

OPUNTIA 526



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.

ABOUT THE COVER

Spring has sprung at Chez Opuntia. I took this photo of leaves budding out on a green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), a common tree in Calgary.



Calgary’s annual anime festival Otafest returned after the pandemic hiatus. As previously, it was held in the Telus Convention Centre on the Victoria Day weekend. There were 9,000 paid members. For comparison, the 2019 Science Fiction Worldcon in Dublin had 6,525 members attending.

The lineup for Otafest stretched a block down the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall from the centre (lower right of photo), then another block around the Imperial Bank corner tailing north on Centre Street. I doubt anyone in the lineup was over 25 years of age. Calgary’s annual readercon When Words Collide had about 1,000 attendees before the pandemic. I doubt anyone there was under 40.



SPRING HAS SPRUNG
photos by Dale Speirs

At right: The northeast side of Olympic Plaza in spring bloom on the Victoria Day weekend.

Below: Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo*) budding out. The droopy brownish stalks will bear the seeds later this summer. Native to the Canadian prairies.

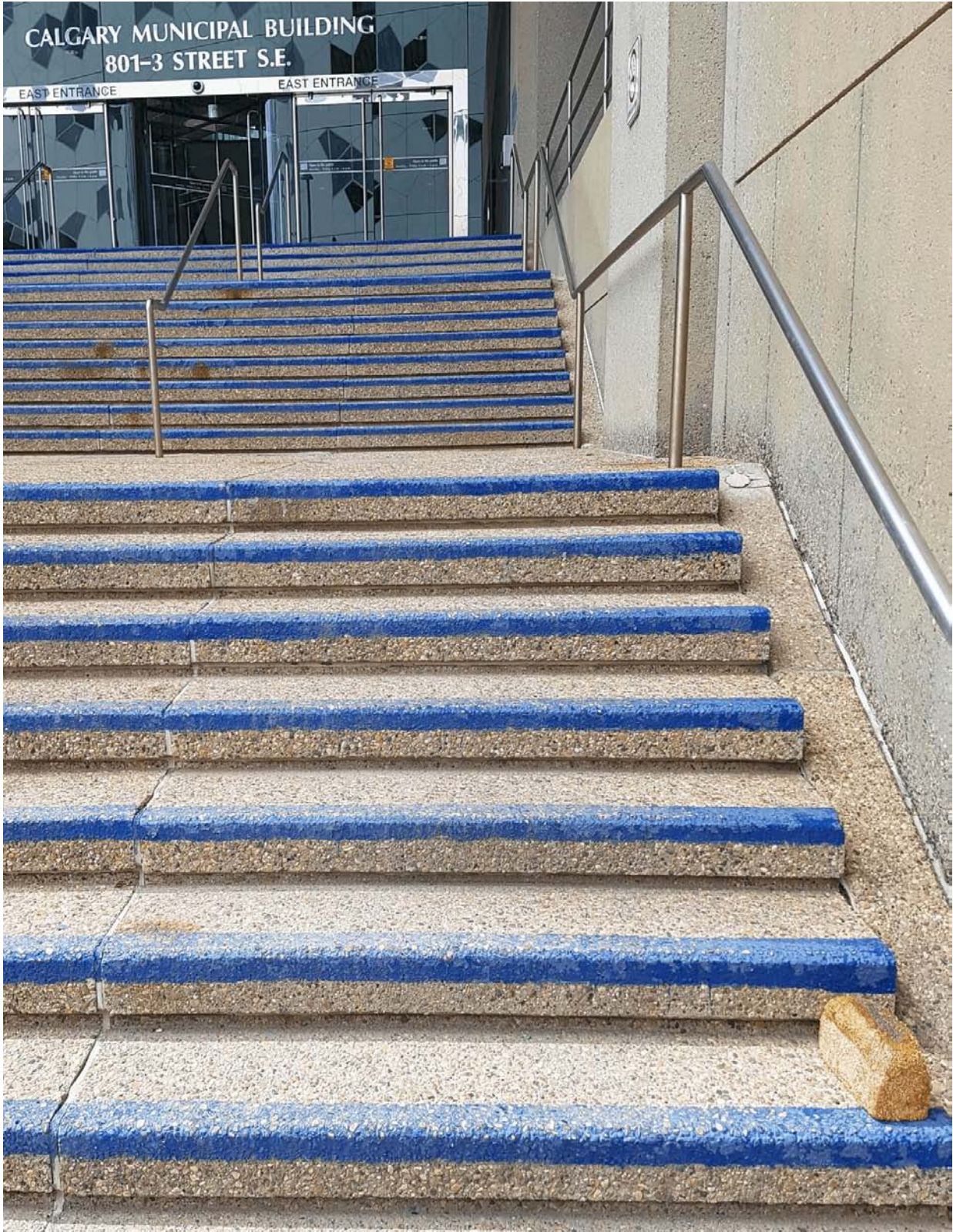
Next page: Hybrid cherry (*Prunus* species) on my boulevard, photographed on June 1. The plant was a gift when I retired from the Parks Dept in 2010.





AROUND COWTOWN
photos by Dale Speirs

Walking past the back door of City Hall, I saw this loaf of bread sitting on the steps. I'm sure there was a reason.



By random chance I walked past a Jelly outlet and learned just how close I came to missing one of our most important national holidays. I had my favourite, a blueberry-lemon doughnut and got a free cream doughnut for the day.



MAIL ART OF BETTY SPEIRS: PART 9

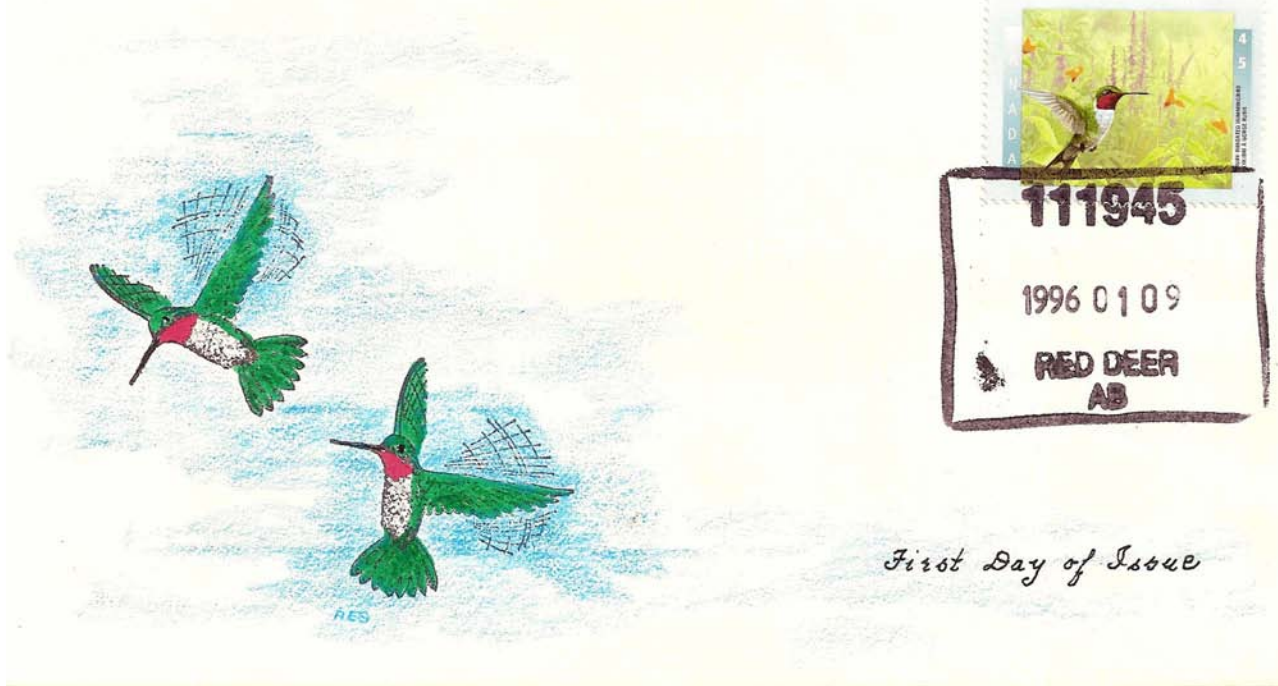
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 8 appeared in OPUNTIA's #511, 514, 517, 519, 521, 523 to 525.]

Long before she took up mail art, my mother Betty was an amateur ornithologist. Eagles, hawks, pelicans, hummingbirds, ducks, geese, sparrows, kingfishers, and woodpeckers are common in Alberta. No puffins though.



Lots of honeysuckle shrubs on the ranch to attract hummingbirds.



First Day of Issue



Northern Pintail



100900

1995-08-15

RED DEER
AB

First Day of Issue



Belted Kingfisher



100900

1995-08-15

RED DEER
AB



1994-04-22

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FIRST DAY OF
ISSUE
APR. 22. 1994



SHERLOCKIANA: PART 39

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 32 to 38 appeared in OPUNTIA's #470, 474, 486, 492, 496, 501, and 510.]

The original Sherlock Holmes stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle are referred to as the canon, while stories written by other authors are called pastiches.

Pastiches: Anthologies.

A SHERLOCK HOLMES ALPHABET OF CASES (P TO T), published in 2020, was the fourth collection of stories by Roger Riccard in this thematic series. Previous volumes were reviewed in OPUNTIA's #496, 501, and 510.

The first of five stories in this collection was “The Piccadilly Poisoner”. A standard setup, with a wealthy middle-aged widower who returned from India with a young Anglo-Indian bride Dinah Patel, the same age as his son. The racial and cultural prejudices were played out, as well as the anger of the jealous stepson.

When Dinah became ill and a patient of Dr Watson, she always improved rapidly in hospital. This led Watson to suspect poisoning. Holmes did his investigating and caught Dinah, who was poisoning herself with mild doses while preparing her husband for a big one.

“The Dead Quiet Library” took place at St Chad’s College out in the country. A student and a rugby coach had been found dead in the library in separate incidents. One supposedly fell off a ladder while reaching for a book on the top shelf. The other apparently tripped and struck his head against a table edge.

Most of the story was taken up by student pranks which proved a diversion. The head librarian had staged the two murders in revenge for them raping a female student. Once he was caught, he suddenly had a terminal case of tuberculosis which killed him before he could be brought to justice. A cheat ending.

“The Raspberry Tart” began with a distinguished banker asking Holmes to gather information about an actress. The banker's son was courting her, far beneath his social class. Watson actually made the break in the case when he met her mother, who was dying of cancer.

Holmes was able to deduce similarities between the young couple, a result of the banker having strayed himself when he was of a foolish age. Holmes found himself having to explain that the couple were siblings, unknowingly to themselves and their father who had sired them both.

“The Student Olympian” brought Watson into the case first, to perform a medical examination on the athlete Conrad Ryder, who was shamming an injury to avoid a nomination to the British Olympic team. Holmes entered the matter and learned that Ryder was of German ancestry and had been competing over there.

The awkwardness of an athlete claiming two countries by birthright was further increased when Mycroft Holmes got into the act. He had recruited Ryder as a spy, for which his Olympic competition would have two countries’ espionage agencies suspicious about him.

The plot seemed overly elaborate but was resolved in a simple manner. Ryder went on the injured list to escape the British side, then took a dive while competing in disguise with the Germans. Holmes orchestrated the matter to ensure honour was satisfied on both sides without either side knowing the truth.

“Death On The Thames” began with the discovery of a body in the freezer room of a Royal riverboat on the Thames river. The unidentified man was indeed a frozen stiff. On board were several highly placed guests making their way home from a party.

The River Police called in Holmes and Watson. The great detective accumulated clues in his usual manner before accusing a doctor and a foreign count. They confessed all, despite the usual situation that the evidence was circumstantial. The dead man had been a blackmailer and learned the hard way why such criminals have a shortened lifespan.

All told, this collection was about average for the stories. Withholding information from the reader is an annoying trait which negates any suspense in the stories.

Pastiches: Short Stories.

SHERLOCK HOLMES MYSTERY MAGAZINE #24 was published in 2018. It is available from www.wildsidepress.com or Amazon print-on-demand. The magazine opened with a review of two Sherlockian movies, one in Portuguese (Brazil) and the other in Spanish. Both of them were more concerned with scenery and costuming than the actual plot.

“Conan Doyle, Holmes, Watson, And Medicine” by Bruce Kilstein discussed the dichotomy between Holmes being based on real-life doctors and Watson’s incompetence. Medical doctors are trained to use logic and deduction in diagnosis, yet Watson repeatedly messed up. Doyle, a doctor himself, went out of his way to have Watson fail while Holmes shone.

MYSTERY WEEKLY MAGAZINE was, despite its title, a monthly. I’m sure there was a reason. MWM is published out of Ancaster, Ontario, at www.mysteryweekly.com, although I bought my copies via Amazon print-on-demand. This periodical has a wide variety of mystery fiction but the issues I buy are the Sherlock Holmes specials, published every October.

The 2018 October issue of MYSTERY WEEKLY MAGAZINE began with “The Inimitable Affair” by Michael Mallory, about the distress of Mrs Ellen Robinson, who received letters from a blackmailer.

Decades ago as the young woman Ellen Ternan, she had an affair with Charles Dickens which produced a stillborn son. Had the matter been known to the public, there would have been quite the scandal.

The blackmailer said the son had survived and was now a grown man. In consideration of not making her a sensation in the newspapers, he wanted her to hand over a Dickens manuscript. It was the summary of the unfinished story “The Mystery Of Edwin Drood”, which was half-published as a serial when Dickens died.

The manuscript was worth a fortune if the public became aware of it. Holmes was able to prove there was no grown son. The blackmailer was sent away with menaces and told to remain forever silent. He was the one now being blackmailed.

“The Very First Detective: The Killing Stone” by Nik Morton was a parody set in caveman days. A small population of cave dwellers was concerned because someone was killing them off. They could not afford the diminishment. The most intelligent caveman was Olmes, assisted by the medicine man Otsun. The chief of the tribe was L’Strad.

