

# OPUNTIA 530





Stampede Rodeo 2022

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YEEHAWING AROUND COWTOWN

2022-07-08 to -17

photos by Dale Speirs

When last we left Calgary in the previous issue of this zine, I had just enjoyed the Stampede parade. The whole city gets involved, with hundreds of pancake breakfasts and barbecues. Every band puts aside their regular music and goes western. Office workers who can't tell the difference between a steer and a cow put on jeans and cowboy hats.

I took the cover photograph while waiting in line to enter the grounds. The wait wasn't as bad as the photo might suggest. I was inside the gates about five minutes after I snapped the shot. The holdup was for people carrying backpacks and purses, as security checked them thoroughly. I had no impedimenta, so the guards waved me through.



I took these licence plate photos during the past year and saved them for this issue.



Food For Yeehawing.



Free pancake breakfasts are an old tradition of the Stampede.

Shown here was one such flapjack kiosk on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall in the downtown core.







Chuck wagons were cook wagons on the old-time ranches.

The racing wagons are still adapted for pancake breakfasts off the track. Seen in Olympic Plaza.





**Tribal Traffic.**



On Centre Street South in front of the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

**Dance Dance Yeehaw.**

Lots of events downtown throughout the Stampede. These line dancers performed in the Bow Valley Square skyscraper atrium.







Out on the Stephen Avenue mall, it was gentlemen left and ladies to the right.

## And So To The Big Show.

The ranch I grew up on was officially called CJS Charolais, a combination of my father's initials and the breed of cattle he kept. Charolais are pure white or cream coloured beef cattle. This cow-calf combination on display in the Stampede barns was a perfect example of the breed.





I wish we had one of these when I was growing up. I used to joke about our tractor that it wasn't the first one Cockshutt ever built but it came off the assembly line the same day.



**Elbow River Camp.**

Calgary is within Treaty 7 land, basically Alberta south of the Trans-Canada Highway plus the Bow River valley into the mountains. The treaty was signed in 1877 with the Blackfoot Confederacy, Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina.

The Confederacy have three tribes with separate Reserves: Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai. The Nakoda have three tribes and Reserves in the mountains adjacent to Calgary. The Tsuut'ina have a single Reserve that originally was far out in the country to the southwest of Calgary, but the city has sprawled out and is now contiguous on two sides.

Reserves, spelt with a capital R, are the lands of aboriginal tribes. In Canada, a reservation is something you make at a hotel or restaurant.

The Treaty 7 tribes participated in every Stampede since the first event in 1912. They have their own section on the rodeo grounds, known as Elbow River Camp. The grounds straddle the Elbow River, and the camp is on the east bank.



The Elbow River looking upstream from the bridge that connects the two sides of the Stampede grounds.







A pow-wow demonstration. Not a full pow-wow, which lasts a weekend and of which there are many throughout western Canada.





Part of the Midway.





Vintage tractor pull. The sled has a skid under the front. As the tractor pulls the sled, the heavy box at the back moves forward and increases the drag on the skid until the tractor stalls. This was the featherweight class of tractors.







The weight box didn't have to move very far to stall this little fellow.

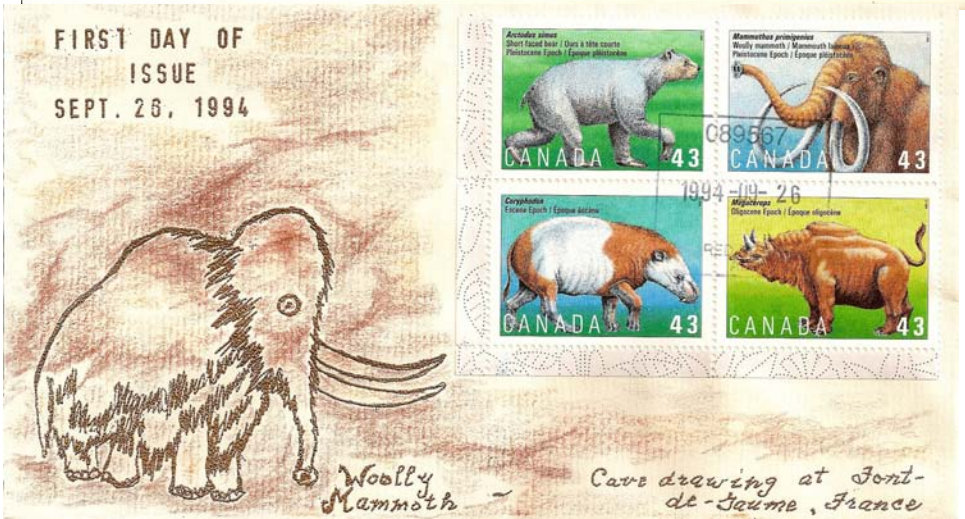


MAIL ART OF BETTY SPEIRS: PART 13

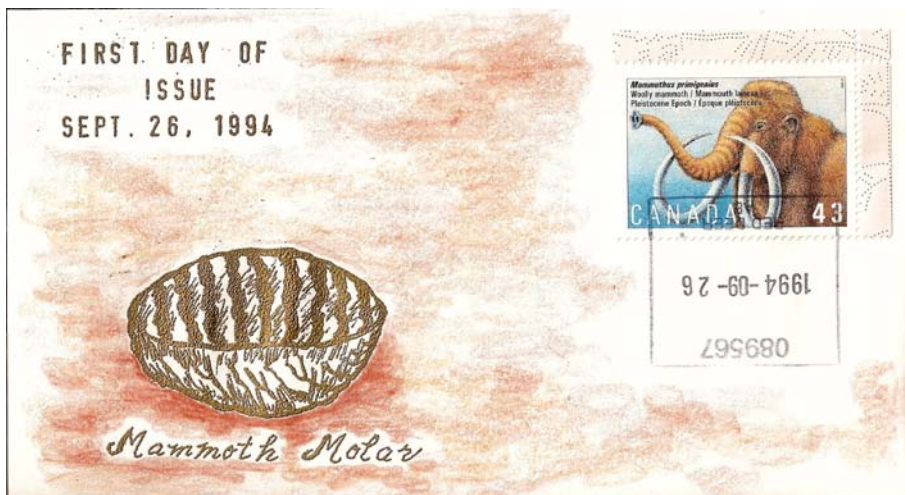
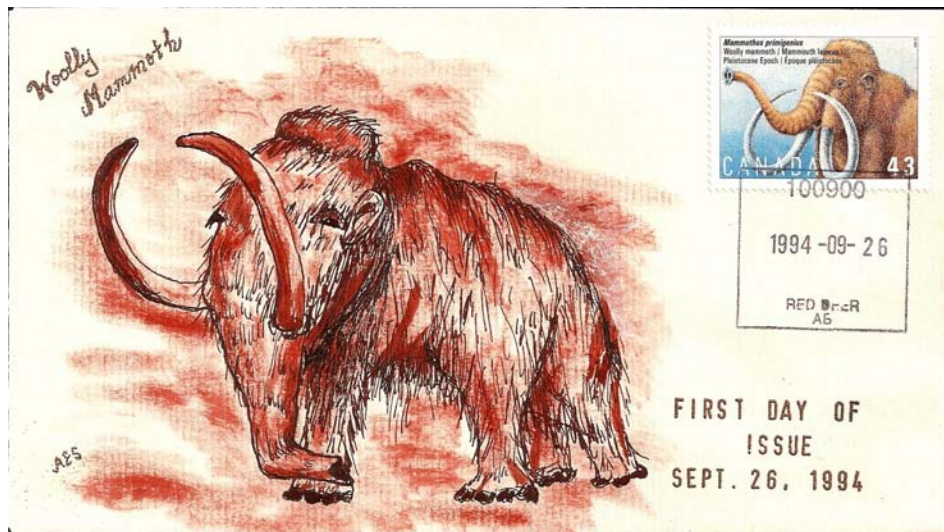
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 12 appeared in OPUNTIA's #511, 514, 517, 519, 521, 523 to 529.]

Not too much mail art by Betty on aboriginal themes. Mammoths were given the coup de grace by the first humans, although climate change was affecting them anyway.







## VANISHED WORLDS: PART 7

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 6 appeared in OPUNTIA's #320, 338, 403, 408, 436, and 483.]

### From The Bargain Bin.

PLANET OF THE DINOSAURS was a 1977 movie written by Ralph Lucas and Jim Aupperle. I found this in a bargain bin back when QR codes were only used for advertising, not proof of vaccination. The plot was about a spaceship crashing on a planet with no hope of rescue. The survivors had to adapt to the dinosaurian fauna and begin a colony of humans.

This was a colour film well photographed and with surprisingly good stop-motion SFX. The dinosaurs were competently animated with nary a rubber suit in sight. In a movie such as this, the SFX are critical to override the other faults.

The main fault was that during encounters with dinosaurs, the women would take about five steps on level ground running away from the beasts, trip over their own feet, then lie on their backs screaming their heads off until one of the men rescued them from the advancing monster.

Even for a 1950s movie those scenes were overdone, much less the 1970s. Not just a few times in this movie, but constantly the women were screamers. They were spaceship officers, so it was implausible they would be such helpless ninnies.

The movie was padded out with shots of the survivors trudging up and down the famous Vasquez Rocks of Los Angeles. This normally would have slowed the pace of the film intolerably. However, the rocks have been used in so many films and television series, notably the Star Trek franchise, that they are instantly recognizable around the world.

Watching the rock formations, one could easily identify specific strata where Kirk and company had boldly gone before. The strata were like old friends. Trekkies could use this movie for a party game, with guests shouting out the names of episodes which used the same shots. Make it a drinking game and no one will be sober by the end of the movie. Alas, I am a teetotaler.



The dinosaurs were a mixture of species from the Triassic to the Cretaceous. They were well done and were the saving grace of this movie. My advice is to fast-forward after the spaceship sinks into the lake (also a good SFX) and just watch the dinosaur scenes.

DINOSAUR WORLD, written by Seymour Wu and Chris Hoyt, was a 2020 movie which went straight to the bargain bin. Even Rotten Tomatoes hadn't yet a single review when I Googled the movie in early June 2022. This was basically a screen capture of a video game with chop-socky and dinosaurs.

The actors were mostly Chinese with a few Caucasians. Strangely, the location scenes were in Oklahoma. The Chinese dialogue was dubbed into English. Supposedly there were English subtitles but I couldn't get them to work on my device.

The plot was about a super-immersive video game contest with twenty or so competitors from around the world. Last one standing won the multi-million dollar prize. The competitors were inserted into a forest inhabited by assorted dinosaurs, mostly carnivorous. They had to survive not only the dinosaurs but each other, as the rules permitted homicide.

The SFX were good though, although the volcano was the usual gasoline fire eruption. Nonetheless the dinosaurs were realistic and provided the main saving grace of the movie.

