





**Stampede Parade 2022**

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

**BACK IN THE SADDLE AGAIN**

2022-07-08

photos by Dale Speirs

The return of the world’s largest rodeo after two years absence put Calgarians into a celebratory mood as the pandemic receded into the distance. The Calgary Stampede begins each year on the Friday after Canada Day with a parade. I was there and so were about 100,000 spectators.





From the old ways to travel to the new.





Lots of ethnic groups in the parade. The Ukrainians received much sympathy and applause from the spectators.







Top left: A Peruvian dancer.  
Bottom left: The Nigerian float.

Top right: Vulcan is about an hour's drive southeast of Calgary.  
Bottom right: Penticton is in interior British Columbia.





Here are two groups of people who dress in funny costumes.

Top: Who yah gonna call?

Left: The latest in Shriner vehicles.





Top left: Strathcona's Colour Guard.

Bottom left: Alas, all good things must come to an end. Not to worry though. The next issue of this zine will have photos from the Stampede grounds.

Below: The parade route remained closed an hour afterward so that crews could clean up along the route. This is 9 Avenue South, the main drag through the downtown core.





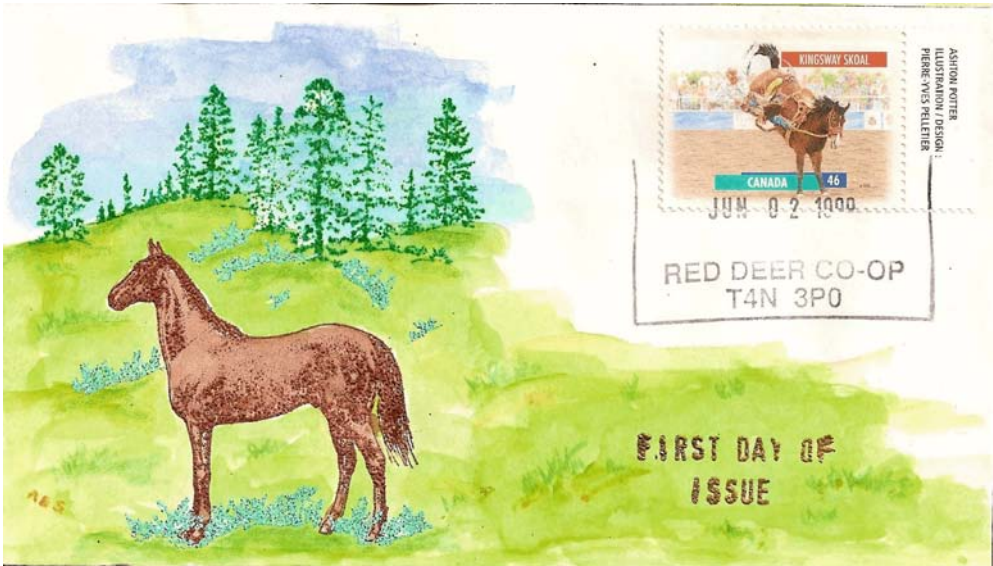
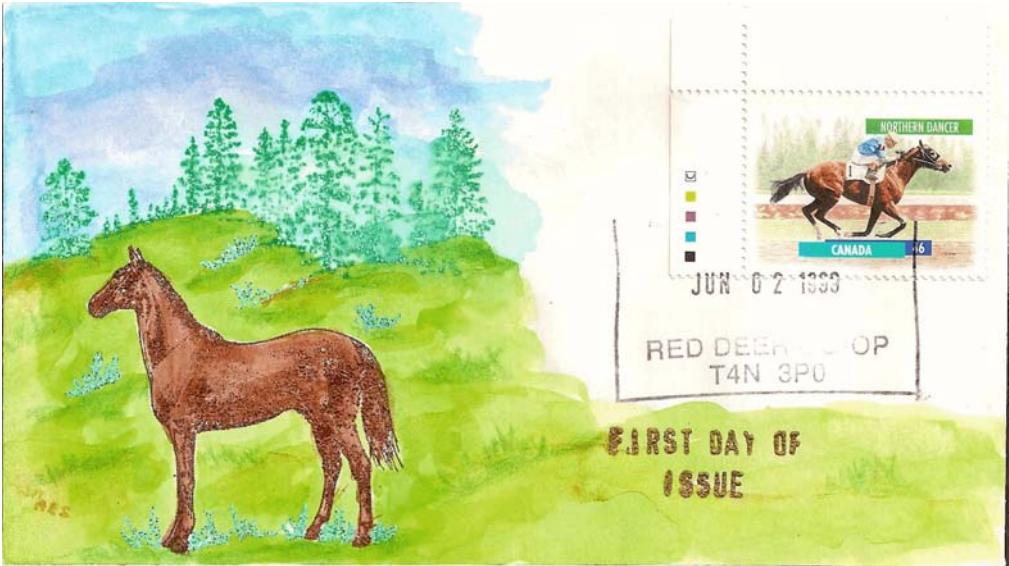
**MAIL ART OF BETTY SPEIRS: PART 12**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 11 appeared in OPUNTIA's #511, 514, 517, 519, 521, 523 to 528.]

Although Red Deer has a rodeo, it wasn't the Stampede. Nothing else is. The Calgary Stampede is the world's largest rodeo,. The Red Deer Westerner rodeo, while respectable, is in the middle class.

My mother did make some horse covers though. At first glance, they look identical but if you look closely you can see minute differences since each one was handmade.







**OUT WHERE THE WEST COMMENCES: PART 9**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 8 appeared in OPUNTIA's #68.1D, 356, 418, 419, 435, 446, 478, and 504.]

**The Dry Lands.**

I am a pure-laine descendant of homesteaders on both sides of my family. My mother's family settled in west-central Alberta, just north of the village of Eckville where I was to be born a half-century later. My father's parents homesteaded in southern Saskatchewan in 1912 during abnormally wet years.

The Great Depression was bad enough for my mother's family but west-central Alberta never had droughts. Southern Saskatchewan was a different story. The land dried up and blew away in giant dust storms. The farm was sold for less than the mortgage, and the Speirs family moved to a rural area northwest of Calgary, today the suburbs of Arbour Lake and Royal Oak.

From Grandfather Speirs, my father, and my uncles, I heard as a boy their stories. The dust storms sandblasted the standing crops, then buried the stumps. No water for the cattle, and it cost more to ship them to slaughterhouses than the money they brought.