Well, you get the idea. Olmes identified the killer because his thumb was marked and left that mark on the blood-stained rock used to kill the most recent victim. Tribesman Mar’ti was trying to clear a path to the chieftainship.

Next was “The Beekeeper’s Dilemma” by Eric B. Ruark, set in the south of England after the Great War. The story was about an unnamed elderly beekeeper making his rounds, selling pots of honey to regular customers such as restaurants. The reader knows who he was.

Alas, at one restaurant the chef had been murdered in the kitchen. The police were already there but the old man steered them to the culprit, who had tried to steal the chef’s recipe book. Afterwards, the beekeeper had his lunch in the cemetery at his friend’s grave, an old soldier who had been his roommate many long years ago. A poignant story.

“The Beginning Of The Final Problem” by S. Subramanian was set in the early days of Professor Moriarty. Before beginning a life of crime, the professor had published “The Dynamics Of An Asteroid” among other papers. This was mentioned in the canon.

Holmes and Watson were called to the murder of a mathematician, clumsily staged as a suicide. The deceased had recently published a refutation of Moriarty’s work, demonstrating the work was in error. Probably forgot to carry the three or something.

The murder was done by a hired hand and Holmes doubted Moriarty was directly connected. He was too clever for that. Holmes knew there would be further trouble with him.

From the 2019 October issue of MYSTERY WEEKLY MAGAZINE was “Of Course He Pushed Him” by Chris Chan, which explained why Holmes came back to end the Great Hiatus. Col. Sebastian Moran wanted revenge for the death of Professor Moriarty.

He started a whispering campaign that Watson had pushed Holmes off the cliff in a lover's quarrel, then killed Moriarty, a harmless mathematics professor, because he was a witness. Watson lost his patients and his wife was cut dead socially. The only way to stop the slanders was for Holmes to re-appear. A clever pastiche.

“The Case Of The Final Interview” by Teel James Glenn presupposes that the Great Hiatus wasn't just Holmes going underground. Watson hired actors to impersonate Holmes to keep the flow of cases coming, but the replacements had short lifespans. Contrary to the STRAND stories, Holmes did not survive the assorted alarms with poisonous snakes, snipers, and hit-and-run carriages.

Each time, Watson had to find a replacement, not an easy task. Mrs Hudson had passed on, so she was impersonated by Watson's wife Mary. This pastiche was more of a vignette. Watson and his wife explained the infodumps to each other. They hired a new Holmes imposter, and with that the story ended.

“Casualty Of The Bidding War” by Jack Bates had Watson and Mrs Hudson taking the steamer to New York City. Holmes was off somewhere in the Crimea on an extended case. Three publishers were bidding for the next Holmes book, so Watson was busy dealing with them.

One of the publishers was murdered at a dinner party, part of a plot by a hotel employee whose manuscript had been rejected. He had a backup plan which might have succeeded had Holmes not been present in disguise, unbeknownst to everyone else. The would-be killer met his death in a twist ending.

“The Adventure Of The Seven Nooses” by Michael Mallory brought a client to Baker Street who said he was being stalked by a psychotic Frenchman who wanted to fight a duel with him. While Holmes and Watson scurried about investigating, the client pulled off an elaborate plan and stole Holmes' violin, a Stradivarius. A bit too clever methinks.

From ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE for 2022 Jan/Feb came “The Musgrave Ritual” by Terence Faherty. This was part of a pastiche series whereby the stories are supposed first drafts by Watson, often different from the canon and containing annotations by him.

The premise is that the drafts were then heavily edited for publication. The humour is in the comparison between what really happened and how Watson

altered the facts. As an example, Watson mentioned Holmes was an annoying roommate because he liked to practice cricket indoors.

In this version, Reginald Musgrave arrived as the client with a list of woes, mostly originating from his family wanting him to marry a rich woman. The treasure turned out to be a set of barber shop tools. Funnier if you know the canon story but still amusing on its own.

Pastiches: Novels.

THE BEAST OF THE STAPLETONS (2021) by James Lovegrove took place in 1894, five years after Sherlock Holmes had gone to Dartmoor to see a man about a dog. Since then, Sir Henry Baskerville had been living peacefully with his wife Audrey and their 3-year-old son Harry.

The peace was broken when Audrey's body had been found on the moors, drained of blood. Holmes was summoned. Watson declined to accompany him, having too many bad memories of the hound. Instead, Holmes went with Corporal Benjamin Grier, a Buffalo Soldier visiting from the USA.

Possibly Jack Stapleton was on the loose, seeking revenge. He had supposedly perished in quicksand in one of the moor's mires, but then again he may have faked his death. The local yokels reporting seeing a human-sized moth flying through the night skies.

Baskerville had the mire drained. Stapleton's body was found, mostly preserved by the cold anoxic mud. Holmes therefore looked elsewhere and found a culprit. She was a woman scorned by Sir Henry and who wanted revenge. A giant kite in the shape of a moth was found in her room.

This seemed to wrap everything up except for the fact that half the book was still to come. Holmes returned to London and related the tale to Watson. Three days later the call came to return. There was trouble down at the moors.

Young Harry Baskerville was missing and the cook had fallen victim to a venomous animal. Holmes realized that Beryl Stapleton had framed the accused, then boarded a ship heading for Costa Rica, taking the boy with her.

A posse led by Holmes and Watson took the next ship. The chase across the Atlantic began. The voyage did not go smoothly. The upper-crust passengers

and ship's officers were aghast to find a Negro in the first-class section. Grier had to put up with nasty remarks. Sir Henry drank morning, noon, and night, and was a mean drunk.

Arriving at Costa Rica, the pursuit continued upriver into the jungles. After assorted alarms, the novel ended in a rush with two twists. The group had been sabotaged by one of their own. He got a bullet in the lung from Watson's trusty service revolver.

The second twist was a boo-hiss revelation entirely unnecessary. The dying man was Professor Moriarty's brother. The case ended well for the rest. Watson got another case to write up. Sir Henry was reunited with his son Harry.

Pastiches: Old-Time Radio.

Sherlock Holmes was very successful on radio. He aired on several networks with several sets of actors from 1930 to 1956, encompassing the entire lifespan of old-time radio. Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce had a long run, but others played the parts before and after. (These and other old-time radio shows are available as free mp3s from www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary.)

"The Book Of Tobit" aired on 1945-03-26, and was written by Denis Green and Anthony Boucher. Jasmine Lefleur, one of her many names, worked in tights and spangles as a stage assistant for a magician.

She became his wife Signora Rossoni. He was mysteriously stabbed to death on their wedding night. A few months later, she became Lady Diana Venery, wife of Sir Wilfred. He didn't survive his wedding night either.

As might be expected, people began to talk about this femme fatale. Fortunately the police found a suspect, Major Beckworth, a cousin of Sir Wilfred and a rival for the lady's favours. He was, however, acquitted at the Old Bailey.

Holmes and Watson were in the courtroom. After the verdict, Holmes mentioned the Book of Tobit, an apocryphal story from ancient Israel, somewhat similar to the lady's problems. She threw fuel on the fire by announcing she would marry Beckworth before the day was out. The newspapers went berserk.

The Rev. Arthur Whalen arrived at 221B. He opened with a reference to Tobit. He said that each deceased husband had received a threatening note written in

Hebrew, signed Asmodeus. With good reason he suspected the next husband would meet the same fate. His connection was that he had officiated at the previous marriages and Diana (to pick a convenient name) was a member of his congregation. Neither Holmes nor Watson believed Whalen's concern was entirely professional.

They visited Lady Diana. She mentioned possible suspects such as ex-lovers and Whalen. The marriage with Beckworth had already taken place in secret. Holmes asked to see him, so the butler was sent upstairs to get him.

There are no prizes for guessing that Beckworth had been stabbed to death without ever getting a speaking part. Diana said she would telephone the police: "*By now I'm rather well acquainted with Inspector Lestrade.*"

The story then jumped a month ahead. Holmes had done nothing and the police had nothing. He was up to something. He began courting Diana, which made Whalen furious and shocked Watson. A wedding was staged, no doubt to flush out the serial killer. Back at the manor, the suspects were guests, but the murderer was Diana herself.

She made an attempt on Holmes but failed since he was on his guard, not to mention booked for several more seasons with the radio series. Her motive was simply inheritance of her dead husbands' estates. Whalen had read the Book of Tobit to her, giving her the idea.

"The Adventure Of The Submerged Nobleman" aired on 1947-05-26. No writer was credited although everyone else was. This part of the series was sponsored by Kreml Hair Tonic.

Online, the episode mp3 is titled "Submerged Baronet", but in the opening credits the announcer called it "Submerged Nobleman". That was more correct because baronets are not addressed as Lord, as the character in this story was.

Holmes and Watson were in Brighton and had just concluded the case of the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant. This was one of those untold stories Watson mentioned in passing as throwaway lines in the canon.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle liked to have fun with such cases, never to be written up as part of the canon, although many were done by pastiche writers. My favourite is the case of Wilson the notorious canary trainer.

Having solved the cormorant case, Holmes and Watson went for a stroll along the beach. They rented a small sailing boat and went out on the water. There's never a dull moment in Brighton, and they were hailed by two women in distress on another boat. The husband of one of them was floating in the water astern, thoroughly drowned.

They took the three ashore, the deceased being Lord Hollis, and the women his wife Lady Diana and her companion a shrewish lady named Miss Cartwright. When Holmes introduced himself, Lady Diana fainted. Once at the Hollis beach house, Holmes sent for Dr Miller, the local coroner who was also the family physician.

Cartwright told Holmes and Watson that m'Lord was a drinking man and had fallen overboard while under the influence. He had been an older husband, overweight, with an attractive young wife. The plot was afoot.

The duo departed. Speaking to Watson privately as they walked away, Holmes noted that Lady Diana did not faint at her husband's death but upon hearing the name Holmes. Watson replied: "*Really Holmes, egotism is all very well but not when it leads you to suspect everyone as a criminal.*"

From there to a visit with Chief Constable Sheridan. Holmes had his suspicions as to whether Hollis drowned or was carried dead aboard the boat by the two women.

The only source of evidence would be the autopsy. There was water in the lungs of the deceased, but it was fresh water, not sea water. Before the next step was taken, over to the mid-episode commercial. An unctuous announcer reassured the male audience that it was never too late to improve one's hair.

Back at the murder, Holmes concluded that the women had drowned Hollis in his bathtub. The problem was proving the murder in court. The women were strong-minded enough that neither would break down and blubber a confession. Holmes sneaked his way into the Hollis house and set up a waxwork figure of the late lord in the bathtub.

Lady Diana became hysterical when she found it and indeed blubbered, with the police listening. In the denouement, Holmes explained he had a friend in London make the waxwork. I don't know the cost of making a waxwork, but then or now it wouldn't be cheap. Nor was Holmes getting a fee.

Pastiches: Modern Radio.

THE MIS-ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES was a humourous radio series that aired in the 2010s and is available from www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary Dr Watson narrated. Mrs Hudson was Irish instead of Scottish and had a different personality than usually portrayed. Holmes was played as an idiot and Watson was the smart one who fixed up the narrative in his stories.

The mp3 episodes are mis-numbered. The internal dialogue does mention the correct episode number most of the time. The episodes are mostly standalone but are best listened to in sequence because they continue story arcs across several chapters.

When I tried to research the mp3s, the Google results kept bringing up Vince Staddon as the script writer, but the mp3s credit Joe Bevilacqua and Daws Butler as the writers.

I suspect there are two radio series floating around out there with identical titles and which happened to be aired about the same time in the 2010s. Bevilacqua's Wikipedia biography made no mention of this series, but the Staddon references are different episode titles than the ones from OTRR.

Joe Bevilacqua did the intro and outro commentaries for the episodes. He gave co-credit for the scripts and occasionally full credit to Daws Butler. The sound quality of the episodes was excellent. Good humour and well recommended.

"The Curse Of Macmillan Castle", written by Joe Bevilacqua, was announced as episode 3 in both the intro and the outro. Watson was now married to Mary Morstan and quite happy. 'Twas Christmas, and the couple went to visit her Uncle Hamish Macmillan in Scotland. Holmes was on the same train, much to Watson's surprise and annoyance. Even worse, he had also been invited to the castle.

After detrainning, they approached the castle on foot. Holmes saw three old witches. He was on cocaine, and the Watsons saw nothing. The witches cackled and babbled enough to frighten a MacBeth, but only Holmes heard them.

Uncle didn't know they were coming. Mary wanted to surprise him. She didn't seem to be running on all cylinders. Holmes found out the hard way what

haggis was when Uncle served the dish for Christmas Eve supper and explained how haggis was made. You don't want to know. (I'm glad my ancestral Speirs family were Lowlanders from west of Paisley who never ate that stuff.)

The Christmas crackers contained weird and ominous predictions. Uncle said he had bought them from three old hags selling door-to-door. He mentioned the curse, which a MacBeth had inadvertently caused to be placed on the Macmillan castle.

Some weird goings-on that night. The next morning was even weirder. The forbidden name of MacBeth was spoken out loud, and sent Uncle into a frenzy, including re-enacting the "Lay on, MacDuff" scene with real swords.

The episode degenerated into the dialogue of The Scottish Play, verbatim. Uncle didn't survive the swordplay. There was no curse, just the insanity of Uncle, who believed he was MacBeth.

"Sherlock Holmes In Trouble" was said by Bevilacqua to be episode 3 in the intro but in the outro he called it episode 4. The episode was written by Daws Butler and began with Watson and Holmes staying in at 221B because of the inclement weather.

Holmes was working on a monograph about nose prints. His thesis was that criminals often looked through windows from the outside while casing a house. If they bumped their noses against the glass, well, you can guess the rest of it.

The duo made small talk about how Watson exaggerated Holmes' activities to make him seem a great detective. Mrs Hudson complained about Watson describing her as a fat old woman. She said she was middle-aged and pleasingly plump. That sort of conversation filled up the most of the episode with padding.