The actors were wooden performers. The martial arts used against the dinosaurs were absolutely pathetic. A karate chop on the back of a raptor would not bring it down, if indeed the beast even noticed.

The extras were easily identifiable because whenever a dinosaur attacked them, they just stood there screaming until chomped. Natural selection in action.

The writers never missed a cliché from any war scene or action-adventure movie you've ever seen. That is why we have fast-forward buttons. Characters always ran away from carnosaurs in straight lines, never a zig-zag. They fell down on level clear ground, then lay on their backs screaming as the dinosaur moved in.

Another drinking game movie. Chug-a-lug whenever some idiot trips over his own feet, then lies there screaming instead of getting up and running.

**Big Mammals.**

“After King Kong Fell” (1973) by Philip Jose Farmer was a humorous piece about the practicalities of dealing with the body of a giant ape after it fell off the Empire State Building. That meant heavy cranes, biiiig semi-trailers to haul it away, an icehouse to store the corpse. Lawsuits everywhere of course.

This story has been reprinted numerous times. I saw it in THE BIG BOOK OF ADVENTURE STORIES (2011), an anthology edited by Otto Penzler.

**FOOD COZIES: PART 23**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 22 appeared in OPUNTIA's #432 to 434, 436, 438, 441, 442, 444, 447, 450, 454, 456 to 458, 460 to 462, 465, 475, 507, 512, and 524.]

Food cozies are about Miss Marples (or Jessica Fletchers) who operate some sort of food store, bakery, or café. They have a recipes appendix. A word of warning though. Never read a food cozy on an empty stomach, otherwise you will be ordering one of everything from Skip The Dishes.

**Café Ole!**

THE CALAMITY CAFÉ (2016) by Gayle Leeson (pseudonym of Gayle Trent) was the inaugural novel in a cozy series about Amy Flowers of Winter Garden, Virginia. She wanted her own café and offered to buy out her boss Lou Lou Holman, an ill-tempered battleaxe. The old biddy didn't survive past the first chapter.

Flowers became a Miss Marple before she even got started with a business. She was among the suspects. Holman's family were white trash but no hard feelings and they were still willing to sell the café to Flowers. Take the money and run was their attitude.



Flowers told her lawyer to plan her defense in case she was charged and simultaneously do the paperwork on the buyout. Other than the Holman family, a real estate developer was hassling Flowers to let him buy the place. She rebuffed him and moved into the café.

The next big excitement came with the discovery of stolen cash from an old bank robbery, hidden inside a wall. Holman had to have known of it, given two of her menfolk were suspects in the holdup. Notwithstanding all the trouble and strife, Lou’s Joint became Down South Café, and Flowers was in business.

Like all Miss Marples, she had a confrontation with the killer, who was acting out on a family feud plus greed for the cash. Flowers survived and so did the Deep South Café.

From there to the recipes appendix, guaranteed to give you constipation. First was Meat Loaf, then Oatmeal Pie, Baked Cinnamon and Sugar Doughnuts (spelled correctly like that), Country Ham with Redeye Gravy, Preacher Cookies, and 7-Up Pound Cake.

That last recipe contained an hilarious suggestion to use Diet 7-Up to reduce the calories. Since the recipe called for 3 cups of sugar, 5 eggs, 3 cups of flour, and a quarter-cup of shortening, one doubts the diet soda would make much difference.

EGG SHOOTERS (2020) by Laura Childs (pseudonym of Gerry Schmitt) was the ninth novel about Suzanne Dietz, co-owner of the Cackleberry Club café in Kindred, Tennessee. The book got off to a quick start with a gunman heisting a hospital pharmacy, killing a guard in the process.

Suzanne saw what happened, and being an established Miss Marple was quickly in the investigation. The café was Information Central, which was just as well because Suzanne had to run the business first. Customers will talk, or at least speculate, so the café was convenient for sleuthing.

The chicken tacos were the best sellers, followed by ham and cheese crepes. Coming up on the menu in the near future was Suzanne’s recipe for tiramisu pancakes (espresso, dark chocolate, and maxarpone cheese).

The town was the kind of place where people filled their Thermos jugs with chili for lunch. Desserts weren’t selling because it was summer and customers

worried about how they would look in swimsuits. The ending was certainly ingenious, and a tip of the cowboy hat to the author.

Suzanne had stirred up the town with her snooping, including the killer/drug pusher. She was hosting a steak barbecue in her backyard when the murderer flew past in an ultralight and tried to shoot her with a pistol. Not so easy from a wobbling powered kite, and he missed.

A kid on the ground didn’t miss though, having just returned from a paintball tournament. A paintball gun is like a shotgun; you only have to be close. He blinded the murderer with a clip of paintballs across the eyes and the ultralight crashed. The rest was details.

The recipes appendix began with Egg Shooters, basically fancy deviled eggs. Then on to Hangover Hash, French Toast Sticks, Ham and Apricot Biscuit Sandwiches, and Beer and Pork Goulash.

DEATH OF AN ITALIAN CHEF (2021) by Lee Hollis (pseudonym of siblings Rick Copp and Holly Simason) was the 14<sup>th</sup> novel in a series about Hayley Powell of Bar Harbor, Maine. She was a food critic for a local newspaper and the resident Jessica Fletcher along that part of the Maine coast.

A new Italian restaurant had just opened in that resort, owned by Romeo Russo, come from New York City. Shortly after his restaurant had opened, he suffered a mild heart attack.

In hospital, his roommate was Hayley’s brother Randy, who was in for gallbladder surgery. Chef Romeo, as he liked to style himself, asked Hayley to take over the restaurant’s kitchen while he was indisposed. Alas, he died from what was said to be complications.

Randy had a different idea. While under sedation, he thought he saw someone enter the hospital room. But first, recipes for Brandy Coffee and Antipasto Tortellini Salad, among the many scattered through the text rather than collected into an appendix.

After those refreshments, Randy told Hayley the intruder was wearing a surgical mask. With a syringe, the man injected something into the chef’s intravenous tube. The Deppity Dawg didn’t take the story seriously because Randy was woozy at the time from the after-effects of the surgery.



Hayley went sleuthing, stopping at intervals for Strawberry Bellinis (a brandy cocktail), Linguini with Clam Sauce, Basito (a rum cocktail), Three-Cheese Rigatoni, and so forth.

There were alarums, mustn't forget them. Chef Romeo's private life was not unspotted and suspicious characters covered the village. The motive was revenge for the chef's actions in New York City putting a competitor out of business by deceit.

Hayley wound up with the restaurant, resigned as food critic and set out on a new career. The book wrapped up with a recipe for Pasta Puttanesca.

NO MEMES OF ESCAPE (2021) by Olivia Blacke was about Odessa Dean of Brooklyn, New York. She waited tables at the Untapped Books and Café and Marpled on the side. The plot began rolling when she and five other women went to an escape room. One of them was murdered inside the room.

Odessa didn't think the other four did the crime. The police had their own opinions of course, but we know who will find the killer. She was a busy woman, posting on social media, conducting a crime investigation, waiting tables for her living, and trying to find an affordable apartment in Brooklyn.

Her boss was weird. He wore a kilt and tennis shoes, although the first could be explained because he was dating a Scottish steampunk fan. You know the kind; they wear a corset on top of their blouse and have brass goggles for no apparent reason.

Meanwhile, back at the plot, Odessa interrogated suspects, focusing on the escape room employees. As she learned during the traditional gunpoint confrontation, one of them was indeed the murderer.

The victim had been a real estate broker who stuck her killer with a bad lease for an apartment from hell. Odessa survived thanks to the equally traditional last-second arrival of the police. And so back to the café, serving the clientele. What? No recipes appendix?

NO GRATER CRIME (2021) by Maddie Day (pseudonym of Edith Maxwell) was a novel in a cozy series about Robbie Jordan of South Lick, Indiana. She was the proprietor of Pans 'N Pancakes, a café and vintage cookware store.

Her operations were under siege by trickery and sabotage. A food truck kept parking nearby to poach business. Someone poisoned one of her customers. A woman was jealous about Robbie marrying her ex-boyfriend. Shop items were stolen. Far too many suspects were named Krueger by blood or marriage.

Notwithstanding the success of her lemon rosemary scones (recipe in the appendix), a poisoned omelet shut down Pans 'N Pancakes. Robbie had to go into full-time Marpleing for her and the café to survive.

Eventually the Deppity Dawgs did a sweep and ran in most of the Kruegers for one crime or another. Quite the criminal family.

The recipes appendix began with Oven Fried Catfish. For the delicate taste, there followed Grated Everything Fritters, Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip Cookie Bars, Mulligatawny Soup, Blueberry Pound Cake, and Peach Hoagy.

**In Vino Morte.**

ONE FOOT IN THE GRAPE (2015) by Carlene O'Neil was the first novel in a cozy series about Penny Lively, who inherited a winery from a departed aunt. The village of Cypress Cove, California, little knew that a Miss Marple had taken up residence among the hitherto peaceful vineyards.

Penny was assisted by her niece Hayley and a handsome manager Connor. The vineyard was getting by. Her neighbour Antonia Martinelli, a distant relative, had problems with someone sabotaging her maturing barrels of vintage.

Penny went into the Marpleing business to find the saboteur and promptly discovered a body. The last person to see the deceased was Hayley. That was good enough for the Deppity Dawgs, so Penny had to prove Hayley's innocence.

Antonia was a stern employer and little loved. Her two children were already maneuvering to take over the winery. Added to the mix were some romances, both unrequited and illicit.

Penny and Connor taught a wine-tasting course at the local community college. That had its own complications, such as tourists who swallowed instead of tasted. As a consequence they were soon blotto on the local wines.



The amateur sleuthing revealed numerous family feuds and scandals. Everyone Penny talked to became a suspect. Another employee at the winery suddenly departed this world.

More yet, for the local wine festival was underway. The winery had a booth. Penny and Antonia went in after dark and were shot at. Due to Penny being the idiot in the idiot plot, the shooter escaped. The next day at the festival, the booth carried on. No amount of gunfire will discourage a vintner who wants to earn back her booth fees.

Eventually there was a final confrontation with one of Antonia’s children, who resented being left out of the will. The culprit became the third body of the week. Good going, even for a Miss Marple.

**Other Orchards.**

COLD PRESSED MURDER (2017) by Kelly Lane (pseudonym of Claire Talbot Eddins) was a novel in a cozy series about Eva Knox of Abundance, Georgia. She and her family had an olive plantation and a bed-and-breakfast.

The county’s annual Farm Family Fare was underway. Tours, exhibits, music, tastings, celebrity chefs, and murder. Okay, that last item wasn’t on the advertised programme.

Peach farmer Big Bubba Clatterbuck was the first to die. Natural causes, as he got his nickname from the barrel of fat wrapped around his torso. Chef Slick Simmer was next, from unnatural causes. Eva was there both times but the prime suspect was her sister Daphne.

