

OPUNTIA 538



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

FOOD INFLATION

by Dale Speirs

I'm glad I have some good investments to supplement my pension. I don't know how other retirees manage. For my house, electricity is now 7.5 cents per kWh, and natural gas is \$6.50 per gigajoule. Gasoline for the Opuntiamobile is anywhere between \$1.30 to \$1.50 per litre.

I still eat out but not in sit-down restaurants, where a decent meal starts at \$30 or so. Here are some of the fast food outlet meals I've had recently. Drinks included in price if shown, if not then not.



A & W
breakfast:
\$12.48



Calgary Stampede
rodeo at the Ag
Grill: \$17.50
chicken fingers,
fries



Opa: \$16
chicken
skewers,
fries



YYC Burgers food truck: \$12 bacon cheeseburger
Best burger I've ever eaten.



Fatburger:
\$17
plain
hamburger,
fries

Second-best
burger in
Calgary



Harvey's:
\$12.40
bacon
cheeseburger
and onion
rings

Third-best
burger

Bourbon Street: \$14.36, salt-and-pepper chicken, fried rice, corn



Kabob Land: \$19.89, steak and chicken skewers, basmati rice, fries



Burger King: \$9.33, chicken fries, mozzarella sticks, Coke Cherry (not available anywhere else in Calgary, whether fast food outlets or supermarkets)



Popeyes: \$11.85, popcorn shrimp, fries, gravy, biscuit



Peter's Drive-In: \$18.65 for plain hamburger, fries, and orange milkshake.
Photo taken inside the Opuntiamobile.



CAKE VENDING MACHINES
photos by Dale Speirs

Last year cake vending machines began appearing in Calgary malls, installed by a New Jersey bakery. The cake slices have to be ordered via a smartphone. The signs say the cakes are baked in Hoboken but I wonder about that. Supposing they ship them to Calgary via expedited air freight, the slices would be at least one day old and probably closer to two days old upon being set into the machines.

The free-standing machine shown below was seen in Southcentre Mall in what we call Deep South Calgary. The next page shows views of a machine occupying a vacant store front in the downtown core at TD Square.





Peanuts are now \$6 a bag. I don't eat peanuts in the shell myself, but feed them to the squirrels in my yard. At the beginning of this summer, there were three black squirrels and one brown. Two of the blacks were run over by vehicles. I saw the magpies feasting on the roadkill on my street. I haven't seen the third black squirrel in weeks. However the brown squirrel is a faithful visitor. The photo here was taken in October.



FOOD COZIES: PART 24

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 23 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, 524, and 530.]

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.

All the food items from Safeway illustrated herein, plus the cover, are what I ate purely to research this column. That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Bake, Batter, And Rolls.

THE WALKING BREAD (2018) by Winnie Archer was the third novel in a series about Ivy Culpepper of Santa Sofia, California. She was an apprentice baker at Yeast Of Eden, and a journeyman Marple.

An art car festival was in progress and Ivy's brother Billy was a contestant. His arch rival Max Litman was found dead, posed in his car by the killer. The sheriff made Billy the prime suspect, so his sister was on the job to exonerate him.

In between pounding bread dough in the bakery, Ivy barged into places where she was not welcome, searching for clues. Litman was a scoundrel who had many enemies, including a group of local residents who had lost money in his investment company.

The art car parade went well, then on to the ball. With only twenty pages to go, the reader will expect the grand finale amongst the gowns and tuxedos. One of the investors Litman had cheated was the sheriff. Never pick a fight with a man who can legally shoot you, or thinks he can.

After the shouting and shooting was over, on to the recipes appendix. Chocolate Babka took up six pages, so clear your schedule if you want to make those. Also a soup recipe, for Chile Ancho Sopa de Chocolate.

NOTHING BUNDT TROUBLE (2020) by Ellie Alexander (pseudonym of Katherine Dyer-Seeley) was the eleventh novel in a series about Juliet Capshaw of Ashland, Oregon. She was pastry chef at the family bakery Torte, and the resident Miss Marple, not necessarily in that order.

The plot began with Juliet inheriting her parent's house. She had a lot of cleaning to do, slowed by constant stops to look over family mementos and documents. One of them was a diary by her late father about a hit-and-run accident in 1988 that he thought was murder, and which he called "the pastry case".

The town's annual Shakespeare festival was nigh, always good for business. After a detour through the kitchen and a recital of the menu, an extended flashback occurred. The text of the diary was a major portion of the book. Juliet mentioned the diary to others, a mistake because the killer was still around and there is no statutory limit for murder.

The story alternated between the diary extracts, modern-day baking, and assorted alarums as the murderer stalked Juliet. Between baking banana bundt cakes and having laser-sighted guns pointed at her, Juliet was a busy woman. She survived and the culprit was brought to justice.



All ended well with jelly-glazed meatballs served at a 1980s retro party to celebrate the closure of the case. I was a young man in the 1980s but don't recall meatballs of any kind being a popular food at get-togethers. But as the saying goes, any excuse for a party.

The recipes appendix began with Ding Dong Cake, a marshmallow concoction that reminded me why I only ate a Twinkie once. Then on to Corned Beef Hash, Pineapple Upside Down Cake, Deep Dish BBQ Chicken Pizza, and of course Banana Bundt Cake. All of that washed down with Pistachio Rose Latte.

MOCHA, SHE WROTE (2021) carried on the saga of Juliet Capshaw. Andy, one of Torte's baristas, was competing in the West Coast Barista Cup. The head judge Benson Vargas was murdered. He had not been a popular man and the list of suspects was everyone who knew him.

Since Andy was near the top of that list, Juliet went sleuthing. As did the police, who were fussy about such things. The back stories were uncovered, the casualties increased, and there was the final confrontation with the murderer. She had been motivated by greed, ambition, and blackmail. The last minute save was a given.

Andy won the Barista Cup, which went on display at Torte. And so to the recipes appendix. Strawberry Cheesecake Bars to begin, followed by Panzanella Salad, Lemon Rosemary Shortbread Cookies, Summer Pasta Salad, Pavlova (with berries in red wine), and for drinks, Hot Honey Latte.



Chocolate-caramel croissant.

CARAMEL PECAN ROLL MURDER (2022) by Joanne Fluke (pseudonym of Joanne Fischmann) was the 31st novel in a cozy series about Hannah Swensen of Lake Eden, Minnesota. Given her status as a murder magnet, the village was woefully misnamed. She operated a bakery when not Marpleing.

The novel began with Hannah baking Butterscotch Delight Cookies, the recipe for which concluded the first chapter. (No appendix; the recipes were scattered through the text.)

There was a multi-car pileup out on the highway in the first few pages but that was the overture. Since many of Hannah's customers were police or tow truck operators, that cut into her business.

Pausing briefly for the recipes Lemon Danish, Miniature Lemon Cheesecakes, and the titular Caramel Pecan Rolls. the plot moved on to a fishing tournament. Hannah was asked to bake for the tournament buffet, viz Scotch Eggs and Breakfast Enchiladas.

The compere of the tournament, television host Sonny Bowman, skipped breakfast so he could get an early start on the fishing. He ought not to have done that, as he was next seen dead in his boat. Shot in the back, so it wasn't suicide, as the medical examiner helpfully noted.

The murder investigation by the police got underway, while the living enjoyed a Reuben Omelet. Hannah dug up back stories with the assistance of her sister Andrea.

Serving Blueberry Coffee Cake as they went, they dealt with Bowman's fiancée, who had caught the deceased in bed with another woman the previous day, and his assistant, who didn't much like his boss.

The story alternated between identifying suspects and lots of cookie recipes. Bowman had not been a popular man. Not for the first time, Hannah misidentified the murderer. The real killer caught her out on the water, but help arrived in time as it always did. The culprit was a woman scorned by Bowman.

With that done, there was time for serious eating. Butterscotch Sundae Cake, European Peach Cake, and Apple School Pie. The kind of recipes with phrases like "sticks of butter" and "cups of sugar".

Baking Down Under.

EARTHLY DELIGHTS (1992) by Kerry Greenwood was the first novel in a cozy series about Corinna Chapman of Melbourne, Australia. She had been an accountant and banker who walked out on a high-paying job and a lousy husband. She became a baker, proud proprietor of Earthly Delights, and a cat named Horatio.

That didn't relieve the stress of life though, setting aside the fact that bakers rise at 04h00 to start their workday. Junkies in front of her shop, a stalker after her, threatening letters and graffiti, street people, and fraud competed with her baking duties.

The plot was complicated, with a large cast of characters. Chapman wasn't so much a Miss Marple as she was a social worker. The novel leaned more to noir than cozy. Two murderers were on the loose, unbeknownst to each other and everyone else. The crimes were dealt with and there was a last-minute save by the police.

The recipes appendix was for Plum Pudding Muffin, Herb Scrolls, and, unusually for cozies, do-it-yourself yeast cultures.

TRICK OR TREAT (2007) was another chaotic storyline as Corinna Chapman dealt with Best Fresh, a cut-price franchise bakery competing with her bakery Earthly Delights. Not related but also in the mix was her boyfriend Daniel's aggressive ex-girlfriend hovering about.

As in previous novels in this series, drug addicts were a problem in the neighbourhood. However, Best Fresh was not the problem Chaman thought it would be, as their main stock was sawdust muffins and they had few repeat customers.