A client finally arrived at the 17-minute mark. Bert Stover said someone had stepped on his cat that morning and killed it. Holmes, oblivious to what he was saying, bumbled how coincidental that was, as he had tripped over a cat in the morning. Violence followed, as did assorted disputations and legal threats.

An interesting point was raised that Watson was getting paid for his stories but not cutting in Holmes for a share of royalties.

Pastiches: Television.

In 1954 and 1955, a television series SHERLOCK HOLMES was aired on NBC. It was written and produced by Sheldon Reynolds in France, where production costs were much lower.

Ronald Howard was Holmes and H. Marion Crawford played Watson. Howard was relatively young and fit the canon better than the more famous Rathbone. Crawford was well into middle age but played Watson as an intelligent man, not the blithering idiot that Nigel Bruce did.

Most of the episodes were pastiches but some were based on canon stories, however loosely. Interestingly there was some continuity between episodes when characters referred back to previous events. That was unusual for the times, as most television show episodes were zero-reset.

The episodes are in the public domain and therefore available in several different DVD box sets. The episodes I'll cite here are from the set issued by Allegro Corporation, "Best Of Sherlock Holmes Collection".

"The Case Of The Thistle Killer" was written by Charles and Joseph Early, and aired on 1955-02-14. A serial killer was loose in London, strangling women and leaving three thistles by their feet as his trademark. Police and Holmes alike tried to find a pattern to the killings.

Holmes noted that the first letter of the street names where the victims died spelled P-H-O-E-N-I. The only possible next letter was X. London had a Xerxes Park, so that was the obvious place to stake out. The explanation of the thistles was not quite as believable. They are the national flower of Scotland, three feet make a yard, ergo Scotland Yard. The killer was teasing the police.

A trap was set in the park, using a policewoman as bait. Police surrounded the park, which had two entrances. Inspector Lestrade took charge of one gate and Holmes and Watson stood by the other.

Almost too late, Holmes figured out the answer. The murderer was an imposter dressed as a police constable, which was why his victims didn't flee him. When the police ran him to ground, Lestrade recognized him as a cabbie who had tried out for the police force and had been rejected. In revenge, he wanted to show up the police.

“The Case Of The Vanished Detective” aired the following week on February 21, also written by Charles and Joseph Early. Watson was in a dither because Holmes hadn’t been home for two days. The doctor lassoed Inspector Lestrade into the search.

The trail led to a curiosity shop whose proprietor was obviously Holmes in disguise, not that Watson and Lestrade could see that. There was a contretemps in the shop and Holmes had to blow his cover. He had been monitoring a woman and an escaped convict John Carson, who used the store as a message drop. Carson fled and Holmes missed catching him.

Watson had been a clever boy though, and was able to get the woman’s place of employ. The three men tracked her down. She in turn sent them on to Joseph Westlake, a retired judge who had sentenced Carson to life in prison. The old boy was tetchy and communicated with the three via marionettes.

Once more they bungled the capture of Carson but managed to stop him in the act of attacking the judge. The good news was that the puppets were also saved. Carson got a bullet in the back where it counted.

Pastiches: Parodies.

I don’t generally read parodies but I’ll mention this one from the 1911 October issue of THE BLACK CAT magazine (available as a free pdf from www.archive.org). Doyle was still publishing original Sherlock Holmes stories at the time.

“The Mystery Of The Missing Shirt” by A.E. Swoyer was about Herlock Shomes and his trusty sidekick Fatson. Shomes was regretting the advance in intelligence among master criminals. They had learned that rather than robbing a bank, more money could be had by starting a bank and charging fees and interest.

The dullness was relieved when a client named Dalrymple arrived at 221B. Someone stole his shirt while he was wearing it. Shomes, careful to milk the case for expenses such as fine dining, never actually solved the matter. Dalrymple solved the case himself. A near-sighted friend had noticed a loose thread and upon pulling it, unraveled the entire shirt while Dalrymple was enjoying himself at a party. The story demonstrates that fan fiction is nothing new, nor has the quality of such writing improved over the past 110 years.

Pastiches: Crossovers.

Bringing Sherlock Holmes into other fictional worlds has been done many times. A recent example is THE SPIDER’S WEB (2020) by Philip Purser-Hallard, which considered the characters of Oscar Wilde’s play THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST as murder suspects.

Holmes and Watson were called to investigate a murder at a society ball held in the mansion of Ernest Moncrieff, popularly known as the Handbag Heir. His family included the battleaxe Lady Bracknell. But wait!, before that, this.

The novel opened with an extended J’accuse! meeting in Belgrave Square where Holmes detailed how and why Lord Arthur Saville murdered a man ten years ago.

The evidence was based on fingerprints, and Holmes managed to obtain Saville’s handprint to match the murder. As the culprit was led away to the police, Holmes and Watson were approached by Lord Goring. He had been at the Moncrieff family’s gala across the street in Belgrave Square.

A man had fallen to his death from a balcony at the gala. His corpse was found clutching Lady Goring’s brooch. The jewelry was a gemstone spider studded with sapphires, on a web made of silver. She hadn’t been to the ball and did not know the dead man, who was subsequently identified as Mr Bunbury.

Ernest Moncrieff was in a tizzy about all those police swarming his home, and wasn’t happy to see Holmes and Watson either. “*The family history is a convoluted one*”, remarked Holmes with a bit of understatement.

He spoke with Cecily, the youngest of the Moncrieffs. She said to him: “*I am glad I live in real life, not in a book ...* “. So far no sign of Oscar Wilde but Lady Bracknell made an imperious entrance, trumpeting like an elephant. She did not approve of riffraff such as police constables and private detectives.

Bracknell asked if it was true that Holmes earlier that evening had her neighbour Saville arrested, and if so, on what evidence. Holmes confirmed the arrest and said Saville’s handprint had been traced to the scene of the crime.

“*A handprint?*” Lady Bracknell’s voice elaborated itself several octaves in disbelief.

That joke will be funnier if you know Wilde's play. Notwithstanding that, Holmes went about interrogating and annoying just about every character from the play. There were murders and blackmail galore as the complicated past of Ernest Moncrieff caught up with him.

Those culprits who did not commit suicide were roused and justice was more or less served. All told, a humorous pastiche. This novel will read better if you know the play or at least read a plot summary of it on Wikipedia.

Fiction: Marginalia.

Vicki Delany has a cozy series about Gemma Doyle of West London, Massachusetts. Her store Sherlock Holmes Bookshop and Emporium was located at 222 Baker Street. (A convenience store had 221 across the street.) Her friend Jayne Wilson operated Mrs Hudson's Tearoom next door. Gemma's boyfriend was police detective Ryan Ashburton.

THERE'S A MURDER AFOOT (2020) took place at a Sherlock Holmes convention in London, England. Gemma Doyle, her father Henry, Jayne Wilson, and Ryan Ashburton were not long in London before the deaths began. Henry was an Englishman and a retired Scotland Yard officer. In London was Gemma's sister Pippa, a bureaucrat in the British government.

Gemma gave a speech on Sherlockian pastiches, which seemed to go over well. What didn't go over well was Henry recognizing his brother-in-law Randolph Denhaugh, the black sheep of the family. Randolph had a decades-long career as an art thief and forger. That career terminated at the banquet when someone settled accounts with him. The list of Randolph's enemies filled a page.

Henry was nabbed as the culprit. Gemma and company went Marpleing, or should that be Sherlocking? They toured the dealer bourse, did a criminal trespass in Randolph's flat, and took in the sights of London in their spare time.

At the usual confrontation with the murderer, the motive was revealed to be Randolph's welshing on a deal to fake a painting. After everything was sorted out, the DoYLES and friends returned to America.

There in West London they received news that a visitor was expected at the bookstore a few weeks hence. He was filming a television episode or something, an actor named Benedict Cumberbatch.

A CURIOUS INCIDENT (2021) was the defence of Sheila Tierney, whose garden had been vandalized the night before the garden club's annual contest. She accused fellow competitor Anna Wentworth, who went on to win the trophy but lost her life to a murderer.

Gemma Doyle and her police detective boyfriend Ryan Ashburton were on the case. He followed standard police procedure. She followed standard Miss Marple procedure, that is, criminal trespass, contaminating evidence, and interfering with a crime scene. The usual routine.

The garden club held a special called meeting in an attempt to salvage the garden tour, which turned into a nasty spat. Gemma's sleuthing revealed a good crop of scandal, family feuds, and sharp practice. The usual routine.

Gemma discovered that Tierney had ghostwritten a gardening book for which Wentworth got the fame and the money. There was a dog running about which did nothing in the night. Any Sherlockian will immediately be on alert.

Assorted alarums came and went until Wentworth's estranged husband was nailed for the killing. In the denouement, Wentworth's fingerprints were found on vandalized statues in Tierney's garden, so she really did trash the place.

Following on was A THREE BOOK PROBLEM (2022). David Masterton rented a manor house near the bookshop for a weekend event of Sherlocking. Jayne Wilson catered from her tearoom and Gemma Doyle provided books and props to decorate the place. Ryan Ashburton took time off from police duties to work in the kitchen.

Masterton had assembled a small group that puzzled Doyle and the others. Only a few were Sherlockians, and some had little or no knowledge about the canon. Nor were they on good terms with each other.

Especially Masterton, who got a poisoned blowgun dart in the neck, fired through an open door. Before anyone could shout "The Sign Of Four", he was dead.

The investigations, both police and Marpleian, carried on while the guests bickered with each other. Masterton was departed but not dearly. The joke was on his heirs when police discovered he had no assets left and was deep in debt.

The conclusion was that Masterton knew his time was up and he wanted one last fling before being disgraced. Worse for him though, was that a greedy relative thought he was still rich and wanted to speed up her inheritance. She was as shocked by his bankruptcy as everyone else.

THAR SHE BLOWS!: PART 5

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #70.1D, 314, 457, and 469.]

Mauna Loa.

“The Fire Creatures” by Edmond Hamilton (1933 July, WEIRD TALES, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org) took place in Hawaii in the Mauna Loa volcano, which really did erupt that year. Professor Newsom lived in a house perched on the edge of the crater. He had designed a new fireproof suit and went into a crevice for a stroll but never returned.

His daughter Helen called in her boyfriend Jerry Holt. The two put on suits and went inside the volcano. Not long after they met up with the fire creatures, described thusly:

Living beasts, a half-dozen of them, moving through fires that would ordinarily annihilate any unprotected life that ventured into them! Yet these were beasts and living, huge and black and barrel-like bodies with four extremely short legs!

Bodies that seemed not of ordinary animal flesh but of a black, stony flesh, a flesh that was mineral-like and inorganic! These beasts of the fires had big bulbous heads; in each were two small eye openings covered by a glassy protective film. Below these eye-openings were great jaws in which were set enormous teeth.

Not to worry, as the duo were saved by the fire men:

The newcomers were a dozen or more dark, man-like shapes! They did not wear heat-armor, yet did not seem more affected by the terrible fires than the fire-beasts. Like the fire-beasts, their bodies seemed of dark, stony flesh impervious to heat and flame.

They were of human height and had human features, but their eyes were covered by a glassy protective film. They were clad in red harnesses of woven mineral-fibers and they carried gun-like weapons of metal, which they were aiming at the fire-beasts.

But not for long. The fire men carried away Helen for who knew what, while Holt was left behind. He eventually met up with her father. Carrying on down below in search of the distressed damsel, they entered a gigantic cavern with a city on the shore of a lava lake. Out on the lava were fishermen, trawling for, you guessed it, fire fish. The fish were made of stone and evidently good eating.

The usual alarums as might be expected, and the trio of humans ran for the surface. The fire men followed in hot pursuit (pun intended) but on reaching the tunnels near the surface fell dead from what to them was freezing cold air. The Professor resolved to return with a better equipped expedition since no one would believe their tale.

Vesuvius.

A few months later a similar story appeared in another pulp magazine. Vesuvius was active from March to June of 1933, which undoubtedly inspired the plot of “Fire Imps Of Vesuvius” by Nat Schachner (1933 October, ASTOUNDING, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org)

This was a pulpish story, very pulpish, concerning the excitement in Italy when the Vesuvius blew its top. The hero was Geoffrey Clive, handsome young man about volcano, who answered the summons of his old mentor Professor Earnest Carewe.

There was more than just lava at Vesuvius. The initial problem was political, from both the anarchists and the fascists. Clive and Carewe descended into the volcano via a pipe that wasn't flowing with lava.

Down below they found metre-high bipeds, somewhat humanoid, who were creatures of the lava. The fire imps obeyed a mad scientist who intended to rule the world, or perhaps just Italy, with their assistance.

There were tears at the end of it, of course. The madman got his and the fire imps went back home down below. Clive and Crewe managed to escape by

being blown out a fumarole. And so to bed, a hospital bed, as they were a bit scorched during the adventure.

APOCALYPSE POMPEII was a 2014 movie from The Asylum studio, who spare every expense in making their movies. The subtitle was clever though: *See Naples and die*. If you don't understand the joke, Google the phrase.

The opening credits began with spectacular aerial stock shots of Rio de Janeiro harbour, easily identified by the giant Christ statue that stands above the city. Since the place is on the opposite of the ocean, one wonders why it was included. They probably got the stock shots cheap.

But on with the plot. Jeff Pierce was in Naples for an important business meeting. He brought along his wife Lynne and their teenaged daughter Mykaela. While he was making his presentation, they went to Pompeii to see the sights. They got more than they bargained for when Vesuvius erupted.

The eruption triggered an odyssey by Jeff to get across the bay and rescue his family. He managed to obtain a helicopter and flew into the danger zone, chased by the authorities. Successfully evading three military choppers, Jeff and his friends found the one building in Pompeii where Lynne and Mykaela were hiding. Their chopper however, was destroyed by a lava bomb.

From there followed a steady stream of alarums as the lava flowed, also in a steady stream, and began filling up the building. They made their way to the rooftop for a last stand. Lots of screaming and shouting. I turned the volume down to 4 since the dialogue was unessential to the plot. Fortunately the DVD had no subtitles. In fact, you could watch the entire movie on mute and still follow the plot.

