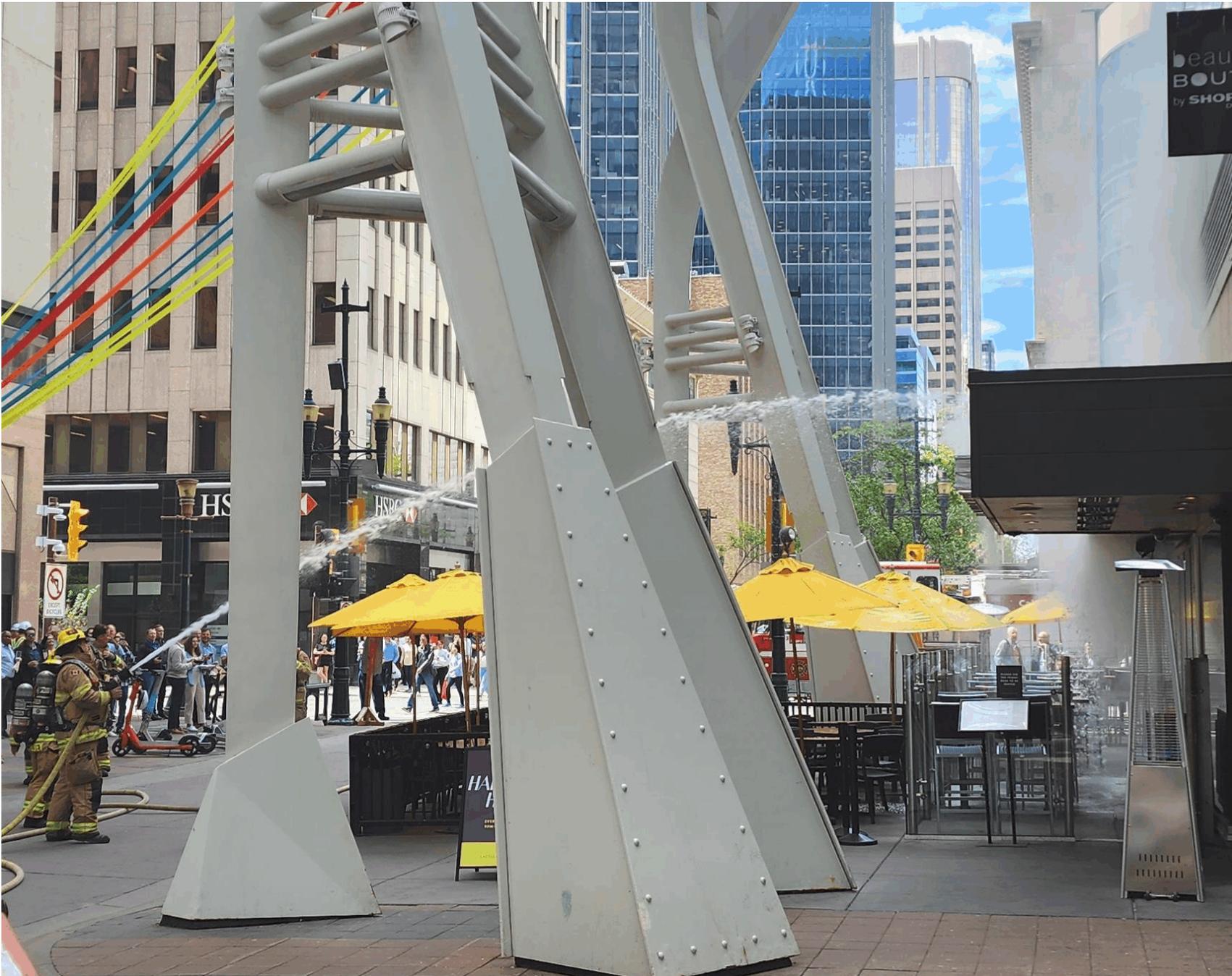


OPUNTIA 550



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.

I already intended this issue to be on the theme of food when I saw a restaurant fire on May 24 at the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall in downtown Calgary.



Even better was the name of the restaurant, the Cactus Club Café, at the corner of 8 Avenue SW and 4 Street.