I told you all that because the story “Angel In The Dust Bowl” by Spencer Lane (1937 December, ASTOUNDING, available as a free pdf from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) resonated with me. Set somewhere on the plains, it was about an inventor who had invented a force field device that bottled up an entire dust storm.

Would that it were true for the flatlanders of Saskatchewan. A poignant story that may not mean much to a city slicker but certainly affected me.

“A Discovery In Dry Farming” by Edmund G. Kinyon (1910 December, THE BLACK CAT, available as a free pdf from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) was about an old farmer Hiram Bevens, who claimed to have discovered a method of raising crops on his desert land without water. Corn above head height, three crops of alfalfa per year, and all done by his secret process of changing sandstorms into rain storms.

He wrote letters frequently to the territorial governor, asking him to come out and see for himself. The governor was interested but instead sent his executive assistant Knude Anderson to have a look. The trip was long and when Anderson finally rode into the Bevens homestead, he found it a sterile desert.

Bevens insisted, at the point of a gun, that Anderson walk about with him and view the bountiful crops. Everywhere was bare sand and rocks, but Bevens waxed at great length about the wonders of his crops. He pointed out the nonexistent corn and made Anderson walk across the invisible hayfields.

Obviously Bevens had gone insane out there in the desert. Anderson barely escaped with his life.

“Mystery At Mesa Flat” by Ivar Jorgensen (1956 June, IMAGINATION, available as a free pdf from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)) began with a alien scout ship leaving Earth after a secret mission. One of the crew bragged that he had killed an Earthling. The captain of the spaceship had him executed but the damage was done.

Back at the murder, in the Arizona desert, the body was found by two security men. The only place the murderer could have gone was a nearby ghost town with a few dozen inhabitants. In the guise of uranium prospectors, they visited the town. The place was suspicious but they couldn’t figure out why.

The town had only existed a few months back in the Old West days before being abandoned. For the last ten years, it had slowly repopulated. The security men eventually found the alien control centre in the hotel basement. They were ambushed by the entire populace but managed to shoot their way out.

After the battle, they discovered the inhabitants were androids created by the aliens. Meticulous attention had been paid to the details of the buildings and furnishings. The security men finally realized what was wrong with the town. The aliens had begun repopulating the settlement a decade ago in secret. There was no cemetery since all the occupants were androids.

### **The Law.**

“In The Interest Of Science” by Emmet F. Harte (1909 February, THE BLACK CAT, available as a free pdf from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) could be classified as a mad scientist story. Most of the dialogue was what Mel Brooks called “frontier gibberish”. The events took place in a hidden canyon Out West in the desert.

The narrator was an old cowhand whose presence was greatly desired by many law enforcement officials for various offences. In consequence, he had to keep moving along.

He found himself in a desert oasis hidden away in a canyon where a mad scientist was working on a formula to increase life spans, possibly to the point of immortality. Alas, things went wrong. The formula and location of the health-giving waters were lost.

STRANGE ADVENTURE probably aired in 1945 but little is known about this radio series. The episodes were about 3.5 minutes long, written by Charles Crowder and narrated by Pat McGeehan. The series was syndicated as a space filler or for insertion inside a variety show. Available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers at [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)

“Cow Town Marshal” caught my eye for obvious reasons. A new marshal Curt Henderson, packing heavy iron on his hip, arrived at a rural village. Not long after, gunslinger Jack Blake showed up.

The gunfight took place as expected. Blake shot first but Henderson shot fatally. Afterwards, the townfolk asked Henderson why he let Blake fire first. *“I had to do it. He was my brother.”*



ROCKY FORTUNE aired for the 1953-54 season. 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.

“The Rodeo Murder Mystery” was written by Ernest Kinoy and aired on 1954-01-12. Rocky Fortune’s latest job was with the Grand National Rodeo in New York City as an errand boy.

Frank Sinatra kept changing his pronunciation of the word rodeo. Sometimes he used the correct sound, row-dee-oh, but often he said row-day-oh. The latter is incorrect; there is no accent mark on the ‘e’.

The boss was Colonel Larrabee, who asked Fortune if he was from the west. Fortune replied that any further west, he’d be swimming in the Hudson River. That wasn’t what Larrabee had in mind but his daughter Jane told her father that he didn’t need a top hand to run errands.

Hardly had Fortune begun when he was slugged unconscious and the Colonel’s office ransacked. Ringo Durham, assistant to Larrabee, arrived and woke up Fortune. \$25,000 cash in box office takings from the matinee was stolen, said Durham.

Larrabee and his daughter appeared moments later. An old cliché was then invoked. Jane said the Colonel had a \$45,000 promissory note due at midnight. Were it not paid, the friendly finance folk at Amusement Corporation Associates would assert their lien and take over the show.

Larrabee pshawed everyone and said he had the \$25,000 in a money belt he was wearing. “*I can take care of myself*”, he said. Famous last words indeed.

Fortune wandered around talking to the cowboys but had trouble because they were all named either Slim or Tex. He yearned to hear proper English spoken and to be among people where the women wore high heels, not the men.

The evening performance commenced. Jane was a competitor in both the steer wrestling and bronco riding. While that was going on, Larrabee was shot dead with his own gun. Durham accused Fortune of stealing the \$25,000.

The stables were the scene of many an alarum and additional sudden death. Durham was the villain, who kidnapped Jane and fled. Fortune gave chase riding a mule, to the music of the William Tell Overture, better known as the theme from the Lone Ranger.

Out onto the streets of Manhattan and along 9th Avenue. The mule chase roared down the avenue. All the cash, and the girl, were retrieved. There’s never a dull moment in Manhattan.

### **The Weird West.**

“The Wizard Of Red Gulch” by William M. Tisdale (1912 June, THE BLACK CAT, available as a free pdf from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) was a ghost story set in the gold fields of California during the big rush.

A traveling salesman was on his way to the mines in a remote area. During one leg of the trip he was the only passenger on a stage coach, so he sat up top with the driver William Murphy.

As they thundered along the narrow trail on a ledge far above a steep canyon, Murphy told how he liked to give passengers a scare. The stretch of trail they were approaching had a very large boulder on the cliff-side edge of the road. Murphy said he liked to deliberately bump the wheel hubs against the boulder to frighten his passengers.

Nearing the boulder, Murphy handed the reins to the traveler and said he had to leave. He calmly stepped off the coach as it passed the boulder. He stood there suspended in mid-air for a moment and then vanished into nothingness.

The traveler had never before held the reins of a six-horse hitch. Fortunately the horses knew the way, and he made it safely down the mountain to the next station.