Lots of shots of stunt performers on fire, staggering about in flames. Not one of them dropped and rolled to smother the flames, as is taught in every first aid course. They were rescued at the last moment by another helicopter and flown back across the bay to safety upwind of Vesuvius. A group hug, and so to the end credits.

A standard disaster movie. The SFX of the volcanic eruption were reasonably well done. No more gasoline explosions on a green screen with the volcano dubbed in. The Asylum has apparently made enough profits that they were able to upgrade their graphics computers.

ACTION ADVENTURE ON THE AIR: PART 8

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 7 appeared in OPUNTIA's #426, 447, 476, 487, 494, 502, and 518.]

The old-time radio series mentioned below are available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

Frankie Does Radio.

ROCKY FORTUNE aired for the 1953-54 season. Writers were seldom credited in the episodes although everyone else was, but references say they were George Lefferts and Ernest Kinoy. The scripts were untitled, as a result of which many episodes circulate under multiple titles.

Frank Sinatra played the hero Rocky Fortune, born Rocko Fortunato, as was specifically mentioned in the second episode. The character was an odd-job man, sent out by his employment agency to a different and strange job each week. Sinatra's career had declined because the bobby-soxers were gone but his movie and nightclub career was only just beginning. He hit it big shortly after this series was transcribed and moved on to better things.

"The Shipboard Jewel Robbery" aired on 1953-10-20. Rocky Fortune was working as a steward on a cruise ship operating between New York City and Bermuda. The plot opened with him hitting on a nurse Helen Savage in sickbay. A passenger needed some dramamine, so Fortune had been sent to sickbay to get the pills.

Lady Harkness, as she was, didn't need the pills. When Fortune entered her cabin, she was on the floor and he was slugged unconscious from behind. \$50,000 in jewels had been stolen. Harkness survived and blamed Fortune.

He didn't help his case by being sarcastic instead of telling the truth. Fortune was, in fact, the idiot in an idiot plot. The Captain quickly taught him the harshness of maritime law.

Savage seemed to be mixed up in the matter. The extremely improbable events that followed kept her in the dialogue. The Captain put Fortune in the brig. The Chief Steward carried on about the dramamine pills, which had gone missing. Fortune found them and the jewels in an improbable place. He knew Savage

had done the heist and explained in detail. The Captain was apologetic but Fortune decided to seek employment elsewhere.

“Pint-Sized Payroll Bandit” aired the following week on 1953-10-27. Rocky Fortune was working as a night counter man in an all-night diner conveniently located between a saloon and a dance hall. An 8-year-old boy came in late and ordered a hamburger and milk. He was a runaway. He was carrying a shoebox with \$50,000 in cash, unfortunately in Howdy-Doody money.

After he ate, Fortune stalled him and went into the back room to call the 21st Precinct about the boy. (A nod to the police procedural of that name which aired on another network.)

Returning to the front, he discovered the boy had vamoosed but there was now a young attractive woman asking after him. She was his aunt and told Fortune that the boy had been in a boarding school.

Jump cut to a radio news bulletin about four men who had robbed a shoe factory of its payroll. The thieves were wearing Halloween masks. (Note the date this episode was aired.) Fortune didn’t get to hear the rest of the broadcast, as two bad guys came in looking for the boy.

The listener can tell one of them, later identified as Moose, was a bad guy because he spoke with a Noo Yawk gangster accent thick enough to cut with a knife. He was with a more cultured man, subsequently identified as Perry Brock. He was obviously Moose’s boss, if only because he spoke good English and said ‘them’ and ‘those’ instead of ‘dem’ and ‘dose’.

Fortune recognized Brock as a member of Murder Consolidated. Fortune was sarcastic as usual and got himself beaten up. He deserved it. This was a trend throughout the series, by the way.

Instead of answering a question directly, he always mouthed off at a hoodlum or police officer. Consequently he was frequently beaten up or arrested on suspicion. Sometimes both if the policeman was in a bad mood.

The robbers left. Fortune went into the back room to clean himself up and discovered the boy hadn’t left but was simply hiding. Now identified as Mickey, he said Brock was his father. Just then a policeman Sgt Finger arrived, so Fortune told the kid to hide again.

The sergeant was disgruntled at having walked all the way over to the diner for nothing. Fortune bought him off with a double burger and a slice of pecan pie, on the house. After closing the diner, Fortune took Mickey home. He told the boy about his life as an orphan and why he couldn’t hold a job.

The next morning, Fortune tripped over the shoebox and discovered not all the cash was Howdy-Doody money. He telephoned the 21st Precinct but as he hung up the phone, Mickey appeared with a handgun that had apparently been with the real cash.

Needless to say, a child with a handgun is very dangerous. Fortune tried to calm him down but the boy took off before the police arrived. Finger told Fortune he had cried wolf too often and they wouldn’t respond to future calls.

The boy’s Aunt Anne contacted Fortune, much too late. He went to help her search for the boy but when he entered her apartment he was slugged unconscious. He was revived by Moose and Brock, but because he was his usual sarcastic self, Moose took him into the bedroom for further work.

Lying on the floor bloody and beaten, Fortune spotted Mickey hiding under the bed. He pushed his gun to Fortune, who tried to turn the tables. Unfortunately the gun was a water pistol. Brock was about to shoot Fortune dead with a real pistol when Sgt Finger arrived.

What brought him there was that Mickey had earlier gone to the 21st Precinct, put the shoebox on the front counter, and left. The police managed to track him to his aunt’s apartment. All ended well except that Fortune learned Anne was married.

Carlton E. Morse.

One of radio’s most prolific writers was Carlton E. Morse, who wrote soap operas and action-adventure series. Insofar as the latter are concerned, he had several series that were basically continuous, changing their titles and character names if they changed networks but maintaining the same sort of plots. His action-adventure stories were basically soap operas with gunfire.

The series were 15-minutes daily episodes, but many have since been recast by OTR fans as half- or one-hour episodes with repetitious the-story-so-far openings stripped out.

I LOVE A MYSTERY aired from 1939 to 1944, then was repeated in 1949-50 with the same scripts but new casts. ADVENTURES BY MORSE aired on radio during the 1944-45 season. I LOVE ADVENTURE aired in 1948. Morse's main activity was the soap opera ONE MAN'S FAMILY, which aired from 1932 to 1959.

Off To The Supposed Jungles Of Chile.

One serial of ADVENTURES BY MORSE was "The Land Of The Living Dead", a 15-part episode which aired in 1944 from October to December. The plot was about Dr Julian English, an archaeologist and palaeontologist, accompanied by his daughter Judith. She was beautiful of course.

Pause for digression. In science fiction, scientists never have ugly daughters, and their wives die young. I have a BSc from the University of Alberta. Four years of close observation of my science professors allow me to confirm that most scientists stay married unto old age, and some have daughters whose appearance would stop a clock. I can only conclude that the demographics are different in Hollywood and New York City.

Julian summoned Friday for a consultation. His son Robert had just returned from Chile with frightening information. Robert had found a lost city in the jungle inhabited by the Chicoti tribe. Lots of buried treasure. Of course there was. No one will go haring off into hellacious lands without incentive.

Another digression. Calgary received a flood of Chilean refugees in 1973 after the military junta took over. Some of them worked in the City Parks Dept. where I was employed for 31 years. I heard their stories about Chile, which is mostly dry and temperate. Several of them remarked they settled in southern Alberta because the climate was similar, albeit colder in winter.

The radio show didn't sound right stating that Chile had jungles, so I checked Google. There are no jungles in Chile but they do have some temperate rainforests similar to British Columbia and Washington State. Close enough to give Carlton Morse a pass.

There is no Chicoti tribe, although Google brought up numerous Romanian websites defining the word in their language as laughter. Morse and/or the studio probably didn't want to be sued by a real Chilean tribe, so he made up a Spanish-sounding word.

Meanwhile, back at the plot, Friday and Turner walked to the English residence near Russian Hill in San Francisco. Just as they turned into the gate, a dog howled, a woman screamed, and gunshots were heard. Robert had been shot dead without getting a speaking part. There's never a dull moment in San Francisco.

Julian blamed the Brothers of the Living Dead. He said they were an ancient Chicoti priesthood from a hidden sacred city. The dog kept howling outside. A beautiful widow Senora Santos knocked on the door, bearing premonitions of doom.

There was nothing to do but head south. Julian had possession of a map, drawn on a piece of human skin. The text was in Sanskrit. Even a Mormon wouldn't buy that. Santos told the others that the priests were out to destroy the world.

The group, consisting of English pater et filia, Friday, Turner, and Santos, headed to Chile. The destination was a monastery whose monks were fighting the priests. The voyage was filled with alarums as might be expected.

As they traveled south, a fog stayed with them. Somewhere on deck a dog howled. Julian suspected the priests were on board. Kidnapping, gunfire, trashed rooms, a gorilla man, a werewolf, the usual routine. The ship's crew and officers were conspicuous by their absence, which had me wondering.

Julian had the map hidden somewhere, which became the MacGuffin. Landing at Chile, having vanquished the gorilla and the werewolf, the expedition booked a hotel prior to pushing inland. A green-eyed murderess was the next hurdle. They had seen her in San Francisco. Friday wondered how she could have arrived before they did if they had taken the first ship to Chile.

Santos pointed out that she would have flown. This immediately raised the question as to why the expedition, if they were in such a hurry to stop the mad priests, had taken a ship instead of flying. Probably in that case the gorilla and werewolf would have booked the same flight.

Santos said the green-eyed woman was a High Priestess of the hidden city. The hotel was a hive of alarums, bodies, and sinister agents. That damned dog was heard again, howling somewhere in the corridors. Santos, Judith, and Tucker all disappeared.

Friday and Julian pushed on into the jungle, the only ones left. They were guided by a shifty native who, however, was soon deleted from the cast list by a man-eating tree. The good news was they were reunited with Turner but the bad news was that the locale was a sacrificial stone where all three were to be the guests of honour.

The three somehow made it to the monastery, where they regrouped. Santos and Judith were there, having traveled independently without telling Friday. He was annoyed, yes he was. He didn't trust Santos, and kept thinking she was a spy for the priests.

Her explanation was that her late husband had discovered a secret word. It was the most powerful word in the history of humans, discovered hundreds of thousands years ago. The word was so powerful that she had to use a hand gesture to signify it to the agents of the Living Dead, who fled in terror.

One heck of a word, especially to be transmitted in secret through a priesthood older than *Homo sapiens*, long before our ancestors left Africa. "*You expect us to believe that?*" was Friday's reply. So say us all.

Setting that aside, everyone settled into the monastery for several weeks. Santos emphasized great urgency to stop the priests from destroying civilization.

There was a secret passage from the monastery under the mountain range to the hidden city on the opposite side. So secret that neither the monks nor the priests had been able to find it from their respective ends. Whoever found it first would be able to launch a surprise attack against the other side.

Friday figured it out in ten minutes. Ta to the monks and priests. They found a dying man in the tunnel who was an American archaeologist. His last words were to go to the end of the tunnel and climb the stairway to the sun.

They found it. The steps were made of gold. At each landing there was a human skeleton, a man who had been chained to the wall centuries ago. They also found some priests conferring how to conquer the world. The werewolf and Santos were there, which miffed Friday.

Santos kept playing innocent. The group took her captive and returned to the monastery. The return trip was slowed by incessant talking, sometimes to summarize the plot and sometimes to advance the story.

Paranoia reigned. Were the monks working for the Living Dead? The passage Friday's group had used was not the real secret passage. The werewolf reappeared and uttered menaces. Judith was kidnapped as she so often was. A prophetess appeared and said refuge could be had in the River of Souls.

The excitement continued underground. Various characters split up for assorted adventures and recombined in random order.

Judith was to become the bride of the High Priest. In body at least, as her mind was to be swapped with a Chicota woman. Just to prove they could, one of the priests showed her a chamber with sleeping conquistadors. 400 years old and fresh as a daisy. The priest said their minds were in the bodies of Chicota priests in the sacred city.

Both sides began trudging up the Stairway to the Sun, which opened up at the top of the mountain. The Living Dead had eight strong guards at the top, versus Friday, Turner, and Julian. No contest of course. The guards came in one at a time for the first three, then two together. The other three jumped off a cliff in desperation. The Living Dead training academy wasn't very good at their job.

The three heroes took the time to admire the view from the mountain. Below was the sacred city, its temples gleaming in the sun. Julian padded out the time by describing the buildings surrounding a pristine blue lake. Sounded like Lake Louise if you ask me.

The plot frequently halted for long intervals while somebody explained something at length. Eventually the group reunited, disguised as Chicotas and led by Santos. Judith was a blubbery ninny. Having finally found the secret passage, they trundled into the hidden city.

Scenic features en route included the Lake of Boiling Lava, not to be confused with the blue lake further up slope. Santos explained the city was in a volcanic crater, which immediately planted suspicions as to how the grand finale would proceed. Even back then, long before James Bond, supervillains liked to nest beside volcanoes.

Remember that other lake? Santos proposed to blow open a channel to the passage, which would drain the water lake into the strata below the lava lake. The sudden boiling of the water into pressurized steam would thus trigger the volcano. Sounded like a good plan to me.

They found a treasure room which regrettably would be destroyed by the big bang. Some last-minute twists occurred, basically tomato surprises, which were made irrelevant when the volcano blew. The heroes were rescued by an airplane just as the lava lifted up.

The epilogue was mostly explanations by Santos and Friday. Up until then the methodology by which the high priests would destroy civilization had not been discussed. Santos told everyone that a powder would be released into the atmosphere which dissolved human flesh.

The Chicotas were immune. After the planet had been purged, they would spread out and begin anew. Trouble was, they weren't immune to lava. And so back to San Francisco. A few of the heroes regretted not being able to save the treasure. Some people don't know when they're well off.

Sharp Practice.

