to substitute himself for some cargo (thus no extra mass on board) and visit the Moon.

He was successful. After the launch, he made his way out of the storage compartment and found the ship was empty. What he didn’t realize was that the spaceship was a prototype and was being tested empty. But not completely empty. The cargo was explosives designed to create a brilliant flash when the spaceship was deliberately smashed into the Moon.

There was no radio on board, and no one knew he was there. In his last moments he realized the utter and complete futility of his life and death.

FOOD COZIES: PART 15

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 14 appeared in OPUNTIA’s #432 to 434, 436, 438, 441, 442, 444, 447, 450, 454, and 456 to 458.]

Food cozies 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. Recipes are generally included, if not at the back of the book, then in between chapters or sometimes integrated into the text. I have learned from experience to read these novels on a full stomach.

Catering To Crime.

ALLERGIC TO DEATH (2012) by Peg Cochran was the first novel in a cozy series about Gigi Fitzgerald of Woodstone, Connecticut. She had opened a home delivery business called Gourmet De-Lite, which specialized in diet food meals.

The business got off to a rough start when she delivered a meal to Martha Bernhardt, a local restaurant reviewer and amateur dramatics actress. Bernhardt promptly died from an allergic reaction due to peanut oil in the food.

Someone had tampered with the food, someone who knew that Bernhardt was allergic to peanuts. Fitzgerald suddenly had to become a Miss Marple to protect her business. Bernhardt’s ex-husband Winston was an obvious suspect. He had an expensive new girlfriend who, combined with Martha’s alimony, put a crimp in his finances. Martha had a variety of feuds and entanglements to provide a shopping list of suspects.

Eventually Fitzgerald learned that Martha and Winston had a complicated past in the New York City theatre. He had dallied with one of the actresses who was now in Woodstone. Because Winston had big money, Martha didn’t want to ruin him so instead she destroyed the actress’s career.

Years later, Martha was taught by that actress that revenge is a dish best served cold with peanut oil. The recipes appendix had diet versions of food that seemed to rely on lean meat and skim milk to reduce the calories. Nothing particularly interesting about the food.

STEAMED TO DEATH (2013) was the sequel. One of Gigi Fitzgerald's customers was aging soap opera actress Felicity Davenport, who was trying to make a comeback and needed to lose weight. It wasn't meant to be. Davenport was hosting a party, catered by Fitzgerald, when someone tranquilized her unconscious, put her in her sauna, turned the dials to maximum, and boiled her like a lobster.

Fortunately for Fitzgerald, her food wasn't blamed. However, one of her friends was the prime suspect, so a Marpleing she would go. The usual panoply of back stories and feuds were dredged up, since Davenport had quite a past. The second murder was not entirely a surprise. Eventually it was revealed that a supporting character had gained revenge for something Davenport did to her sister long ago and far away.

The recipes appendix had nothing about steamed clams as I thought it might. It opened with Magic Omelet, cooked by boiling it in a Ziplock bag. Following on were Smoky Chipotle Chili and Tilapia A La Provencal, both of which were properly cooked on a stove as God intended.

ICED TO DEATH (2014) was the third installment in the series. Gigi Fitzgerald was catering an engagement party. The groom's father got an icepick out in the parking lot. Fitzgerald found the body, of course.

She screamed like a ninny when she did. Because this was the fourth murder victim she had found in the last two years, it didn't seem believable that she would panic. She must have Homicide on her speed dial by now. She was bedding the local police detective, so she was practically a special constable.

The prime suspect was her sister's boyfriend. After sorting out all the details, the killer was a woman scorned, as Fitzgerald found out at the point of a gun.

On one of her dates with the handsome detective, Fitzgerald had steak, baked potatoes, and ice cream. Diet catering it wasn't. Do as I say, not as I do. Nonetheless the recipes appendix had diet versions of Gazpacho, Curried Chicken Thighs, and Chicken Tetrazzini.

Krista Davis (pseudonym of Cristina Ryplansky) has a cozy series about Sophie Winston of Alexandria, Virginia. Her husband Mars had dumped her in favour of Natasha Smith, a rival from school days. Smith had a cooking show on local cable television, a poor woman's Martha Stewart.

Winston managed to bounce back from her divorce with a newspaper food column and event catering business. Smith was Winston's bete noir throughout the series and kept popping up to cause problems. Mars wasn't much better.

THE DIVA RUNS OUT OF THYME (2008) was the first novel in the series. While shopping for turkey and stuffing, Sophie Winston found a corpse and became embroiled in the subsequent police investigation. More serious yet, she was one of six finalists in the Stupendous Stuffing Shakedown. The contest was sponsored by media mogul Simon Greer, who really, really liked stuffing.

Greer messed up the contest by asking Winston for a date before the contest was judged. As the other contestants screamed "It's a fix!", Winston went after Greer to tell him she had no intention of dating him, only to find his bloody corpse in a hotel room. The police, still investigating the first murder, didn't have to ask her for identification. All this by the end of Chapter 5.

The plot tangled up and it simply wasn't safe for anyone to be near Winston. Talk about alarums and excursions. Houses were torched, food poisoned, and apparently a half-dozen murderers were running about, each with their own agenda. Greer had been involved in shady practice, which set off the chain reaction.

It was the first denouement I have read where there were so many police officers in her house that Miss Marple set up a buffet for them. The final line had Smith deciding to serve goose henceforth.

The recipes appendix began with Bourbon Pecan Pie, guaranteed to make you flunk the breathalyzer test. There followed three types of stuffing, more than enough for any dinner table.

THE DIVA TAKES THE CAKE (2009) was the sequel. Sophie Winston's sister Hannah was to be married a third time, to a man Sophie distrusted on sight. Her dislike for Craig Beacham increased after his ex-wife was found hanged in Natasha Smith's garden.

Sophie found the body, it hardly seems necessary to write. She crossed paths with Hannah's second husband, a man no better than Beacham.