Eva and her other sister Pepper-Leigh did some sleuthing. Lots of back stories, a love child or two, feuds, and sharp practice were detailed. They all boiled down to revenge for past misdeeds. The killer was caught, leaving the three sisters free to annoy the Deppity Dawgs in future books.

The recipes appendix was Southern food. (I can’t use the word ‘cuisine’.) The first item was Sweet And Slightly Spicy Barbecue Sauce. Next up was Balsamic Berry And Peach Olive Oil Scones, hopefully not to be eaten with the sauce.

The recipe for Peach Bourbon Ice Cream specified “*4 ounces bourbon, or more, to taste*”. I liked that modifier clause. And remember, don’t eat and drive. Following on for the teetotaler were Olive Oil And Yogurt Waffles, then Cold Pressed Olive Oil Peach Cake.

DIPPED TO DEATH (2018) was the next novel in the series. Eva Knox’s ex-boyfriend Dudley Dexter Codman III arrived at the plantation. With a name like that, there was no loss to posterity when he was murdered. Poison in the olive oil at a tasting party. Not wine, but olive oil.

Eva and family had to clear their collective name, so the three Marple sisters went to work. The white trash of the county were out in full force. The poison had been administered at the olive oil tasting party, but was the dead man the intended victim?

The answer was no, and the killer kept trying. When Eva got in the way, that was just an extra victim to poison. Trouble was, Eva was booked for the series and the murderer wasn’t.

Onward to the recipes appendix. They sure like bourbon Down South, as evidenced by the opening recipe Bourbon Ginger Barbecued Chicken (1 cup bourbon).

The rest were teetotal: Summer Pasta Salad, Lime Vinaigrette, Roasted Pecans, Corn Pudding, Chocolate Olive Oil Cake (with Mascarpone Frosting).

**Public House Problems.**

TO BREW OR NOT TO BREW (2015) by Joyce Tremel was the first novel in a cozy series about Maxine O’Hara of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She had just opened the Allegheny Brew House, a combination pub and microbrewery. The place was located in an old brewery that had been abandoned for decades.

Unfortunately, instead of worrying about stouts and lagers, she had to deal with sabotage and, eventually, the murder of her brewmeister and chef Kurt Schmidt. He did get a brief speaking part but never got past Chapter 1, having been strangled and dumped into a brew vat.

Equally unfortunately, Chapter 2 began with a major implausibility which cast a pall on the rest of the book. The investigating homicide detective was



Maxine's father Sean. Instead of recusing himself from the case, he took charge of the investigation, a blatant violation of standard police procedure.

In the meantime, the pub needed a new chef, so Maxine considered a handsome ex-hockey player Jake Lambert. They were at school together before going their separate ways in adulthood.

Despite an alarm system, someone was still intruding into the pub at night and sabotaging the utilities and equipment. Eventually Maxine found a hidden tunnel left over from Prohibition, through which the brewery owners had smuggled their production out to the river.

She also found the murderer down there but was saved at the last minute by Jake. The killer had been using the tunnel to store contraband back when the brewery was vacant, and was trying to drive Maxine away.

After all the excitement, the recipes appendix provided a couple of snacks. Most pubs serve chicken wings but I confess not having heard of Buffalo Chicken Perogies. For dessert, Kirschtorte, or as we anglophones call it, Black Forest Cake.

Carrying on in the series was A ROOM WITH A BREW (2017) which happened during Oktoberfest. Pittsburgh resounded with oom-pah-bah music. Anyone who owned a pair of lederhosen and a sousaphone had steady work in a band. Except when the band was hired by Maxine O'Hara to play at the Allegheny Brew House.

Doodle Dowdy (really? that was his name?) was found dead by Maxine, his head stuffed into his sousaphone. Perhaps he should have played trombone. Maxine got in some sleuthing during the busy days and nights in the pub.

Lots of back stories were dredged up, with ex-husbands and ex-fiancées coming out of the woodwork. Those were just Maxine's friends. Her suspects were out of spy agencies and black ops. The MacGuffin of the book was a Vermeer painting, possibly authentic but more likely a forgery.

There were two culprits but in the final confrontation it wasn't Miss Marple, pardon me, Maxine at risk for her life. The pair had a falling out, and one shot her partner dead, then blubbered a confession. An easy case for the prosecutor.

From there to the recipes appendix. The author was coasting on this. The first recipe was for Turkey Sandwich With Cranberry Chutney. Here is the recipe: *"Place cheese and turkey on one slice of bread. Top with cranberry chutney, then add remaining slice of bread."* Got that?

The Pittsburgh Pretzel Salad took a full page though. Finishing off were Ham Barbecues, Beer Brats (bratwurst), und der German Potato Salad.

PULP FRICTION (2020) by Julie Anne Lindsey was a novel in a cozy series about Winona Mae 'Winnie' Montgomery and her Granny Smythe of Blossom Valley, West Virginia. They operated Smythe Orchards which only made a profit from its cider shop and a barn that was rented out for weddings and dances.

Twas the nuptials of Elsie Grace Sawyer and Jack Robert Warren out there in the barn. The reception was marred by a shoving match between Warren and Winnie's ex-boyfriend Hank Donovan. When the groom was fatally run over by the honeymoon getaway vehicle, Elsie became a widow on her wedding night.

Numerous witnesses told the Deppity Dawgs about the fight between the two men. Donovan fled the scene, which confirmed him as the prime suspect. Winnie went into Marpleing mode, although she was hampered by the police, who insisted they would investigate the murder. Winnie was also hampered by the fact that apples wait for no one and she had to keep turning them into cider.

There followed infodumps on the process, in case any reader hoped to take up the business. The sleuthing by Winnie revealed the blushing bride had a lot to blush about.

She had killed a loan shark and buried him in the orchard. Her ex-boyfriend murdered Donovan out of jealousy. The gunpoint confrontation took place in the orchard with a last-second rescue by the sheriff. You knew that would happen.

The recipes appendix gave me pause. I'm well aware that, other than barbecue, southern USA cuisine generally isn't. The Fried Bologna Sandwich confirmed my belief. The Apple Dumplings were a better choice, and the Summer Cider Slushie will be nice on a hot summer day.



THE CURE FOR WHAT ALES YOU (2021) by Ellie Alexander (pseudonym of Katherine Dyer-Seeley) was the fifth novel in a cozy series about Sloan Krause of Leavenworth, Washington State. She operated a microbrewery called Nitro and Marpled as a side line. Nitro had a small café and some bed-and-breakfast rooms over the shop.

The brewery was bringing out a new product, Lemon Kiss ale, in time for the village’s Maifest celebration. Sloan was tracking down her past, having been adopted. A mysterious woman named Marianne had previously been her protector but had a hidden past, as did her adoptive parents.

When not digging into her past, Sloan and her partner Garrett Strong prepared for the May festival. Leavenworth themed itself as a New Bavaria, so the lederhosen and barmaid décolletage were everywhere. There was a parade and a May pole dance.

Also a murder, another fine tradition in any village where a Miss Marple resided. Past and present murders actually, and alarums too numerous to signify. A killer was loose, with only Marianne to guide Sloan to safety. The ending wrapped up more or less, leaving a few loose threads that might be trailers for future novels.

**Tea For Trouble.**

LIVE AND LET CHAI (2018) by Bree Baker (pseudonym of Julie Anne Lindsey) was the first novel in a cozy series about Everly Swan, recently arrived in the seaside resort of Charm, North Carolina.

She opened a tea shop called Sun, Sand, and Tea. Her induction as the local Jessica Fletcher began with the body in front of her tea shop, the village curmudgeon Benedict Paine.

He wasn’t mourned but the medical examiner said he had been poisoned. One of the tea shop’s glasses was by his body. Swan had publicly clashed with him so she became guilty until proven innocent.

Various alarums ensued, such as threatening notes and physical attacks on Swan. The only question about Paine was why he hadn’t been disposed of years ago by some public-spirited citizen. However Swan wasn’t in much better shape as villagers harumphed at her while the killer relentlessly stalked her.

In the denouement the murderer was revealed as a woman scorned. She tried to finish off Swan with poison but fortunately the village clinic had a stomach pump.

The appendix had recipes for two teas, Summer Strawberry And Peach and Iced Chai Latte. This was interesting because one reason Swan was unpopular with the villagers was because she wouldn’t share her recipes.

TIDE AND PUNISHMENT (2019) continued the saga of Everly Swan. Her grandaunt Fran Swan was running for mayor against the incumbent Dudley Dunfree. The announcement was made at a party hosted by the tea shop. The mayor was in attendance but didn’t survive past Chapter 1.

Fran was the prime suspect. Everly went sleuthing in between working on new tea recipes such as apple cinnamon with nutmeg and pumpkin spice. Village politics can be as vicious as anything in the federal domain.

Between dealing with campaign dirty tricks and running the tea shop, Everly was a busy woman. The shop’s website was hacked, and there were more traditional alarums. The murderer was acting out from a childhood trauma and taking revenge against anyone who even reminded her of that long-ago event.

After all the excitement was over, the survivors adjourned for lemon cake, which strangely enough was not in the recipes appendix. Starting off was Caesar Salad, then Gingerbread Bars, and all washed down with Cranberry Iced Tea.

CLOSELY HARBORED SECRETS (2021) put Everly Swan at risk for a murder during an historic sites walking tour. She was a suspect but there was no suspense in that because the reader knows she would be cleared.

Many excursions about the Outer Banks in search of suspects or historical ghosts, possibly both. There were two culprits working at cross purposes in search of treasure, one of whom decided to eliminate his co-conspirator.

With Everly on his trail, he tried to get her before she got him, reasoning that he could only be hanged once. Since he wasn’t a continuing character, justice was served against him.



From there to the recipes appendix. Savory Sweet Potatoes made the meal. For dessert, Bite-Sized Apple Pies (we call them tarts in Alberta), washed down with Lemon Basil Iced Tea.

PARTNERS IN LIME (2021) was the sixth novel in the series. Everly Swan had a boyfriend, police detective Grady Hays, who had investigated her in the first novel. A surfing pro named Kai Larsen was found murdered on the beach, so away they went.

Swan was hampered by business matters, not just operating her tea shop, but the arrival of a competitor, plus a nasty blogger gossiping about her. Larsen’s wife had just sent out flyers for a divorce party, accusing him of cheating on her. Other suspects abounded, and Swan went into action while Hays tried to keep her out of trouble.

As a villager, soon to become a suspect himself remarked to her: *Maybe because anytime someone dies, you get involved somehow. And you usually need a medic afterward.*

To which Swan defensively replied: *I don’t get involved when everyone dies. Only when the cause of death is murder and I’m worried about the accused. Or when I’m the accused.* A good summary of every cozy mystery.