THE THIRD MAN aired on old-time radio for a season in 1951-52, with Orson Welles as Harry Lime. No writers were credited. The mp3s are often labeled with varied series titles using the name Harry Lime. The character came from Graham Greene's movie and later novel adaptation. Well worth downloading as free mp3s from www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary.

Lime was a confidence man constantly traveling throughout Europe. He met a nasty end in the original movie. In the opening narration of the radio episodes, Welles told the audience that these stories were set before Lime was shot dead fleeing through the sewers of Vienna like a rat.

In the radio series, most of his schemes seemed to fall through, yet he always had money to live well and go gambling in casinos. Lime narrated all the episodes as if he were a god speaking from Olympus, complacent in his superiority over the lumpenproletariat while oblivious of the fact that he lost more often than he won.

The most distinctive part of the radio series, and what set it apart from other radio shows, was the theme and incidental music, played on a zither by Anton Karas. Even today it would stand out on a television series. As part of the radio episodes, the music could be considered as important as Welles' rich voice. The existing mp3s are somewhat distorted from old tape recordings but allowing for that they cannot fail to impress.

"The Hyacinth Patrol" aired on 1952-02-29 but was a reminiscence set during World War Two in the Panama Canal Zone. Harry Lime's ship made a layover in Cristóbal while waiting its turn to make the transit down the canal to the southeast. (Most people think the canal runs east-west. It actually goes northwest to southeast.)

Lime strolled out and found himself in a tavern called Ptomaine Joe's. He made the acquaintance of a middleweight boxer Sgt. Joe Dolan, who said he was stuck on the hyacinth patrol. That was grunt duty clearing water hyacinths out of the channels. This perplexed me as I didn't think an Army labour brigade would be doing that kind of work for the Navy.

Be that as it may, Dolan was chafing under the command of Lt. Hero Nugent, who not only had it in for him but had stolen Dolan's girlfriend Lola. Not really his girlfriend but a local temptress who kept two or three men at a time. Dolan pointed her out at the far side of the tavern sitting with Nugent.

Lola and Lime made eye contact. Returning to his hotel room later that night, Lime found her waiting for him. Dolan arrived at just the most awkward moment. She left, and Lime successfully explained himself to Dolan, who wasn't too bright even for a boxer.

Dolan told Lime that Nugent had been seen visiting a suspected enemy agent. He figured that if he could prove Nugent was a traitor then he could eliminate a rival for Lola's affection plus scoop up a medal or citation.

Thus it was that Lime found himself with Dolan in a pole boat, working their way into a swamp where an informant named Rita lived. She told them she had seen Nugent visiting a local man named Gibber, a halfwit hermit.

Why he was suspicious was never stated. Very few village idiots, or their swamp equivalents, would seem to be Nazi spies. It transpired that he was, but it wasn't demonstrated by any real evidence.

Back to Cristóbal, where in his snooping Lime eavesdropped on an argument between Lola and Nugent. She warned him to stay away from both Gibber and Rita. He slapped her around.

Jump cut to the swamp where Lime's hope of an inconspicuous visit were ruined when he crossed paths with Dolan and Rita. They had two of the loudest

voices in the isthmus, so Lime wasn't surprised that Gibber was waiting for him. So was Nugent.

They took the pair into captivity. Gibber's cabin contained a radio which Nugent, indeed a German spy, was using to contact an enemy aircraft carrier in international waters. Nugent mentioned in passing that he had no qualms about betraying his adopted country. Until now, he had spoken with an American accent but suddenly began speaking mit der German accent.

The plot was to bomb the Gatun Dam with aircraft from the enemy carrier. I'm not a WW2 history aficionado who knows all the details about every aspect of the war, but I don't remember the Germans operating an aircraft carrier in the Caribbean. They only built one, which never got into combat, according to Wikipedia.

Nugent said Lime and Dolan would be dropped into a channel where they could observe the root formation of water hyacinths at close range. There was a last-minute rescue by the hyacinth patrol, which had been alerted by Rita. All ended well, with the carrier sunk before an attack could be launched. Dolan married Rita. Lime went on his way. His ship sailed with Lola as his companion.

"Harry Joins The Circus" aired on 1952-04-25, set in an era when many groups were hunting escaped Nazi war criminals. One such was Hans Hessel, a confidential aide to Hitler who knew where stolen art treasures were hidden.

Harry Lime had joined a circus touring Germany as a roustabout. He needed the money, that was all. Among the characters was a clown named Geeko, a paranoid man whom the listener will suspect was Hessel and will not be disappointed.

Lime and Hessel qua Geeko ended up in an abandoned mine in the mountains where the treasures were hidden. A cave-in trapped both and only one could survive. The rescue was rather improbable, with a bizarre twist.

Afterwards, Lime entertained thoughts of going back with a mining crew and retrieving the artworks for the black market. Alas, no one would go in on the deal with him. His reputation preceded him.

Another aspect of the immediate postwar situation was covered in the next episode, "Suzie's Cue", first aired on 1952-05-02. Harry Lime was in Austria, which at that time was occupied by the four Allied powers: Britain, the USA, France, and the USSR. It was allowed its independence in 1955 after promising to become a neutral country like Switzerland.

In his opening narration, he said he had gone there with the thought of making some money in the grey area of currency manipulation between the four zones. He quickly discovered that the four powers were extremely vigilant about such matters at the dawn of the Cold War.

At loose ends in Vienna, he made the acquaintance of a German oberst named Klaus and his companion Suzie. She was a genuine countess. Like most of Europe's nobility after the war, she didn't have the money to live in the style to which she would like to become accustomed.

The three decided the best method of solving their mutual financial problems was to relieve a local baron of a necklace he owned, diamonds worth \$100,000. The plan was for Suzie to accept a dinner invitation from the baron. While they were dining in the schloss banquet hall, the two men would be elsewhere in the castle looking for the necklace. The heist was successful but afterward the men had a falling out over the division of spoils.

Suzie betrayed them to the police, who arrested Klaus and returned the necklace to the baron. Lime escaped by a fortuitous circumstance, helped by Suzie. After the excitement was over, Lime asked her for an explanation. She told him that during the dinner the baron had made a serious proposal of marriage. She accepted, which meant that she didn't want to lose the necklace.

Road Race Action.

THOSE DARING YOUNG MEN IN THEIR JAUNTY JALOPIES was a 1969 comedy movie about the Monte Carlo Rally, set in the 1920s. Available on DVD via Amazon.

This was a sequel to THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN IN THEIR FLYING MACHINES, which I reviewed in issue #359 of the zine, as well as another comedy movie THE GREAT RACE. Both those movies were loosely based on actual events, the former about the first London to Paris airplane race and the latter on the 1906 New York to Paris automobile race.

I mention these movies because there was considerable overlap between the three. The two “men in their” movies had similar casts. Tony Curtis was in the auto race movie and was the star of Jaunty Jalopies movie. Terry Thomas appeared again. He specialized in dastardly cad roles, a well-bred Englishman who was always up to sharp practice.

The Jaunty Jalopies movie followed the fortunes of various teams driving across Europe to Monte Carlo in winter. Peter Cook and Dudley Moore were perfect for the roles of two India Army men who didn’t doubt for a moment that God was an Englishman. Gert Frobe, better remembered as Auric Goldfinger in the James Bond movie, was equally convinced that the Germans were superior and would win the rally.

The movie cut back and forth between the escapades of the competing teams in the rally. Lots of stunts and wild action as the cars careened down the roads. The only annoying parts were the insistence of the producer on frequently speeding up the action 2X or 3X, which made the movie appear like one of those unsynchronized silent films.

Lots of scenic views of many European locations. The cars were mildly interesting, although the German team’s Mercedes-Benz was most impressive. Automobiles of the 1920s were becoming somewhat more reliable and much faster. They were built to travel over roads that were roads in name only.

Assorted sub-plots were of schemers and romancers. Lots of crashes, and a couple of the cars were torched. Most of the route was through heavy snow, which gave opportunity for competitors to crash into snowbanks and survive to drive another day.

BLOTTO, TWINKS, AND THE GREAT ROAD RACE (2019) by Simon Brett was a humorous novel set in the late 1920s. Devereux Lyminster was a redundant son of Tawcester Towers, the younger brother of the Duke of Tawcester, and was known as Blotto. Not an intellectual but handsome and a dashed good cricket player. His sister Honoria, aka Twinks, was a beautiful woman, reasonably intelligent, and practical.

The Lyminsters were nobility but having trouble keeping up the repairs on the stately manor. The Dowager Duchess had all she could do to keep Tawchester Towers from leaking like a sieve every time there was rain.

Blotto mentioned the Great Road Race from London to Rome paid 10,000 gold sovereigns for first place. His mother authorized him to enter on the understanding that he would come back with his shield or on it. At today’s gold price, 10,000 sovereigns are worth about \$7 million, more than enough to replenish the Lyminster treasury.

Blotto owned a Lagonda. With his chauffeur Corky Froggett, they were off to the races. Meanwhile, the Duchess ordered her daughter to the Scottish highlands where a wealthy laird had an eligible son. A back-up plan, so to speak.

The night before the race began, Blotto and Corky dined well but not wisely on seafood that was not as fresh as it should have been. They were rendered hors de combat but Twinks volunteered as a relief driver.

The prize money being what it was, the race was a dirty one, with lots of sharp practice and outright sabotage among the competitors. The ending was silly when Twinks bought a conversion kit that turned the Lagonda into a helicopter. This enabled the Lyminsters to evade roadblocks.

The knives came out at the finish line, and not just figuratively. Blotto et al grabbed the chest of gold sovereigns and fled, giving new meaning to the phrase “Take the money and run”.

Miscellaneous.

INTRIGUE aired in the summer of 1946 as a syndicated series. Not enough radio stations picked up the show, so only eight episodes were made.

“Satan Was A Salesman” was written by Robert Tallman and aired on 1946-09-11. The episode was based on the true story of munitions merchant Sir Basil Zaharoff, prominent over the early 1900s. He also owned the Monte Carlo casino and was chairman of Vickers.

Zaharoff was an intriguer in the Middle East and Balkans. The episode opened in Constantinople, which became Istanbul in 1923. The narrator said the time was the 1870s, when Greece and Turkey were maneuvering for territory. Zaharoff was a private secretary to the Greek Minister of Defence. In 1877 he accepted an espionage job that paid £5 per week, very good money in those days.

Zaharoff played off Greece and Bulgaria against each other by alternating sales of the latest and greatest artillery between them, creating an arms race. Very profitable to weapon manufacturers, and which garnered Zaharoff a £1,000 commission.

From there he ventured into stock manipulation of munitions companies and takeovers of rival manufacturers. He sold machine guns by the thousands to almost every country as Europe built up armies. Zaharoff eventually created a giant merger of munitions suppliers, folded into Vickers. He branched out into submarines.

Many called him Satan, and attributed World War One in part to him. Britain took three million casualties in the war, for which Zaharoff was knighted. He married a Spanish princess. From there he went into international finance, buying banks, and by the 1920s became one of the wealthiest men in history. He bought the Monte Carlo casino in Monaco.

He then financed Greece’s war against Turkey, Japan’s invasion of China in the 1930s, Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia, and Franco in the Spanish Civil War, just to name a few. He got his money back many times over in munitions sales, not to mention the interest on the original loans.

Zaharoff died in 1936. Few mourned him at the funeral. He had suffered poor circulation in his final years and was always cold, even in Monaco. Therefore he specified a steam-heated tomb. Not a few people commented that Zaharoff wouldn’t need heat where he was going.

LITERA SCRIPTA BIBLIOTHECA: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #512.]

Science Fiction.

“The Book Keepers” by J.T. Sharrah (2021 Sep/Oct, ANALOG) was about several time travelers who went back to the great library at Alexandria to copy all the missing books. Not as easy as might seem. They couldn’t just saunter into the building and begin photographing scrolls. The ancients weren’t as ignorant as might be thought, so there were many trials and tribulations.

Cozy Libraries.

BURIED IN THE STACKS (2019) by Allison Brook (pseudonym of Marilyn Levinson) was a cozy mystery in a series about librarian Carrie Singleton of Clover Ridge, Connecticut. The gimmick was that the library had a resident ghost named Evelyn, whom only Singleton could see and hear. Evelyn had been murdered in the library six years earlier.

A fellow librarian Dorothy Hawkins, niece of Evelyn, was murdered. Singleton moonlighted as a Miss Marple and soon discovered that Hawkins had been moonlighting as a blackmailer. There was no shortage of suspects. The library also had a problem with homeless people using it as a shelter, so Singleton had her hands full.

Evelyn offered advice from the other side of the veil. She had the advantage that she could listen in on conversations in the library without others being aware of her. Dorothy had been good at dredging up details of people’s lives for blackmail. Singleton was just as good, only she wasn’t doing it for profit.

The murderer was a family member who had killed both Dorothy and Evelyn. There was nothing to convict him since Miss Marples don’t bother with court-admissible evidence, but the usual confession was made. Had the killer kept his mouth shut, he would not have been convicted.

CHECKED OUT FOR MURDER (2020) continued the series. A movie crew was filming in the area. Carrie Singleton’s mother had remarried, changed her first name to Brianna, had her teeth capped, and her face lifted. Her new

husband was a much younger man, actor Tom Farrel, who was the leading man in the movie.

Meanwhile, a former Clover Ridge resident Daphne Marriott returned to town. Years earlier her abusive father Chet had been stabbed to death, which she told police was done by her brother Billy. He had served time but was later exonerated.

The movie production company held a meet-and-greet which ended with Daphne being murdered shortly after. There were ample suspects. Not long after, Brianna was arrested for the murder of an actress who was also Farrel's ex-fiancée.

Singleton became a very busy Miss Marple. She used the library to research past histories in Clover Ridge. Contrary to popular belief, not everything is on the Internet. She hosted a dinner party that became a night to remember, especially when someone chucked a rock through her living room window.

The movie actors staged a table reading at the library, but not the movie script. The play was the thing, written to catch the conscience of the murderer, whom Singleton thought would be in the audience. Instead, the killer was one of the actresses at the table, her voice recognized by a member of the audience.