All sides of all the families had their white trash. Fortunately the wedding reception was a barbecue at Sophie's place, not a crime scene ribboned off by

police. This was an important point because the pulled pork had to be slow cooked for several hours.

Hannah and Craig had their melodramas. The wedding planning was one disaster after another. The wedding party drank quite a bit of Riesling. All the wine in the world couldn't blot out the discovery that Craig was an impersonator, a diamond thief, and a murderer.

Nonetheless, after the police had come and gone, a bottle of champagne helped end the novel. That probably explained why the recipes appendix included Wedded Blitz Martinis (vodka, peach schnapps, cranberry juice, and mango nectar).

Next up in the series was THE DIVA PAINTS THE TOWN (2010), which began with the death of Sophie Winston's neighbour Prof. Mordecai Artemus. Surprisingly, he died of natural causes from old age, and even more surprisingly Winston wasn't the one who found the body.

Artemus's house was to be renovated before being sold by the executors. Natasha Smith convinced them to make the renovations part of her cable show. Each room was to be redecorated by a different person. Winston was dragooned into the contest.

The last will and testament of Artemus provided that instead of a funeral there would be a soiree. The menu was to be Strawberry Daiquiris, Baked Brie, Onion Quiche, Crudités With Spanish Dip (I had to look that one up on Google; they are sliced raw vegetables served with dipping sauce), and Chocolate Chip Blondies. Winston was hired as the caterer.

While in the Artemus house, Winston finally did discover a body, allowing the novel to revert to traditional cozy form. The body disappeared by the time police arrived, and from there the plot became complicated.

Not content with just messing up the house renovation contest, Winston catered a garden show where the next body appeared. Then back to the house where the missing corpse reappeared, plus Winston found a third corpse.

Even to her it was all a bit too much. She did the logical thing and went out for doughnuts to sooth her nerves. With chocolate icing. Once she recovered her composure, she returned to the Artemus house for the traditional confrontation

with the murderer, who had been clearing away loose threads from events decades ago.

THE DIVA DIGS UP THE DIRT (2012) had Natasha Smith talking Sophie Winston into a garden makeover by the television series TEAR IT UP WITH TROY. To escape the chaos, Winston moved to her boyfriend's home. Doing a bit of landscaping there, she dug up a purse belonging to his missing wife. He promptly scarpered.

Meanwhile, Winston was busy catering the Greene family picnic, formally the Planters Punch and Backwoods Picnic and Open House. Beside the food preparation, her services included finding a body in the Greene garden, a former employee who had been dismissed without a reference. Even for a Miss Marple she was a one-woman federal disaster area.

The motive of the murderer was to cover up an embezzlement against the Greene family business, using the dysfunctional family as a smokescreen. Half the family weren't talking to each other. Several were trying to poison others to change the line of inheritance of the family wealth in their favour. There should have been a flow chart in the denouement so the reader could keep track.

The appendix had a variety of picnic recipes, minus the poisons. Garden Veggie White Pizza, Walnut Pesto, Cheese Crostinit, Danish Apple Cake, and, to wash them all down, Lemon Slush.

THE DIVA SERVES HIGH TEA (2016) began with Natasha Smith causing problems for Sophie Winston. Situation normal. Elsewhere, Martha Carter opened The Parlour (spelled with the 'u' in the text of this novel, not me changing it to conform to Canadian style), a pretentious tea shop in a city that really needed another pretentious restaurant.

It was across the street from an antiques store run by Robert Johnson. He made it as far as Chapter 9 before being poisoned. Johnson had attended a literary fund raiser at The Parlour the night before, which gave Winston cause to go Marpleing.

The snooping was sidetracked by assorted melodramas, plus Smith's attempts to raise chickens in her backyard. Nobody ever answered their cellphone or recharged the batteries. Despite all that, the motive and murderer were elucidated during a complicated who-did-what-to-whom denouement.

The recipes appendix was mostly tea parlour stuff, beginning with Cucumber Sandwiches. Why anyone would need a recipe for them is beyond me. Following on were Lemon Tarts, Bacon Cheddar Cheese Scones, Pumpkin Scones, and Apple Crostata. Since not all the action took place in a tea shop, there was Caramel Appletini's (vodka, Schnapps, and apples) to wash down the scones, followed by Pork Chops With Bourbon Cider Cream Sauce.

THE DIVA COOKS UP A STORM (2018) began with Sophie Winston organizing a pop-up gourmet dinner party. Sort of like an underground warehouse rave but with a better class of people and much better food. One of the attendees was Hollis Haberman, there with his young trophy wife, his ex-wife, and his teenaged son. As the blurb mentioned, there was more heat out at the tables than in the kitchen. The dinner had other contretemps.

Winston had to make peace between Natasha Smith, a busybody who thought she was the greatest cook in the city, and the chef, who knew he was the greatest cook in the country. Smith wandered into the kitchen, decided the food needed something, and began salting it without so much as a by-your-leave. Not surprisingly the chef went after her with a cleaver.

The real excitement began the next morning when Haberman was fatally poisoned. His current wife was the main suspect, but his personal and business affairs were such that there was no shortage of people with motives. What really perturbed Winston was that the funeral reception had store-bought food brought by some of the attendees. She hoped when they died, mourners would bring fast food.

Oh yes, the dead man. Winston continued her Marpleing. There followed a chain reaction of murders and grievous assaults. Several villains were acting from different motives while trying to clear their respective tables, so to speak. Once the flow of blood slowed to a trickle, the denouement explained everything at length while the survivors munched on casseroles and leftovers.

The recipes appendix began with Chocolate Truffle Tart With Strawberries, then a succession of assorted cocktails and baked goods. It finished up with Funeral Potatoes, better than the name would suggest.

The most recent novel in the series as I type this was THE DIVA SWEETENS THE PIE (2019). Events began during the Pie Festival, which Sophie Winston was asked to organize. The judge of the cooking contest was Patsy Lee Presley,

host of a cable food show but not for long. She did a faceplant into a butterscotch cream pie.