The punchup at the witches' coven was none of her problem. They were celebrating Samhain mainly to justify the title of this novel. There was little else Halloweenish in this book.

A mixup occurred when Earthly Delights received a bag of rye flour not from their regular organic supplier. The stuff looked strange but they sent it over to Best Fresh as a mis-delivered bag.

The dodgy flour had ergot fungus. Since Best Fresh hired anyone off the street instead of trained bakers like Earthly Delights, their staff blindly used the flour for that day's offerings. The result was a flood of dazed and hallucinating people wandering the streets.

Meanwhile there were some characters who had a huge loot of gold bars stolen during World War Two and nowhere to sell them. Therefore they bought a played-out Australian gold mine as a cover to smelt down the bars and sell the re-refined gold legitimately. Trouble was, some of Chapman's neighbours knew the back story and caught on to the scheme.

And so to the recipes, which included Wonder Cake, Boiled Chocolate Cake (worse than it sounds), Cheesy Muffins, and Chicory And Onions.

FORBIDDEN FRUIT (2010) was the next novel in the series. T'was Christmas, which in Australia is a summer festival. Corinna Chapman dealt with the usual melange of characters and alarums. These included a rogue donkey, a pair of runaway lovers, a religious cult, vengeful Romanies, and fanatical vegans.

The Earthly Delights had steady business, although everyone seemed put off by the Grated Carrot Sultanas, even the vegans. The gypsies clashed with the coven of witches. The catering of a vegan party went well though, such as ricepaper rolls and mushroom wonton.

Christmas finished up with dinner at Chapman's landlord. He was not a vegan. Ham with quince glaze, turkey with cranberry jelly, roast beef with horseradish, and assorted sweets.

In The Sweet Pie And Pie.

NEVER SAY PIE (2012) by Carol Culver was a novel in a cozy series about Hanna Denton of Crystal Cove, California. She operated The Upper Crust, a pie shop she inherited from her grandmother. In this installment, she had a booth at the Crystal Cove Food Fair, whence many alarums.

A local food critic Heath Barr gave her and the other vendors scathing and unfair reviews. He didn't survive past Chapter 2 and no one mourned him. All of the food vendors, Hanna included, were on the list of suspects, so she went Marpleing.

She was an inept sleuth. The reader will wonder how she found her way home each night from the pie shop. If there was a way for her to be trapped on a stopped escalator, she would find it.

Notwithstanding all that, she managed to find the murderer. Barr had been diddling one of the food vendors in exchange for a good review. Her cuckolded husband found out and the rest followed.

After the final confrontation, on to the recipes appendix. Double Chocolate Cream Pie and Butterscotch Pecan Pie will blow apart any diet, but what of it?

TREACHEROUS TART (2014) by Ellie Grant (pseudonym of Joyce and Jim Lavene) was the second novel in a cozy series about Maggie Grady and her Aunt Clara of Durham, North Carolina. They operated a bakery called Pie In The Sky and Marpled in their spare time.

Aunt Clara was romanced by Donald Wickerson, whose five pervious wives all died under suspicious circumstances. There was nothing suspicious about Wickerson's death. He staggered into the pie shop and died there on the floor, shot through the stomach. Clara was the prime suspect.

Maggie and her boyfriend Ryan Summerour began sleuthing to clear Clara's name. He was a news reporter and Maggie picked up gossip in the pie shop. Business boomed after the murder. There's nothing like a good unsolved killing to sell more pies to tourists who wanted to rubberneck.

The suspects were plentiful, from the five families of Wickerson's previous wives to a real estate developer who wanted to buy the pie shop. The deceased was quite a skirt chaser. There were many women scorned who were happy to see him dead. One of them succeeded.

The recipes appendix included Pumpkin Pizzazz Pie, Mince Pie, and Eggnog Pie (the rum was optional for teetotalers). But where were the tarts?

THE CURSE OF THE CHERRY PIE (2021) by Amy Patricia Meade was the fourth novel about Letitia Tarragon, proprietor of Cookin' The Books café. She was competing in the Virginia Commonwealth Bake-Off in Henrico County. Her entry was Frangipane Cherry Pie.

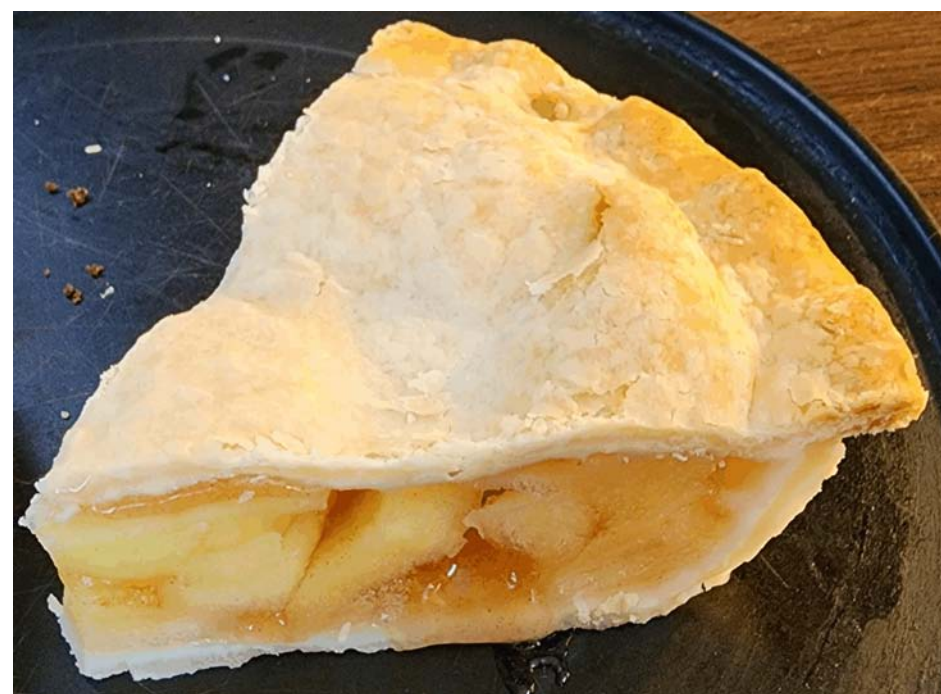
Her competition was vicious, one of whom sent threatening notes. The judges weren't much better, feuding with each other over who stole whose recipes back in the 1980s. On the cherry pie side, two contestants from previous competitions had died under suspicious circumstances.

The electrical cord on one of her appliances was sabotaged in an attempt to electrocute her. Didn't work. The villain failed to realize that Tarragon was booked for the series. Putting a heroine in peril doesn't build any suspense since the reader knows she will come through okay.

Tarragon was also squabbling with her boyfriend, who didn't like her spending so much time in the kitchen. Unusual for a cozy, the subject of racism was introduced. A Hindu competitor was told by a judge that only a white woman could win. The white woman who had won for three years in a row spouted dialogue that would embarrass a convoy truck driver.

The alarums spread suspicion hither and yon, with a side trip into Quebec transsexuals, one of whom had settled down south. However, all that was diversion, as the murderer was jealous about her dentist, who on the side did some drug pushing and canoodling with other women.

Only one recipe, for Tarragon (the spice, not her) Chicken with Spring Vegetables.





The appendix recipes were all for cupcakes. Surprised? Pumpkin Spice, Coffee Mocha, Root Beer Float, and Passion Fruit flavours.

The next novel in the series was *FOR BATTER OR WORSE* (2021). Angie was now eight months pregnant. Melanie was about to marry Angie's brother Joe DeLaura, but that didn't slow down her sleuthing.

The wedding reception was booked for the Sun Dial Resort. Melanie's friend Oz Ruiz was the pastry chef, working for head chef Miles Gallway, a tyrant and a bully, even for chefs. There was no surprise when Gallway subsequently had his head bashed in with a meat tenderizer.

Ruiz was the prime suspect. Melanie et al went sleuthing, if only because she didn't want crime scene tape cluttering up her reception. A complication was a cable television crew that had arrived to do a food show with Gallway as the star chef.

After working out the details of the murder, Melanie held a J'accuse! meeting. The killer was being blackmailed by Gallway. As usual in cozies, the culprit confessed all instead of keeping quiet and letting a defense lawyer get her acquitted.

The wedding and the baby were both successes, so onward to the recipes appendix. All cupcakes of course: Chocolate Orange, Vanilla Sprinkle, Chocolate Lava, and Limoncello.

Carrying on was *STRAWBERRIED ALIVE* (2022), which began with someone firing shots at Melanie DeLaura, as she now was. She had been locking up the Fairy Tale Cupcakes bakery at night.

She wasn't singled out, for the gunman later went after other shopkeepers. More successfully in some attacks, so the death toll had people wondering. Nasty remarks were made about murder magnets. Business fell off at the bakery.

Even a loan shark operation was discovered but they weren't the killers. A string of their clients were, killing spouses for life insurance to pay off the 36% per annum debts. Melanie had been mistaken for one of them. Given how many small businesses were failing, one wondered how a cupcake bakery could survive.

Cupcakes.

PUMPKIN SPICE PERIL (2020) by Jenn McKinlay was the 12th novel in a cozy series about Melanie Cooper of Scottsdale, Arizona. With her partner Angie Harper, they operated the Fairy Tale Cupcake bakery when not Marpleing.

Regular customer Rene Fischer-Klein was poisoned, possibly by one of the bakery's Pumpkin Spice cupcakes. That put Melanie and Angie into sleuthing mode to protect their reputation.