Singleton called the police and in the intermission the actress was hauled away in handcuffs. No indication who substituted for her but presumably there was an understudy somewhere in the cast. The murders had been follow-ons to the original murder of Chet, as the killer feared being exposed. There is no statute of limitations for murder.

DEADLY EVER AFTER (2021) by Eva Gates (pseudonym of Vicki Delany) was the eighth novel in a cozy series about Lucy Richardson of the Outer Banks of North Carolina. She was a librarian at the Dodie Island Lighthouse Library and doubled as a Jessica Fletcher along the seashore.

She was marrying Connor McNeil but was plagued by her ex-fiance's mother, who wanted her to take back her son Richard Eric Lewiston III. He was embarrassed by that but his mother Evangeline was determined. The plot got rolling when his father REL the II was murdered in the parking lot of the restaurant where a pre-nuptial party was held. To add flavour to the mix, the deceased was a business partner of Lucy's father.

What with the police investigation and the funeral planning, Evangeline dumped her dog Fluffy on Lucy. She lived above the library, which had a cat named Charlie, who objected to Fluffy in the most strenuous terms.

While that war was progressing, so was the sleuthing, both police and Fletcher. The library book club, which Lucy moderated, was discussing a dog book, the one about the troublesome beast annoying the Baskervilles.

The deceased had financial problems, and had fathered a love child born out of wedlock decades ago, present-day identity unknown. Fletcher, pardon me, Lucy had the end-piece confrontation at the lighthouse. It was a dark and foggy night. The killer had been embezzling from the Lewiston company and wanted to clear the decks before the auditors arrived.

Lucy survived, as we knew she would. She then tidied up by discovering the identity of REL II's love child, who turned out to be a member of the book club. And so to the wedding, mustn't forget that.

Less Cozy Libraries.

MURDER IS A MUST (2020) by Marty Wingate was the second novel in a cozy series about Hayley Burke, newly appointed curator of the First Edition Library in Bath, England. (The first novel was reviewed in OPUNTIA #468). The library was endowed by the late Lady Georgiana Fowling and specialized in women authors of the Golden Age of mystery novels.

Burke had to work with two obstinate women, Glynis Woolgar and Oona Atherton to bring the library into the modern age. Woolgar was the library secretary and Atherton was an event planner from outside. To publicize the library, an exhibition was being staged about Lady Georgiana's life and letters.

The exhibition planning and associated seminars would take a year to organize. Since the library was a narrow townhouse not suitable for the event, a venue was located in London.

Atherton came across evidence that somewhere in the library was a rare book autographed by several famous authors. Trying to find the venue and staff were onerous tasks but not as aggravating as when Atherton's body was found at the foot of the stairs in the library.

There were two questions to be answered. Firstly, who was the murderer. Secondly, did the killer find and take the rare book, or was it still lost somewhere in the stacks. Burke weaved through a plethora of suspects, not to mention the constabulary.

The killer was a rival of Atherton and had wanted the commission for the exhibit. His thinking was that with her out of the way, the library would hire him.

It is said that London has the highest concentration of security cameras in the world. That was indeed how the murderer was caught. He changed his clothing en route to the murder and again on the way home, keeping his face in shadows with a broad-brimmed hat. He forgot about his shoes, so the police caught him out that way.

THE LIBRARIAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE (2022) was the next installment in the series. Hayley Burke was saddled with a new assistant she despised. The board of directors insisted she work with boorish Charles Henry Dill, nephew of the late Lady Georgiana Fowling.

Their mutual antipathy had to be set aside when a claim jumper John Aubrey arrived at the library. He said he was Lady Georgiana’s grandson, and as such had the rights to her estate. Another character Milo Overton was introduced but he didn’t live long. He was knifed in front of the library.

Unlike most cozies, the investigations in this series acknowledged the modern world. The police checked security cameras and cellphone locations, while Burke relied on snooping through suspects’ text messages. The murder was unrelated to the Aubrey matter.

After a knife fight the killer was wounded just as the police arrived. As for Aubrey, he was suddenly dropped from the narration after confessing he was a fraud.

Noir Libraries.

In the noir style, not as a cozy, was MURDER IN THE MANUSCRIPT ROOM (2017) by Con Lehane, part of a series about librarian Raymond Ambler of New York City’s 42 Street Library. Although Ambler was an amateur sleuth, he did not operate as a male Miss Marple.

Ambler had serious problems in his family, including a son who was serving hard time up the river. At work, he was preparing an exhibit for the library and dealing with a man named Paul Higgins. The latter was a retired NYPD officer who was now a minor mystery author. He wanted to donate his papers to the library, which contained police intelligence that would definitely have to be sealed for many decades.

The plot began rolling when Ambler arrived at the library one morning and found the NYPD there ahead of him. A new library assistant had been murdered and her body left in Ambler’s office. She was subsequently discovered to have been an undercover agent.

The investigations, both Ambler and NYPD, were messy. Black ops agencies, a kidnapped Iraqi researcher at the library, past murders from long ago, and assorted men in black. Eventually the complicated cast of characters and events, past and present, were sorted out.

The villain of the piece, a modern-day Moriarty, posed as a super-patriot. He got what was coming to him.

Litera Scripta Magicae.

LIBRIOMANCER (2012) by Jim C. Hines was the first novel in a series about Isaac Vainio, employed by the Copper River Library in peninsular Michigan. The Magic Ex Libris series read well. They were leavened by humour, and the author did try to rationalize the interactions of magic and technology.

The library was secretly funded by an underground organization Die Zwelf Portenaere (The Twelve Doorkeepers), established five centuries ago by Johannes Gutenberg. The man himself was still around, six centuries old and didn’t look a day over 599 years.

Vainio was a bibliomancer, who could reach into books and from them create characters and objects as real things of this world. He still couldn’t get the library’s barcode scanner to work properly, but then again, magic has its limits.

Vainio had a pet fire-spider named Smudge, who kept breaking into flames at inopportune moments. And you thought you had problems house-training your new puppy.

There were a variety of alarums. Some vampires were trying to kill Vainio. The DZP organization was under attack. A dryad named Lena Greenwood appointed herself as Vainio's bodyguard. Old man Gutenberg disappeared. Amateur libromancers were freeing all sorts of creatures and artifacts from books. Trouble and strife everywhere in this modern world.

A battle to save Earth ensued, with lots of automatons, historical characters brought to life, and nasty magical beings. Since more novels were to come in this series, there was no suspense about Vainio and Greenwood surviving. The plot logic was reasonably consistent in blending magic into our modern world.

CODEX BORN (2013) was the sequel. Life was good for Isaac Vainio. The library was quiet and two months had passed without anyone trying to kill him. Since the calm wouldn't justify a sequel, a magical war broke out in the Upper Peninsula, centred around the hitherto peaceful mining town of Tamarack.

But first, assorted infodumps and side excursions. Adult libromancers from the Boomer generation couldn't do it, but teenaged ones figured out how to practice the magic on electronic devices. Gutenberg himself said characters and objects couldn't be extracted from fiction on tablets, smartphones, or laptops. Vainio dealt with a bratty teenaged girl who could do the magic. Kids these days.

Die Zwelf Portenaere were now racing into the modern age to find other young wizards who knew binary code. So was another organization known as The Students of Bi Sheng, a man who had created the Ghost Army. Other creatures ran amok in Michigan, such as the wendigo which ate at the local McDonald's. Not hamburgers and fries, but the customers and staff.

There was much to-ing and fro-ing about the Upper Peninsula. The battle was won but DZP lost the war. They wanted to suppress the news but too many people had smartphone cameras, and were posting on innumerable social media sites.

UNBOUND (2014) was the third novel in the series. Die Zwelf Portenaere was fighting a rearguard action, trying unsuccessfully to delete all those photos from the Internet. Meanwhile, from a millennia ago, a wanna-be ruler of the world arose, Queen Meridiana. That set off another struggle, between her, the DZP, and the Students of Bi Sheng, each trying to take control of the Ghost Army.

The town of Copper River was never the same after the previous battle and property values dropped like a rock. Isaac Vainio had lost his magical powers and could no longer extract characters or objects from books. 34 townsfolk had died in the battle, well documented by smartphone videos. The trolls and conspiracy theorists were in full cry.

Meridiana was in full bwah-ha!-ha!. She stored her surplus magic on her smartphone, which made one wonder what would happen if the battery went flat. That was a moot point, as Vainio managed a last ditch offense that gave her brain freeze.

WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. 2022 will be the 29th year of the WWP. Mark your calendars now!

At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of zinedom around the world. It is important to have it exactly at 21h00 your time.

The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet. Rescheduling it to a club meeting or more convenient time negates the idea of a wave of celebration by science fiction fans and zinesters circling the globe.

At 21h00, face to the east and salute those who have already celebrated. Then face north, then south, and toast those in your time zone who are celebrating as you do. Finally, face west and raise a glass to those who will celebrate WWP in the next hour.

Raise a glass, publish a one-shot zine, have a party, or do a mail art project for the WWP. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

WINNIPEG BIDS FOR THE 15TH NORTH AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION

by Jannie Shea

2022-05-19

The Winnipeg in 2023 Committee is pleased to announce it will bid for the right to host the 15th North American Science Fiction Convention (NASFiC). In March 2022, the bid filed the required papers in accordance with the World Science Fiction Society Constitution, with the Chicon 8, the 80th World Science Fiction Convention (September 1 to 4, 2022).

The vote to determine the 2023 NASFiC Site will be held by Chicon 8, (<https://chicon.org>) and voted on by its membership. The Winnipeg in 2023 Committee is bidding to host the 2023 NASFiC in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, with the Delta Hotels by Marriott Winnipeg and RBC Convention Centre as its main facilities.

Bid documents are here: <https://main.winnipegin2023.ca/filingdocuments/> The bid committee boasts a number of experienced convention organisers, including former Worldcon and World Fantasy Convention chairs and enthusiastic local convention runners.

The committee is headed jointly by Linda Ross-Mansfield and Robbie Bourget. Linda is active in Winnipeg fandom, and Robbie has wide experience with running conventions of various sizes and subgenres. Both are familiar with Worldcon culture and fandom, having served at the Division head and executive levels.

The Winnipeg in 2023 bid is a committee of Cansmof, a Canadian not-for-profit corporation that focuses on running and sponsoring fannish events in Canada. The bid is endorsed by WINSFA Inc., which oversees KeyCon, an annual science fiction convention held in Winnipeg.

Keycon has been held annually since 1984 over the Victoria Day weekend. Although the 2020 and 2021 events were virtual for safety reasons, the 2022 KeyCon is being planned as an in-person event. More information about KeyCon is available at <https://keycon.org>. Should Winnipeg win the right to host, this will be the first NASFiC to be held in Canada.

Direct all queries for additional information to info@winnipegIn2023.ca The bid chairs may be directly contacted at bidchairs@winnipegIn2023.ca

CURRENT EVENTS: PART 42

[Parts 1 to 41 appeared in OPUNTIA's #474, 475, 479, 480, 483, 484, 488 to 503, and 507 to 525.]

As of June 3, COVID-19 has killed 41,231 Canadians from a population of 38,000,000, The number of vaccinated Canadians is 81.5%.

Seen In The COVID-19 Literature.

Stokes, E.C., and M.O. Román (2022) **Tracking COVID-19 urban activity changes in the Middle East from nighttime lights.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 12:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-12211-7 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the world have enacted widespread physical distancing measures to prevent and control virus transmission.*

Quantitative, spatially disaggregated information about the population-scale shifts in activity that have resulted from these measures is extremely scarce, particularly for regions outside of Europe and the US.

Public health institutions often must make decisions about control measures with limited region-specific data about how they will affect societal behavior, patterns of exposure, and infection outcomes.

The Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite Day/Night Band (VIIRS DNB), a new-generation space-borne lowlight imager, has the potential to track changes in human activity, but the capability has not yet been applied to a cross-country analysis of COVID-19 responses.

Here, we examine multi-year (2015-2020) daily time-series data derived from NASA's Black Marble VIIRS nighttime lights product (VNP46A2) covering 584 urban areas in 17 countries in the Middle East to understand how communities have adhered to COVID-19 measures in the first 4 months of the pandemic.

Nighttime lights capture the onset of national curfews and lockdowns well, but also expose the inconsistent response to control measures both across and within countries. In conflict-afflicted countries, low adherence to lockdowns and curfews was observed, highlighting the compound health and security threats that fragile states face.

Tamimi, A., et al (2022) **Facemask wearing does not impact neuro-electrical brain activity.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 12:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-12875-1 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Given the massive use of facemasks (FMs) during the COVID-19 pandemic, concerns have been raised regarding the effect of FMs wearing on overall health. This study aimed at evaluating the effect of surgical FM on brain neuro-electrical activity.*

Electroencephalography (EEG) background frequency (BGF) and background amplitude (BGA) was performed on 30 volunteers before (baseline), during, and after wearing a FM for 60 minutes.

Measurements were done during normal ventilation, hyperventilation and post-hyperventilation (PHVR). Blood gas levels were assessed at baseline and after FM use.

There were no statistically significant differences between baseline BGA and BGA under FM and post FM. BGF, Baseline data were 10.27 ± 0.79 , FM use 10.30 ± 0.76 and post FM use was 10.33 ± 0.76 . There were no statistically significant differences between baseline BGF and BGF under FM and post FM.

Venous blood gases, and peripheral oxygen saturation were not significantly affected by FM use. Short-term use of FM in young healthy individuals has no significant alteration impact on brain’s neuro-electrical activity

Harvey-Carroll, J., et al (2022) **Continued availability and sale of pangolins in a major urban bushmeat market in Cameroon despite national bans and the COVID-19 outbreak.** AFRICAN JOURNAL OF ECOLOGY 60:doi.org/10.1111/aje.12969 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ discussion: *We have documented the availability of pangolins in a major urban bushmeat market in Cameroon following national bans in the trade of the species and during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

We identified a significant decrease in the average number of arboreal pangolins offered for sale per day at a major bushmeat market in the capital city between 2017 and 2020, but we cannot distinguish whether this was specifically due to the national bans or the coronavirus outbreak.