Natasha Smith stirred up additional trouble. She had been banned from the competition but managed to sneak in one of her pie's under a friend's name. Presley and Smith were rival cable cooking stars with no love lost between them.

Notwithstanding Presley's poisoning, the pie eating contest went ahead as scheduled. The competitors should have gotten medals for bravery. Winston did her Marpleing and the police did theirs. Presley had an angry ex-husband, an angry ex-friend, and many other angry exes too numerous to be named.

The Pie Festival and its assorted bake-offs continued, for the show must go on. More alarums followed, suggesting that now was a good time to switch to cakes or doughnuts as healthier lifestyle choices. To do so might improve the odds of surviving to the recipes appendix.

Winston alternated between baking and snooping. The murderer delivered a poisoned lemon meringue pie to her but she was suspicious and did not partake. The case broke open and the rest was predictable. The recipes appendix began with Piled High Strawberry Pie, then Blueberry Cobbler, Salted Caramel Apple Pie, and so forth. It ended with Grilled Cheese BLT, which seemed a bit of a letdown.

From another cozy series was HOT FUDGE MURDER (2019) by Cynthia Baxter. The novel opened six weeks after Kate McKay opened the Lickety Splits Ice Cream Shoppe in the formerly peaceful village of Wolfert's Roost, upstate New York.

The Shoppe was catering a gala hosted by fashion designer Omar DeVane. The menu prepared for the event included six dozen ice cream sandwiches, an equal number of ice cream cupcakes, four tubs of just plain ice cream, and a pail of hot fudge. Before any of the guests could dig in, DeVane was strangled with his cravat in another room.

What horrified McKay was that because the place was a crime scene, she had to stay there and watch all the ice cream melt uneaten. Her thought was "*how horrific the cleanup was going to be*". She was also worried about how the murder might affect business at the Shoppe, so she went Marpleing.

DeVane's entourage were a nasty bunch as one would expect of fashionistas. McKay began crashing her way into star-studded events with intent to interrogate them. She took the opportunity to propagandize for her proposed Lickety Light menu of diet sorbets.

The final confrontation with the murderers, a pair of them, was at the final round of those parties. The killers were upset that DeVane was going to change his will and leave his fortune to charity instead of them. She stopped them from killing her by spraying hot fudge in their eyes. Quick thinking, that woman.

In case you are thinking about self-defence lessons, the recipes appendix began with Heavenly Hot Fudge Sauce. If you are worried about your weight, the other recipe was Peach Basil Bliss Sorbet. As for me, I dashed off to the nearest Dairy Queen.

CLAMMED UP (2013) by Barbara Ross was the first novel in a cozy series about Julia Snowden of Busman's Harbor, Maine. Yes, one of those deadly seaside villages with a big-city murder rate concomitant with the presence of a local Miss Marple or, in this state, Jessica Fletcher. As the novel began, Julia's family business was catering a clambake for a wedding.

The Snowden Family Clambake Company owned Morrow Island off the Maine coast where they had a decrepit mansion and staged their clambakes. The wedding party was missing their best man Ray Wilson when they took the boat out for the clambake. They found him when they arrived at the mansion, hanging in the foyer.

It wasn't just a disaster for the Wilson kin and the newlyweds. The island was closed off as a crime scene. The family business was already teetering on the edge beforehand, and their inability to stage clambakes would ruin them.

That prompted Snowden to begin sleuthing. Matters were not helped by a feud she had with her brother-in-law Sonny about how the business should be run.

The reception was postponed by force majeure. Snowden was busy making telephone calls canceling orders for live lobsters and such. As for the back stories, there were plenty, within and without the family. Romantic entanglements and blood feuds stretched back decades. Wilson's part was to tease a crazy woman one step too far, unaware of her insanity.

After all that soap opera, on to the recipes, beginning with, you will not be surprised, Clam Chowder and Clam Hash. Blueberry Grunt was the dessert. The recipe for Lobster Mac And Cheese will be appreciated by the type of people who put ketchup on scrambled eggs or salt their food before tasting it.

BOILED OVER (2014) was the sequel, taking place eight weeks later during the village's first annual Founder's Day. No one knew anything about Busman, so Julia Snowden was delegated to find out if he did indeed found the village and what it was he did for a living.

The Snowden Family Clambake Company was a vendor at the town pier where some of the celebrations were taking place. Once again they didn't get past Chapter 1 without a corpse, this one burned in their seafood firepit. The villagers caught on quick, as one said to Snowden: *"You don't see dead people. You attract them!"*

The victim was Stevie Noyes, a local RV park owner, who never got a speaking part. One of Snowden's employees, Cabe Stone, panicked and ran. A good way to become the prime suspect. The Founder's Day went on, as it had to, being of major economic importance to the village in attracting tourists. Snowden was a volunteer for the committee.

The blueberry pancake breakfast was a critical fundraiser. Meanwhile, the family's regular clambake business out on their island continued, shuttling boatloads of tourists out to the island twice a day. That made it more difficult for Snowden to snoop as she had to be out on the boat. She was also a judge for the blueberry pie eating contest.

Cabe Stone lurked in the background, still on the run. He had a rough childhood. Noye's past was just as bad, a con man now living under a false name with two wives. Other people, both sinners and sinned against, floated out of the past, one of whom was the murderer.

Snowden survived the traditional encounter with the killer. The epilogue wrapped up with a litany of who did what to whom, both in the present and the past. The recipes appendix had the expected Blueberry Pancakes and Blueberry Pie, plus a variety of items such as Lobster Deviled Eggs, Baked Beans, and Lobster Salad.

MUSSELED OUT (2015) was the third installment of the series. The tourist season was almost over and Julia Snowden was settling into her life as the resident Miss Marple. The family business was threatened by David Thwing, the self-proclaimed Mussel King, who wanted to open a competing clambake business that would probably ruin the Snowden family.

He was actively opposed by Snowden's brother-in-law Sonny. Surprisingly, Thwing made it as far as Chapter 3 and had a speaking part before someone sent him to sleep with the fishes. Sonny was the main suspect.