I've never eaten there because the menu is for office workers on an expense account.

The fire looked like a kitchen fire and was soon extinguished.

Food Inflation.

I eat mostly fast food. I admit it freely. As a young university student during the middle 1970s, I could have a hamburger, fries, and soda pop for under \$1. Now I doubt anyplace in Calgary will serve that order for less than \$11.



Mind you, I don't exist entirely on a diet of hamburgers. Below left was top quality apple-pecan salad from Wendy's, as good as any regular restaurant. With soda pop, \$14.47 Below is Christie's Rotisserie, with a hot chicken sandwich, gravy, fries, soda, cost \$11.85



Food Trucks And Festivities.

Calgary has always been a great city for partying. There are several winter events but the summer season is the busiest for street and ethnic festivals. The first street event of the summer season is the Lilac Festival, held each year on the first Sunday in June just before the rainy season begins..

This year we had a warm early spring, so the lilacs around the city were in full bloom by the middle of May. The flowers were already fading by June 4, the date of the festival, but no matter.

The Lilac Festival is the biggest street festival in the city, with about 50,000 people jammed in solid. See OPUNTIA #343, 380, 415, and 444 for accounts of previous festivals. There was, of course, an interregnum during the pandemic, but we're done with that and now we're partying.

The Lilac Festival is held in central Calgary in the Mission district. The festival goes along 4 Street SW from the Elbow River to 12 Avenue SW, about 1.2 km long if I read Google Maps correctly.

A half block of each side avenue is also included along the way, where the performing acts are spotted. The street itself has kiosks and food trucks aplenty.





I arrived at the north end of the festival and worked my way south down 4 Street, starting off with a slice of cheese pizza. The other trucks I just walked past.



My brother Neil (at left of selfie with myself) came down for the festival. His wife doesn't like the crowds but Neil and I are both food truck junkies. Here we are enjoying V Burgers.



You could enjoy doughnuts (top) or, further down the street, holes (bottom).



Below: A warm sunny day, so this truck did good business.

Top right: I did not buy here.

Bottom right: I meant to buy here but forgot to come back for a package.





Lots of music acts on the side avenues.

FOOD COZIES: PART 25

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 24 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, 530, and 538.]

Bakeries.

THE HOLIDAY SWAP (2021) by Maggie Knox (pseudonym of Karma Brown and Marissa Stapley) was set in the cutthroat world of cable television cooking shows.

Charlie Goodwin was co-host with a nasty chef but the show was cancelled. There was a possibility that one of them would be the sole host of the replacement show.

Charlie lost her sense of taste and smell in an accident. She and her identical twin Cass decided to swap places and hope nobody noticed, including potential boyfriends. Cass had been operating the family bakery back home, so Charlie took over the business.

Her senses returned but Charlie found that trading back with Cass wasn't quite that simple. It all worked out in the end though. No recipes appendix but cooking was thoroughly integrated into the text. You may suffer hunger pangs while you read.

KILLED ON BLUEBERRY HILL (2018) by Sharon Farrow (pseudonym of Sharon Pisacreta) was a novel in a cozy series set in Oriole Point, Michigan. The annual Blueberry Blow Out festival was underway.

Marlee Jacob was the resident Miss Marple. She owned a bakery called The Berry Basket and had a booth at the festival. Her fiance Ryan Zeller was from an orchard family who had an ongoing feud with the Gale family of Blueberry Hill Farm.

Porter Gale bested Ryan in the pie eating contest, which surprised everyone because he was diabetic. Someone had fiddled with Porter's insulin and the taste of blueberry was his last. Ryan was the main suspect so Marlee had to go Marpleing.

Lots of back stories about the families and few of them about blueberries per se. The carnies working at the festival also had some sharp practice going. The wonder was that more people didn't die.

Marlee was the idiot in the idiot denouement but she was booked for the series and survived. Ryan wasn't and was exposed as a ladies man cheating on Marlee, conveniently ending the engagement.

The recipes appendix began with Blueberry Coffee Cake, courtesy of Betty Crocker and so credited. Then on to Baked Blueberry French Toast and Blueberry Muffins.