At the next stop he learned the story. Murphy had been dead for some time. The villagers told the traveler that the day came when Murphy miscalculated his boulder trick. The bump jolted the coach the wrong way and he was catapulted off his seat over the edge of the cliff. A long fall to his death.



## **Just Give Me The Countryside.**

GRANBY'S GREEN ACRES was a comedy radio series that aired briefly for eight episodes in 1950. The episodes were written by Jay Sommers, Jack Harvey, and Dave Swift. Available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers at [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)

John Granby, city slicker, threw away his career as a banker and bought a farm, seeking a simpler and cheaper life. As anyone knows who grew up on a farm, life there is different but no simpler or easier than city life.

Gale Gordon played the part of John, with Bea Benaderet as his wife Martha. The producer Jay Sommers revived it in the 1960s as the television series GREEN ACRES, with better success. Benaderet kept up her association with Sommers by appearing as the innkeeper Kate Bradley on the affiliated series PETTICOAT JUNCTION. Gordon was not available as by then he was working with Lucille Ball.

“Granby Discovers Electricity” aired on 1950-07-17. John wanted to hear the baseball game on a portable radio but the batteries went dead in the ninth inning. Bases were loaded with two out.

Martha and their teenaged daughter Janice had been nagging John to put in electricity for the farm. In 1950, that wasn't unusual. It was just before my time (born 1955) that my mother's grandparents got electricity for their homestead. I remember the farmhouse. Electric lights but a wood stove and coal furnace.

The Granby women wanted appliances and other nice things. John was adamant that the farm should pay for itself before spending the money to bring in electricity. He milked the cow Bossy by hand.

He lost the battle. To pay the cost of electrification, he decided to sell the cow. She was dry anyway. He thought it would cost \$150 to electrify the farm. Call it \$2,000 in today's money. Today a milk cow sells for about \$3,000. I would be surprised if electricity could be brought into a farm for less than that. The relative costs don't seem to have changed much.

John offered the cow to a local dairyman named Kimball, and learned he used electric milking machines like every other farmer. In fact, everything on the farm was electrified, which convinced John that he should do the same for his

farm. Instead of selling the cow, John bought Kimball's milking machinery.

Notwithstanding that, John decided to save money by wiring the farm himself instead of paying an electrician. The possibilities for slapstick were endless and indeed were fully exploited. The accidents on the ladder were a given.

Finally the house and barn were wired. The power company crew arrived and rendered their bill of \$147 for installing the line. John borrowed the money from Kimball.

“Granby Lays An Egg” aired 1950-07-31 The episode began with John Granby trying to settle the monthly accounts of the farm despite constant interruptions from Martha and Janice.

A sea of red ink, and not just figuratively, because in those days the books were kept by hand. The problem was that it was July and the crop wouldn't be harvested and sold for a couple of months. In the meantime, there was no income.

Pause for digression. I grew up on a cattle ranch in west-central Alberta. My father was a livestock veterinarian. He thus had a steady income throughout the year until the calves were weaned in the autumn and could be sold at the auction mart. His brothers had taken over the family dairy farm near Calgary and likewise had a regular cash flow.

My mother's family, just north of the village of Eckville, ran cattle and grain crops. Their income came in one big lump in autumn with the harvest. As was a common practice with many such farmers, they took out promissory notes due and payable at the harvest.

On the next page is a scan of one such note signed by my great-grandfather August B. Koski. Notice that their surety was the livestock and crops in the field.



\$ <sup>290</sup> 200.00  
~~202.90~~

Due

4<sup>th</sup> Dec / 1918Eckville Alta 1<sup>st</sup> October 1918On 1<sup>st</sup> December / 1918

after date I promise to pay to

THE CANADIAN BANK OF COMMERCE at its office in Eckville the sum ofTwo hundred Dollars,with interest at the rate of Eight per cent. per annum as well after as before maturity. Value received.A. B. Koski

The undersigned promise and agree to give the above-named Bank security for the above note and any renewal thereof under Section 88 of the Bank Act covering all the

live stock and  
threshed grain

which are now or may be from time to time owned by the undersigned, and which are now or may be in

on on his farm

situated

S. 6<sup>th</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Dec 28 = Township 29 - Range 3 West of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meridian  
Sub 14 " 27 " 39 " 3 " 5<sup>th</sup> Meridian

or by way of Warehouse Receipts or Bills of Lading for the same or part thereof; and the Manager of the said Bank or the Acting Manager for the time being is hereby appointed the attorney of the undersigned, to give from time to time to the Bank the security

Canadian Bank  
of Commerce  
992  
Eckville, Alta.The borrower to  
sign here also }A. B. Koski



Meanwhile, back at the Granbys, John decided the Green Acres farm needed a steady source of income. His first choice was minks, not something that most farmers would consider. Martha and the local county agent Henry recommended chickens, since the eggs would provide a good cash flow.

Neighbour Kimball sold him a flock of 200 Rhode Island Red roosters. The complications can be imagined. John was indignant they wouldn't lay eggs. He was too proud to seek advice. He bought some eggs and put one under each rooster so they would get the idea. Didn't work.

Henry, who was dating Janice, stopped by. When John showed him the flock, Henry burst out laughing. After the facts of chicken life were explained to him, John decided to buy 200 hens, one for each rooster. That, of course, was just as ridiculous.

**Western Humour.**

Bud Abbott and Lou Costello were among the famous stand-up comedy teams of their time. They specialized in word play, where Abbott was the straight man trying to explain something to Costello. Their most famous act, considered one of the greatest comedy routines ever recorded, was "Who's On First?" Available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers at [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)

"The Wild West With Lynn Bari" aired on 1943-12-16. As many comedy shows did at the time, the first half was variety, a mixture of stand-up comedy and skits, an orchestra instrumental, and a singer. After the middle commercial, the guest star would appear for a longer sketch.

Lynn Bari is forgotten today but in the 1940s she was a middle-ranked leading lady in forgettable movies. For the Wild West sketch she adopted a Texas accent thick enough to slice with a knife. That was strange because she played an aboriginal woman named Cross-Eyed.

Lou Costello played Buffalo Bill, formerly Two-Gun Costello, formerly Six-Gun Costello. He had to change his name because the weight of six revolvers on his belt kept pulling his pants down. With his partner Buckskin Bud Abbott, they were riding the trail.

The western was sponsored by Meyer's Butcher Shop. Meyer kept barging in every few minutes for commercials. Chief Flatfoot introduced himself. Two-Gun was to marry his daughter Cross-Eyed. She preferred to marry the Bicarbonate Kid, also known as Wild Bill Hiccup, and formerly Hopalong Acidity.