Snowden's investigations, as per standard cozy practice, helped muddy the waters. Thwing had a past relationship with a local woman, and a feud between lobster men might be related. In the denouement though, it was drug smuggling at the root of it. Thwing accidentally stumbled into a messy dispute.

From there to the Shrimp and Lobster Polenta leading off the recipes appendix. The Slow-Cooker Curried Fish And Butternut Squash Stew is one that I hope never to be offered. Fortunately we never have such at the Calgary Stampede, although it helps to be 600 km from the nearest ocean. For dessert, Pumpkin Whoopie Pie.

ICED UNDER (2017) took place during the off-season in February. Julia Snowden and her mother Jacqueline received a package in the mail. It contained a black diamond necklace that had belonged to Julia's great-grandmother but was stolen in the 1920s.

After the return of the necklace became known, a family feud erupted over inheritances and past grievances from forty years ago. Cousin Hugh was murdered, an apparent attempt to re-adjust the line of inheritance. Julia learned more about her family history than she would like to have known.

Since there were no clambakes, this novel was a straightforward mystery rather than a food cozy. The only item of interest was Julia explaining an inside trick of clambakes. Once the firepit was going, place a fresh egg on top. When the egg was hard-boiled, the food was ready. In the appendix, the recipes were an assortment of hot dishes, suitable for a February supper.

Carrying on the series was STOWED AWAY (2018), which began in early June when Julia Snowden and her family were gearing up for a new tourist season. An old classmate, Susan Wyatt Jayne, appeared. She was now the fiancé of

billionaire recluse Geoffrey Bower, whose megayacht was moored in the harbour.

First the subplots were set up. The Snowden family was busy getting in food and supplies for their first clambake of the season. They were also discussing the renovation of the mansion on the island. Jayne was an interior decorator and restorer who was hired for the job. Meanwhile, protestors were picketing Bower's yacht and providing a fresh crop of suspects. They were there because Bower was a 1%, so that made him guilty of everything.

Bower didn't make it past his lobster dinner in Chapter 9, but he did get a brief speaking part. It was something he ate, or rather something added to what he ate. The autopsy revealed hemlock water dropwort, found throughout North America and Europe.

By now the villagers were beginning to catch on about Snowden. *With that remark, all eyes turned toward me. I was the most murder-adjacent person at the table by a wide margin.*

The plot made a right-angle swerve when it was discovered the deceased was an imposter working for Bower. This immediately tangled all the narrative threads. The ending was so messy that I never could figure out the motive for the murder. The good news was that the first clambake went well.

The recipes began with Tarragon Ricotta Gnocchi Lobster Velouté, minus the hemlock. Following on were Herbed Halibut Sous-Vide and, for the commoners, Beer Can Chicken With Roasted Potatoes, exactly what it seemed.

Bower's body was only just buried when excitement returned to Busman's Harbor in STEAMED OPEN (2018). Bartholomew Fitch had just inherited a beachfront estate and immediately cut off public access to the beach. That blocked the Snowden family from their source of clams and damaged the tourist trade in general. In retaliation, Fitch got a clam rake in the neck, and thereby hangs a tale.

Julia Snowden was on the case, nevermind the police. Suspects abounded as Frick was the man for whom the word 'boor' was invented. Besides the aforementioned beach, he had disgruntled employees and relatives disputing the inheritance.

Snowden had to run about finding clams from other suppliers elsewhere on the coast. The clambake business squeaked by but it wasn't so good for the clambers on that beach who lost their livelihood. One of them took direct action.

After the murderer was hauled away and the clambakes resumed, it was on to the recipes. There were Linguini With Clam Sauce, Clam Dip, and Clam Potato Casserole. For dessert, Raspberry Muffins. What, no Clam Ice Cream?

For a change of scenery, we go to Half Moon Bay in upstate New York. ROUX THE DAY (2017) by Linda Wiken was a novel in a cozy series about Josephine Tanner. She was an event planner whose latest contract was with the Culinary Capers Dinner Club on board a cruise ship traveling Lake Champlain.

Entertainers for the cruise were DJ Connor Mac and television presenter Miranda Myers, his ex-fiancé. She didn't finish the voyage, owing to a knife stuck into her. The cruise buffet was sautéed shrimp, three salads, four veggies, cheese, fruit, and chocolate mousse. All of that turned into ashes in the mouth after the murder.

Tanner began sleuthing. There was trouble at the television station, nevermind the personal entanglements. The murderer wanted to protect her boyfriend, who was running for public office, from a scandalous relationship with Myers.

The usual type of gunpoint ending, after which Tanner relaxed with a box of chocolates. The appendix had recipes by mystery authors, such as Chicken Gabriella by Sara Paretsky.

MARINATING IN MURDER (2018) was to have been an autumn picnic with Josephine Tanner and her friends. One of them was Alison Manovich, who opened the back door of her SUV to load the food, and found the corpse of her estranged husband.

The picnic went on for the rest of the group after the police hauled Manovich to a jail cell. Mustn't let good fresh food go to waste. Everyone commented on the delicious salads and the pasta.

Having consumed the meal, Tanner went investigating, including the favoured break-and-enter to find evidence. That's one advantage Miss Marples have over police, not having to fuss about search warrants and evidence chain of custody.

The dead man was part of a gang of thieves who had a falling out. Tanner survived her encounter with the leader. Everyone was so relieved that they had another picnic. The recipes, strangely, were assorted slow-cooked or sit-down dinner table foods.

From another series was DEATH ON THE MENU (2018) by Lucy Burdette (pseudonym of Roberta Isleib). Set on Key West, Florida, the resident Miss Marple was Hayley Snow, food critic for KEY ZEST, a tourist magazine. She was attending a political conference not as a writer but to help her mother's catering business.

The excitement began when someone stole Ernest Hemingway's Nobel Prize medal from its display case. That became an international incident because it was the property of the Cuban government, on loan for the occasion. Hemingway had left it behind in Havana when he moved to Key West.