Emotions ran high, angry words were said, threats were uttered, and that was just Angie, who was newly pregnant and very hormonal.

The soap operas and back stories among the suspects weren't much better. The chief Deppity Dawg suspected the bakery was a front for money laundering. He was not being unreasonable, given how many murders had been associated with the place and/or Melanie.

The killer was over the edge. She admitted poisoning Fischer-Klein but said that was a mistake. She only meant to sicken her but miscalculated the dose. Nonetheless, that was still murder.

Pause for digression. Like other cozies published in 2022 which I have read, not a word mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic. I can understand novels published in 2020 and 2021 not mentioning the virus because they would have been in the publisher's pipeline before the pandemic. By 2022, every food cozy should have been integrating the disaster into their storyline.

However, cozy authors are slow on the uptake. Not until the late 2010s did mention of Google searches by Miss Marples become, if not common, then at least not absent.

Cellphones, seldom smartphones, were used as fake suspense because Miss Marples, when going to confront a murderer, left them at home or failed to charge the battery overnight like the rest of the world.

End of rant. Since the pandemic is now over, it is unlikely to be incorporated into future novels, which will leave a gap in cozy histories. On to happier things, such as the recipes appendix.

To no reader's surprise, the lead-off recipe was Strawberry Surprise Cupcakes. Then Vegan Coconut Cupcakes and Hummingbird Cupcakes. The final recipe, last but certainly not least, was Grapefruit With Chai Frosting. That one I'll pass by.



Doughnut Commit Crimes.



MURDER AT THE BEACON BAKESHOP (2021) by Darci Hannah was the first novel in a cozy series about Lindsey Bakewell of Beacon Harbor, Michigan. Living up to her surname, she established a bakery in an old lighthouse.

The grand opening was a disaster. The local historical society held a protest about the lighthouse being converted to a shop. Bakewell's ex- fiancé Jeffrey Plank and his new girlfriend Mia Long arrived in the village and attended the opening. She wasn't long for this world after eating one of Bakewell's doughnuts, which had been spiced with cyanide.

The alarums and confusions spread. There was never a dull moment in Beacon Harbor after Jessica Fletcher, pardon me, Lindsey Bakewell arrived. The smarter villagers would be well advised to sell their house at any price and move to someplace with a lower crime rate, such as Chicago.

In an extensive multi-page confession, the murderer explained the cyanide had been meant for her godmother, who had sold the lighthouse to Bakewell. The culprit wanted the place for herself, because she and her husband had been using the lighthouse for drug trafficking.

After the denouement, on to the recipes. Two basic types of doughnuts were given in the appendix, Raised and Cake. There followed the glazes, Chocolate, Vanilla, and Hog Heaven (with bacon bits).

Then on to Chicken Marsala, Garlic Mashed Potatoes, Carrot-Raisin Muffins, Bacon Spinach Quiche, and Cherry Chocolate Chunk Cookies. Diet? What of it?



*Maple bacon
doughnut
from the Jelly
franchise.*

Chocolate.

THE CHOCOLATE RACCOON RIGMAROLE (2021) by JoAnna Carl (pseudonym of Eve Sandstrom) was the 18th novel in a cozy series about Lee Woodyard of Warner Pier, Michigan. She operated the TenHuis Chocolade and was the local Miss Marple.

The village was plagued by a series of shop break-ins, every kind of store from jewelry to haberdashers. The puzzling aspect was that only sweets and cookies were stolen by the two burglars. Of greater concern was that racoons were nesting under her chocolate shop. The man she hired to trap them was attacked and hospitalized.

He survived but another woman didn't. Along the way, recipes were scattered through the text. The Velveeta Cheese Fudge recipe was a crime against humanity. I don't know why the Potato Soup recipe was in there, although it did look filling.

Chocolate shop business suffered a bit because Woodyard spent too much time Marpleing. The denouement was a complicated one. Essentially a pair of local ne'er-do-wells were at fault for anything not blamed on the racoons.

The traditional gunpoint confrontation was more elaborate than most, but with some screaming and yelling along the way there was a happy ending. Even better, in the final paragraph Woodyard got an order for 100 pounds of bonbons.

DEATH BY CHOCOLATE SNICKERDOODLE (2021) by Sarah Graves was the fourth novel in a series about Jacobia Tiptree and Ellis White of Eastport, Maine. They were proprietors of The Chocolate Moose bakery. Jessica Fletcher was too busy down the coast at Cabot Cove, so Tiptree and White looked after the amateur sleuthing in Eastport.

The tourist season was over, and like all the other village businesses, the bakery would have to subsist on Internet orders. The Eastport Cookie Baking Contest was a pleasant distraction. The bakery had high hopes for a triple-chocolate recipe.

Another distraction was the murder of village curmudgeon Alvin Carter. He was one of those people where the real mystery wasn't why he was killed but why he had lived as long as he did. There was no shortage of suspects. Local and state police notwithstanding, Tiptree and White were on the job.

The duo hardly spent any time in the bakery, mostly interrogating villagers in an "Achtung! Here is Gestapo!" style. If you took a swallow of hard liquor every time they committed criminal trespass, break-and-enter, or contaminated evidence, you'd be unconscious several chapters before the book ended.

The murderer kidnapped White at knife point but she was rescued in the nick of time. Indeed, she had to be since the book series would continue. The cookie contest, mustn't forget that. White didn't win, triple chocolate being passé. The successful entry was Snickerdoodle Au Chocolat. No recipe though.

Everyone thought Carter was a multimillionaire but in reality he was scraping by on next to nothing, too proud to admit his poverty. That was a joke on the murderer, who had forged a will leaving everything to him. Even funnier was that others had the same idea. There were enough fake wills to wallpaper Carter's house.

DEATH BY CHOCOLATE CHIP CUPCAKE (2022) was the next installment in the series. The title of this book was a misnomer since Jacobia Tiptree and Ellis White were obsessing over a new recipe for chocolate pizza, not a cupcake.

Old-Hollywood movie star Ingrid Merryfield had just bought Cliff House, the name of which immediately informed the reader how the first victim would die. She hired Tiptree and White to cater a housewarming party.

All the usual clichés were trotted out, from a storm isolating the house to a reputed haunting to, of course, the victim being pushed over the cliff. The past history of the mansion involved a mass murder and so did the present.

Tiptree and White were caught up in the slaughter of a half-dozen or so guests. Unusually bloody for a cozy. There were three psychopaths in operation. The final explanations took place over a snack of chocolate pizza, with recipe for same in the appendix. The only unsolved mystery was the title of this novel.

Jams And Jellies.

A KILLER MAIZE (2012) by Paige Shelton was the fourth novel in a series about market gardener Rebecca Robbins. She sold fresh produce, jams and jellies, and Marpled, usually in that order. As the novel opened, she had a concession booth at the Swayton County Fall Fair, South Carolina.

A big part of the event was a corn maze (without the 'i'). The title of this book is a pun on the common name for corn in most of the world (with an 'i'). The Ferris wheel operator was found hanging dead from the ride. He had been shot. Robbins' ex-husband Scott Triplett had a shooting gallery at the fair. Nuff said.

Robbins went to work uncovering back stories and skeletons in closets, both hers and others. The murder was good for business at the shooting gallery, and Robbins had difficulty keeping enough jam jars on the shelves. The Ferris wheel was shut down but became the biggest tourist attraction in the county.

Lots of excitement at the fair, including a roller-coaster ride disintegrating while customers were riding. That shut the fair down for good. The food vendors and amusements were ordered to vacate.

Robbins had other problems. She had to get the pumpkin harvest finished on her farm. She still found time to become lost in the corn maze and have a contretemps with the killer. The murderer's motive was revenge for something that happened two decades ago. Revenge is indeed a dish best served cold.

The recipes appendix included South Carolina health foods (for them) like Funnel Cake, Deep-Fried Snickers Bars, and Corn Dogs. Don't forget your Lipitor.

Catering For Crime.

THE BREAKFAST CLUB MURDER (2014) by Camilla T. Crespi was a novel about Lori Corvino of Hawthorne Park, Connecticut. She was recently divorced, had a bratty teenage daughter, a bothersome vegan mother, and a catering business.

Her ex-husband Rob married a dentist Valerie Fenwick. A few days after a serious confrontation between the two women, Valerie was murdered. Lori was briefly a suspect until police learned that Rob had been in financial trouble but inherited Valerie's wealth. For all his sins, Lori didn't believe Rob was a murderer, so she went Marpleing.

Food was constantly on the menu and the pages of this novel. Everyone did their investigating or conspiring over meals. No need for a recipes appendix as the food was described in detail.

As the characters munched their way along, some nasty back stories emerged between courses. One of Rob's creditors learned about Valerie's will and murdered her in the expectation that the debt would be paid off.

BAKER’S DEADLY DOZEN (2017) by Livia J. Washburn was a novel in a cozy series about Phyllis Newsom of Weatherford, Texas. She was a retired school teacher who kept busy baking and Marpleing. She catered a high school dance called Friday the 13th.

The dance was unlucky for the school’s security guard. The deceased had cookie crumbs around his mouth. Guess who baked them? Fortunately for Newsom, if not the guard, he had been stabbed. The Deppity Dawgs were not thrilled to learn that Newsom found the body and was on the case.