The plot made no sense, lurching from one gag to another. The script suddenly cut off for a commercial and orchestral number. This was a common feature of Abbott and Costello's shows. When their writers ran out of ideas, they just cut off the script.

**THE AWL BIZ: PART 4**  
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA #71.1D, 434, and 483.]

The petroleum business isn't quite as dead as the greenies would have you believe. Electric vehicles only comprise 3% of vehicles on the road. Everything you eat, drink, wear, or possess was delivered by trucks burning diesel.

**Sharp Practice.**

The oil business, or the awl biz as my friends from Texas and Oklahoma say, was known from its earliest beginnings for fraud. Nick Carter, master detective who preceded Sherlock Holmes, was on the case.

"Nick Carter Strikes Oil" appeared in the 1912-12-23 issue of NICK CARTER STORIES (available as a free pdf from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)). Not really he didn't, but he did come out to Colorado to investigate.



A farmer Hank Low had sold what he thought was worthless land to sharpies who then turned about to drill for oil. Not long thereafter, one of the associates took a dive out a fourth floor window. Was it suicide or murder? Nick Carter would know, so a telegram was sent.

Between snipers firing at him in the mountain passes and a panther jumping him, Carter got the impression he wasn't liked by man or beast. Since his career would last another five or six decades, there wasn't any suspense about him solving the case.

The joke was on the oil speculators. They had misjudged the geology and discovered the deposit was further afield. This error was remedied by changing the land title by forgery and moving the boundary posts to take in the actual oil field. Trouble was, Carter was on the case and stymied them in the act of moving the posts.

THE UNEXPECTED was a syndicated anthology radio series that aired in 1947 and 1948, and repeated in subsequent years by stations who bought the series at a later date. The 15-minute episodes are available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers Website at [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary) The stories were like THE WHISTLER, with a twist at the end.

"The Tulip Garden" aired on 1947-12-17, and was written by Robert Lippert and Frank Burt. The narrator Gordon was approached by an oilman named Marshall who said he knew there was oil on his land. For a \$10,000 payment by Gordon, they would drill on the land and pay him a royalty on any oil pumped.

Whoa there! I almost stopped listening at that moment. I happen to know quite a bit about oil rights because I get a few hundred dollars in royalties each month as part of a family trust. My mother's family owns mineral rights in west central Alberta where her grandparents homesteaded.

In those days, the only mineral rights the federal government kept (Alberta didn't exist then; it was still part of the Northwest Territories) were coal, precious metals, and valuable stone (ex. diamonds or jade). We no longer own the farm but mineral rights are separate from the land title, so we get the oil money, not the current land owner.

Mineral rights owners lease oil and natural gas rights to petroleum companies, as did my ancestors. They never pay a fee to the companies to drill. That risk was always assumed by the drillers, and I know the same situation exists in the USA. Gordon should not have put up cash for the drilling.

Gordon was digging in his tulip garden when his lawyer brother-in-law Oscar visited, having heard about the deal. He berated Gordon for being so stupid to fall for the fraud, and said it was a good thing the land title was in June's name. (Wife of Gordon, sister of Oscar.)

The contract was legal and rigid, so Gordon lured Marshall to his house. The matter was resolved with a gunshot. Gordon decided to bury Marshall in the tulip garden. June came home at an inopportune moment, but Gordon managed the burial without her knowing.

Gordon was a weak-willed man and his guilt made him a nervous wreck. Marshall's disappearance was no surprise to anyone, particularly after the District Attorney announced they were looking to arrest him.

Oscar let Gordon in on another secret. June was going have a sprinkler system installed as a surprise. Gordon managed to change her plans into pouring a concrete slab atop the tulip bed for a barbecue. From there he convinced June to sell the house and relocate.

After the final commercial, the twist was made. Gordon and June sold the house and moved elsewhere. Oscar handled the sale and was smart enough to separate the mineral rights from the land title.

Sometime later the good news arrived from him. A different and legitimate oil company had leased the rights. Oscar said they were going to spud the well where the tulip garden used to be.

### **The Biter Bit.**

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](http://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.

“A Night In A Harem” aired on 1952-06-06, about the same time that western petroleum companies were waking up to the potential of oil fields in all those small Arabian emirates. Harry Lime was more interested in the potential of 10% commissions on \$100 million oilfield concessions.

He was in Paris where he tried to scam an American oilman Sam Kordak. Unfortunately for Lime, the oil business puts an edge on its practioners. He didn’t get to first base with Kordak. However, Kordak was a good ole boy, Stetson and all. He was a jovial man who tagged along with Lime as an observer.

Having been stymied at the starting line (if I may mix sports metaphors), Lime turned his attention to the flighty emirate Princess Lylah, who buzzed around the world from resort to posh hotel to smart set hangout. She was the daughter of the Sultan of Qualibad.

Lime got in on her good side, when he could keep up with her, and let her know he was interested in brokering the sale of Qualibad’s oil field. His presence got his enemies into the contest, one of whom successfully bypassed him and bought a \$10 million option on the fields.

Lime was subsequently mortified to learn from Kordak that Qualibad was one of the few places in the Middle East that had no oil. Lylah and her father knew that. They used Lime as a stalking horse to flush out other suckers, the ones who had real money.

As Kordak said, Lylah and her father had to live too. For \$10 million and no guarantees about any oil, they’d get by.

**HYPERCUBIC LITERATURE**

by Dale Speirs

TESSERACTS was an annual series of anthologized Canadian speculative fiction. Volume 22 was issued in 2019 but I haven’t heard of any subsequent volumes. The pandemic, no doubt.

I haven’t reviewed them all. Volumes 5, 6, 7, and 8 were reviewed in OPUNTIA’s #31.1, 37.1, 43.1A, and 44.1A, respectively. Volume Q (for translated Québec fiction) was reviewed in #31.1 of this zine.

Volume 11 was issued in 2007 and edited by Cory Doctorow and Holly Phillips. I won’t review all 24 stories but here are a couple.

“Vampires Of The Rockies” by Randy McCharles will be funnier to those who know Banff National Park, adjacent to the Calgary district. Instead of bison paddocks for tourists to gawk at, there were vampire paddocks. The hero complained because everything was overpriced, which I can vouch for in the real BNP. Think Vail, Colorado, or Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Banff is like that.

The plot revolved around Bram and Mina, who wanted to see a real vampire in the wild. Unfortunately they had been hunted almost to extinction by pioneer settlers. Bram had to run the gauntlet of concession operators and park officials in his search for a real vampire. A funny story about stalking the wild ones.