The first suspect in the theft was a busboy but his body was soon found, stabbed to death. The family of the deceased asked Snow for help. This being the eighth novel in the series, by this time she had established a reputation as a Miss Marple. Snow had to work her way around all the federal investigators.

Her greatest concern was that the theft had ruined the event for her mother. No one would remember the good food she supplied, only the excitement of the theft. The medal was recovered but the problem was getting evidence to convict the thief. Snow volunteered to help with a sting operation. After the usual guns-drawn denouement it all ended well.

The novel covered a lot of ground about modern Cuban-American relations and history, with a number of small infodumps to set up the back story. The recipes appendix began with Mojitos (a rum drink), then a Cuban meat dish called Ropa Vieja, followed by Flan, Cuban Roast Pork, and many others.

DARK TORT (2006) by Diane Mott Davidson was a novel in a food cozy series about Goldy Schulz, a caterer in Aspen Meadow, Colorado. Among her regular contracts, she prepared breakfasts and conference snacks for a local law firm.

The book started with a bang. The very first sentence of the first chapter was: *I tripped over the body of my friend Dusty Routt at half past ten on the night of October 19.*

Shulz was carrying in food for an event and spilled it all over the carpet when she fell over the body. One tragedy after another. Routt was a paralegal with the firm. The grieving mother asked Schulz to investigate. Yes, there were police, but we all know who really solves these cases. It wasn't long before Shulz was in deep and compiling a list of suspects.

She was a klutz who could be relied upon to spill, drop, or break things in almost every chapter. As an example, when she suddenly realized who the murderer might be, she was so excited that she slopped a bowl of guacamole onto a bishop's shirt. The shirt was purple, which goes well with green, so there was that. Somehow Shulz managed to set the salad bowls on the table without vegetating the floor.

A break-and-enter provided useful data. The murderer was the wife of a partner at the law firm, and Routt had been the third node of a love triangle. A second murder victim had to go because he might blab an inconvenient fact.

The recipes appendix began with Dark Torte, this one with an 'e'. The title of this noel was of course a pun. Following on were assorted baked goods and hot dishes, the kind you've eaten at any catered business lunch.

SWEET REVENGE (2007) was the follow-on. Goldy Schulz was catering a Christmas breakfast for the Aspen Meadow Library. Menu items included Great Expectations Grapefruit, Chuzzlewit Cheese Pie, and Bleak House Bars, the last two in the recipes index. Nothing about Scrooge or Tiny Tim. The body didn't show up until the end of Chapter 2.

The MacGuffin was antique maps, the high-priced ones handled by dealers who change the subject when the word 'ethics' is spoken out loud. The defunct had such a map on him when his body was found in a corner of the library.

Schulz had her own demons. She was certain she had seen a woman lurking about who had been responsible for the death of Schulz's ex-husband. As one of the Deppity Dawgs remarked to her: *Trouble just follows you around, Mrs Schulz, doesn't it?* She responded by giving him a bag of Bleak House Bars to be going on with.

There followed the general type of alarums and excursions one expects in a cozy, as well as the unearthing of various social melodramas. A map dealer was found dead at the base of a waterfall, and no one believed he had been

swimming. The catering still went on, including a church fete where one of the items was Unorthodox Shepherd's Pie (recipe in the appendix).

The denouement was detailed at great length, as it had to be with all those loose threads. The murderer was seeking revenge, a dish she did not serve cold. The library had been gutted of its maps. Ex-wives and nasty stepdaughters fought in the courts. A tangled web indeed.

FATALLY FLAKY (2009) took place in the summer when Goldy Schulz was busy catering wedding receptions. One in particular, that of Billie Attenborough, caused a lot of work. The bridezilla kept changing the menu, the date, and the venue. At the last moment, Attenborough decided on the Gold Gulch Spa, forcing Schulz to scramble to get an additional 50 servings ready.

Meanwhile, a family friend Doc Finn was killed in a car crash which turned out to be a murder staged to look like an accident. In between frantic wedding preparations in the kitchen, Schulz did some investigating. The reception went reasonably well, although the police had to remove a drunken intruder from the kitchen and someone slugged a man unconscious outside the building. Sounds like several wedding receptions I've been to.

The spa motivated the plot. Medical malpractice suits, drugs, and health food smoothies that were addictive because they had more than fruit juice in them. Schulz went undercover as a cook, which came in handy, what with all the non-approved additives in the food.

The spa owner got what was coming to him. He had killed Finn, who was about to expose the place as Drug Central. After the shutdown, it was on to the recipes, which fortunately did not include smoothies.

THE WHOLE ENCHILADA (2013) rehashed the poisoned food plot. Goldy Schulz catered a birthday with Hispanic food, after which a guest keeled over. She got the blame, threats from vigilantes, and assaults, so she had to clear her name. Oh, and she was heavily pregnant.

The poison had to have been added to the food after serving. The deceased came from an equally toxic family. Blackmail, embezzlement, and predatory lawsuits weren't the half of the trouble. The denouement came down to sociopathic behaviour with all the usual alarums and excursions. Plus one extra alarum, as the baby appeared on the final page.

The recipes appendix began with Enchiladas Suizas. The rest of the menu was anglo, such as Spinach Dip, Chocolate Snowcap Cookies, and Tenderloin Grilled Steaks.

PUDDING UP WITH MURDER (2017) by Julia Buckley was part of a cozy food series about Lilah Drake, a home-delivery caterer in Pine Haven, Illinois. She specialized in covered-dish menus, not fast food. This novel was the sad tale of Marcus Cantwell, an unpleasant man with numerous ex-wives plus feuding children and step-children (as in fistfights, not just nasty words). He did a faceplant into Drake's rice pudding casserole. Fortunately for Drake, the lab tests established the drink was poisoned, not her food.

Nonetheless she went sleuthing. It would be difficult to find a more dysfunctional family than the Cantwells, even in fiction. Basically everyone who knew the old man hated him, with his children at the top of the list. It was indeed one of his kids who did him in.