Newsom’s sleuthing, and the police too, it must be admitted, revealed drug dealing around the school and other nasty things. The guard was about to squeal, so he was silenced. The murderer confronted Newsom but she had her cellphone turned on and the police heard everything.

And so to the recipes appendix, including Banana Nut Oat Pancakes, Ranch Cheez-Its (which should be outlawed), Texas Chicken Dumplings, and three kinds of casseroles. For the Friday the 13th dance, there were Chocolate Mint Cat Brownies, Killer Sugar Cookies, Lit’l Mummy Dogs, and Chocolate Mummy Cupcakes.

A FATAL GLOW (2022) by Valerie Wilson Wesley was about Odessa Jones of Grovesville, New Jersey. A recent widow, she worked as a real estate agent and on the side had a catering business. Wealthy businessman Casey Osborne hired her at \$150 per plate for thirty people, an offer she could not refuse.

She ought not to have taken the contract. Osborne sampled her homemade preserves and promptly keeled over. Jones and her friends who helped cook were the automatic suspects.

Osborne was not without sin and was little mourned. An ex-wife, a subsequent trophy wife, a business partner, basically everyone was a suspect. To know him was to hate him.

The murder didn’t kill the catering business. Jones still got a few orders here and there. A second murder muddled the soda water fountain. The back stories were fleshed out but everything came down to someone trying to speed up an inheritance.

Two different murders were at work. One was brought to justice but a case couldn’t be proven against the other. As the police detective remarked, sometimes you can’t win them all. There was only one recipe in the appendix. Not preserves, fortunately, but Collard Greens Quiche.

ONE POISON PIE (2021) by Lynn Cahoon was the first novel in a cozy series about Mia Malone of Magic Springs, Idaho. The usual setup was involved, fleeing from an unhappy life in the big city to the village of her birth.

Being a kitchen witch (her description), Mia started a gourmet dinner delivery business. She also went straight into the Marpleing business, as her first delivery was to a client found under the head table, stabbed to death.

With her grandmother and her ex-husband’s sister, Mia went about filling in back stories along with filling in apple pies. Lots of melodrama, some of which the murderer hadn’t wanted revealed, which was what the victim had intended.

Suspects abounded as they so often do in such villages. After surviving the finale, Mia settled in to her new life as a Miss Marple and caterer. Wrapping up was one recipe, for Easy Apple Pie.

Televised Crookery, Pardon Me, Cookery.

THE MISSING INGREDIENT (2010) by Diane Noble was a novel in a non-food cozy series about Kate Hanlon of Copper Mill, Tennessee. Her husband Paul was a church minister and she was the village Miss Marple.

The Taste Network came into town to film an episode of “Great Chefs Of The South”. The show was hosted by Susannah Applebaum, a childhood friend of Kate. The producer was Newt Keller, an all-around boor, who soon disappeared under suspicious circumstances.

That triggered a free-for-all between local police, the FBI, and private citizens. Notwithstanding that hoorah, the show must go on, and the very disgruntled crew continued filming.

You wouldn’t think it but the live audience, Tennessee hillbillies all, were entranced by the demonstration of French fusion cooking. The catfish meuniere with balsamic brown-butter sauce got the cook a standing ovation. Well, the audience probably appreciated a change from hominy grits.

Susannah had her problems. Someone stole her secret recipes and she had a good idea who on the show was the culprit. Plus, she was a suspect in Newt's disappearance. The hotel where the crew was staying and filming was supposedly haunted. Kate found evidence that the events were not hauntings but sabotage.

The denouement was stretched over several false endings. Newt was in hiding as a publicity stunt. There was vicious internecine warfare between several factions of the film crew vying to take over the show. Perhaps it might be wise to skip the catfish meuniere and stick to hominy grits.

MANGO, MAMBO, AND MURDER (2021) by Raquel V. Reyes was the debut novel in a new food cozy series about Miriam Quinones-Smith. She was formerly a New York City academic and now resided in Miami as a stay-at-home mom and part-time television chef.

She presented Caribbean dishes on the hispanic morning show UnMundo. As a new celebrity, a local one at least, she was asked to attend a Women's Club luncheon. That function ended abruptly when a socialite did a face plant into her plate of chicken salad.

She had been poisoned but since no one else who had the chicken salad died, there had to be a different source. When a second victim died from poisoning, suspicion fell on Dr Mario Fuentes, who peddled diet supplements and special teas.

Miriam had her own troubles. Her first cooking spot on UnMundo was a complete disaster because she wasn't used to the pace of television and bungled a few shots.

The alarums accumulated, and Miriam found herself sleuthing, much to the annoyance of the Miami police, who felt they had that prerogative. There was much talk through the novel about diets among all the characters, enough to almost make this an anti-food cozy.

Eventually the culprit was fingered. She had a grudge against the victims as a result of family financial problems. And so to the recipes appendix.

The first recipe was Batida De Fruta Bomba, or Papaya Smoothie in English. However the author advised that the word papaya is crude slang in Cuban

Spanish, so don't order it in English when you're next in Miami. Thence to Saint Tropez Sangria, Picadillo De Pavo, and Chicken Fricassee.

CALYPSO, CORPSES, AND COOKING (2022) was the sequel. Miriam Quinones-Smith and her new husband Robert were preparing for Halloween. The body count began climbing when Miriam found a real body next to a fake tombstone in her front yard.

The Women's Club, undaunted by what happened in the first novel, hired Miriam to cater their annual gala at a country club. Out there, the head chef took a dive off a balcony and was found dead at the foot of the grand staircase. There followed two poisonings.

Miriam also had a booth at the Fall Festival, plus she was still doing her cooking show on UnMundo. The festival had several food trucks, ranging from vegetarian to grilled cheese to Haitian fritay.

The Haitian menu caught Miriam's eye, so she dined on Griot (citrus-marinated pork), pinchos (Puerto Rican kebabs), and a bunch of other items of which I have no idea what they were.

There were the usual back stories plus lessons in conversational Spanish. The alarums included someone snooping around with a drone and using it to attack people.

Planning for the country club gala wasn't entirely smooth. The replacement chef was indignant when he learned he was expected to prepare banana pudding. The calypso band was well received though. Miriam got herself locked inside a walk-in food cooler by the killer.

All of the excitement traced back to drug smugglers. One of them wanted his nephew as head chef at the country club, which explained why one of the victims was the head chef, to create a vacancy.

The recipes appendix included Caldo Gallego (pork belly stew), Ensalada de Pulpo (octopus salad), Pastelitos de Guayaba y Queso (cheese pastry), Fritay Pikliz (hot spiced slaw), and Cala-flan-za (flan).

A CASE OF CAT AND MOUSE (2020) by Sofie Kelly (pseudonym of Darlene Ryan) was a novel in a cozy series about librarian Kathleen Paulson of Mayville Heights, Minnesota.

She was the resident Miss Marple, assisted by her two cats Owen and Hercules, who had magical powers to sniff out clues. Kathleen’s boyfriend Marcus Gordon was a police detective.

A reality television crew had come to Mayville Heights to film a cooking show called “The Great Northern Baking Showdown”. Kathleen found the body of a show judge soon enough. With the help of her cats pointing out clues, the chase was underway. The police were in it too, mustn’t forget them.

The bake-off was on a tight budget. They were hoping to sell the series to a network or streaming service, but so far that was just rumour. The deceased judge was Kassie Tremayne. She was a blogger and social media critic who never let outmoded concepts such as “fair play” and ‘factual evidence” get in the way of her reviews. The production crew did not mourn her.

The producer did, because Tremayne’s father had cycled a half million dollars into the series. The condition was that his daughter be made a judge and, more seriously, be taken off his hands. Any parent with grown children still living at home will understand.

The cats stalked in and out of scenes just to remind readers this was supposed to be a cat cozy. Kathleen was trapped as per usual Marple procedure. One of her cats disarmed the culprit with a snarl and a swipe of his claws across the hand holding the gun.

Kathleen then used a flour bomb, a rather clever device. A real bomb, not just throwing flour in the killer’s face. Flour, like other powdered substances, will explode if spread through the air like dust and then touching an ignition source. The stage kitchen was a writeoff but Kathleen survived.

The bake-off was the other victim but the survivors moved on. There is always another reality show.

MURDER IN THE COOKBOOK NOOK (2021) by Ellery Adams (pseudonym of Jennifer Stanley) was a novel in a cozy series about Jane Steward of Stockton, Virginia. She operated a resort hotel that specialized in book retreats.

This particular novel, however, is better placed as a food cozy. A reality television show “Posh Palate” was filming a bake-off at Storyton Hall. Six chefs were competing for big money. They were also plugging their cookbooks on the side.

As with many such food cozies, the contest developed into a last-person-standing event. The winner wouldn’t be the one with the best recipe but the one who survived to the final round.

The first victim was Chef Pierce, an ill-mannered boor unsurpassed for the speed at which he insulted everyone at Storyton Hall, staff and guests alike. There was no surprise therefore when he was murdered in Chapter 4. His body was found in a alcove off the main kitchen where the cookbooks were stored.

The Storyton staff regretted the murder because the police investigation severely inconvenienced the kitchen operation. Notwithstanding the sudden demise of one of the contestants, the bake-off continued.

The next round was to prepare a menu of Southern food, the main course of which had to be fried. Sho nuff. The chicken and waffles won, while the mustard fried tofu from the vegan chef deservedly did not place.