The killer of Larsen was one of his long-standing antagonists. He then kidnapped Swan and yes, she did need a medic afterward when the murderer’s SUV rolled in the ditch as Hays pursued.

For relaxation, in or out of a hospital bed, the recipes appendix offered Munch Mix (popcorn balls) and Southern Tea Cakes. To wash it all down, there was Basil Raspberry Tea.

TWISTED TEA CHRISTMAS (2021) by Laura Childs (pseudonym of Gerry Schmitt) took place in Charleston, South Carolina. Teahouse operator Theodosia Browning was catering a Victorian tea party in the mansion of Drucilla Heyward. She was a grande dame who hosted the event but did not live to see its conclusion. Someone stuck a syringe of fentanyl into her neck.

This novel was the 23<sup>rd</sup> in this food cozy series, so Browning was an experienced Miss Marple by then. The sleuthing was slowed by her having to operate her tea shop to earn a living. Fortunately the detective in charge liked

tea and scones, so he briefed Browning at intervals while slurping oolong and gobbling down cream scones.

The infodumps were mixed in with the tea shop operations as the day progressed, with lots of menu items alternating with medical reports and court documents. Absolutely you should not attempt to read this book on an empty stomach or you’ll go berserk when you come across frequent paragraphs such as:

*Chicken salad on pumpkin bread, and smoked turkey with Gouda cheese on rye bread ... red pepper quiche and citrus salad ... cream scones and strawberry muffins ... two pans of sultana raisin scones.* And that was just page 32 (hardcover).

The murder, mustn’t forget that. Hayward had announced she was going to change her will and leave everything to charity. At her death, a Renoir painting was stolen from her mansion, which may or may not have been a forgery. The art dealer who sold the painting was subsequently terminated with extreme prejudice. Worst of all, the tea shop lost a catering contract.

Cozies often end with a gunpoint confrontation but this time Miss Marple, pardon me, Browning had the gun. She kept the thief/murderer at bay until the police arrived.

Off to the recipes index, with Fried Coffee Cake, Lobster Hush Puppies, Lemon Cream Scones, Pork Chops With Apples, and Shrimp Balls, just to name a few items. Lots of tea selections of course.

MURDER IN A TEACUP (2021) by Vicki Delaney was the second novel in a series about Lily Roberts of North Augusta, Massachusetts. She was proprietor of a tea shop and, since the village was a seaport, she doubled as a Jessica Fletcher.

Lily was an optimist. When the cold wind came up from the sea across the shop’s patio, she found the tinkling of tea cups shaking in the wind delightful.

The hoorah began when the tea shop hosted a family reunion. A nasty affair, making it obvious they didn’t pray together. The gathering ended after one of them drank a cup of poisoned tea. The death wasn’t the tea shop’s fault since no one else died.



Needless to say, such publicity did not bode well for the tea shop, so Lily went into action. She wasn't happy about the murderer being called The Tearoom Killer by the news media. The medical examiner said cause of death was digitalis from foxglove, a popular garden flower.

As someone commented about the Deppity Dawg: *"I bet her happy place is the basement of the police station before a suspect's lawyer arrives."* There was bad blood within the family, both squabbling over an inheritance and illicit romantic affairs. Enough to involve everyone from Granny on down.

The tearoom got another workout as a crime scene during the denouement. Since Lily was booked for the series, she won the struggle. And so to the recipes appendix, which included Chocolate Chip Cookies, Shortbread Cookies, and Curried Egg Salad Sandwiches. This is why I never go into tea or coffee shops. I'd gain weight.

A SPRINKLING OF MURDER (2020) by Daryl Wood Gerber was the first novel in a new cozy series about Courtney Kelly of Carmel, California. She operated a combination tea shop and garden centre specializing in things fairy. Wind chimes, fairy figurines, that sort of thing.

Plus real fairies, which put this book into the category of fantasy cozies. (Not that small of a category either.) The murder victim, and there was one, was Mick Watkins of the adjacent store, a dog grooming and training business. He had the bad sense to die in the garden centre.

Courtney went Marpleing, dredging up back stories while simultaneously fighting off false accusations and innuendos. The murderer had a long and nasty history with Watkins. She wanted him out of the way so she could enter local politics.

The tea shop survived, leading on to the recipes appendix, beginning with Brie And Strawberry Sandwiches (together in one sandwich, not separately).

Following on were Caramel Blondies, Chocolate Caramel Brownies, Vanilla Coriander Cookies, Lemon Cupcakes, and Peanut Butter Brownies. For savories, there were Minestrone Soup, Herb Scones, and White Fish with Beurre Blanc Sauce.

A GLIMMER OF A CLUE (2021) was the sequel. Courtney Kelly's friend Wanda Brownie got into a hair pulling contest with local art critic Lana Lamar.

At a subsequent event, Lana was stabbed to death with Courtney's letteropener. The killer might have been Wanda, or Lana's husband, or a victim of her art reviews, or anyone who knew her.

In addition to operating her garden centre and tea shop, Courtney was preparing for the Beauty of Art Spectacular garden show. Digging up clues didn't require just a shovel but a front-end loader.

The finale, explained at length by the murderer as she held a gun on Courtney, was a complicated mess of romantic entanglements, financial misappropriation, and white-hot jealousy. Courtney's escape was foreordained.

There was another massive recipes appendix, far beyond what most food cozies have. Leading off was Adult Lemonade, then Baked Fried Chicken, Blueberry Lemon Muffins, Cinnamon Swirl Scones, Double Chocolate Cookies, Lemon Thyme Biscuits, Mint Chocolate Brownies, Mushroom Cheese Puffs, and Sugar Cookies. The Cheddar Asparagus Appetizers were not what I would call appetizing.



*Cupcakes from my local Safeway. Originally a stomach filler, now here as space fillers.*



**IF YOU AREN'T SQUAMOUS,  
THEN WHY ARE YOU TRYING TO BE ELDRITCH?: PART 18**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 17 appeared in OPUNTIA's #298, 333, 340, 352, 365, 395, 410, 415, 422, 443, 465, 480, 486, 492, 498, 504, and 513. Issues #22 and 63.1A have related articles on H.P. Lovecraft.]

Now that H.P. Lovecraft's works are all in the public domain, there has been a flood of pastiches. You will need a deep purse to keep up. I don't even try but just pick up a few now and then.

**Alma Mater.**

MAYHEM AT MISKATONIC: AUGUST BEGINNINGS (2019) by William Theodore Savage was a novella chapbook. The story was set at dear old Miskatonic University. Student Issac (sic) Parks did a time travel experiment in his dormitory room that shredded him into pulp.

Except that he was still there, standing in the midst of blood, gore, and a talking skull. He didn't have much time to think about the paradox because the opening ceremony of the new academic season was about to begin.

That involved new students such as him swearing a blood oath of loyalty. Not just rhetorically but real blood from each student. I'm glad I attended the University of Alberta, where all I had to do was fill in some forms.

MU was not an ordinary university. There were four cemeteries on the campus, for a start. Perhaps better to say, for a finish, as the fatality rate for students was high. For any other university there would be a federal inquiry.

Students didn't drop out. They were dismembered or splattered into pulp when a summoning or experiment went wrong. In the case of one unfortunate student, she was eaten alive by a grimoire.

The succeeding chapters introduced additional students as supporting characters. Corvide and her roommates had assorted magical powers or at least dabbled in them. There were hybrids between humans and snakes. The vampires, dryads, witches, and werewolves were a given. Mary Anne Holt was a demon who kept being summoned day or night by amateur sorcerers. She was exhausted much of the time and had trouble keeping up with her studies.

This chapbook was self-published, which I bought as an Amazon print-on-demand. While the story read well, it could have used a good proofreader. Examples were "straightjacket" instead of "straitjacket" (page 17) and "peak" instead of "peek" (page 36). The most glaring error was the protagonist's name spelt "Issac" all the way through the book instead of "Isaac".

**The Old Town.**

ARKHAM AFTER DARK (2022) by Byron Craft was part of a series set in Arkham, Massachusetts, during the Great Depression. The narrator was a private detective who was always nameless. Normally he tailed cheating spouses and gathered evidence for court cases. Given the locale though, chasing eldritch beasts, squamous or not, was occasionally part of his work.

The client was the Arkham Museum of Antiquities. The case was a locked room mystery. A staff researcher Vernon Bellows went into a small windowless laboratory and never came out. 'Twas Christmas, a time for tree decorating and, this being Arkham, a shoggoth or two on the loose.

The first of the critters was an accidental escape from the laboratory and the second was mailed in a plain brown package to The Detective by a person unknown. Bellows reappeared but different, an imposter from the shoggoths. He didn't stay long. Simultaneously another museum staffer vanished.

Shoggoths were here, there, and everywhere, impersonating citizens of Arkham. They complicated matters by shape-shifting into characters such as police officers and The Detective himself. Much to-ing and fro-ing. Bullets didn't stop shoggoths but fire did. Fuel was in great demand. Ultimately though the best method was to lock them in an old bank vault and let them starve to death.

As with the previous self-published books by Craft, proofreading was greatly required. Typographical errors can be ignored but not "low and behold" instead of "lo and behold" (page 41). There were too many garbled quotes or missing commas to mention.

The worst was Chapter 7 repeated twice, the first time inside Chapter 6. I like Craft's stories but honestly cannot recommend the books any longer. They just kept getting worse because of lack of proper editing.



**Two-Fisted Bob.**

Teel James Glenn wrote a series that combined alternative history with weird fiction. The novels were written in pulpish style, sometimes descending into parody of those two-fisted stories.



The basic divergence was that on June 11, 1936, Robert E. Howard did not commit suicide from grief over his mother’s imminent death. (She died the next day.) Instead, Howard put down his gun and decided to persevere, no matter how difficult life may have seemed without his mother.

He went traveling to England. There he met William Henry Pratt, who never got the part of Frankenstein’s monster in the movie. His film career having failed, Pratt returned to England, was working as a caretaker, and the name Boris Karloff vanished from history.

A COWBOY IN CARPATHIA was the first novel. I reviewed it in OPUNTIA #501. Vampire chasing and that sort of trouble. THE COWBOY AND THE CONQUEROR (2022) was the sequel, set in 1938.

The narrator was an Austrian named Adolf Hister\*\*, writing as A.S. Gruber. He specialized in German-language western novels. Hister met Bob Howard as the two were on a tourist boat going up the Nile River. Arab bandits boarded the ship and kidnapped a group of schoolgirls, then rode off into the desert.

The Arabs were led by an Englishman named T.E. Lawrence, who did not die in a 1935 motorcycle accident as in our timeline. He became a cultist, reading grimoires such as NECRONOMICON. Lawrence’s intent was to sacrifice the girls to bring the Cthulhu jubilee.