“Persephone’s Library” by Khria Deefholts was a fantasy where something, God perhaps, had physically destroyed Earth except for one wedge, then preserved the remaining piece as is.

For the humans who survived, this was God’s mercy, or perhaps his punishment, or perhaps both. Falling off the edge of the world was the most popular form of suicide. The question was whether the jumpers really did die or were they transformed into a different world.

TESSERACTS SEVENTEEN (2013) contained 29 stories and was edited by Colleen Anderson and Steve Vernon. Picking one story to start with, “Hereinafter Referred To As The Ghost” by Mark Leslie was about the job hunting troubles of a ghost named Patrick Collins. He had been fired from his last job because his hauntings weren’t up to contract specifications. The employment agency listened to his tale of woe and gave him another chance.



Collins was slipping with age, so like many elderly men he was put out to pasture on a simpler job, playing the ghost of a victim of the 1917 Halifax explosion. If you’ve ever made the rounds looking for work, you’ll sympathize with this story.

“Everybody Wins” by Rachel Cooper began with hovering small spheres appearing everywhere around the world, offering big prizes if the contestant could touch them. They made the contest moderately difficult, say a Level 3 in a video game but ensured that everyone won.

The winners received a receipt for a prize to be delivered in 60 days. The spheres managed to get most of Earth’s population. Sixty days later, the winners began dying.

WRESTLING WITH GODS: TESSERACTS EIGHTEEN (2015) had 25 stories and was edited by Liana Kerzner and Jerome Stueart. The theme was speculative theology, as might be guessed from the title.

The first story was “Mecha-Jesus” by Derwin Mak, set in a world where androids and automation had displaced most human workers. In Japan, a priest Father Xavier Ito investigated a cult based on an android Jesus. The cult, like all Japanese of that time, were Shinto, but the village recognized the value of a tourist attraction.

Anti-android protestors arrived and began attacking androids. Mecha-Jesus saved its cohorts and dispelled the attackers. This would make an interesting movie but no Hollywood studio would produce it.

“The Harsh Light Of Morning” by David Jon Fuller will be read by Canadians in a much different manner today than in 2015. The basic plot was a vampire woman who lived in an aboriginal residential school in Saskatchewan. One of her former students was now a Mountie seeking revenge.

The story did not end well for either of them. My non-Canadian readers should Google “Canada residential school children” to better understand this story.

“Summon The Sun” by Carla Richards was an amusing story. A part-time barista named Marin was a dabbler in witchcraft. She managed to summon the sun god Ra. Trying to teach English to an ancient Egyptian wasn’t easy.

With only one acolyte he had no powers, so Marin’s primary task was to get believers via Twitter and Facebook. She was too successful. The planet began to warm up in a hurry and baked under the influence of Ra. Marin couldn’t get rid of Ra so she counterprogrammed him by summoning Ullr, the Norse god of snow.

SUPERHERO UNIVERSE: TESSERACTS NINETEEN (2016) had 25 stories and was edited by Claude Lalumiere and Mark Shainblum. The latter editor is best remembered in Canada as the co-creator of the Northguard comic book series. (See OPUNTIA #499, pages 17 to 18 for a brief review of Canadian comics history.)

“Diary Of A Teenage Grizzly” by Patrick T. Goddard was about the travails of a Calgary teenager attending superhero classes and trying to live a normal life. As he hit puberty, he began transforming into Grizzly whenever he got angry. That made for a difficult adolescence.

“The Island Way” by Mary Pletsh and Dylan Blacquiere illustrated how forming a league of superheroes in Canada had unique problems. Our country is a confederation, not a unitary federal state. This means the provincial premiers have equal status with the federal prime minister.

Any Canadian league would therefore have to have one superhero from each province. True North, the leader, was from Ontario. Quebec’s superhero was a separatist. The Inuit of Nunavut didn’t want to know the aboriginals of the rest of Canada.

Prince Edward Island, a province by historical accident despite only being the size of a Saskatchewan cattle ranch, had trouble finding a superhero within its small population.

“Crusher And Typhoon” by Brent Nichols was an alternative history where the transcontinental railroad was abandoned unfinished because airships arrived in quantity. The airships stole all the passenger traffic and much of the freight.

The tracks had been laid into the Rockies when construction halted. The laid-off workers were left roaming British Columbia looking for something to do. One of them went into the superhero business, clearing out evil from Kicking Horse Pass to Vancouver. He used an exoskeleton suit and had a Chinese sidekick.



COMPOSTELA: TESSERACTS TWENTY (2017) was edited by Spider Robinson and James Alan Gardner. There were 37 stories but many were short-shorts, which jacked up the story count but not the pages.

Leading off was a short-short, “The Tell” by Roxanne Gregory, which started out as an aboriginal story told by an Elder. She began with the Great Dying of the indigenous peoples from smallpox and other diseases which raced ahead of the Europeans and depopulated the Americas.

The story seemed to be about ancient legends but then veered into the battle between the Great Oogle and Little Bing, which ended inconclusively. In the aftermath, the Vi-rushes infected the survivors.

Initially this story read with mild amusement but became darker. The ending took another abrupt turn when the Elder chastised a listening child for being politically incorrect, then invoked cancel culture.

“Intervention” by Brent Nichols was about a games player named Pace in a world where computer games were completely immersive. Not just holodeck style but Matrix style.

Trouble was, those addicted to living inside such games let their real bodies go to ruin from thirst and starvation since they couldn’t feel them while inside the game.

There was more to the games than that though. Trollers and cancellers could get an account suspended, leaving the gamer floating in black emptiness. The only escape was to hit the exit button, but that brought the gamer out into the real world where he didn’t want to be.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Planets.