However, despite the prohibition of pangolin trade, new legislation listing all pangolins as integrally protected species within Cameroon, and the COVID-19 pandemic, we found that arboreal pangolins were persistently and openly offered for sale throughout 2020, and the daily number of pangolins available during this period remained consistent.

Arboreal pangolins were observed on 72% of survey days in 2020, and most pangolins were alive (62%). Furthermore, despite national bans in giant pangolin trade since 2006, pieces of giant pangolin meat and some whole carcasses were observed in 2017/2018, although not during the 2020 survey (however one whole giant pangolin was observed by the researchers on the market on a non-survey day –27 May).

These results are likely indicative of the infrequent enforcement of protected species laws at the market, as also observed in a year-long ethnographic study of the same market in 2009/2010.

Given that giant pangolins have been legally protected for longer, trade in giant pangolins is highly likely to have gone underground. At our survey market, many traders have private storerooms and freezers for meat, and in the past other protected species such as gorillas and elephants were available as smoked meat at the same market.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Planets.

Maurice, S., et al (2022) **In situ recording of Mars soundscape.** NATURE 605:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-04679-0 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Before the Perseverance rover landing, the acoustic environment of Mars was unknown. Models predicted that:*

- (1) atmospheric turbulence changes at centimetre scales or smaller at the point where molecular viscosity converts kinetic energy into heat,*
- (2) the speed of sound varies at the surface with frequency, and*
- (3) high-frequency waves are strongly attenuated with distance in CO₂*

However, theoretical models were uncertain because of a lack of experimental data at low pressure and the difficulty to characterize turbulence or attenuation in a closed environment.

Here, using Perseverance microphone recordings, we present the first characterization of the acoustic environment on Mars and pressure fluctuations in the audible range and beyond, from 20 Hz to 50 kHz.

We find that atmospheric sounds extend measurements of pressure variations down to 1,000 times smaller scales than ever observed before, showing a dissipative regime extending over five orders of magnitude in energy.

Using point sources of sound (Ingenuity rotorcraft, laser-induced sparks), we highlight two distinct values for the speed of sound that are about 10 m s⁻¹ apart below and above 240 Hz, a unique characteristic of low-pressure CO₂-dominated atmosphere.

We also provide the acoustic attenuation with distance above 2 kHz, allowing us to explain the large contribution of the CO₂ vibrational relaxation in the audible range. These results establish a ground truth for the modelling of acoustic processes, which is critical for studies in atmospheres such as those of Mars and Venus.

Before the landing of Perseverance (18 February 2021), no pressure fluctuations had ever been monitored on Mars at a frequency >20 Hz, namely,

in the acoustic domain. The recording of sounds offers the unique opportunity to study the atmosphere as the main natural source of sound and as the propagation medium for acoustic waves.

From the knowledge of Mars atmospheric pressure (about 0.6 kPa) and the physical properties of CO₂, one can predict that: the acoustic impedance results in approximately 20 dB weaker sounds on Mars than on Earth if produced by the same source, the speed of sound should be around 240 m s⁻¹ near the surface and acoustic waves are heavily damped in CO₂ at these atmospheric pressures and temperatures.

Alien Life.

Caballero, Alberto (2022) **An approximation to determine the source of the WOW! signal.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 21:doi.org/10.1017/S1473550422000015 (available as a free pdf)

[The WOW! signal was received 1977-08-15 by Ohio State University’s radio telescope. It was a loud blast that lasted for 72 seconds. The characteristics of the trace were the closest to any deliberate message ever received. Since then there has been considerable debate about it being an alien communication.]

Author’s abstract: *In this paper it is analysed which of the thousands of stars in the WOW! Signal region could have the highest chance of being the real source of the signal, providing that it came from a star system similar to ours. A total of 66 G and K-type stars are sampled, but only one of them is identified as a potential Sun-like star considering the available information in the Gaia Archive.*

This candidate source, which is named 2MASS 19281982-2640123, therefore becomes an ideal target to conduct observations in the search for techno-signatures. Another two candidate stars have a luminosity error interval that includes the luminosity of the Sun, and 14 candidates more are also identified as potential Sun-like stars, but the estimations on their luminosity were unknown.

Despite the WOW! Signal never repeated, the key aspect was its duration. The signal lasted for 72 seconds, but since this was the maximum amount of time that the Big Ear radio telescope was able to observe, it is likely that the signal would have lasted longer.

The main problem, however, is that the signal never repeated. Follow-up observations of the area conducted by many observatories during several years never detected another signal. Nonetheless, the fact that the signal never repeated, does not necessarily rule out that it was produced by extraterrestrial intelligence.

In fact, if we analyse the history of (the few) radio signals that humanity have sent to several targets in the hope of contacting a civilization, none of those transmissions had a long duration or were repeatedly sent for a long time. An extraterrestrial civilization could have opted to behave in a similar manner.

Caballero, Alberto (2022) **Estimating the prevalence of malicious extraterrestrial civilizations.** www.archiv.org arXiv:2205.11618 (available as a free pdf)

Author's abstract: This paper attempts to provide an estimation of the prevalence of hostile extraterrestrial civilizations through an extrapolation of the probability that we, as the human civilization, would attack or invade an inhabited exoplanet once we become a Type-1 civilization in the Kardashev Scale capable of nearby interstellar travel.

The estimation is based on the world's history of invasions in the last century, the military capabilities of the countries involved, and the global growth rate of energy consumption. Upper limits of standard deviations are used in order to obtain the estimated probability of extraterrestrial invasion by a civilization whose planet we send a message to.

Results show that such probability is two orders of magnitude lower than the impact probability of a planet-killer asteroid. These findings could serve as a starting point for an international debate about sending the first serious interstellar radio messages to nearby potentially habitable planets.

The fact that the estimated probability of extraterrestrial invasion is two orders of magnitude lower than that of a planet-killer asteroid collision should open the door to the next step, which is having an international debate to determine the conditions under which the first serious interstellar radio or laser message will be sent to a nearby potentially habitable exoplanet.

It is necessary to mention that the probabilities are cumulative, which means that sending radio messages to several potentially habitable planets raises the total to the sum of all of them, which is in any case an extremely low probability.

We could send up to 18,000 interstellar messages to different exoplanets and the probability of invasion by a malicious civilization would be the same as that of an Earth collision with a global-catastrophe asteroid.

Origin Of Life.

Mills, D.B., et al (2022) **Eukaryogenesis and oxygen in Earth history.** NATURE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 6:520-532

[Mitochondria are organelles within plant and animal cells which use oxygen to generate energy carrying molecules called ATP. Without them, we would die in seconds.]

Authors' abstract: The endosymbiotic origin of mitochondria during eukaryogenesis has long been viewed as an adaptive response to the oxygenation of Earth's surface environment, presuming a fundamentally aerobic lifestyle for the free-living bacterial ancestors of mitochondria.

This oxygen-centric view has been robustly challenged by recent advances in the Earth and life sciences. While the permanent oxygenation of the atmosphere above trace concentrations is now thought to have occurred 2.2 billion years ago, large parts of the deep ocean remained anoxic until less than 0.5 billion years ago.

Neither fossils nor molecular clocks correlate the origin of mitochondria, or eukaryogenesis more broadly, to either of these planetary redox transitions. Instead, mitochondria-bearing eukaryotes are consistently dated to between these two oxygenation events, during an interval of pervasive deep-sea anoxia and variable surface-water oxygenation.

The discovery and cultivation of the Asgard archaea has reinforced metabolic evidence that eukaryogenesis was initially mediated by syntrophic H2 exchange between an archaeal host and an α -proteobacterial symbiont living under anoxia.

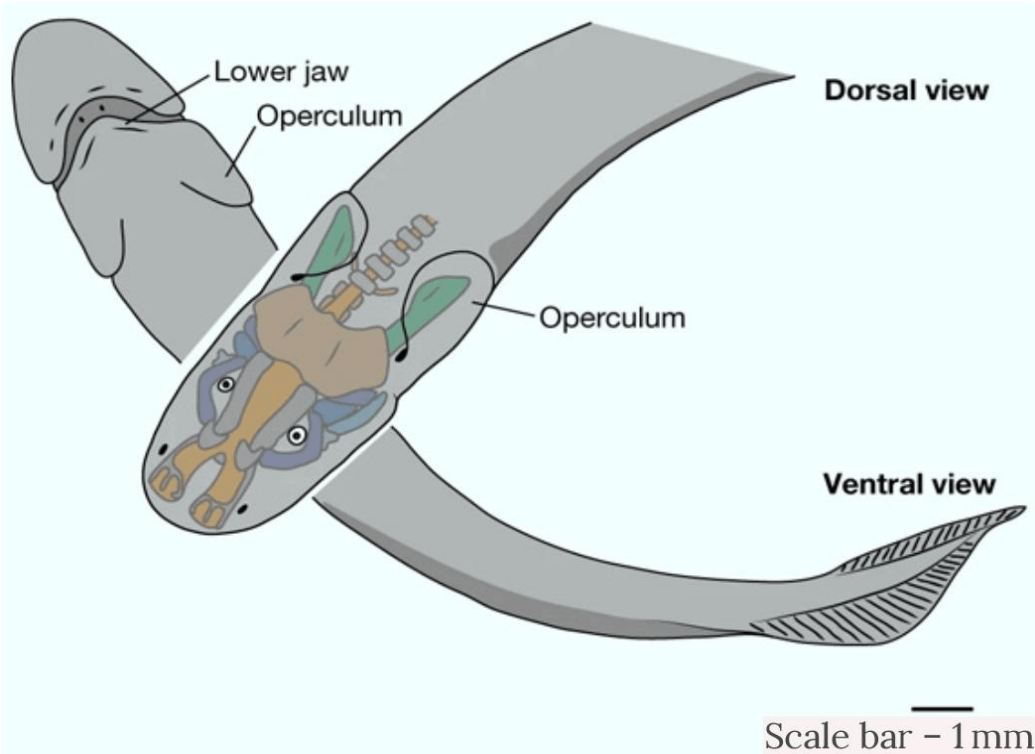
Together, these results temporally, spatially and metabolically decouple the earliest stages of eukaryogenesis from the oxygen content of the surface ocean and atmosphere.

Rather than reflecting the ancestral metabolic state, obligate aerobiosis in eukaryotes is most probably derived, having only become globally widespread over the past 1 billion years as atmospheric oxygen approached modern levels.

Paleobiology.

Hirasawa, T., et al (2022) **Morphology of *Palaeospondylus* shows affinity to tetrapod ancestors.** NATURE 606:109-112

Authors’ abstract: *Palaeospondylus gunni*, from the Middle Devonian period, is one of the most enigmatic fossil vertebrates, and its phylogenetic position has remained unclear since its discovery in Scotland in 1890. The fossil’s strange set of morphological features has made comparisons with known vertebrate morphotype diversity difficult.



Here we use synchrotron radiation X-ray micro-computed tomography to show that *Palaeospondylus* was a sarcopterygian, and most probably a stem-tetrapod. The skeleton of *Palaeospondylus* consisted solely of endoskeletal elements in which hypertrophied chondrocyte cell lacunae, osteoids and a small fraction of perichondral bones developed.

Despite the complete lack of teeth and dermal bones, the neurocranium of *Palaeospondylus* resembles those of stem-tetrapod *Eusthenopteron* and *Panderichthys*, and phylogenetic analyses place *Palaeospondylus* in between them.

Because the unique features of *Palaeospondylus*, such as the cartilaginous skeleton and the absence of paired appendages, are present in the larva of crown tetrapods, our study highlights an unanticipated heterochronic evolution at the root of tetrapods.

[Image is from this paper.]

Gulbranson, E.L., et al (2022) **Paleoclimate-induced stress on polar forested ecosystems prior to the Permian-Triassic mass extinction.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 12:/doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-12842-w (available as a free pdf)

[Glossopterids were the dominant vegetation throughout the Permian but went extinct during the mass extinction, even though they were adapted to a wide variety of climates worldwide. They were woody plants, from shrubs to trees the height of sequoias. They had fern-like anatomy but bore seeds in stalked clusters arising from the upper side of the leaf.]

[Paleosols are fossilized soil layers preserved intact.]

Authors’ abstract: *The end-Permian extinction (EPE) has been considered to be contemporaneous on land and in the oceans. However, re-examined floristic records and new radiometric ages from Gondwana indicate a nuanced terrestrial ecosystem response to EPE global change.*

Paleosol geochemistry and climate simulations indicate paleoclimate change likely caused the demise of the widespread glossopterid ecosystems in Gondwana.

Here, we evaluate the climate response of plants to the EPE via dendrochronology snapshots to produce annual-resolution records of tree-ring growth for a succession of late Permian and early Middle Triassic fossil forests from Antarctica.

Paleosol geochemistry indicates a shift in paleoclimate towards more humid conditions in the Early and early Middle Triassic relative to the late Permian.

Paleosol morphology, however, supports inferences of a lack of forested ecosystems in the Early Triassic. The plant responses to this paleoclimate change were accompanied by enhanced stress during the latest Permian as determined by high-resolution paleoclimate analysis of wood growth intervals.

These results suggest that paleoclimate change during the late Permian exerted significant stress on high-latitude forests, consistent with the hypothesis that climate change was likely the primary driver of the extinction of the glossopterid ecosystems.

During the late Permian, glossopterids occurred on every continental landmass of Gondwana, and were the predominant arborescent taxa of terrestrial ecosystems at paleopolar latitudes. These plants were adapted for a broad range of climate conditions, changes of climate state (e.g., icehouse to greenhouse), and persisted as a low-biodiversity floral province throughout the Permian.

It is, therefore, a paradox that such a widespread flora was unable to cope with global change during the EPE. In Australia, glossopterids went extinct approximately 370 kiloyears prior to the marine EPE at 251.939 ± 0.031 megayears ago, indicating that the specific mechanism(s) to stress these ecosystems differed in type, timing, or magnitude from the marine extinctions.