Meanwhile, back at the murder, complications ensued as the back stories were uncovered by the police. For once, the Deppity Dawgs had the upper hand over Miss Marple.

The filming of the bake-off continued, with lots of descriptions of the food. Make certain you eat before you read this book, otherwise the hunger pangs will drive you crazy. The killer was eventually revealed to be a production assistant on the crew who had a family connection with Pierce.

In the epilogue, the narrative explained that the crimes did wonders for Storyton Hall. The hotel was booked up solid for months in advance. It’s an ill wind that blows no good.

Seafood.

REVENGE OF THE LOBSTER LOVER (2010) by Hilary MacLeod was the first novel in a series about Hy McAllister, an amateur sleuth on Prince Edward Island. A province in eastern Canada, I will add for the benefit of my non-

Canadian readers, but minuscule. We have cattle ranches on the prairies that are bigger. For Americans, think Rhode Island.

McAllister was a walking bag of neuroses who earned her living as a freelance writer for websites. Her current job was an article about ten ways to cook a lobster. She didn't know how to cook a lobster even just one way, but was hoping to rely on the village women to help her out with recipes.

Hawthorne Parker was an outlander who bought a house on the edge of an eroding cliff. The locals saw him coming and were quick to take advantage. So was Parker's boyfriend Guillaume, who did however meet a bad end.

The back stories were filled in, including a vociferous protestor against eating lobsters who said the village women were murderers. The Lobster Liberation Legion, as they called themselves, sabotaged lobster traps and raided the annual village lobster fete.

The denouement was a spectacular storm that swept Parker and his house into the sea and eradicated several other supporting characters. Drug smugglers had been moving lobster claws filled with cocaine. Quite a mess at the end of the book. Wear a bib when reading this novel.

In Vino Homicidium.

A CASE OF SYRAH, SYRAH (2017) by Nancy J. Parra was the first novel in a cozy series about Taylor O'Brian of Sonoma County, California. She lived at her family's winery and operated a tour group agency that specialized in wine country excursions.

Her Aunt Jemma called the winery Sookie's Vineyard because the place was supposedly haunted by a ghost of that name. This gave her an excuse to build up trade by hosting psychic fairs and seances.

Taylor's first tour included a local yoga instructor Laura Scott, who didn't survive the trip. She was found dead with one of Taylor's corkscrews in her neck. The blood was everywhere.

Laura's husband Dan was grief-stricken for at least two weeks, until he married her assistant Amy. That certainly got tongues wagging in the county. Then his sister was murdered.

That didn't take the pressure off Taylor. Her snooping and visits to Dan and Amy constituted stalking, something few Miss Marples think about. Then she stirred up the real killer, who responded with break-and-enter charges.

The police arrested everybody but the reader will wonder how any case could be prosecuted in court. Any defence lawyer could have the case tossed because of Taylor's activities.

The tour agency changed its name to Wine and Crime Tours, there having been plenty of both in Sonoma County. The novel ended with Taylor and friends enjoying a glass of Syrah wine.

Then on to the recipes appendix, with Grilled Lamb Chops, Grilled Eggplant, Spicy Chocolate Chili Cookies, and a selection of cheeses that go well with Syrah.

SEVEN DEADLY ZINS (2019) was the sequel. Taylor O'Brian took a group of potential investors on a tour of Tim Slade's winery. Unfortunately the highlight was the body of an FDA inspector floating in a vat of fresh-pressed grapes.

Since Tim was the main suspect, Taylor went Marpleing. A second murder and other scandals kept her busy contaminating crime scenes.

The first murder was more humourous than it should have been, as the paramedics squabbled with the sheriff over who had rights to the body. Probably they were both behind on their quotas.

Tim's greatest concern was that he had lost a vat of wine. The death toll and the complications steadily increased, involving quite a cast of characters. The killer was trying to salvage her investment in an adjacent winery by clearing away those who would impede her.

Tim specialized in zinfandel grapes, so after police hauled away the murderer, Taylor and Aunt Jemma settled back with a glass of zinfandel wine. The recipes appendix had two foods that apparently went well with the wine, Tandoori Chicken and Homemade Fudge.

MURDERS AND METAPHORS (2019) by Amanda Flower was a novel in a cozy series about Violet Waverly of Cascade Springs, New York, in the Niagara wine country. She operated the Charming Books shop with the assistance of her Grandma Daisy.

The bookstore hosted a book signing by Belinda Perkins, a sommelier who had grown up in the area. She left years ago after a nasty feud that estranged her from her three sisters. The ice wine festival was underway but Belinda was iced herself in the middle of a vineyard. Someone put a grape cutting knife into her chest.

Lacey, one of her sisters, had a public screaming match with Belinda just before the murder and thereby became the prime suspect. The Morton family, who owned the vineyard, weren't too happy because they were trying to springboard a new line of ice wines. Not the best kind of publicity for a new product launch.

The Deppity Dawgs went into action and so did Miss Marple, aka Violet. The soap opera feuds between the Perkins sisters were counterpointed by references to Louisa May Alcott's novel LITTLE WOMEN.

Violet consulted the book for sleuthing guidance. Her cat Emerson also got into the act as a bit player who stirred up the plot from time to time by discovering something.

The killer was a Morton who learned that Belinda was going to write a vicious review about their ice wines. The denouement was settled out in the vineyards and Violet lived to see another day. Plus another novel, depending on sales of this one.

No Rest In The Restaurant Business.

COOKING MOST DEADLY (1996) by Joanne Pence was a novel in a cosy series about Angie Amalfi of San Francisco, California. She was a food writer, occasional chef, and engaged to SFPD detective Paavo Smith.

Angie kept busy, barging into police investigations, helping a struggling restaurant, and putting herself on a serial killer's things-to-do list.

The restaurant was run by three Noo Yawkers who had served time and couldn't pronounce the letter 't'. Angie ended up helping them in the kitchen. She also

auditioned for a cooking show on cable television but failed the audition when she got into an argument with the director about preparing the food.

The murderer almost got Angie. She was rescued in the nick of time when Paavo shot him and saved the state of California the cost of a trial. From there to the restaurant where one of da boys impressed all the gourmets with his meatballs recipe. Until he told them the secret ingredient: Spam.

PROVENCE – TO DIE FOR (2002) by Jessica Fletcher and Donald Bain had the grand old lady vacationing in France for a month. Ostensibly Fletcher was taking a gastronomic course from local chef Emil Bertrand.

He was not a diplomatic man, even allowing for typical maitres de cuisiniers. Consequently no one was surprised when someone stuck a kitchen knife into him. The author Donald Bain had some fun by introducing characters with names such as Poutine and Bonassé.

Bertrand's first cooking class had rabbit on the menu, which dismayed Fletcher and the other anglophone students. Even more dismaying for her was the reaction of the Commissariat Centrale d'Avignon, who did not like amateur detectives barging into their murder investigations.

Fletcher's own snoopings were intermixed with truffle hunting infodumps. There were practical details of managing a restaurant, including how to estimate how much fresh food to buy each day. Margins are thin in the business, and wasted food cuts into the profits.

Bertrand had been planning to move to Paris for fame, fortune, and his own television cooking show. He would have dumped his restaurant financier, his staff, and his pregnant mistress. Instead, the latter got him. A woman scorned and all that.

DEATH AT THE DAY LILY CAFÉ (2016) by Wendy Sand Eckel was a novel in a cozy series about Rosalie Hart of Cardigan, Maryland. She had just opened the Day Lily Café.

Not five minutes after the doors opened, she was asked to become a Jessica Fletcher. Cardigan was a fishing village on Chesapeake Bay, so therefore any local sleuths would be Fletchers, not Marples.

A friend had a sister who was the prime suspect in the murder of Carl James Fiddler. He spent his life living up to his surname and was not mourned. Rosalie’s daughter became tangled in the mess as a further incentive for her to snoop.

The café had to come first though. Not just menus and customer service, but tweets and Facebook updates. Rosalie intermixed questions to her customers about the deceased with food talk. Almost every page had a menu item, so don’t read this book on an empty stomach.

The murderer and the victim had differed on the division of proceeds from a stolen payroll. Rosalie had the usual last-second rescue, and so to the recipes appendix.

The first selection was the Grand Opening Egg Bake, followed by Potato Cake, Arugula Side Salad, Caramelized Onion Grilled Cheese Sandwich, Ten-Minute Tomato Soup, Key Lime Bars, and three types of homemade seasoning salts.

The author also got in a rant against chefs who don’t chop up leaf salads into bite-sized pieces, with which I heartily agree. In some restaurants, I’ve had to use a knife and fork to cut plate-sized leaves into eatable size.

PLEADING THE FISH (2022) by Bree Baker (pseudonym of Julie Anne Lindsey) was the seventh novel in a cozy series about Everly Swan of Charm, North Carolina. She was the proprietor of the Sun, Sand, And Tea café, the local Jessica Fletcher, and a bride-to-be. All told, a busy woman.

Susan Thames was a historian at the local museum who was researching the Swan family history. She didn’t survive the fish fry in the opening scene. Twas a curse, everyone said, meaning Everly, not the victim.

The café took up Everly’s time in between sleuthing and preparing for her wedding. Jerk shrimp kabobs on rice wait for no one, particularly hungry customers during the lunch hour.