Stern, J.C., et al (2022) **Organic carbon concentrations in 3.5-billion-year-old lacustrine mudstones of Mars.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2201139119 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *This work presents the first quantification of bulk organic carbon in Mars surface sedimentary rocks, enabled by a stepped combustion experiment performed by the Curiosity Rover in Gale crater, Mars.*

*The mudstone sample analyzed by Curiosity represents a previously habitable lacustrine environment and a depositional environment favorable for preservation of organics formed in situ and/or transported from a wide catchment area.*

*The Sample Analysis at Mars instrument stepped combustion experiment on a Yellowknife Bay mudstone at Gale crater, Mars revealed the presence of organic carbon of Martian and meteoritic origins.*

*The combustion experiment was designed to access refractory organic carbon in Mars surface sediments by heating samples in the presence of oxygen to combust carbon to CO<sub>2</sub>.*

*The source of high temperature organic carbon cannot be definitively confirmed by isotopic composition, which is consistent with macromolecular organic carbon of igneous origin, meteoritic infall, or diagenetically altered biomass, or a combination of these.*

*If from allochthonous deposition, organic carbon could have supported both prebiotic organic chemistry and heterotrophic metabolism at Gale crater, Mars, at ~3.5 gigayears ago.*



**Paleobiology.**

Feng, X., et al (2022) **Resilience of infaunal ecosystems during the Early Triassic greenhouse Earth.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 8:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abo0597 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *The Permian-Triassic mass extinction severely depleted biodiversity, primarily observed in the body fossil of well-skeletonized animals. Understanding how whole ecosystems were affected and rebuilt following the crisis requires evidence from both skeletonized and soft-bodied animals.*

*The best comprehensive information on soft-bodied animals comes from ichnofossils. We analyzed abundant trace fossils from 26 sections across the Permian-Triassic boundary in China and report key metrics of ichnodiversity, ichnodisparity, ecospace utilization, and ecosystem engineering.*

*We find that infaunal ecologic structure was well established in the early Smithian. Decoupling of diversity between deposit feeders and suspension feeders in carbonate ramp-platform settings implies that an effect of trophic group amensalism could have delayed the recovery of non-motile, suspension-feeding epifauna in the Early Triassic.*

*This differential reaction of infaunal ecosystems to variable environmental controls thus played a substantial but heretofore little appreciated evolutionary and ecologic role in the overall recovery in the hot Early Triassic ocean.*

[Images are from this paper.]



**Fig. 5. Reconstruction of marine ecosystems before and after the P-Tr mass extinction in China.** (A) Pre-extinction marine ecosystem in the latest Permian, showing diverse nekton, benthic animals, and burrowing animals. (B) Marine ecosystem in early Griesbachian (early Induan) after the mass extinction, showing only few nekton, simple horizontal burrows, and the development of microbialites. (C) Marine ecosystem in late Griesbachian, showing the flourishing of burrowing animals in some habitats. (D) Marine ecosystem in Dienerian, which is similar to early Griesbachian. (E) Marine ecosystem in Smithian, showing more diverse nekton and motile benthic animals, and a well-established infaunal ecologic structure. (F) Marine ecosystem in Spathian, which is similar to Smithian but with the emergence of reptiles. The reconstruction is largely based on the carbonate ramp environment. The artistic illustrations were designed by authors X.F., Z.-Q.C., and M.J.B. and drawn by Y. Jiang, who is a graduate student of art.



Tian, Q., et al (2022) **Ultrastructure reveals ancestral vertebrate pharyngeal skeleton in yunnanozoans.** SCIENCE 377:doi.org/10.1126/science.abm2708

Authors’ abstract: *Yunnanozoans are Cambrian animals with a taxonomic position that has long been debated with regard to whether they are ancestral chordates.*

*We use new imaging approaches on new yunnanozoan specimens and found evidence that their branchial arches are composed of cartilage within an extracellular matrix of microfibrils.*

*This combination of tissue types has been considered vertebrate specific, suggesting that this group of animals are indeed basal vertebrates. Pharyngeal arches are a key innovation that likely contributed to the evolution of the jaws and braincase of vertebrates.*

*It has long been hypothesized that the pharyngeal (branchial) arch evolved from an unjointed cartilaginous rod in vertebrate ancestors such as that in the non-vertebrate chordate amphioxus, but whether such ancestral anatomy existed remains unknown.*

*The pharyngeal skeleton of controversial Cambrian animals called yunnanozoans may contain the oldest fossil evidence constraining the early evolution of the arches, yet its correlation with that of vertebrates is still disputed.*

*By examining additional specimens in previously unexplored techniques (for example, x-ray microtomography, scanning and transmission electron microscopy, and energy dispersive spectrometry element mapping), we found evidence that yunnanozoan branchial arches consist of cellular cartilage with an extracellular matrix dominated by microfibrils, a feature hitherto considered specific to vertebrates.*

*Our phylogenetic analysis provides further support that yunnanozoans are stem vertebrates.*

**Dinosaurs.**

Olsen, P., et al (2022) **Arctic ice and the ecological rise of the dinosaurs.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 8:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abo6342 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Abundant lake ice-rafted debris in Late Triassic and earliest Jurassic strata of the Junggar Basin of northwestern China (paleolatitude ~71°N) indicates that freezing winter temperatures typified the forested Arctic, despite a persistence of extremely high levels of atmospheric P<sub>CO2</sub> (partial pressure of CO<sub>2</sub>).*

*Phylogenetic bracket analysis shows that non-avian dinosaurs were primitively insulated, enabling them to access rich deciduous and evergreen Arctic vegetation, even under freezing winter conditions.*

*Transient but intense volcanic winters associated with massive eruptions and lowered light levels led to the end-Triassic mass extinction (201.6 megayears ago) on land, decimating all medium- to large-sized non-dinosaurian, non-insulated continental reptiles.*

*In contrast, insulated dinosaurs were already well adapted to cold temperatures, and not only survived but also underwent a rapid adaptive radiation and ecological expansion in the Jurassic, taking over regions formerly dominated by large non-insulated reptiles.*

**Botany.**

Dancák, M., et al (2022) **First record of functional underground traps in a pitcher plant: *Nepenthes pudica* (Nepenthaceae), a new species from North Kalimantan, Borneo.** PHYTOKEYS 201:doi.org/10.3897/phytokeys.201.82872 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Nepenthes pudica, a new species from North Kalimantan, Indonesia, is described and illustrated. The species belongs to the N. hirsuta group but exhibits some characters that are unique within the group or even within the genus. Above all, it produces underground, achlorophyllous shoots with well-developed, ventricose lower pitchers that form in soil cavities or directly in the soil. No lower pitchers are formed above ground.*



The main part of its prey are ants, besides other litter- and soil-inhabiting species of invertebrates. A number of infaunal species were found in both aerial and underground pitchers, mainly Diptera and nematodes.

*Nepenthes pudica* is known only from a few neighbouring localities in the Mentarang Hulu district of North Kalimantan, where it grows on ridge tops at an elevation of 1,100 to 1,300 metres. Its discovery underlines the natural richness of Borneo's rainforest and the necessity to preserve this important ecosystem with its enormous and still undiscovered biodiversity.

[Images are from this paper.]



**Figure 6.** *Nepenthes* sp. with excavated underground traps (bottom left) from a locality in the Berau region of East Kalimantan. Photograph by M.R. Golos.