Hister and two-fisted Bob managed to free the girls and escape to Cairo. Since the novel was only one-quarter done, the plot kept going. Hister and Howard pressed onward.

The Cthulhu acolytes were worldwide, busily planning nefarious deeds. Their organization was called The White Hand, and their leader was code-named W. They hosted one heck of a party in Cairo that ended in gunfire and eldritch horrors.

The action shifted to England. Himmler was on the march into the Sudetenland. Lawrence of Arabia was on the march in England, marshaling his acolytes. Hister and Howard were met upon arrival in England by Pratt.

They began tracking Lawrence across England, while also trying to identify W. That one turned out to be Winston Churchill, embittered by his exclusion from political power. From there to the basement of the Houses of Parliament, where the Cthulhuians planned to succeed where Guy Fawkes failed.

The grand finale was Churchill’s attempt to summon an Elder God to do his will. He found out the hard way what the hazard was in summoning a demon. Hister and Howard saved the day, and the world lurched on.

This novel was a fair read but could have used a good proofreader. Near the end of the book, the font size fluctuated but this may have been the printer's fault.

\*\* Teel James Glenn footnoted that the name came from Nostradamus, and should not be confused with that other Austrian who went into politics. No need for wokers to be upset. Glenn did, however, keep spelling the name as Adolph in the text even though he used Adolf in the introduction.



**RADIO SF**  
by Dale Speirs

One peculiarity about science fiction was its late arrival on radio airwaves as adult series. The genre was kiddie fiction for most of radio’s Golden Age from 1930 to 1955.

Serious anthology series such as SUSPENSE and ESCAPE often had science fiction episodes mixed in with mystery, action adventure, fantasy, and horror. Not until 1950 did the genre finally get proper treatment.

2000 PLUS had the honour of being the first adult science fiction series, and was broadcast on the Mutual network.. The first episode aired 1950-03-15 and the series lasted until 1952-01-02.

BEYOND TOMORROW was almost the first adult science fiction show on radio. As with DIMENSION X and X MINUS ONE, it relied on stories from pulp magazines adapted for radio. The CBS network recorded three episodes, which are available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers at [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)

“Requiem” was based on the Robert Heinlein story. The audition record was dated 1950-04-05. Following on was “Incident At Switch Path” from Theodore Sturgeon, then “The Outer Limit” by Graham Doar (frequently re-used on just about every radio anthology series).

The NBC network broadcast DIMENSION X. The series aired “The Outer Limit” as its first episode on 1950-04-08. Stories were adapted from ASTOUNDING. The series was short-lived and only lasted until 1951-09-29.

NBC revived science fiction as X MINUS ONE, from 1955-04-24 until 1958-01-09. The earliest episodes were transcriptions of its predecessor, after which stories from GALAXY magazine were used.

There was a feeble attempt to revive the series as transcriptions from 1973 to 1975. Unfortunately the revival was only broadcast once a month on random days. No listener could find the shows on the dial.

Sporadic attempts with other series were made in later years, but radio drama was long dead. Television won.

**STATELY PILES: PART 7**  
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 6 appeared in OPUNTIA #386, 395, 415, 455, 481, and 506.]

**Cozy Mansions.**

DEATH AT A COUNTRY MANSION (2020) by Louise R. Innes pretty much said it all in the title. The setting was Edgemoor, Surrey, England, at the stately manor Brompton Court. Dame Serena Levanté, retired opera singer, got a brief speaking part before her killer dumped her at the foot of the grand stairs to make her death look accidental.

There were police of course, but no rural village in England was without a Miss Marple, in this case hairdresser Daisy Thorne. Serena’s daughter Floria asked Thorne for help, and away they went. Plenty of suspects and plenty of family melodrama.

The biggest piece of drama was Floria learning she had three half-sisters she had never known about. Thorne, meanwhile, still had her hairdressing salon to look after. The denouement poured on more melodrama, as if there hadn’t been enough already.

Floria learned she was adopted and Serena didn’t have her in the will. Her biological father didn’t want to see her position usurped by the half-sisters. Characters came out of the woodwork at the manor house, each with revelations. Twisted endings to say the least.

**Never Buy A House At The Top Of A Cliff.**

THE STRANGE DR WEIRD was an anthology series that aired on radio during the 1944-45 season, written by Robert A. Arthur. The show was a mixture of mysteries and weird fantasy. The host was Dr Weird himself. The episodes were 15 minutes long and are available from the Old Time Radio Researchers at [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)

“Murder Comes Home” aired on 1944-12-05. This was a melodrama about an elderly widow Mrs Barnes on her deathbed. She yearned to see her other son Harry, who had been gone two years. Her younger son Tom had never told her that Harry was serving a life term for murder.



Mother and son lived in a house on a riverbank with steep cliffs. She mentioned that for thirty years she had watched the cliff coming closer and closer as the river ate into the bank. The alert listener will be aware that someone was going to fall off that cliff in the near future.

Tom wanted her to move because the house wasn't safe anymore. It was now perched on the edge of the cliff, with a 100-foot drop to the river outside the back door. Mrs Barnes refused to leave because she was waiting for Harry to come home. She worried he wouldn't be able to find her if she moved.

Not to worry, as that very day Harry and a cellmate broke prison, killing a guard in the process. Police thought Harry might be on his way home. While he was wending his way, the story broke for a commercial from the sponsor, Adam Hats. The announcer proclaimed that any man would be proud to wear an Adam hat. Dr Weird chipped in with an endorsement that an Adam hat made a new man of him. If you could call that an endorsement.

Picking up the story, Harry arrived home on cue. No mention was made of him or his partner in crime wearing hats. The brothers were openly hostile to each other. Harry told his mother that he could only stay a day and then was going on a long trip.

It was a dark and foggy night. As Harry said to Tom, a man couldn't see a foot in front of him. The conversation was interrupted by the baying of bloodhounds. The convicts panicked because the sheriff's men would soon arrive.

Tom told his brother there was a rowboat on the riverbank behind the house. They could lose the dogs out on the river. The two fugitives raced out the back door. The finale was flagrantly obvious.

"Beauty And The Beast" aired on 1945-01-16. The venue was a mansion perched on the edge of a cliff overlooking the ocean. The listener immediately knows someone will taking an involuntary dive.

Just to confirm the clichés, as the episode opened, a beautiful young woman Kathy met a handsome young man Alan for a tryst on the escarpment. Her husband Jason Winthrop was a crabby old man twice her age, insanely jealous. His private secretary George Davis had vanished two weeks ago after Jason caught him talking with Kathy.

She returned to the mansion after the meeting. Jason belaboured her but was interrupted by the arrival of the local sheriff. Davis' body had washed ashore down the coast. The sheriff noted that Jason's chauffeur Sam Arnold had been stabbed to death four months ago near the mansion. The Winthrops were summoned to the coroner's enquiry.

After the sheriff left, there was a domestic brawl which Kathy won by virtue of younger reflexes and a fireplace poker. Jason was knocked unconscious but survived. When Alan arrived for a cliff-top rendezvous with Kathy, Jason appeared and warned him that she was the murderer. She had psychotic episodes from which she recovered without memory of what she had done.

Alan didn't believe him and threw him off the cliff. Well, we knew someone was booked for a long fall. Only after tossing the old man did Alan suddenly remember that Jason was in Canada when Arnold was murdered.

Kathy's voice suddenly changed. She confessed to the murders and tried to push Alan off the cliff. He won that contest and she followed her husband into the sea. Dr Weird made a few remarks about Beauty married to the Beast, and so to the organ music.

THE MYSTERIOUS TRAVELER was an anthology radio series which aired from 1943 until 1952. All episodes were written by Robert A. Arthur and David Kogan. Only about one-quarter of the episodes still exist on tape or free mp3 via [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)

The episodes always opened with the sound of a train whistling its way through the night. The narrator introduced himself as The Mysterious Traveler on board the train. He urged the listener to "*settle back, get a good grip on your nerves, and be comfortable, if you can*".

"Change Of Address" aired on 1952-01-22. Andrew Holland was a henpecked husband at the mercy of his wife Jocasta. (Who would name their daughter Jocasta? Did she have a brother named Oedipus?) Events followed from there.

Andrew maintained an outward show of respectability but did not hide his feelings from Jocasta, telling her he felt as if he was in a prison cell. Jocasta ordered him to visit their family physician Dr Stevens, whom Andrew despised in equal measure. "*He's had a pill ready for every emergency in the last quarter-century.*"



Andrew started an affair with the maid Julie. He had caught her trying to steal Jocasta's pearls but didn't report her. Instead he began a relationship with her.

Stevens recommended a vacation. Andrew thought he meant by himself, an opportunity to escape with Julie and start a new life on the opposite side of the continent. Unfortunately Jocasta invited herself along. Andrew decided there was only one method to solve the problem, murder Jocasta.

Arriving on the California coast, they leased a cliff-top house from a man named Wilson. He had retired there but his wife left him and was never seen again. The basement of the house had a dirt floor. Pay no attention to that script writer waving a red flag.

Andrew started digging a hole behind the furnace. Wilson decided to sell the house because he needed money for an unspecified legal problem. Andrew was happy to buy it. Jocasta said no, they were going to break the lease and move. She didn't like the place but her opinion didn't matter once he buried her in a shallow grave behind the furnace. Andrew didn't have long to enjoy himself. Jocasta had been suspicious about Wilson and contacted the local sheriff.

The police couldn't find any change of address for Mrs Wilson, which she certainly would have filed with the post office had she just left her husband. Wilson had confessed to the murder and said he had buried her very deep behind the furnace. Some deputies arrived with shovels. Andrew talked on the telephone with Julie and told her he was saying goodbye. "*Jocasta is coming back.*"

THE ADVENTURES OF PHILIP MARLOWE was based on the character created by Raymond Chandler. It aired on radio from 1947 to 1951, changing networks in midstream. The series was slightly darker than most mystery shows, although never as dark as the noir novels upon which it was based.

"The Iron Coffin" was written by Robert Mitchell and Eugene Levitt, and aired on 1950-07-12. Katherine Newbold was the client, who wanted Philip Marlowe to find her daughter Irene and fiancé Bennett Verrago. Irene had gone chasing after Bennett and her mother feared the worst.

Katherine said Bennett was a graduate student in Spanish history who had become obsessed with a particular incident. A 16th-century Spanish nobleman Peter the Cruel, of the family Verrago, had been condemned for heinous crimes

and executed. He was placed into an iron coffin and buried in a crypt under the castle.

In the late 1800s an American plutocrat bought Peter's castle, had it dismantled, and re-erected on the California coast. The safe assumption is that the scriptwriters were inspired by Hearst Castle. At the time they would have been writing this episode, the Hearst estate had unloaded the castle on the California government, not without controversy.