The recipes appendix began with Rice Pudding Casserole, as eaten by the lead character himself. Next were Raspberry-Almond Deep-Dish Coffee Cake, then Egg And Dill Delight, and finally Mushroom Collezione. After you've dined, remember to be nice to your children. One of them may not murder you, but they will pick the nursing home to which you'll be committed.

A CATERED MURDER (2003) by Isis Crawford was the first novel in a cozy series about sisters Bernadette and Libby Simmons of Longely, upstate New York. They operated a restaurant and catering service called A Little Taste Of Heaven.

The task at hand in this novel was a high school reunion with a vampire theme. The menu included rare beef tenderloin, salad with blood oranges, and devil's food cake, with Bloody Marys to wash it all down.

The keynote speaker was Laird Wrenn, author of a series of vampire novels. He made it through the menu but not his after-dinner speech. He paused to take a sip of bottled water which had been flavoured with cyanide.

Libby was briefly a suspect because she had argued with the deceased. Since no one else who ate the food died, attention shifted to others. Wrenn had just dumped a girlfriend, his agent didn't like him much, and others abounded who were not sad and often delighted at his unexpected passing. The good news was

that the Simmons's restaurant suddenly had lineups of new customers. Any publicity is good publicity.

The sisters got in and out of scrapes while Marpleing. Libby worried she was losing a battle to control her weight but since she was continually nibbling on cookies it was no surprise. The sisters finally discovered the murderer, who blamed two deaths in her family on Wrenn. One of his vampire novels was actually a roman-a-clef which drove the killer's husband to suicide.

The appendix was the recipes from the reunion menu. It began with Caviar Mousse (red caviar), Tomato Aspic, Finger Bone cookies, and the other items mentioned above.

A CATERED BIRTHDAY PARTY (2009) had the Simmons sisters catering a dog's birthday party, feeding both the humans and the canines. Annabel Colbert, wealthy woman about town, took a gulp of wine at the party, then fell forward into the soup. She was not mourned, least of all by her husband.

The Simmons sisters worked their way through the back stories, constantly munching on finger food along the way. Hardly a scene went by without them doing some detecting from a laden table. There were a plethora of suspects but for once the obvious one was indeed the killer. Colbert's husband didn't want the fuss of a divorce, not to mention being pushed away from her fortune.

The recipes appendix had a mixture of both human and doggie items, so close reading and attention to detail is essential. I re-read the Cheesy Roll Appetizers recipe several times and am still unsure of which species it was intended for. The Doggy Birthday Cake was obvious, having a can of dog food in the list of ingredients, and the Strawberry Shortcake was undeniably for bipeds.

A CATERED ST PATRICK'S DAY (2012) began with the body of Mike Sweeney floating in a barrel of green beer, the luck of the Irish not applying to him. The Simmons sisters were busy baking cookies in the shape of four-leaf clovers when the call came to investigate. The prime suspect was Duncan Nottingham, whose doting Aunt Bree asked the sisters for help. She was one of the best customers of A Little Taste Of Heaven, so the sisters could not refuse.

Duncan belonged to a group of ne-er-do-wells called the Corned Beef and Cabbage Club. All of them had something to hide and were none too pleased

about a pair of biddies (to use an Irish word) snooping about. Duncan was not a nice man in his private life, so motives and suspects abounded.

The Deppity Dawgs arrested various suspects, mostly on the grounds they didn't like the look of them. Another murder upped the tempo. The sisters hardly had time to run their shop but by Chapter 26 were able to get in some cooking, viz two Soups of the Day (minestrone and fish) for starters, then three long paragraphs about the bread (with chopped walnuts and raisins).

Finally to the traditional confrontation with the murderer, who had been cheated of a substantial sum by Sweeney and the gang. In the appendix, the only 'Irish' recipe was Grasshopper Squares (brownies with green icing) which I suspect no real Irish have eaten.

A CATERED FOURTH OF JULY (2014) was celebrated in Longely with a reenactment of the Battle of Meadow Creek, a Revolutionary War incident over who stole whose chicken.

Shots were fired from muskets but someone arranged that the gun used by Jack Devlin had extra shot and powder in it and was solidly plugged with a clod of soil. He was the village lothario. The blood on his uniform proved real when the gun exploded in his face and killed him.

Bernadette and Libby Simmons were catering the re-enactment. It was a blazing hot day, so the deviled eggs had to go on a bed of ice. The villagers were already suspicious about how the sisters always found the bodies, and a case of food poisoning from bad eggs would get them lynched. Their investigation of Devlin's murder dredged up most of the psychopaths in the village, say about half the adult population.

Devlin's canoodling was the motive, to no one's surprise. The police were conspicuous by their absence in the denouement. Muskets were aimed and all that. Afterwards, the loose threads were tied up over a hearty meal of Brie and Black Forest ham sandwiches at a garden club meeting, catered by the sisters of course.

The recipes appendix featured patriotic foods such as Bolivian Potato Salad, for which the author herself had to apologize to the reader, saying it was tastier than might be assumed from the recipe. Filling out the menu were Chicken Marinade, Carrot Raisin Salad, Strawberry Sparkle Cake, and Blueberry Pie.

A CATERED MOTHER'S DAY (2015) had a bizarre and convoluted plot. Bernadette Simmons had a friend Ellen Hadley who was an overworked businesswoman and who felt her family was neglecting her. To get their attention, she took seriously a suggestion made as a joke by Bernadette to fake her own kidnapping.

Hadley booked a hotel room for hiding, then found the body of a stranger of the bed. Her husband had reported the kidnapping to the police. Needless to say, the constabulary had a lot of uncomfortable questions.

Another body followed, sending the Simmons sisters into full Miss Marple mode. Despite their sleuthing away from the restaurant, A Little Taste Of Heaven did okay. Bernadette explained it to one of the suspects at the beginning of Chapter 34:

Bernie leaned back in her chair and continued smiling. "One thing about our shop. Every time there's a homicide in Longely our business goes up. Do you know why?"