**Human Prehistory.**

Granger, D.E., et al (2022) **Cosmogenic nuclide dating of *Australopithecus* at Sterkfontein, South Africa.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2123516111 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Australopithecus* fossils from the richest hominin-bearing deposit (Member 4) at Sterkfontein in South Africa are considerably older than previously argued by some and are contemporary with *Australopithecus afarensis* in East Africa.

*Our dates demonstrate the limitations of the widely accepted concept that Australopithecus africanus, which is well represented at Sterkfontein, descended from A. afarensis.*

*The contemporaneity of the two species now suggests that a more complex family tree prevailed early in the human evolutionary process.*

*The dates highlight the limitations of faunal age estimates previously relied upon for the South African sites. They further demonstrate the importance of detailed stratigraphic analysis in assessments of accurate dating of the karst cave sites in South Africa, which are stratigraphically highly complex.*

*Sterkfontein is the most prolific single source of Australopithecus fossils, the vast majority of which were recovered from Member 4, a cave breccia now exposed by erosion and weathering at the landscape surface.*

*A few other Australopithecus fossils, including the StW573 skeleton, come from subterranean deposits. Here, we report a cosmogenic nuclide isochron burial date of  $3.41 \pm 0.11$  million years (My) within the lower middle part of Member 4, and simple burial dates of  $3.49 \pm 0.19$  My in the upper middle part of Member 4 and  $3.61 \pm 0.09$  My in Jacovec Cavern.*

*Together with a previously published isochron burial date of  $3.67 \pm 0.16$  My for StW 573, these results place nearly the entire Australopithecus assemblage at Sterkfontein in the mid-Pliocene, contemporaneous with Australopithecus afarensis in East Africa.*



*Our ages for the fossil-bearing breccia in Member 4 are considerably older than the previous ages of ca. 2.1 to 2.6 My interpreted from flowstones associated with the same deposit. We show that these previously dated flowstones are stratigraphically intrusive within Member 4 and that they therefore underestimate the true age of the fossils.*

**Modern Humans.**

Choshen-Hillel, S., et al (2022) **Physicians prescribe fewer analgesics during night shifts than day shifts.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2200047119

*Authors’ abstract: Adequate pain management is critical for patient health and well-being. Here we use a laboratory based experiment and an analysis of archival data over 7 years from Israeli and US hospitals to test the effects of night shifts on pain management. We show robust evidence that physicians’ pain management decisions are impaired during night shifts.*

*We argue that even medical experts, who try to provide the best care for their patients, are susceptible to the effects of night shifts. Our findings highlight the need to implement more structured pain management guidelines in hospitals and seek improved physician working schedules.*

*Adequate pain management is one of the biggest challenges of the modern healthcare system. Physician perception of patient subjective pain, which is crucial to pain management, is susceptible to a host of potential biases. Here we explore the timing of physicians’ work as a previously unrecognized source of systematic bias in pain management.*

*We hypothesized that during night shifts, sleep deprivation, fatigue, and stress would reduce physicians’ empathy for others’ pain, leading to under-prescription of analgesics for patient pain relief. In study 1, 67 resident physicians, either following a night shift or not, performed empathy for pain assessment tasks and simulated patient scenarios in laboratory conditions.*

*As predicted, following a night shift, physicians showed reduced empathy for pain. In study 2, we explored this phenomenon in medical decisions in the field. We analyzed three emergency department data sets from Israel and the United States that included discharge notes of patients arriving with pain complaints during 2013 to 2020 (n = 13,482).*

*Across all datasets, physicians were less likely to prescribe an analgesic during night shifts (compared to daytime shifts) and prescribed fewer analgesics than generally recommended by the World Health Organization.*

*This effect remained significant after adjusting for patient, physician, type of complaint, and emergency department characteristics. Under-prescription for pain during night shifts was particularly prominent for opioids. We conclude that night shift work is an important and previously unrecognized source of bias in pain management, likely stemming from impaired perception of pain.*

Diamantopoulou, Z., et al (2022) **The metastatic spread of breast cancer accelerates during sleep.** NATURE 607:156-162

*Authors’ abstract: The metastatic spread of cancer is achieved by the haematogenous dissemination of circulating tumour cells (CTCs). Generally, however, the temporal dynamics that dictate the generation of metastasis-competent CTCs are largely uncharacterized, and it is often assumed that CTCs are constantly shed from growing tumours or are shed as a consequence of mechanical insults.*

*Here we observe a striking and unexpected pattern of CTC generation dynamics in both patients with breast cancer and mouse models, highlighting that most spontaneous CTC intravasation events occur during sleep.*

*Further, we demonstrate that rest-phase CTCs are highly prone to metastasize, whereas CTCs generated during the active phase are devoid of metastatic ability. Mechanistically, single-cell RNA sequencing analysis of CTCs reveals a marked up-regulation of mitotic genes exclusively during the rest phase in both patients and mouse models, enabling metastasis proficiency.*

*Systemically, we find that key circadian rhythm hormones such as melatonin, testosterone, and glucocorticoids dictate CTC generation dynamics, and as a consequence, that insulin directly promotes tumour cell proliferation in vivo, yet in a time-dependent manner.*

*Thus, the spontaneous generation of CTCs with a high proclivity to metastasize does not occur continuously, but it is concentrated within the rest phase of the affected individual, providing a new rationale for time-controlled interrogation and treatment of metastasis-prone cancers.*



**Climate Change.**

Paxman, G.J.G., et al (2022) **Total isostatic response to the complete unloading of the Greenland and Antarctic Ice Sheets.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 12:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-15440-y (available as a free pdf)