The Verrago castle was said to be cursed, with seven labourers dying on the job as it was reassembled in California. Brought along were some original coffins, including an iron coffin. They were sealed into a crypt deep underneath the castle.

Nonetheless, they moved around every so often and wouldn't stay put. The iron coffin kept standing up on end. 'Twas the curse of Peter the Cruel, trying to escape from the crypt. Bennett wanted to determine why the coffins kept moving.

He and Marlowe discovered why when a spring tide came in. The floor of the crypt was cracked, and the seawater rushed in and floated the coffins. When the tide receded, the crypt dried and the coffins were left scattered about. The iron coffin stood on end because Peter's feet had been bound with heavy chains to ensure a good hanging.

Everyone congratulated Marlowe on providing a rational explanation. Then Irene spotted the ghost walking on the ramparts.

### **The Fall Of A House.**

I LOVE A MYSTERY aired from 1939 to 1944, then was repeated in 1949-50 with the same scripts but new casts. The episodes were written and directed by Carlton E. Morse.

Each story was 15 episodes, during which nothing much happened. The final episode would then wrap up the story with undisclosed details and lengthy as-you-know explanations. The series is available from the Old Time Radio Researchers as free mp3s from [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)



The opening credits began with a train whistle and the rush of its passage along the tracks. A short burst of organ music allowed local stations to insert their identification. Next was a police car siren approaching, skidding to a stop. Then deep church bells chimed ominously. One gets the impression that the sound man picked a few tracks at random just to fill in the time.

“The Thing That Cries In The Night” aired in late 1949. Jack Packard, Doc Long, and Reggie York operated a detective agency. They had just been paid for their last case and had \$25,000 to blow in riotous living. While partying, they became tangled up with a weird family in a manor house.

The Martins were ruled by the grandmother. Granny was a tyrannical matriarch. There were four grandchildren: Joe and his sisters Faith, Hope, and Charity. The last was apparently psychic and crazy. Joe was an alcoholic. The other sisters were just plain crazy. Charity always spoke in a breathless voice that was just plain annoying.

Every so often the sound of a baby crying was heard. Shortly after, someone would be seriously assaulted or murdered. The chauffeur was the first to go. Joe was killed and most of the women were pushed down stairs or chloroformed.

The Martins insisted that there was no baby in the mansion. Given the size of the house, localizing the sound was nearly impossible and there were far too many rooms to check fast enough to find the source of the cries.

The three detectives spent most of their time dashing around the mansion, stating the obvious, and listening to Charity breathlessly make predictions. At one time or another, almost everyone was slugged unconscious.

The police surrounded the mansion and sent in plainclothes detectives, which only threw fuel on the fire. The action mostly consisted of people being locked in closets and telling lies that contradicted each other. The detectives broke down so many doors trying to get in or out of rooms that it was a wonder there were any left.

The Martins accused each other. Not a happy family. Packard identified the killer as actress Pauline West, an outsider who had suddenly appeared from elsewhere. She had been a busy woman inside the mansion. She traveled about without being seen, attempting to obliterate the Martin family.

Faith went berserk at the J'accuse! meeting because she knew who West really was. Charity pushed Faith off the roof and followed as they swan dived through the sun room glass. In the hospital waiting room, Packard explained that West was really Charity in disguise, who was a murdering psychopath. Charity could do a perfect imitation of a crying baby.

She didn't do everything by herself though. There were in fact several murderers working at cross purposes to each other, while Charity inadvertently helped all of them. Packard's explanation of who did what to whom was convoluted and lengthy. He concluded by saying the House of Martin had fallen. Indeed it had.

THE PRODUCTIONS OF TIME was a 1967 novel by John Brunner, set in a British manor house where a group of decrepit actors were hired to rehearse a play. The main protagonist was Murray Douglas. He was a recovering alcoholic who had hit bottom and was now trying to climb back up onto the stage.

Each actor had a different vice or liability, whether alcohol, drugs, homosexuality\*\*, an aging actress who could only get grandmother parts, or a leading man gone bald and fat. The management, such as they were, had innumerable recording devices hidden about the mansion. Each actor was constantly tempted by offerings to fit their individual vice.

Manuel Delgado, of mysterious antecedents, was the director. The producer and financier of the play was Samuel Blizzard. The butler and major domo of the manor was Valentine. A shifty lot, and all of them up to something.

Led by Douglas, the actors and crew found mysterious recording devices under everyone's beds and in their television sets. The melodrama and conflicts that followed revealed that the shifty men were time travelers from the future.

Their leader was Valentine. Yes, the butler did it. They were recording memories of people falling into degradation, for sale to future citizens who liked things kinky without any actual physical threat. Every room of the manor was wired to record, with cables running to a central control in Room 13.

\*\* This novel was published shortly before Britain legalized homosexuality. Prior to that, it wasn't just a sin but a felony offense.

Douglas kept up a campaign of sabotage. His final one inadvertently started an electrical fire and burned down the manor house. The time travelers escaped but the story thread made it clear they would face retribution in their own century hence.

**Haunted Houses.**

“The Haunted Column” by Mary Morrison Raynal (1912 July, THE BLACK CAT, available as a free pdf from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)) was about a treasure hunt way on down south. James Ravenel had inherited an old plantation near Charleston from his uncle Alfred.

James and his new bride Helen set up housekeeping. They thought Alfred was a miser whose treasure was hidden somewhere in the mansion. Extensive searching failed to uncover any valuables.

Chatting with an elderly servant, James and Helen learned that those who lived in Alfred’s time considered one of the ornamental columns along the front of the mansion to be haunted. The column creaked and groaned at intervals, which none of the others did.

James climbed up into the attic and crawled over to where the columns were. The others were solid stone but the haunted column was hollow. From its bottom he fished out a metal strongbox. When the couple opened the box, they were delighted to find thousands of banknotes stuffed inside. Alas, they were Confederate banknotes. Uncle Alfred wasn’t a miser. He had died a pauper.

SHERLOCK HOLMES MYSTERY MAGAZINE #24 was published in 2018. It is available from [www.wildsidepress.com](http://www.wildsidepress.com) or from Amazon print-on-demand.

“Voices” by Michael Haynes was about a retired couple buying an isolated house. The narrator and her husband heard faint voices and snatches of conversation. Over time, the voices became clearer and the brief sentences became full stories.

The ghosts were speaking about their lives and telling anecdotes about life in the house over its past centuries. The couple began listening most of their time, and the ghosts became more and more realistic. Eventually the couple realized they had become ghosts themselves and now had their own stories to tell.

**SEEN IN THE LITERATURE**

**Origin Of Life.**

Ozturka, S.F., and D.D. Sassellov (2022) **On the origins of life’s homochirality: Inducing enantiomeric excess with spin-polarized electrons.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2204765119 (available as a free pdf)

[Almost all complex organic molecules have a twist or chirality to the left or to the right when viewed down their long axis. Theoretically the two types should occur in equal proportions. Strangely though, all organisms use amino acids twisted to the left and sugars twisted to the right. This had to have been emplaced during the origin of life since all organisms have this chirality, but no one knows why.]

Authors’ abstract: *Essential biomolecules, like amino acids and sugars, are chiral; they exist in mirror symmetrical pairs named enantiomers. However, modern life selectively uses only one of the enantiomers.*

*Life as we know it is homochiral, but the origins of biological homochirality on early Earth remain elusive. Shallow closed-basin lakes are a plausible prebiotic environment on early Earth, and most are expected to have significant sedimentary magnetite deposits.*

*We hypothesize that ultraviolet (200- to 300-nm) irradiation of magnetite deposits could generate hydrated spin-polarized electrons sufficient to induce enantio-selective prebiotic chemistry.*

*Such electrons are potent reducing agents that drive reduction reactions where the spin polarization direction can enantioselectively alter the reaction kinetics.*

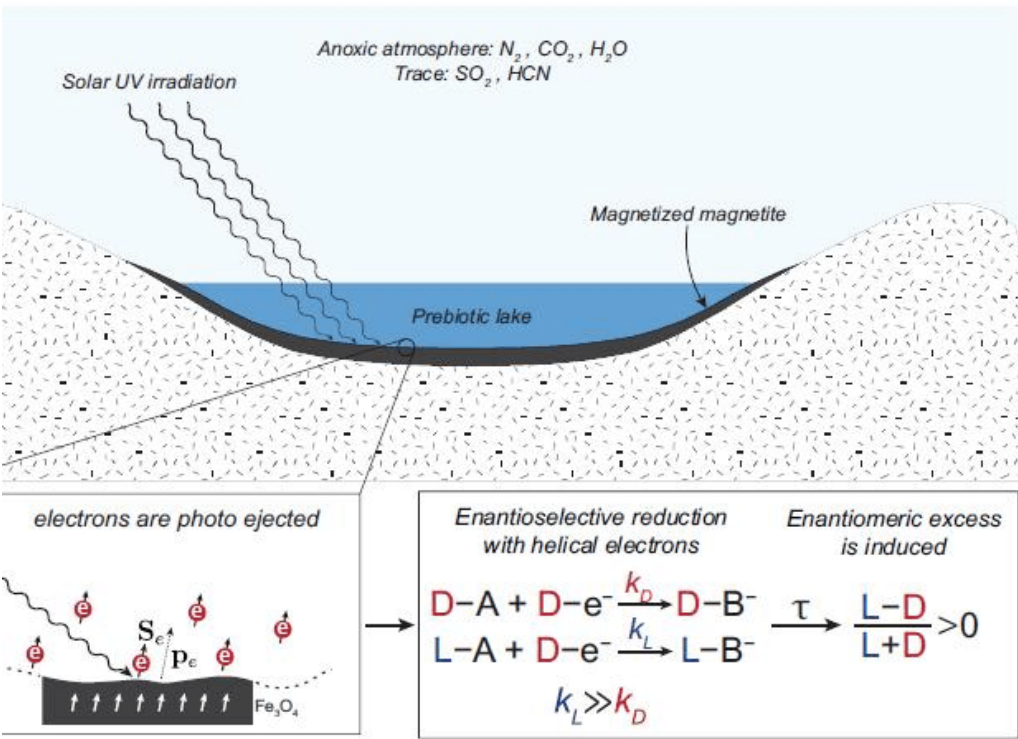
*Our estimate of this chiral bias is based on the strong effective spin orbit coupling observed in the chiral-induced spin selectivity (CISS) effect, as applied to energy differences in reduction reactions for different isomers.*

*In the original CISS experiments, spin-selective electron transmission through a monolayer of double-strand DNA molecules is observed at room temperature, indicating a strong coupling between molecular chirality and electron spin.*



We propose that the chiral symmetry breaking due to the CISS effect, when applied to reduction chemistry, can induce enantio-selective synthesis on the prebiotic Earth and thus facilitate the homochiral assembly of life's building blocks.