Jeremy shook his head. "Should I care?"

"Indeed you should. Here's the thing. People want to know what happened." she said. "Think of us as Twitter with coffee and muffins."

The denouement was a gunfight but this time it was Miss Marple aka Bernadette doing the shooting to bring down the murderer. A refreshing change. The murderer and the first victim had been involved in a land deal that went wrong and was settled up in blood, not cash.

The recipes appendix was the result of the author asking several men what they would prepare for their wives on Mother's Day. The results were Pulled Pork (slow-cooked in root beer), Tuna Fish Casserole, Zita With Broccoli And Chickpeas, and Venison Stew (*For those of you who are fortunate enough to have a hunter in your family.*)

A CATERED TEA PARTY (2016) was the next novel in the series. Bernadette and Libby Simmons were catering the opening of an art gallery, the theme being Alice in Wonderland. The patron was cranky old billionaire Ludvoc Zalinsky. He didn't make it past the tea party, being electrocuted by a sabotaged electric tea kettle.

The police did things their way and the Simmons sisters did thing their way, such as break-and-enter to gather evidence. Zalinsky had quite a biography, multiple passports under different names, and apparently was about to skip the country before someone got to him. Too slow on the reflexes.

The plot details were worked out as the sisters prepared food for the shop. Infodumps about the case were inserted between info dumps about preparing bread dough. The denouement was another gunfight but alas, this time it was the usual Miss Marple threatened by the murderer, and escaping with th usual dumb luck. Zalinsky had been stealing big money from his fellow thieves.

The tea party theme didn't appear in the recipes appendix. Instead, there were Chinese Marbled Eggs, Alla Romana, and Triple Ginger Loaf.

A CATERED CAT WEDDING (2018) was exactly that. Crazy but rich cat lady Susie Katz (really?) decided to stage a wedding for her two Russian Blue cats. There was method in her madness, as she wanted to annoy her enemies. Invited guests included her bird-lover neighbour, a rival cat breeder, an animal rights activist, and her niece and nephew, who were in line to inherit her estate.

The Simmons sisters had catered the affair with poached salmon and caviar, several other recipes for salmon, and Paté Baguettes. For the sisters themselves, bourbon and branch water helped them get through the ceremony.

The event was quite the hoorah. Someone released a batch of mice in the midst of the cats. In the chaos that followed, Katz got a knife in the back. She didn't have nine lives. The investigation by the sisters revealed a tangle of blackmail, illicit romance, and just plain greed.

The recipes began with just plain Borscht (I believe red beets should be outlawed and not used to ruin a stew) and ended with Pancakes. That was it, just the two recipes. Not a word about salmon.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Kaur, T., and S. Sahijpal (2019) **Heterogeneous evolution of the Galaxy and the origin of the short-lived nuclides in the early solar system.** MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY 490:1620-1637

Authors' abstract: *We present Galactic chemical evolution (GCE) models of the short-lived radionuclides (SLRs), ^{26}Al , ^{36}Cl , ^{41}Ca , ^{53}Mn , and ^{60}Fe , across the entire Milky Way galaxy. The objective is to understand the spatial and temporal distribution of the SLRs in the galaxy.*

The gamma-ray observations infer widespread distribution of ^{26}Al and ^{60}Fe across the galaxy. The signatures of the SLRs in the early solar system are found in meteorites.

We explore the possibility of the birth of the solar system in an environment where one of the stellar clusters formed > 25 megayears earlier. The decaying ^{53}Mn and ^{60}Fe remnants from the evolved massive stars from the cluster probably contaminated the local medium associated with the pre-solar molecular cloud.

Speirs: The Sun was born 4.6 gigayears ago not in isolation but as part of a cluster of stars orbiting around the rim of the Milky Way galaxy. Its siblings have scattered over time. This paper suggests that 25 megayears prior to the Sun's birth, its parental dust cloud was saturated with heavy metals from an adjacent cloud, the traces of which can still be detected today.

Jordan, S.F., et al (2019) **Promotion of protocell self-assembly from mixed amphiphiles at the origin of life.** NATURE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 3:doi.org/10.1038/s41559-019-1015-y

Authors' abstract: *Vesicles formed from single-chain amphiphiles (SCAs) such as fatty acids probably played an important role in the origin of life. A major criticism of the hypothesis that life arose in an early ocean hydrothermal environment is that hot temperatures, large pH gradients, high salinity and abundant divalent cations should preclude vesicle formation.*

However, these arguments are based on model vesicles using 1-3 SCAs, even though Fischer-Tropsch-type synthesis under hydrothermal conditions produces

a wide array of fatty acids and 1-alkanols, including abundant C₁₀ to C₁₅ compounds.

Here, we show that mixtures of these C₁₀ to C₁₅ SCAs form vesicles in aqueous solutions between pH ~6.5 and >12 at modern seawater concentrations of NaCl, Mg²⁺ and Ca²⁺. Adding C₁₀ isoprenoids improves vesicle stability even further.

Vesicles form most readily at temperatures of ~70 °C and require salinity and strongly alkaline conditions to self-assemble. Thus, alkaline hydrothermal conditions not only permit protocell formation at the origin of life but actively favour it.

Henahan, M.J., et al (2019) **Rapid ocean acidification and protracted Earth system recovery followed the end-Cretaceous Chicxulub impact.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:22500-22504

Authors' abstract: Debate lingers over what caused the last mass extinction 66 million years ago, with intense volcanism and extraterrestrial impact the most widely supported hypotheses. However, without empirical evidence for either's exact environmental effects, it is difficult to discern which was most important in driving extinction. It is also unclear why recovery of biodiversity and carbon cycling in the oceans was so slow after an apparently sudden extinction event.

In this paper, we show (using boron isotopes and Earth system modeling) that the impact caused rapid ocean acidification, and that the resulting ecological collapse in the oceans had long-lasting effects for global carbon cycling and climate. Our data suggest that impact, not volcanism, was key in driving end-Cretaceous mass extinction.