Blueberry doughnut, a la Calgary Safeway



Assorted cupcakes a la Calgary Co-op

Cupcakes.

BUTTERCREAM BUMP OFF (2011) by Jenn McKinley was a novel in a food cozy series about Melanie Cooper and Angie DeLaura of Scottsdale, Arizona. They were the proprietors of the Fairy Tale Cupcakes bakery, and Marpled in their spare time.

Their nemesis (their word) was Olivia Puckett of the Confections bakery. As the novel opened, she was parading the sidewalks dressed as a giant cupcake and handing out coupons for a free cupcake. She wasn't that important to the plot though.

More serious was Melanie's mother Joyce, widowed for a decade. She wasn't as careful as she might have been in her choice of boyfriends. Her current one was a gigolo named Baxter Malloy who, however, quickly got himself murdered.

Melanie and Angie had to work in the sleuthing between the Valentine's Day rush for their Kiss Me Cupcakes (white icing with red highlights and a Hershey's Kiss on top). They also taught a night class in cookery. Not to mention a catering contract for 300 cupcakes in four flavours for a wedding.

The alarums and cupcakes multiplied. In the denouement, the murderer revealed he had been blackmailing Malloy, who in turn had been running a stock fraud. They argued and Malloy lost in the heat of the moment.

The recipes appendix began with the aforementioned Kiss Me Cupcakes. Then on to other cupcakes such as Orange Dreamsicle, Cupid's Bliss (white icing topped with raspberries), and Moonlight Madness (chocolate cupcake with buttercream frosting topped with shredded coconut and a Hershey's Kiss).

Magical Bakeries.

Bailey Cates had a cozy series about Katie Lightfoot of Savannah, Georgia. She worked for her aunt and uncle in a bakery. On the side, she was learning witchcraft from Aunt Lucy. On her own, she was learning the craft of Marpleing.

BEWITCHED, BOTHERED, AND BISCOTTI (2012) began with the body of a man who belonged to a secret society. Katie was busy Marpleing when not pushing the sourdough bread at the bakery café.

Alarums included assailants repeatedly bombing Katie with pumpkins from a great height, certainly a unique attack. The scenes in the bakery included much discussion about food, including lemon cupcakes seasoned with black pepper, lime and ginger scones, and molasses oatmeal cookies.

The denouement was a coven in the cemetery. The killer was an ambitious witch who wanted to get ahead and become the all-powerful whatever-it-was. She was foiled.

The recipes appendix began with Cinnamon Raisin Biscotti, followed by Coca-Cola Cake, which was not a complete surprise since the novel was set in Georgia.

CHARMS AND CHOCOLATE CHIPS (2013) put Katie Lightfoot into the middle of murder once again. She had joined a local conservation group called

Georgia Wild. The organization was founded by Autumn Boles, who didn't survive past Chapter 2.

Katie was delivering pastries to the Georgia Wild office when the body was discovered. Setting aside the murder, Katie and her fellow witches in their coven were being harassed. The subplots included investors in a proposed golf course, Boles' ex-husband, shifty real estate deals, and assorted personal feuds.

Unlike any other cosy series, an explanation was provided as to why Katie was a murder magnet. Aunt Lucy explained Katie was a magical catalyst. Seems logical. The bakery and its café kept Katie busy selling muffins and gathering in gossip from customers.

The final confrontation took place in a magical swamp, the centre of the real estate deal, in which the murderer was embroiled and the deceased was trying to preserve. From the recipes appendix were Mocha Shortbread Cookies and Chocolate Chip Gingerbread.

MAGIC AND MACAROONS (2015) shifted the theme from food cosy to urban fantasy. Katie Lightfoot and her coven met in the bakery after hours for a book discussion (spells, not novels).

A young woman burst in, babbled about a stolen voodoo charm, and then died on the floor of the bakery. That drew Katie into the middle of a war between witches as she searched for the murderer.

However she still had time to invent pineapple macaroons (recipe in appendix). Further on, she lectured about sourdough yeast while baking the bread.

The MacGuffin was a talisman with which to rule them all, etcetera. The final confrontation was with cultists and coral snakes but since Katie was booked for the series, her magic was stronger. From there to the recipes appendix for Thumbprint Macaroons (with pineapple filling) and Brazilian Cheese Bread.