[Image is from this paper. L is left-handed spin or twist, D is right-handed, e- is an electron, k are the reaction types, A is an organic molecule twisted into B.]



### Paleobiology: Precambrian.

[The Precambrian is when life made the transition from single cells or clumps of cells to organized multicellular life. The final period of the Precambrian was the Ediacaran, from 600 to 542 megayears ago. The fauna of this period was wiped out by the origin of predators during the following Cambrian period. Prior to predators, organisms were soft bodied, while the Cambrian had a burst of speciation of armoured or shelled species.]

Butterfield, N.J. (2022) **Constructional and functional anatomy of Ediacaran rangeomorphs.** GEOLOGICAL MAGAZINE 159:doi.org/10.1017/S0016756820000734 (available as a free pdf)

[Heterotrophs are animals that have to feed. Autotrophs are plants that generate their food from photosynthesis.]

Authors' abstract: *Rangeomorphs were conspicuous members of the Ediacaran biosphere, present from roughly the end of the Gaskiers glaciation through to the beginning of the Cambrian period (c. 575 to 540 megayears ago).*

*As the first substantial instances of large complex organisms in the fossil record, they mark a key transition in geobiological history, presaging the first appearance of unambiguous animals at c. 555 Ma.*

*Ediacaran rangeomorphs were the first substantially macroscopic organisms to appear in the fossil record, but their underlying biology remains problematic.*

*Although demonstrably heterotrophic, their current interpretation as osmotrophic consumers of dissolved organic carbon (DOC) is incompatible with the inertial (high Re) and advective (high Pe) fluid dynamics accompanying macroscopic length scales.*

*The key to resolving rangeomorph feeding and physiology lies in their underlying construction. Taphonomic analysis of three-dimensionally preserved Charnia from the White Sea identifies the presence of large, originally water-filled compartments that served both as a hydrostatic exoskeleton and semi-isolated digestion chambers capable of processing recalcitrant substrates, most likely in conjunction with a resident microbiome.*

*At the same time, the hydrodynamically exposed outer surface of macroscopic rangeomorphs would have dramatically enhanced both gas exchange and food delivery.*

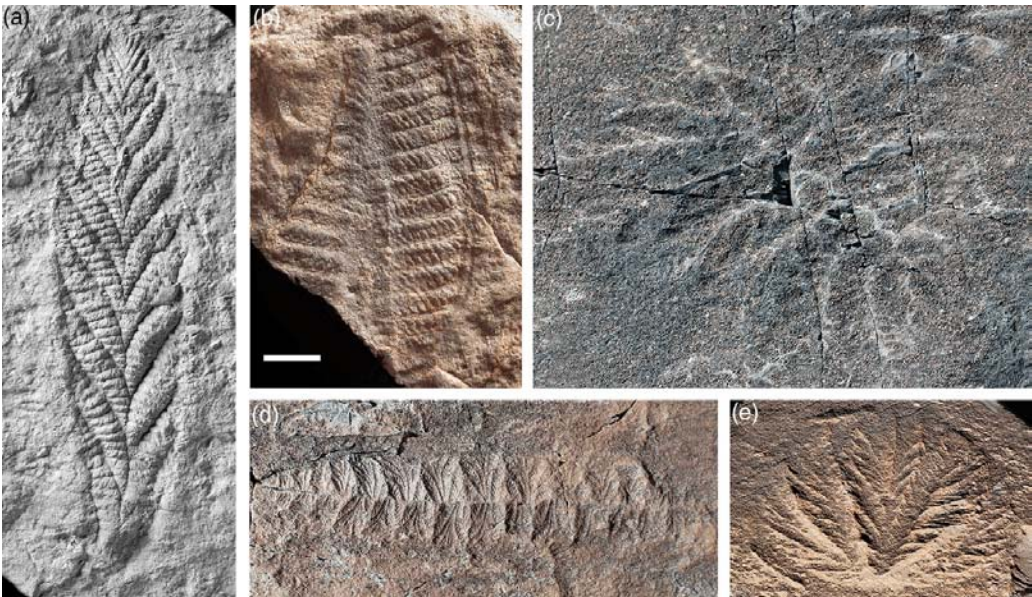
*A bag-like epithelium filled with transiently circulated seawater offers an exceptionally efficient means of constructing a simple, DOC-consuming, multicellular heterotroph.*

*Such a body plan is broadly comparable to that of anthozoan cnidarians, minus such derived features as muscle, tentacles and a centralized mouth. Along with*



other early bag-like fossils, rangeomorphs can be reliably identified as total-group eumetazoans, potentially colonial stem-group cnidarians.

[Images are from this paper and show examples of rangeomorphs.]



Groups of differently shaped grooves laying in the depression that enhance the Dickinsonia body imprints or accompany their individual areas are interpreted as imprints of ridges and cords of mucous material. They are considered to represent structures of self-determined stretching and liftoff of the body margins from the substrate.

The rings and arcs of silt- and sand-sized mineral particles bordering the body imprints are composed of material that was supposedly brushed off from the surface of the microbial mat by Dickinsonia. They are considered traces of the adhesion of these organisms to the substrate.

Accumulations of multidirectional pulling and tear-off structures, lacking the body imprint but accompanied by the joint plane passing into the overlying sediment and cutting through the bedding, are interpreted as escape traces.

The dual modality of the behaviour (attachment and mobility) could indicate the adaptability of Dickinsonia to life in extremely shallow-water environments.

[Image is from Wikipedia and shows a life pose of Dickinsonia. The colours are imaginary.]



Ivantsov, A., and M. Zakrevskaya (2022) **Dickinsonia: mobile and adhered.** GEOLOGICAL MAGAZINE 159:doi.org/10.1017/S0016756821000194

Authors' abstract: The classical genus of Ediacaran macroorganisms, Dickinsonia, was part of an extensive benthic marine community inhabiting the fields of microbial mats. The remains of Dickinsonia are commonly preserved in the position of adhesion to the habitat substrate.

However, these were mobile organisms. In addition to the already known feeding traces of Dickinsonia, structures described as traces of motor activity are reported.

Long parallel furrows, extending from the posterior end of the body imprint, are interpreted as imprints of ridges left by an organism moving along the surface of the substrate.



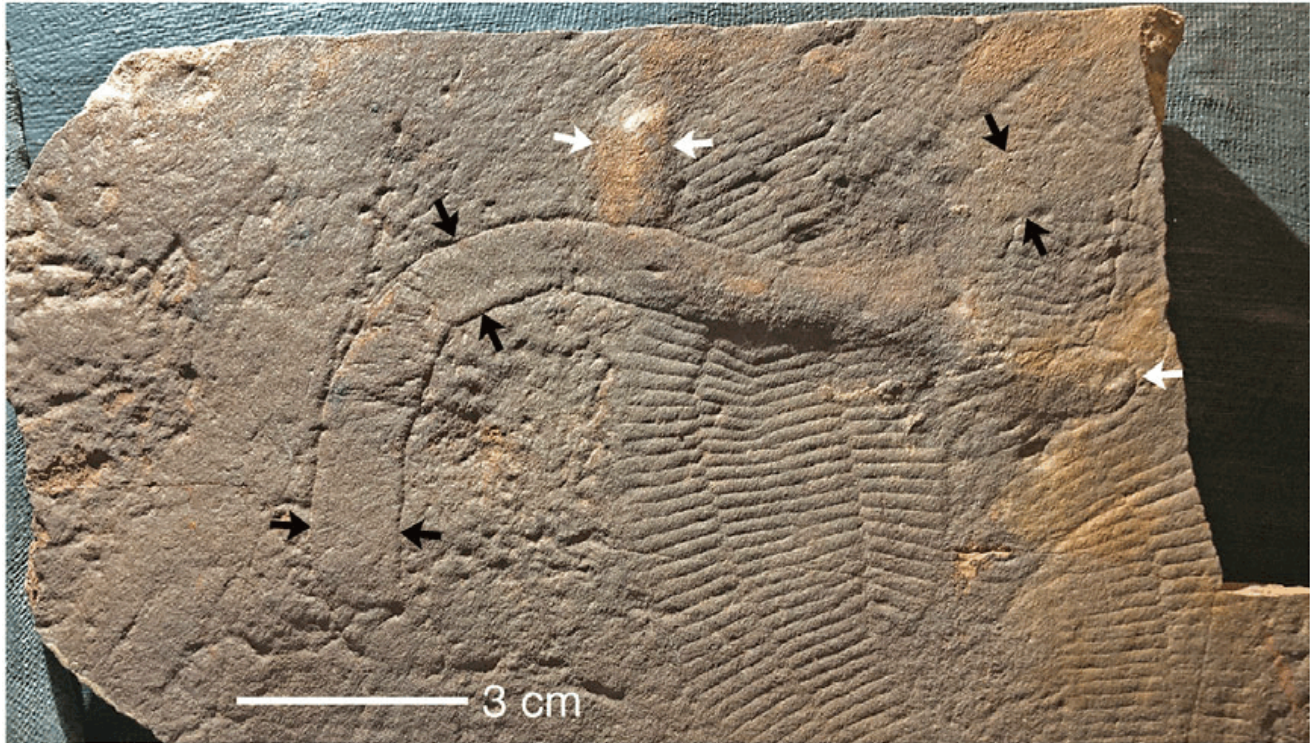
Gehling, J.G., and B. Runnegar (2022) **Phyllozoon and Aulozoon: key components of a novel Ediacaran death assemblage in Bathtub Gorge, Heysen Range, South Australia.** GEOLOGICAL MAGAZINE 159:doi.org/10.1017/S0016756821000509 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The recognition of fossiliferous horizons both below and above the classical Ediacara levels of the Flinders Ranges, South Australia, significantly expands the potential of this candidate World Heritage succession.*

*Here we document a small window into the biology and taphonomy of the late Ediacaran seafloor within the new Nilpena Sandstone Member of the Rawnsley Quartzite in Bathtub Gorge, northern Heysen Range.*

*A 1 metre<sup>2</sup> slab extracted from the gorge, now on permanent display at the South Australian Museum, has a death assemblage dominated by the erniettomorph *Phyllozoon hansenii* and a newly named macroscopic tubular body fossil, *Aulozoon soliorum* gen. et sp. nov., on its fine sandstone bed sole.*

*The orientations and juxtaposition of these taxa suggest overprinting of an in situ benthic *Phyllozoon* community by sand-filled tubes of *Aulozoon* carried in by a storm wave-base surge.*



*Phyllozoon hansenii* is a widespread species that is restricted to the Nilpena Sandstone Member of the Rawnsley Quartzite, whereas *Dickinsonia costata* ranges from the underlying Ediacara Sandstone Member into the Nilpena Sandstone Member.