Dredging up back stories proceeded a la Fletcher. If there was a curse on the Swan family then it didn’t apply to Everly, who once again survived a near-lethal encounter with the killers. A seagull saved Everly’s life, yes it did.

And so to the wedding and from there to the recipes appendix. First was the Pina Colada Pie, then Blueberry Lemonade Cake, and finally just plain Lemon Cake. All guaranteed to fatten up any bride or groom.

NACHO AVERAGE MURDER (2020) by Maddie Day (pseudonym of Edith Maxwell) was the seventh novel in a cozy series about Robbie Jordan, the proprietor of the Pans ‘N Pancakes café in South Lick, Indiana.

Like many Marples and Fletchers, she went traveling, ostensibly for a high school reunion in Santa Barbara, California. Realistically though, her village had noticed the spike in murders since Robbie settled there, whereas Santa Barbara was big enough that one or two more murders wouldn’t be noticed.

While in the city, Robbie investigated her mother’s death years ago, supposedly from an aneurysm. In between she ate. She posted photos of her breakfasts, the mark of a true foodie. Each chapter had a description of one of her meals, so don’t read this book on an empty stomach.

There was another death. When not stuffing her face, Robbie was investigating both the past and the present. She had the usual contretemps that Miss Marples get into, not to mention stirring up trouble at the reunion. The murderer came from a dysfunctional family and held grudges for a long time.

Thence to the recipes: Mexican Chocolate Almond Cakes, Flaky Chicken Empanadas, Avocado Huevas Rancheros, Orange Scones, Broccoli Tofu Stir Fry, and just plain Nachos.

RED BEANS AND VICE (2001) by Lou Jane Temple was a novel in a cosy series about restaurateur and caterer Heaven Lee of Kansas City, Missouri. A friend asked her to come out to New Orleans to help cater a charity benefit.

She and several other chefs were to prepare a dinner in aid of the Sisters of the Holy Trinity. Before she could serve the Jambalaya, a coffee importer Truly Whitten got one of her knives stuck into him. The recipe for that dish was the prologue to the first chapter.

Other recipes were interleaved throughout the book with the chapters, rather than in an appendix. Pausing only for Brie And Artichoke Profiteroles, the plot commenced.

Lee wasn't the best of Marples but snooped away in between recipes such as Pear Honey, Fish In Parchment, and Trinity Rice Cakes. Both the convent and Lee had problems. Someone stole a cross and back home someone was spreading poison pen letters about her.

Problems and alarums continued, hardly mitigated by French Onion Soup Beignets, Chicken Crepes, Barbecue Shrimp, Tiramisu, and Fried Green Tomatoes With Shrimp Remoulade.

The Red Beans And Rice recipe was the overture to Lee's confrontation with the culprits, who were drug smugglers. The recipe gave me pause, as the first line was "*Examine the beans for rocks, then soak in a large soup pot.*" I'm hoping that was some kind of typo. I can't believe that food inspectors south of the border are so lax that rock-adulterated beans are common enough to warrant a caution.

All ended well for Lee, as it had to because she was booked for the series, with a hearty recipe for Beignets.

DEATH IS SEMISWEET (2002) was the next novel in the series. Heaven Lee was back in Kansas City, concentrating on her restaurant. A friend Stephanie Simpson opened a chocolate shop nearby. Her shop was independent but her uncles owned Foster's Chocolates, a national corporation.

The opening murder was certainly different than the usual run of cozies. 'Twas the 50th anniversary of Foster's. To celebrate, they hire a blimp to cruise over the city with advertising. Someone shot the airship down, killing the pilot. The blimp crashed on top of Stephanie's store.

Café Heaven kept Lee busy but not so busy that she couldn't handle the Marpleing. The novel opened with a recipe for Miracle Whip Chocolate Cake and away it went.

Onward with Flourless Chocolate Soufflé Cake, then the blimp, then the café's open-mic night, which featured a routine about a blimp as a pinata. Tasteful? You decide, but there will be no doubt about other recipes separating the chapters, such as Choc-O-Rama Brownies, Nutella Chocolate Chip Cookies, Truffles, a garroted chocolate expert, and other alarums.

Rabbit In Sweet And Sour Sauce broke the trend. The recipe began "*2 rabbits, each cut in six pieces.*" The Vegetarian Chili With Chocolate opened for the finale. A disgruntled Foster's employee wanted to destroy the company. Chocolate sprayed everywhere on the factory floor before the culprit was stopped.

Mobile Food.

DOUBLE SHOT DEATH (2022) by Emmeline Duncan (pseudonym of Kelly Garrett) was a novel in a cozy series about Sage Caplin of Portland, Oregon. She operated a coffee cart, a small trailer towed from place to place. Not a food truck but the next closest thing.

Her operation was called Ground Rules and specialized in gourmet coffees. She was working at the Campathon Music Festival, held on a farm just outside Portland.

The murder victim, and of course there was one, was discovered by Sage. The body was clutching one of her coffee mugs. Of course it was. So away to the Marpleing. The musicians had lots of back stories and feuds which filled up the novel.

Sage only had three days of the weekend to solve the crime. The Multnomah County sheriffs did not take kindly to her barging about. Something about job demarcation rules.

Sage had other problems. She got on well with her neighbours at the Complementary Chocolate cart. (Complementary to what? They only sold chocolate items.) Unfortunately the proprietor of the Breakfast Bandits was spreading vicious lies about Sage.

The killer was working out Daddy issues by killing her half-brother. She almost got Sage, who nonetheless survived to the recipes appendix. Starting off was Peach And Lemon Iced Tea, then Mint Syrup, Ginger Syrup, Mint Cold Brew (coffee), and Mint Coffee Soda. Those ought to clear your stuffed sinuses.

Following on were Ginger Tea Soda, Ginger Lemonade, and Strawberry-Sage Drinking Vinegar. I never knew people drank vinegar as a beverage. Finally there was Chia Seed Pudding.

Dead And Breakfast.

A CAJUN CHRISTMAS KILLING (2017) by Ellen Byron was a novel set in Pelican, Louisiana. Magnolia “Maggie” Crozat and her family operated a bed-and-breakfast and restaurant on the Crozat Plantation. The business had been plagued by a troller giving them bad reviews.

A rival businessman, possibly the troller, was stabbed to death on their property, which set the plot and the Marpleing in motion. Twas Christmas but definitely not the festive season. Other back stories emerged, such as romantic feuds and pasts that should have remained in the past.

Lots of eating too, in every chapter. French bread with shrimp remoulade alternated with clues, although junk food was admitted along with the sweet potato pralines.

The murderer was acting out over a very complicated mess of family troubles dating back to childhood. And so to the recipes appendix, beginning with the aforementioned Shrimp Remoulade. Following on were Muffaletta Frittata, Brandy Pain Perdu (don’t eat and drive), Chocolate Pecan Bars, and Spicy Cajun Sugar Cookies.

FATAL CAJUN FESTIVAL (2019) took place at the Cajun Country Live! music festival. Maggie Crozat and her family started the festival to drum up business for the plantation but it also drummed up murder. Two bands in the festival were feuding, one of which had an entourage member sent off stage into the heavenly choir.

Gaynell Bourgeois and The Gater Girls were lined up against Tammy Barker, a diva who was a legend in her own mind. Tammy’s manager Pony Pickner had been electrocuted by the microphone which Tammy was to use and which he was testing. The question was which of the two was the intended target.

The Crozat Plantation bed-and-breakfast was sold out with guests, many of whom were picky eaters. In between sorting out food stocks, Maggie sorted out the rivalry between Gaynell and Tammy, and sleuthed into Pickner’s past.

He had sired several illegitimate children, one of whom was a drug dealer who resented Daddy.

Stressed people tend to eat more, which brings me to the recipes appendix. (How’s that for a segue?) I’ll skip the Cauliflower Jambalaya, but the Shrimp Etouffee seemed better.

Then on to Pecan Pralines, Maple Bacon Pralines, Sweet Potato Pralines, and for a change of pace, Rum Raisin Cake (1 cup of rum, so you may fail the breathalyzer test if you eat too much and drive).

THE BODY IN THE BOUILLON (1991) by Katherine Hall Page was a novel in a non-food cozy series about Faith Sibley Fairchild. Being an inveterate Miss Marple, she joined the kitchen staff of Hubbard House, a retirement home in Aleford, Massachusetts.

There were goings-on and she was going to find out what and why. Unfortunately a resident did a face plant into Faith’s hot and savory bouillon. The excitement continued when a local drug dealer’s body was found in her bedroom.

Few places are as filled with feuds and vicious gossiping as a nursing home whose occupants have little else to do. Lots and lots of back stories to dig up, in between arguing with the head cook about where biscuits go on a dinner plate (at the side or underneath the entree to soak up the juices).

The killer trapped Faith but was kind enough to say her bouillon wasn’t the cause for the first death. The old geezer just happened to have a fatal heart attack.

Many residents left legacies to Hubbard House and since the director needed the money, he sped up their demises. And so home for Faith, for some open-faced sandwiches.

Scream For Ice Cream.

A SPRINKLE IN TIME (2022) by Dana Mentink was a novel in a cozy series about Trinidad Jones of Upper Sprocket, Oregon. She operated the Shimmy and Shake Shop, and her grandfather Luis drove the village taxi.

The story began when Luis delivered a passenger, helped her inside with some luggage, and returned to his taxicab to find someone had delivered a corpse into the trunk.