Mass extinction at the Cretaceous-Paleogene (K-Pg) boundary coincides with the Chicxulub bolide impact and also falls within the broader time frame of Deccan trap emplacement. Critically, though, empirical evidence as to how either of these factors could have driven observed extinction patterns and carbon cycle perturbations is still lacking.

Here, using boron isotopes in foraminifera, we document a geologically rapid surface-ocean pH drop following the Chicxulub impact, supporting

impact-induced ocean acidification as a mechanism for ecological collapse in the marine realm. Subsequently, surface water pH rebounded sharply with the extinction of marine calcifiers and the associated imbalance in the global carbon cycle.

Our reconstructed water-column pH gradients, combined with Earth system modeling, indicate that a partial ~50% reduction in global marine primary productivity is sufficient to explain observed marine carbon isotope patterns at the K-Pg, due to the underlying action of the solubility pump. While primary productivity recovered within a few tens of thousands of years, inefficiency in carbon export to the deep sea lasted much longer.

This phased recovery scenario reconciles competing hypotheses previously put forward to explain the K-Pg carbon isotope records, and explains both spatially variable patterns of change in marine productivity across the event and a lack of extinction at the deep sea floor.

Lee, H., et al (2019) **Sustained wood burial in the Bengal Fan over the last 19 My.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:22518-22525

Authors' abstract: The Bengal Fan is the largest sedimentary deposit in the world and has previously been shown to represent a major sink of carbon that may have contributed to the Cenozoic cooling trend. Wood transport has been observed in rivers during the high flows of the monsoon season, or associated with events such as cyclones, earthquake-triggered landslide and dam-and-release events from the mountains.

However, wood was not widely thought to survive export and burial in the oceans. This study shows that woody debris can survive thousands of kilometers of transport in rivers and in turbidites, to be deposited in the fan. Wood has been overlooked in quantification of organic carbon burial on continental margins.

The Ganges-Brahmaputra (G-B) River system transports over a billion tons of sediment every year from the Himalayan Mountains to the Bay of Bengal and has built the world's largest active sedimentary deposit, the Bengal Fan. High sedimentation rates drive exceptional organic matter preservation that represents a long-term sink for atmospheric CO₂.

While much attention has been paid to organic-rich fine sediments, coarse sediments have generally been overlooked as a locus of organic carbon (OC) burial. However, International Ocean Discovery Program Expedition 354 recently discovered abundant woody debris (millimeter- to centimeter sized fragments) preserved within the coarse sediment layers of turbidite beds recovered from 6 marine drill sites along a transect across the Bengal Fan (~8°N, ~3,700-m water depth) with recovery spanning 19 megayears.

Analysis of bulk wood and lignin finds mostly lowland origins of wood delivered episodically. In the last 5 My, export included C₄ plants [dryland plants], implying that coarse woody, lowland export continued after C₄ grassland expansion, albeit in reduced amounts. Substantial export of coarse woody debris in the last 1 My included one wood-rich deposit (~0.05 Ma) that encompassed coniferous wood transported from the headwaters.

In coarse layers, we found on average 0.16 weight % OC, which is half the typical biospheric OC content of sediments exported by the modern G-B Rivers. Wood burial estimates are hampered by poor drilling recovery of sands. However, high-magnitude, low-frequency wood export events are shown to be a key mechanism for C burial in turbidites.

Chan, E.K.F., et al (2019) **Human origins in a southern African palaeo-wetland and first migrations.** NATURE 575:185-189

Authors' abstract: Anatomically modern humans originated in Africa around 200 thousand years ago (ka). Although some of the oldest skeletal remains suggest an eastern African origin, southern Africa is home to contemporary populations that represent the earliest branch of human genetic phylogeny.

Here we generate, to our knowledge, the largest resource for the poorly represented and deepest-rooting maternal L0 mitochondrial DNA branch (198 new mitogenomes for a total of 1,217 mitogenomes) from contemporary southern Africans and show the geographical isolation of L0d1'2, L0k and L0g KhoeSan descendants south of the Zambezi river in Africa.

By establishing mitogenomic timelines, frequencies and dispersals, we show that the L0 lineage emerged within the residual Makgadikgadi-Okavango palaeo-wetland of southern Africa, approximately 200 ka (95% confidence interval, 240 to 165 ka). Genetic divergence points to a sustained

70,000-year-long existence of the L0 lineage before an out-of-homeland northeast-southwest dispersal between 130 and 110 ka.

Palaeo-climate proxy and model data suggest that increased humidity opened green corridors, first to the northeast then to the southwest. Subsequent drying of the homeland corresponds to a sustained effective population size (L0k), whereas wet-dry cycles and probable adaptation to marine foraging allowed the southwestern migrants to achieve population growth (L0d1'2), as supported by extensive south-coastal archaeological evidence.

Taken together, we propose a southern African origin of anatomically modern humans with sustained homeland occupation before the first migrations of people that appear to have been driven by regional climate changes.

Rodríguez-Hidalgo, A., et al (2019) **The Châtelperronian Neanderthals of Cova Foradada (Calafell, Spain) used imperial eagle phalanges for symbolic purposes.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 5:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax1984

Authors' abstract: Evidence for the symbolic behavior of Neanderthals in the use of personal ornaments is relatively scarce. Among the few ornaments documented, eagle talons, which were presumably used as pendants, are the most frequently recorded. This phenomenon appears concentrated in a specific area of southern Europe during a span of 80 thousand years.

Here, we present the analysis of one eagle pedal phalange recovered from the Châtelperronian layer of Foradada Cave (Spain). Our research broadens the known geographical and temporal range of this symbolic behavior, providing the first documentation of its use among the Iberian populations, as well as of its oldest use in the peninsula.

The recurrent appearance of large raptor talons throughout the Middle Paleolithic time frame, including their presence among the last Neanderthal populations, raises the question of the survival of some cultural elements of the Middle Paleolithic into the transitional Middle to Upper Paleolithic assemblages and beyond.