How this array of climate and environmental change directly affected terrestrial ecosystems is a key area of research, but what is known is that ecosystem recovery was delayed, and taxa that filled-in ecosystem niches following the EPE were most likely affected by repeated environmental/climatic stress during the Early Triassic.

Elements of the succeeding flora appear dispersed through the Early Triassic and suggest a delayed recovery of paleo-equatorial ecosystems.

Ecology.

Grossman, E.L., and M.M. Joachimski (2022) **Ocean temperatures through the Phanerozoic reassessed.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 12:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-11493-1 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The oxygen isotope compositions of carbonate and phosphatic fossils hold the key to understanding Earth-system evolution during the last 500 million years. Unfortunately, the validity and interpretation of this record remain unsettled.*

Our comprehensive compilation of Phanerozoic $\delta^{18}\text{O}$ data for carbonate and phosphate fossils and microfossils (totaling 22,332 and 4,615 analyses, respectively) shows rapid shifts best explained by temperature change.

Average low-latitude (30° S to 30° N) paleotemperatures for shallow environments decline from $42.0 \pm 3.1^\circ\text{C}$ in the Early to Middle Ordovician to $35.6 \pm 2.4^\circ\text{C}$ for the Late Ordovician through the Devonian, then fluctuate around $25.1 \pm 3.5^\circ\text{C}$ from the Mississippian to today.

The Early Triassic and Middle Cretaceous stand out as hothouse intervals. Correlations between atmospheric CO_2 forcing and paleotemperature support CO_2 's role as a climate driver in the Paleozoic.

Borie-Mojica, A., et al (2022) **Fish chorus and vessel noise in a marine protected coastal reef vary with lunar phase.** ENVIRONMENTAL BIOLOGY OF FISHES 105:575-587

Authors' abstract: *This study implemented Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM) to evaluate temporal acoustic patterns in a protected coastal reef area in Tamandaré beach (100 km south of Recife city, Pernambuco State, Brazil). We used an autonomous underwater recorder that allowed continuous recordings from December to March.*

The sounds detected in the marine protected area indicated the presence of six chorus types, two of them occurring only in winter. We detected choruses occurring in different times of the day and presenting a daily pattern, with differences in the initial time of detection.

Overlapping signals from four choruses occurred mainly after sunset (17:30), while two choruses occurred after midnight. Choruses usually lasted for 1 hour 30 minutes.

One of the choruses produced a wide frequency band (300 to 4000 Hz) that masked the frequency of the other choruses. Lunar phase changes influenced all choruses, with major differences during the first-quarter moon.

Vessel noise occurred primarily in the early morning and at night. Vessels had low dominant frequencies, with higher peaks below 155 Hz and different peaks that can reach 7000 Hz. The vessels produced noises with energy of 90 dB, distributed in a wide frequency band. These noises were enough to mask all the choruses, although characterized by short peaks (< 10 min of detection).

Kellera, T., and D. Orc (2022) **Farm vehicles approaching weights of sauropods exceed safe mechanical limits for soil functioning.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2117699119 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: Mechanization has transformed agriculture over the past century, greatly improving crop production efficiency. However, the higher capacity has resulted in increased farm vehicle weights.

We show that while machinery design maintains constant surface contact stresses, an insidious and largely overlooked threat of subsoil compaction has developed.

We demonstrate that modern vehicles induce high soil stresses that now exceed critical mechanical thresholds for many arable soils, inducing chronic soil compaction in root zones below tillage depths and adversely affecting soil functioning.

We draw parallels between modern farm vehicles and the heaviest animals that walked Earth: sauropods. We hypothesize that these prehistoric giants may have induced subsoil compaction, thus presenting a paradox for productivity of the land that supported them.

Mechanization has greatly contributed to the success of modern agriculture, with vastly expanded food production capabilities achieved by the higher

capacity of farm machinery. However, the increase in capacity has been accompanied by higher vehicle weights that increase risks of subsoil compaction.

We show here that while surface contact stresses remained nearly constant over the course of modern mechanization, subsoil stresses have propagated into deeper soil layers and now exceed safe mechanical limits for soil ecological functioning.

We developed a global map for delineating subsoil compaction susceptibility based on estimates of mechanization level, mean tractor size, soil texture, and climatic conditions. The alarming trend of chronic subsoil compaction risk over 20% of arable land, with potential loss of productivity, calls for a more stringent design of farm machinery that considers intrinsic subsoil mechanical limits.

As the total weight of modern harvesters is now approaching that of the largest animals that walked Earth, the sauropods, a paradox emerges of potential prehistoric subsoil compaction.

We hypothesize that unconstrained roaming of sauropods would have had similar adverse effects on land productivity as modern farm vehicles, suggesting that ecological strategies for reducing subsoil compaction, including fixed foraging trails, must have guided these prehistoric giants.

Wang, W., et al (2022) **Emphasizing actions over words: A Chinese perspective on Thunberg's protest.** AMERICAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS AND SOCIOLOGY 81:doi.org/10.1111/ajes.12460 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: Fridays for Future, an environmental protection campaign initiated by Greta Thunberg, has received a lot of attention worldwide. Some have suggested that Greta is a prodigy of climate activism.

By analyzing Thunberg's protests and the Protestant culture behind them, we argue that the climate movement has failed to tackle the climate crisis. We then advance an alternative approach from the perspective of Chinese culture that points to more practical solutions, insisting that political activism must reflect the broader culture if it is to win the support and participation of the people.

Whether activism can help resolve the climate crisis or not depends on the will of the people. While protest is sometimes an effective way to address social and political problems, its purpose is ultimately to inspire action.

In solving societal problems, Chinese people pay special attention to process, balance, and practical action. The evidence shows that, so long as Chinese people can do so, they will safeguard their homes and protect their environment based on sentiments that are deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

The cultural practice embodied by the Chinese adage “change starts with me, change starts now” offers a practical solution to the current climate crisis.

Speirs: This paper goes into eye-opening detail about Thunberg’s showboating and her refusal to admit that anyone is working for practical change because that would negate her thesis that we are all doomed. Well worth reading.



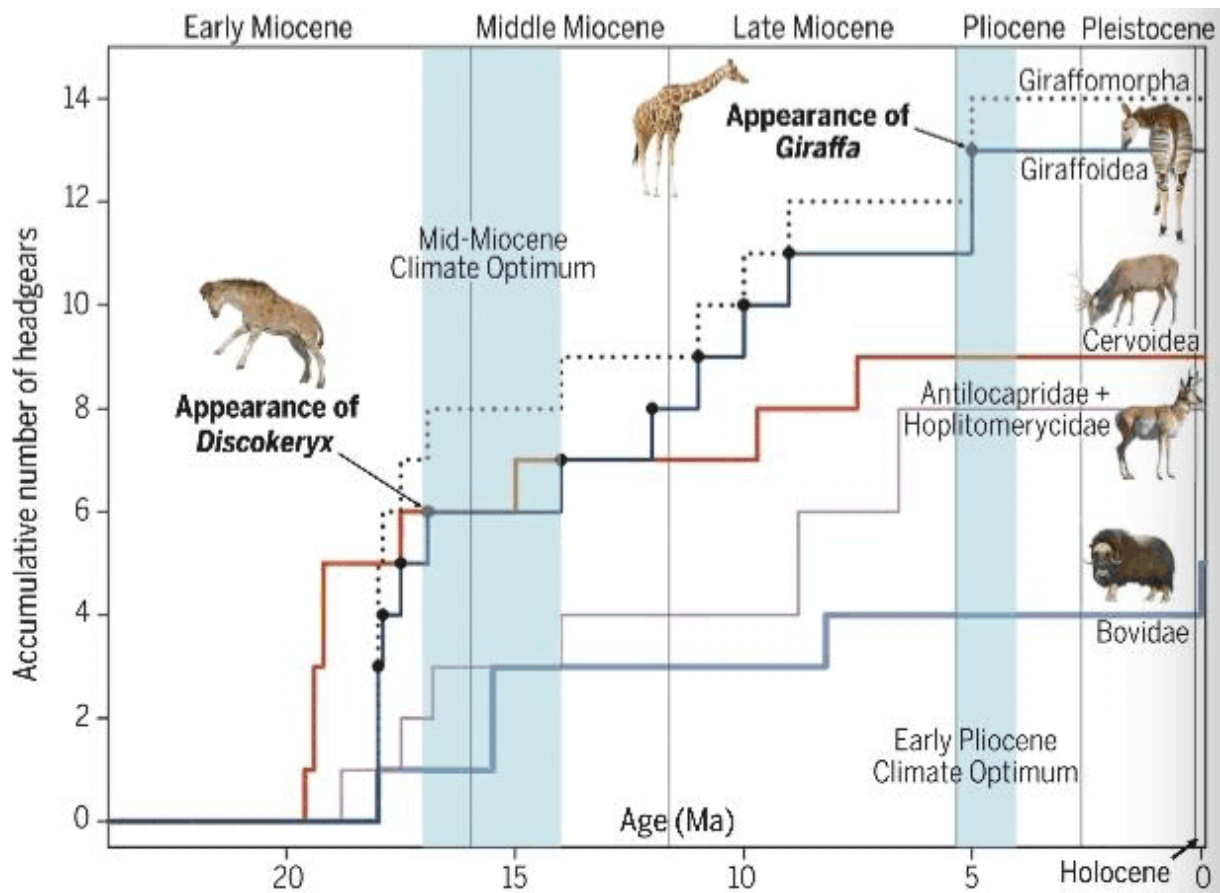
Zoology.

Wang S.Q., et al (2022) **Sexual selection promotes giraffoid head-neck evolution and ecological adaptation.** SCIENCE 376:doi.org/10.1126/science.abl8316

Authors’ abstract: *Extreme evolution of animal organs, such as elongation of the giraffe’s neck, has been the focus of intensive research for many decades. Here, we describe a fossil giraffoid, Discokeryx xiezhi, from the early Miocene (~16.9 million years ago) of northern China.*

This previously unknown species has a thick-boned cranium with a large disklike headgear, a series of cervical vertebrae with extremely thickened centra, and the most complicated head-neck joints in mammals known to date.

The peculiar head-neck morphology was most probably adapted for a fierce intermale head-butting behavior, comparable to neck-blowing in male giraffes but indicative of an extreme adaptation in a different direction within giraffoids.



This newly identified giraffoid increases our understanding the actual triggers for the giraffe's head-neck evolution. The comparative anatomical studies of osteological structures, including the bony labyrinth morphology, the headgear genesis and histology, and dentitions, provide the basis for the giraffoid affinity of D. xiezhi, which was further supported by phylogenetic analyses and reconstructions of the fauna.

Finite element analyses explain the mechanical predominance for the peculiar head-neck morphology in various head-butting modeling. Tooth enamel isotope analyses indicate the distinctiveness of the ecological niche occupied by D. xiezhi. Diversity of headgear within different pecoran groups reveals the different evolutionary selection pressure on these groups.

Finite element analysis reveals that the enlarged atlanto-occipitalis and intercervical articulations are essential for high-speed head-to-head butting. D. xiezhi appears to exhibit the most optimized head butting adaptation in vertebrate evolution when compared with the models of extant head-butters.

Tooth enamel isotope data show that D. xiezhi had the second highest average $d^{13}C$ value among all herbivores and a large range of $d^{18}O$ values, with some individuals occupying an isotopic niche differing substantially from others in the fossil community. This indicates that D. xiezhi was an open land grazer with multiple sources of water intake, and their habitats likely included areas that were difficult for other contemporary herbivores to make use of.

The morphology and inferred ecology of D. xiezhi provide another example for understanding the neck evolution in giraffoids. Fossil giraffoids exhibit a higher degree of diversity in headgear morphology than any other pecoran group. Such a diversity, associated with the complex head-neck morphology, likely indicates the intensive sexual combats between males in the evolution of giraffoids.

For interspecific relationship, one possible strategy of early giraffoids is that they might have avoided competition with coeval bovids and cervids by taking advantage of other niches in the ecosystem. Giraffa, with its long neck, did not appear until the early Pliocene in savannah areas, when C_4 ecosystems started being vastly established.

“Necking” combat was likely the primary driving force for giraffes that have evolved a long neck, and high-level browsing was likely a compatible benefit of

this evolution. The ecological positioning on the marginal niches promoted the intensive sexual competition, and the fierce sexual combats fostered extreme morphologies to occupy the special niches in giraffoids.

[Images are from this paper.]

Modern Humans.

Roy, B., et al (2022) **Regional brain gray matter changes in patients with Type 2 diabetes mellitus.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 12:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-67022-5 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: Patients with Type 2 diabetes mellitus (T2DM) show cognitive and mood impairment, indicating potential for brain injury in regions that control these functions. However, brain tissue integrity in cognition, anxiety, and depression regulatory sites, and their associations with these functional deficits in T2DM subjects remain unclear.

We examined gray matter (GM) changes in 34 T2DM and 88 control subjects using high-resolution T1-weighted images, collected from a 3.0-Tesla magnetic resonance imaging scanner, and assessed anxiety, depressive symptoms, and cognition. We also investigated relationships between GM status of cognitive and mood control sites and these scores in T2DM.

Significantly increased anxiety and depression, and reduced cognition appeared in T2DM over controls. Decreased GM volumes appeared in several regions in T2DM patients, including the prefrontal, hippocampus, amygdala, insular, cingulate, cerebellum, caudate, basalforebrain, and thalamus areas.

GM volumes were significantly associated with anxiety, depression, and cognition scores in regions associated with those regulations (prefrontal cortices, hippocampus, para hippocampus, amygdala, insula, cingulate, caudate, thalamus, and cerebellum) in T2DM patients.

Patients with T2DM show brain damage in regions that are involved in cognition, anxiety, and depression control, and these tissue alterations are associated with functional deficits. The findings indicate that mood and cognitive deficits in T2DM patients has brain structural basis in the condition.