Trinidad had her own problems, financial mostly, and was hoping the annual Alpenfest would bring in tourists to try her milkshakes. The yodeling could be heard out to the county line.

The deceased was Forge Emberly, heartily disliked by everyone who knew him. In addition to Marpleing his death, Trinidad learned of an unsolved murder from 30 years ago. When that body was finally discovered, the question was whether Emberly knew about it and was silenced by the murderer.

The denouement was a series of twists, each of which pinned the blame on a different person. After the final details, the guilt and anguish was resolved with a bowl of ice cream in the shop. There were two recipes in the appendix: Browned Butter Apple Bars, and Cheery Cherry Pickle Jar Ice Cream.

Drink And Be Merry, For You Shall Die.

APPLE CIDER SLAYING (2019) by Julie Anne Lindsey was set in Blossom Valley, West Virginia, where Winona Mae Montgomery and her Granny Smythe operated Smythe Orchards.

To pep up business, they were hosting the First Annual Christmas At The Orchard festival. Pick your own apples and drink lots of cider.

The only sour spot was when Nadine Cooper, a bad apple if ever there was one, was found dead in the apple press. The orchard was in financial difficulties and a murder wouldn't help cider sales.

Winona went investigating, in between dealing with ex-boyfriends and adopting kittens Kenny and Dolly (well, it was West Virginia). There was a land corporation sniffing about. Their agent was trying to sabotage the orchard. The ending was a barn burner, not just figuratively, as an arsonist tried to torch the place.

To finish up, the recipes appendix began with Slow Cookin' Cider. To fill you up, there followed Tater Salad and Dump Cake.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Astronomy.

NASA/ESA/CSA (2022-11-16) **Webb catches fiery hourglass as new star forms.** SCIENCE RELEASE, www.esaweb.org/news/weic2219

Extracts from press release: *The NASA/ESA/CSA James Webb Space Telescope has revealed the once-hidden features of the protostar within the dark cloud L1527 with its Near Infrared Camera (NIRCam), providing insight into the formation of a new star.*

These blazing clouds within the Taurus star-forming region are only visible in infrared light, making it an ideal target for Webb. The protostar itself is hidden from view within the 'neck' of this hourglass shape.

An edge-on protoplanetary disc is seen as a dark line across the middle of the neck. Light from the protostar leaks above and below this disc, illuminating cavities within the surrounding gas and dust.

The region's most prevalent features, the blue and orange clouds, outline cavities created as material shoots away from the protostar and collides with the surrounding matter.

The colours themselves are due to layers of dust between Webb and the clouds. The blue areas are where the dust is thinnest. The thicker the layer of dust, the less blue light is able to escape, creating pockets of orange.

Webb also reveals filaments of molecular hydrogen that have been shocked as the protostar ejects material away from it. Shocks and turbulence inhibit the formation of new stars, which would otherwise form throughout the cloud. As a result, the protostar dominates the space, taking much of the material for itself.

Despite the chaos that L1527 is causing, it's only about 100 000 years old, a relatively young body. Given its age and its brightness in far-infrared light, L1527 is considered a class 0 protostar, the earliest stage of star formation.

Protostars like these, which are still cocooned in a dark cloud of dust and gas, have a long way to go before they become fully-fledged stars. L1527 doesn't

generate its own energy through the nuclear fusion of hydrogen yet, an essential characteristic of stars.

Its shape, while mostly spherical, is also unstable, taking the form of a small, hot, and puffy clump of gas somewhere between 20% and 40% of the mass of our Sun.

[Images are from this press release, showing a long view and close-up.]



Planets.

Sauterey, B., et al (2022) **Early Mars habitability and global cooling by H₂-based methanogens.** NATURE ASTRONOMY 6:1263-1271

[The Noachian era of Mars was 4,100 to 3,700 megayears ago, just as life on Earth was being born.]

Authors’ abstract: *During the Noachian, Mars’ crust may have provided a favourable environment for microbial life.*

The porous brine-saturated regolith would have created a physical space sheltered from ultraviolet and cosmic radiation and provided a solvent, whereas the below-ground temperature and diffusion of a dense, reduced atmosphere may have supported simple microbial organisms that consumed H₂ and CO₂ as energy and carbon sources and produced methane as a waste.

On Earth, hydrogenotrophic methanogenesis was among the earliest metabolisms, but its viability on early Mars has never been quantitatively evaluated.

Here we present a probabilistic assessment of Mars’ Noachian habitability to H₂-based methanogens and quantify their biological feedback on Mars’ atmosphere and climate.

We find that subsurface habitability was very likely, and limited mainly by the extent of surface ice coverage. Biomass productivity could have been as high as in the early Earth’s ocean.

However, the predicted atmospheric composition shift caused by methanogenesis would have triggered a global cooling event, ending potential early warm conditions, compromising surface habitability and forcing the biosphere deep into the Martian crust.

Spatial projections of our predictions point to lowland sites at low-to-medium latitudes as good candidates to uncover traces of this early life at or near the surface.

Bolides.

King, A.J., et al (2022) **The Winchcombe meteorite, a unique and pristine witness from the outer solar system.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 8:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abq3925 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *The Winchcombe meteorite is the most accurately recorded carbonaceous chondrite fall. Its pre-atmospheric orbit and cosmic-ray exposure age confirm that it arrived on Earth shortly after ejection from a primitive asteroid.*

Recovered only hours after falling, the composition of the Winchcombe meteorite is largely unmodified by the terrestrial environment. It contains abundant hydrated silicates formed during fluid-rock reactions, and carbon and nitrogen-bearing organic matter including soluble protein amino acids.

The near-pristine hydrogen isotopic composition of the Winchcombe meteorite is comparable to the terrestrial hydrosphere, providing further evidence that volatile-rich carbonaceous asteroids played an important role in the origin of Earth’s water.

The Winchcombe fireball occurred at 21:54:16 (UT) on 28 February 2021 and was recorded by 16 dedicated meteor cameras.

The fireball was also captured on numerous doorbell and dashcam videos, and there were >1000 eyewitness accounts and reports of a sonic boom to the International Meteor Organization and UK Meteor Observation Network.

The main mass (319.5 grammes) of the meteorite was discovered the next day in the town of Winchcombe, Gloucestershire, UK.

The stone landed on a driveway, fracturing into a pile of dark millimeter- to centimeter sized fragments and powder that was collected with the aid of rubber gloves and securely sealed within polyethylene bags only ~12 hours after the fall.

Further stones were recovered in the local area over the following week by the public and during an organized search by members of the U.K. planetary science community. The largest intact piece of the Winchcombe meteorite is a 152.0 grammes fusion-crust stone found on farmland on 6 March 2021.

In total, 531.5 grammes of material was recovered less than 7 days after the fall, when there was fog and dew on the ground but no rainfall in the area.

[Images are from this paper and show one of the impact sites on a homeowner's driveway in Winchcombe.]



Paleobiology.

Evans, S.D., et al (2022) **Environmental drivers of the first major animal extinction across the Ediacaran White Sea-Nama transition.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCE USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2207475119

Authors' abstract: *Mass extinctions are well recognized as significant steps in the evolutionary trajectory of life on this planet. Here, we document the oldest known extinction of animals and test for potential causes.*

Our results indicate that, like younger diversity crises, this event was caused by major shifts in environmental conditions. Particularly, we find support for decreased global oxygen availability as the mechanism responsible for this extinction.

This suggests that abiotic controls have had significant impacts on diversity patterns throughout the more than 570 megayear history of animals on this planet.

The Ediacara Biota, the oldest communities of complex, macroscopic fossils, consists of three temporally distinct assemblages: the Avalon (ca. 575 to 560 megayears ago), White Sea (ca. 560 to 550 Ma), and Nama (ca. 550 to 539 Ma).

Generic diversity varies among assemblages, with a notable decline at the transition from White Sea to Nama. Preservation and sampling biases, biotic replacement, and environmental perturbation have been proposed as potential mechanisms for this drop in diversity.

Here, we compile a global database of the Ediacara Biota, specifically targeting taphonomic and paleoecological characters, to test these hypotheses. Major ecological shifts in feeding mode, life habit, and tiering level accompany an increase in generic richness between the Avalon and White Sea assemblages.

We find that ~80% of White Sea taxa are absent from the Nama interval, comparable to loss during Phanerozoic mass extinctions. The paleolatitudes, depositional environments, and preservational modes that characterize the White Sea assemblage are well represented in the Nama, indicating that this decline is not the result of sampling bias.

Counter to expectations of the biotic replacement model, there are minimal ecological differences between these two assemblages.

However, taxa that disappear exhibit a variety of morphological and behavioral characters consistent with an environmentally driven extinction event. The preferential survival of taxa with high surface area relative to volume may suggest that this was related to reduced global oceanic oxygen availability.

Thus, our data support a link between Ediacaran biotic turnover and environmental change, similar to other major mass extinctions in the geologic record.

Valentich-Scott, P., and J.H.R. Goddard (2022) **A fossil species found living off southern California, with notes on the genus *Cymatinoa* (Mollusca, Bivalvia, Galeommatoidea).** Z O O K E Y S 1128:doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.1128.95139 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *A small bivalve mollusk previously only known from the Pleistocene of Los Angeles County has recently been found living intertidally near Santa Barbara, California. The bivalve has been determined to be Cymatinoa cooki (Willett, 1937), a member of the Galeommatoidea J.E. Gray, 1840.*

We document the habitat for the newly discovered C. cooki, and compare it to C. electilis (Berry, 1963), the other extant member of this genus recorded from the region.