*Fundamental differences in the ways these two vendobiont taxa are constructed and preserved may provide insights into their biology and phylogenetic affinities.*

*In the Nilpena Sandstone Member, *D. costata* is joined by *Dickinsonia rex*, which appears to be confined to the member, and is here re-described to clarify its taxonomic status and stratigraphic distribution.*

[Image is from this paper. Many more worth looking at in the free pdf, which show the difficulty of collecting and interpreting these fossils.]

**Paleobiology: Post-Cambrian.**

Kraft, P., and M. Merg (2022) **Struggle for phosphorus and the Devonian overturn.** TRENDS IN ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 37:doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2022.03.009

Authors' abstract: *Phosphorus had a key role in the Early Paleozoic radiation events. The decline of organisms with external phosphatic shells was caused by an increasing inaccessibility of phosphorus during the Early Paleozoic.*

*The dominant phosphorus pool shifted from benthic groups to pelagic vertebrates during the Devonian. Recycling of phosphorus in the marine environment substantially moved phosphorous into the water column.*

*The Devonian phosphorus pool pattern is one of the key factors controlling marine diversity and ecological patterns up to the present time.*

*Organisms with external phosphatic shells diversified and became abundant at the beginning of the Early Paleozoic but gradually declined and were rare by its end.*

*The decreasing availability of phosphorus in oceans is thought to be responsible for this evolutionary trend. Responses of organisms to changes in the phosphorus cycle can be traced to the late Neoproterozoic, and likely had a significant role in the Cambrian explosion, the Great Ordovician Biodiversification Event, and the Devonian nekton revolution.*

*Effective use of phosphorus by vertebrates during the Devonian nekton revolution caused the phosphorus pool to shift from benthic external shells to the skeletons of pelagic vertebrates, and moved the marine faunas toward the dominance patterns and ecological structure of the modern evolutionary fauna.*

**Zoology.**

Wang, M.S., et al (2022) **A polar bear paleogenome reveals extensive ancient gene flow from polar bears into brown bears.** NATURE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 6:936-944

Authors’ abstract: *Polar bears (Ursus maritimus) and brown bears (Ursus arctos) are sister species possessing distinct physiological and behavioural adaptations that evolved over the last 500,000 years.*

*However, comparative and population genomics analyses have revealed that several extant and extinct brown bear populations have relatively recent polar bear ancestry, probably as the result of geographically localized instances of gene flow from polar bears into brown bears.*

*Here, we generate and analyse an approximate 20X paleogenome from an approximately 100,000-year-old polar bear that reveals a massive prehistoric admixture event, which is evident in the genomes of all living brown bears. This ancient admixture event was not visible from genomic data derived from living polar bears.*

*Like more recent events, this massive admixture event mainly involved unidirectional gene flow from polar bears into brown bears and occurred as climate changes caused overlap in the ranges of the two species. These findings*

*highlight the complex reticulate paths that evolution can take within a regime of radically shifting climate.*

Selden, V., and F.E. Putz (2022) **Root cropping by pocket gophers.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 32:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2022.06.003

Authors’ abstract: *Pocket gophers (Geomys spp.) are solitary, root-eating fossorial rodents native to North and Central American grasslands and are presumed to acquire most of their food through excavation of tunnels maintained as part of tunnel systems up to 160 metres long.*

*Given that burrowing is 360 to 3,400 times more energetically costly than surface walking, pocket gophers have high energy requirements.*

*Roots are scarce at the depths of their tunnels in the sandy soil of our study site (20 to 64 cm), but here we describe a novel food source for southeastern pocket gophers (Geomys pinetis, hereafter gophers): roots that grow into their tunnels. These roots could supply an average of 21% but up to 62% of their daily basal energetic needs.*

**Human Prehistory.**

Bergström, A., et al (2022) **Grey wolf genomic history reveals a dual ancestry of dogs.** NATURE 607:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-04824-9 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *The grey wolf (Canis lupus) was the first species to give rise to a domestic population, and they remained widespread throughout the last Ice Age when many other large mammal species went extinct.*

*Little is known, however, about the history and possible extinction of past wolf populations or when and where the wolf progenitors of the present-day dog lineage (Canis familiaris) lived.*

*Here we analysed 72 ancient wolf genomes spanning the last 100,000 years from Europe, Siberia and North America. We found that wolf populations were highly connected throughout the Late Pleistocene, with levels of differentiation an order of magnitude lower than they are today.*



*This population connectivity allowed us to detect natural selection across the time series, including rapid fixation of mutations in the gene IFT88 40,000 to 30,000 years ago. We show that dogs are overall more closely related to ancient wolves from eastern Eurasia than to those from western Eurasia, suggesting a domestication process in the east.*

*However, we also found that dogs in the Near East and Africa derive up to half of their ancestry from a distinct population related to modern southwest Eurasian wolves, reflecting either an independent domestication process or admixture from local wolves.*

*None of the analysed ancient wolf genomes is a direct match for either of these dog ancestries, meaning that the exact progenitor populations remain to be located.*

*The grey wolf (Canis lupus) has been present across most of the northern hemisphere for the last few hundred thousand years and, unlike many other large mammals, did not go extinct in the Late Pleistocene.*

*Studies of present-day genomes have found that current population structure formed mostly in the last ~30,000 to 20,000 years, or roughly since the Last Glacial Maximum (LGM; ~28 to 23 thousand years ago (ka)).*

*Siberian wolves predating the LGM have ancestries that are largely basal to present-day diversity, which has led to suggestions that many pre-LGM wolf lineages went extinct.*

*Among the central questions is thus to what extent the global wolf population was subject to extinction processes or responded to climate change with new adaptations.*

*While it is clear that grey wolves gave rise to dogs, there is no consensus regarding when, where and how this happened. Skeletal remains attributable to the present-day dog lineage appear archaeologically by 14 ka, and genetic estimates of when the ancestors of dogs and modern wolves diverged range from 40 to 14 ka.*

Maroti, Z., et al (2022) **The genetic origin of Huns, Avars, and conquering Hungarians.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 32:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2022.04.093 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Huns, Avars, and conquering Hungarians were migration-period nomadic tribal confederations that arrived in three successive waves in the Carpathian Basin between the 5th and 9th centuries.*

*Based on the historical data, each of these groups are thought to have arrived from Asia, although their exact origin and relation to other ancient and modern populations have been debated.*

*Recently, hundreds of ancient genomes were analyzed from Central Asia, Mongolia, and China, from which we aimed to identify putative source populations for the above-mentioned groups.*

*In this study, we have sequenced 9 Hun, 143 Avar, and 113 Hungarian conquest period samples and identified three core populations, representing immigrants from each period with no recent European ancestry.*

*Our results reveal that this immigrant core of both Huns and Avars likely originated in present-day Mongolia, and their origin can be traced back to Xiongnus (Asian Huns), as suggested by several historians.*

*On the other hand, the immigrant core of the conquering Hungarians derived from an earlier admixture of Mansis, early Sarmatians, and descendants of late Xiongnus.*

*We have also shown that a common proto-Ugric gene pool appeared in the Bronze Age from the admixture of Mezhovskaya and Nganasan people, supporting genetic and linguistic data.*

*In addition, we detected shared Hun-related ancestry in numerous Avar and Hungarian conquest period genetic outliers, indicating a genetic link between these successive nomadic groups.*

*Aside from the immigrant core groups, we identified that the majority of the individuals from each period were local residents harboring native European ancestry.*

**Technology.**

Byers, M., et al (2022) **Unnecessary risks created by uncontrolled rocket reentries.** NATURE ASTRONOMY 6:doi.org/10.1038/s41550-022-01718-8 (available as a free pdf)

*Authors’ abstract: Most space launches result in uncontrolled rocket body reentries, creating casualty risks for people on the ground, at sea and in aeroplanes. These risks have long been treated as negligible, but the number of rocket bodies abandoned in orbit is growing, while rocket bodies from past launches continue to reenter the atmosphere due to gas drag.*

*Using publicly available reports of rocket launches and data on abandoned rocket bodies in orbit, we calculate approximate casualty expectations due to rocket body reentries as a function of latitude.*

*The distribution of rocket body launches and reentries leads to the casualty expectation (that is, risk to human life) being disproportionately borne by populations in the Global South, with major launching states exporting risk to the rest of the world.*

*We argue that recent improvements in technology and mission design make most of these uncontrolled reentries unnecessary, but that launching states and companies are reluctant to take on the increased costs involved.*

*Those national governments whose populations are being put at risk should demand that major spacefaring states act, together, to mandate controlled rocket reentries, create meaningful consequences for non-compliance and thus eliminate the risks for everyone.*

*However, there is no international consensus on the acceptable level of risk, and other spacefaring states, including the USA, make similar choices concerning uncontrolled reentries. The added technological complexity and cost involved in achieving controlled reentries helps to explain the shortage of international rules on this matter.*

*Moreover, casualty risks are usually assessed on a launch-by-launch basis, which keeps them low and makes it easier for governments to justify uncontrolled reentries. However, as humanity’s use of space expands, cumulative risks should also be considered.*

*Launch providers have access to technologies and mission designs today that could eliminate the need for most uncontrolled reentries. The challenge, in an increasingly diverse and competitive space launch market, is not only to raise safety standards but to ensure that everyone is subject to them, and to do all this without creating unreasonable barriers for new entrants.*

*Launch sequences vary between rocket models. Some rockets have ‘boosters’, which are dropped suborbitally during the launch sequence with some precision and usually into the ocean.*

*All rockets have a ‘core’ or ‘first stage’, some of which are designed to be suborbital and others orbital. If the core stage attains orbit, it is then either abandoned in orbit (as with the Long March 5B rockets) or brought back through a controlled reentry.*

*When a rocket stage is abandoned with sufficiently low perigees, gas drag gradually reduces its altitude and eventually causes it to reenter the atmosphere in an uncontrolled way, which can occur at any point under its flight path. In contrast, controlled reentries from orbit use an engine burn to direct the stage to a remote area of ocean or recovery zone. Most rockets also have one or more upper stages, which deploy the payload (such as one or more satellites).*

*Although upper stages are sometimes brought back to Earth through a controlled reentry, they are often abandoned in orbit. This article focuses on abandoned orbital stages (generically called ‘rocket bodies’ hereafter) that return to Earth in an uncontrolled way, creating danger for people on the surface.*

*In 2020, over 60% of launches to low Earth orbit resulted in a rocket body being abandoned in orbit. Remaining in orbit for days, months or even years, these large objects pose a collision hazard for operational satellites.*

*They can also, in the event of a collision or an explosion of residual fuel, fragment into thousands of smaller but still potentially destructive pieces of space debris, creating even more hazards for satellites.*

*There is yet another risk, which is the focus of this paper: when intact stages return to Earth, a substantial fraction of their mass survives the heat of atmospheric reentry as debris. Many of the surviving pieces are potentially lethal, posing serious risks on land, at sea and to people in aeroplanes.*