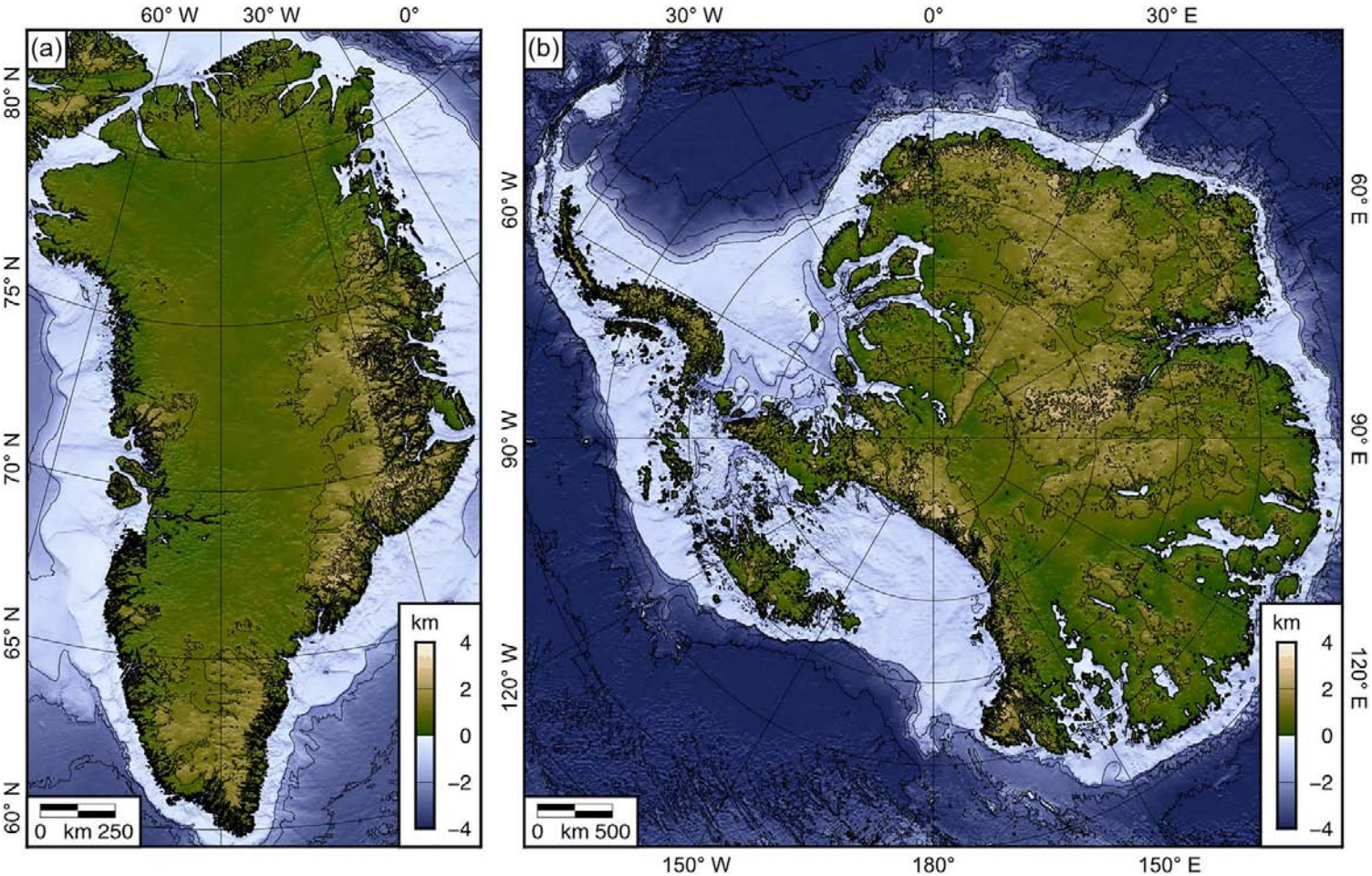
Authors’ abstract: *The land surface beneath the Greenland and Antarctic Ice Sheets is isostatically suppressed by the mass of the overlying ice. Accurate computation of the land elevation in the absence of ice is important when considering, for example, regional geodynamics, geomorphology, and ice sheet behaviour.*

*Here, we use contemporary compilations of ice thickness and lithospheric effective elastic thickness to calculate the fully re-equilibrated isostatic response of the solid Earth to the complete removal of the Greenland and Antarctic Ice Sheets.*

*We use an elastic plate flexure model to compute the isostatic response to the unloading of the modern ice sheet loads, and a self-gravitating viscoelastic Earth model to make an adjustment for the remaining isostatic disequilibrium driven by ice mass loss since the Last Glacial Maximum.*

*Feedbacks arising from water loading in areas situated below sea level after ice sheet removal are also taken into account. In addition, we quantify the uncertainties in the total isostatic response associated with a range of elastic and viscoelastic Earth properties.*

*We find that the maximum change in bed elevation following full re-equilibration occurs over the centre of the landmasses and is +783 metres in Greenland and +936 metres in Antarctica. By contrast, areas around the ice margins experience up to 123 metres of lowering due to a combination of sea level rise, peripheral bulge collapse, and water loading.*



[Images are from this paper and show what Greenland and Antarctica would look like if all the ice melted away.]



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: George Phillies 2022-06-27  
Worcester, Massachusetts

[Re: Calgary Philatelic Society centennial] A centennial is impressive. Worcester just celebrated its tercentennial, but that is a rare event.

[The city of Calgary was founded in 1875, so we’re just a spring chicken compared to eastern cities.]

The N3F [National Fantasy Fan Federation] is only 81, not a hundred years old, but we are not local.

[National organizations do have more longevity. The Royal Philatelic Society of Canada was founded in 1919, and the American Philatelic Society in 1886.]

FREE STUFF ONLINE

You will have noticed that I provide sources for the pdfs and mp3s reviewed in this zine. Here is a summary of some good resources, all of which are free.

In particular, the “Seen In The Literature” column cites only peer-reviewed papers. For topics such as COVID-19 or social media effects, more people should be reading these papers instead of blogs where commentators confuse their opinions as being facts.

For scientific papers for which free pdfs are available, the easiest method is to Google either the title of the paper or its digital object identifier, the phrase beginning with doi.org. Most papers are behind a paywall, so unless you have access to a university library computer, you can only get the abstract. However, the abstract is often enough to understand the gist of the article.

For zines, [www.efanzines.com](http://www.efanzines.com) provides current pdf zines as well as some older ones. A club called Fanac at [www.fanac.org](http://www.fanac.org) does the reverse; they provide thousands of old zines from the 1930s to date, with a few current zines. Both sites have a free email notification service you can subscribe to.

The Old Time Radio Researchers have thousands of old-time radio shows (1930s to 1950s) covering all the genres, such as comedy, science fiction, fantasy, and mystery. Visit [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary).

They also publish a bulletin OLD RADIO TIMES, available at [www.otrr.org/?c=times](http://www.otrr.org/?c=times), with a free email notification service. Don’t pay money for audio books and listen to a droning voice when you can listen for free to full-cast shows such as Jack Benny or Inner Sanctum from the OTRR.

For pulp fiction magazines from all genres, visit [www.archive.org/details/pulpmagazinearchive?&sort=-downloads&page=2](http://www.archive.org/details/pulpmagazinearchive?&sort=-downloads&page=2) Books in the public domain are free from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)