Cymatinoa cooki is rare, and while many galeommatooid species have been shown to be commensal with other invertebrates, we have been unable to determine any specific commensal relationships for it.

Previously only known from the Pleistocene of Los Angeles, Cymatinoa cooki is herein recorded living for the first time. Only three living specimens have been discovered to date.

Despite C. cooki’s potential commensal relationship with burrowing invertebrates, we have not sampled the intertidal infauna deeply enough to discover the potential true habitat for this species.

Depending on the lifespan of C. cooki, the adults we observed at Naples Point may have been transported as larvae from much farther south during the marine heat waves of 2014 to 2016, which drove northward numerous marine species distributions in the northeastern Pacific, including populations documented specifically at Naples Point.

This might explain why the second author did not find C. cooki at this site prior to 2018, despite intensively searching the same under-rock habitat for heterobranch sea slugs at Naples Point since 2002.

[Images of the living *Cymatinoa cooki* are from this paper.]



Evolution.

Ghaly, T.M., et al (2022) **Discovery of integrons in Archaea: Platforms for cross-domain gene transfer.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 8:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abq6376 (available as a free pdf)

[Horizontal gene transfer occurs when mature organisms exchange DNA or RNA directly with each other, as opposed to vertical transfer, which is parent to child. Integrons are used by bacteria to develop resistance to antibiotics.]

Authors’ abstract: *Horizontal gene transfer between different domains of life is increasingly being recognized as an important evolutionary driver, with the potential to increase the pace of biochemical innovation and environmental adaptation.*

However, the mechanisms underlying the recruitment of exogenous genes from foreign domains are mostly unknown. Integrons are a family of genetic elements that facilitate this process within Bacteria.

However, they have not been reported outside Bacteria, and thus their potential role in cross-domain gene transfer has not been investigated.

Here, we discover that integrons are also present in 75 archaeal metagenome-assembled genomes from nine phyla, and are particularly enriched among Asgard archaea. Furthermore, we provide experimental evidence that integrons can facilitate the recruitment of archaeal genes by bacteria.

Our findings establish a previously unknown mechanism of cross-domain gene transfer whereby bacteria can incorporate archaeal genes from their surrounding environment via integron activity.

Horizontal gene transfer between different domains of life can be a major driver in species evolution. There are now numerous examples of genes that have been transferred among Archaea, Bacteria, and Eukarya. Among the consequences of these gene transfers are the gain of novel biochemical functions and the ability to colonize specific environmental niches.

Integrons are mostly known for their role in driving the global antibiotic resistance crisis by disseminating diverse resistance determinants among bacterial pathogens.

Davies, K.M., et al (2022) **Evolution and function of red pigmentation in land plants.** ANNALS OF BOTANY 130:doi.org/10.1093/aob/mcac109 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Land plants commonly produce red pigmentation as a response to environmental stressors, both abiotic and biotic. The type of pigment produced varies among different land plant lineages.*

In the majority of species they are flavonoids, a large branch of the phenylpropanoid pathway. Flavonoids that can confer red colours include 3-hydroxyanthocyanins, 3-deoxyanthocyanins, sphagnorubins and auronidins, which are the predominant red pigments in flowering plants, ferns, mosses and liverworts, respectively.

However, some flowering plants have lost the capacity for anthocyanin biosynthesis and produce nitrogen-containing betalain pigments instead. Some terrestrial algal species also produce red pigmentation as an abiotic stress response, and these include both carotenoid and phenolic pigments.

The evidence suggests that pigment biosynthetic pathways have evolved numerous times in land plants to provide compounds that have red colour to screen damaging photosynthetically active radiation but that also have secondary functions that provide specific benefits to the particular land plant lineage.

The Archaeplastida group of photosynthetic eukaryotes are thought to have originated about 1,500 million years ago (mya). This gave rise to the green algae (which included the ancestors of land plants), rhodophytes (red algae) and the less species-diverse glaucophytes and Prasinodermophyta.

Around 1,000 mya it is thought that the ancestors of chlorophyte algae and streptophytes arose from within the green algae lineage.

The extant streptophytes are generally taken to include land plants (Embryophyta) and streptophyte algae, a group of freshwater and terrestrial algae. The first land plants are thought to have arisen from a freshwater (or terrestrial) charophyte ancestor 550 to 470 mya.

Early land plant evolution led to specializations for the terrestrial environment that resulted in embryophytes becoming the dominant terrestrial lineage. The

extant land plants are classified into major groupings, notably the non-tracheophyte hornworts, liverworts and mosses (Bryophyta); lycophytes, ferns and fern allies (Monilophyta); gymnosperms; and flowering plants (Angiospermae).

Species numbers within each of these groups vary greatly, with hornworts having the smallest estimated species diversity, at 220, and the largest groups being mosses and flowering plants, with species estimates of >12 000 and >300 000, respectively.

The early land plants adapted to take advantage of access to full sunlight and atmospheric CO₂, which is available at concentrations higher than that dissolved in water and when plants first colonized land was at higher concentrations than today.

However, both increased photosynthetic activity and the variable terrestrial conditions presented cellular and abiotic environment stresses different from those of the water environment, and required appropriate stress tolerance adaptations.

All extant land plants (i.e. embryophytes) are thought to have evolved from a single event, resulting in the monophyletic land plant lineage.

However, terrestrial colonization events have occurred independently within different algal lineages, and extant species belonging to the chlorophytes and the charophytes occupy terrestrial or semi-terrestrial habits

Human Prehistory.

Sears, E.L., et al (2022) **A story of awe and clay: Mold-made hieroglyphs from Alta Verapaz, Guatemala.** ANCIENT MESOAMERICA 33:doi.org/10.1017/S095653612000053X

Authors’ abstract: *The recent discovery of an ancient Late Classic ceramic production facility in a valley floor, east of the current capital of Cobán in Guatemala, reveals a new ceramic form and provides data concerning regional chronology.*

Among the remains are thin, mold-made fragments identified as ceramic plaques that have epigraphic information providing a Long Count date for the first time in the Alta Verapaz region.

These data correlate with the preliminary ceramic sequences and assist with understanding political-economic interactions that occurred at a time of societal collapse within the southern lowland region.

Speirs: In other words, ceramic printing plates. Not the same as moveable type a la Gutenberg, but rather print making.

Modern Humans.

Waters, C.N., and S.D. Turner (2022) **Defining the onset of the Anthropocene.** SCIENCE 378:doi.org/10.1126/science.ade2310 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ extracts: *Earth’s geological history is divided into chronostratigraphic units that distinguish phases in the planet’s evolution by summarizing complex biotic, geochemical, and climatic changes.*

Over the past century, many components of the Earth system have changed so much that they no longer occur within the ranges evident during the Holocene, the geological epoch that represents the past ~11,700 years.

There are also distinct geological traces that warrant recognition as a new geologic epoch: the Anthropocene.

A candidate Anthropocene global boundary stratotype section and point (GSSP) site must have at least one primary stratigraphic marker to be used as a reference to correlate the boundary at the selected GSSP site to other locations across the planet.

These markers include those that indicate a geochemical change, e.g., plutonium isotopes, carbon-14 (¹⁴C), and delta¹⁵N [based on the ratio of nitrogen-14 (¹⁴N)/¹⁵N isotopes], or the appearance of anthropogenic particles, e.g., spheroidal carbonaceous particles (SCPs), which are a type of fly ash only produced by high-temperature combustion of coal or fuel oil.

Ideally, the site should have precisely datable strata with enough resolution to fix the onset of the Anthropocene to a specific year. The strata, mainly extracted as cores at the sites, must represent a complete time record, with no gaps or disturbances in the critical Holocene-Anthropocene boundary interval.

Although showing regional signals from industrial and agricultural processes with decade-scale variations in timing, global signals provide clear instances of time that can be linked between the sites.

Hence, the base of strata marking the beginning of the Anthropocene can be recognized and correlated between all of the sites, whether on land, in ice, or beneath the sea.

For instance, one such marker is the acute influx of plutonium isotopes created by a series of aboveground hydrogen bomb test detonations commencing in late 1952.

The plutonium provides a sharper global marker than those produced by larger and longer-lasting drivers of Earth system change, e.g., increased burning of fossil fuels and expansion of agriculture, and consequently has been selected by many of the sites as the primary marker.

Technology.

Pouran, H.M., et al (2022) **Environmental and technical impacts of floating photovoltaic plants as an emerging clean energy technology.** iSCIENCE 25:doi.org/doi.org/10.1016/j.isci.2022.105253 (Not to be confused with the journal SCIENCE. Available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Floating photovoltaic (FPV) plants present several benefits in comparison with ground-mounted photovoltaics (PVs) and could have major positive environmental and technical impacts globally. FPVs do not occupy habitable and productive areas and can be deployed in degraded environments and reduce land-use conflicts.*

Saving water through mitigating evaporation and improving water security in arid regions combined with the flexibility for deployment on different water bodies including drinking water reservoirs are other advantages of FPVs.

They also have higher efficiency than ground-mounted PV solar and are compatible with the existing hydropower infrastructures, which supports diversifying the energy supply and its resilience.

[Images are from this paper. The photographs show early and late stages of installing 70 megawatt FPV on a flooded coal mine in Anhui, China.]