SPELLS AND SCONES (2016) began with Katie Lightfoot catering a book signing at the bookstore adjacent to her bakery. The guest author was radio psychologist Dr Dana Dobbs, plugging her new self-help book. Someone plugged her instead.

As Katie mentioned herself (Chapter 4), she had by this time been involved with five murders in two years. One wonders why the townfolk hadn't already burned her as a witch.

The prime suspect was in fact another witch. Marpleing, baking, and being a panicky idiot helped Katie fill the intervening pages. There was magic in the air during the denouement but not the nice kind. Dana had been murdered by her husband's lover, who was caught out by her inconsistent alibis.

And so to the recipes appendix for Greek Scones (tomatoes, olives, and feta cheese) and Pumpkin Spice Softie cookies.

POTIONS AND PASTRIES (2017) celebrated the second anniversary of Katie Lightfoot at the bakery. Strangely, no angry mob with torches and pitchforks had yet run her out of town for being a murder magnet.

After the party at the bakery, Katie and her Aunt Lucy went for a stroll along the waterfront to visit fortune teller Orla Black. The next day Orla failed to foresee her sudden demise, hit by a car.

Among the subsequent alarums were someone trying to kill Katie by forcing her car off the road, then torching her house, and last but not least, a demon-possessed ventriloquist dummy. Katie solve that last problem by drowning the dummy in the river. No murder charge possible for that.

The killer was involved in a family feud that extended across the Black family in many lines of descent too complicated to describe here. The final details were explained over deviled eggs. No pastries in the recipes appendix but there were Brown Butter Chocolate Chip Cookies and Rhubarb Ricotta Crostini.

WITCHES AND WEDDING CAKE (2020) was the week before Katie Lightfoot married Declan McCarthy. His family arrived in town, including his sister Rori. Definitely not invited or wanted was her ex-husband Turner.

He soon departed, not just Savannah but this world, in a bloody murder. Rori was the main suspect, so in between wedding preparations and the bakery, Katie did some sleuthing. As befits the majority of murder victims in cozies, Turner was not popular and therefore many suspects surfaced.

The final confrontation brought in magic but the killer, a jealous woman, was brought down by conventional means. On to the recipes which were Hummingbird Cupcakes (pineapple, banana, pecans, coconut shavings) and Peanut Butter Bacon Cookies.

SPIRITS AND SOURDOUGH (2022) began with Katie Lightfoot being followed by the ghost of a woman murdered a few hours prior. There were also some assorted witch problems, such as her husband Declan missing his guardian spirit.

Kate did some of her investigating by gossiping with customers while pushing the moon-and-stars cookies and pumpkin hand pies. The cookies were prepped for sale by chanting a spell at them (Chapter 14):

Petals purple and pink / Blooms of beauty, link / To peace and ease / And appease / Loss and distress / So mote it be. Doesn't quite scan, and 'mote' is a noun, not a verb. Hopefully the cookies were tasty anyway.

Notwithstanding that, the denouement revealed the murderer had killed her victim under the mistaken idea that she was having an affair with her husband. Not so, making it a wrongful death indeed. Thence to the recipes, which were Spiced Molasses Cookies and Blood Orange Thyme Cake.

Cafés.

KILLER IN THE KITCHEN (2015) by Jessica Fletcher and Donald Bain was set in Cabot Cove, Maine, which, surprisingly by now, still had surviving residents. A young couple Bradley and Marcie Fowler opened a restaurant called the Fin & Claw.

Trouble began when a New York City chef Gerard Leboeuf, who had a summer home in Cabot Cove, opened up a splashy new restaurant adjacent to the Fin & Claw. Leboeuf was an ill-mannered boor who was not long for this world. Few, if any, mourned his murder.

Bradley was the prime suspect, so Fletcher went sleuthing. Leboeuf's son was arrested for drug trafficking but soon made bail. There was no love lost between father and son, nor with Eva, Leboeuf's wife.

The denouement was messy. The killer had acted from jealousy. A half-dozen people went to jail for various crimes, not to mention the murderer. As Fletcher noted: "*The only member of the Leboeuf family who emerged unscathed was Max, their German shepherd.*"

All ended well at a dinner in the Fin & Claw. However, Fletcher was put off for a while by any French dish containing beef. Boeuf, in French.

A WAFFLE LOT OF MURDER (2020) by Lena Gregory was the fourth novel in a food cozy series about Gia Morelli of Boggy Creek, Florida. She operated the All-Day Breakfast Café and did some Marpleing on the side.

Halloween was nigh and the Haunted Town Festival was in preparation, held on an abandoned farm near the village. Gia had high hopes for her pumpkin spice waffles, and a booth at the festival would certainly help business.

The catch was that the festival organizer Barbara Woodhull didn't survive past the second chapter. In between making omelets and barbeque, Gia and her friend Savannah went snooping. The Deppity Dawgs were much annoyed as they considered they had jurisdiction.

Woodhull was involved in sharp practice business transactions but the murderer killed her for diddling her boyfriend. The final confrontation out in the woods was standard point-of-a-gun but Gia was booked for the series.

The recipes appendix began with Pumpkin Spice Waffles and several types of Breakfast Pie, the southern version of quiche.

Caffeinated Crimes.

ON WHAT GROUNDS (2003) by Cleo Coyle (pseudonym of Alice Alfonsi and Marc Cerasini) was the first novel in a food cozy series about Clare Cosi. She was newly hired to work at a coffee shop called The Village Blend in Manhattan.

On her first day, she found a coworker beaten unconscious, Clare's ex-husband was caught trespassing in her apartment, and some of the customers were rude to her. It's a hard life in the big city.

In between Marpleing, there were infodumps about making coffee the commercial way. This included an explanation about how espresso can't be made in 7 seconds as a competing coffee shop claimed.

The alarums continued and the coworker died. There were two different gunpoint confrontations arising from a multiplicity of culprits committing just about every felony in the code.

The recipes appendix included Caffe Cannella, Raspberry Mocha Bocci, Cappuccino Walnut Cheesecake, Black Russian Cocktail, and Screaming Orgasm Cocktail (burnt almonds).

Two decades later came HONEY ROASTED (2022), the 19th novel in the series. By this time Clare was an experienced Miss Marple. She was preparing for her marriage to an NYPD detective and was busy as a bee publicizing her latest coffee blend Honey Cinnamon Latte.

Clare got her honey from Bea Hastings, who kept bees on her high-rise rooftop. Bea's honey may have been sweet but she wasn't, having made many enemies. Clare found Bea on an apartment balcony after someone pushed Bea off the roof.

The New York City honey market was apparently vicious enough to make a gangster pause. The authors' foreword explained that urban beekeeping was so popular in New York City that the NYPD created a special one-man squad to deal with loose swarms.

That surprised me because in most cities, including Calgary, bee swarm removal is done by the Parks Department. I worked 31 years in park maintenance with the Calgary Parks Dept. Many times I was called out to handle bee swarms. But I digress.

The alarums accumulated before culminating in Clare confronting the murderer. The culprit got off a gunshot but missed, lost her balance, and fell off a balcony to her death.

The recipes appendix was foreordained, with Honey Coffee, Honey Cookies, Apple Scones with Honey-Cinnamon Icing, Honey Glazed Peach Crostata, Honey Cupcakes, and many more Honey This and Honey That.

COLD BREW CORPSE (2021) by Tara Lush was a novel in a cozy series about Lana Lewis of Devil's Beach, Florida. She operated the Perkatory coffee shop and had dreams of becoming a journalist. (Why? Reporting is a low-wage job with no future.)

Next door was a yoga studio run by Raina Romero, who went missing at the beginning of the novel. Not until Chapter 12 was her body found in a swamp. She never got a speaking part.

Lana went Marpleing, competing not only with local police but a long list of alphabet agencies. Raina didn't just have back stories, she had rap sheets as long as your arm.

In between investigating, Lana had to keep going back to her shop to work shifts serving coffee. That's the trouble with having to work for a living; it interferes with the fun of Marpleing.

Lana managed to get herself trapped with the killer, who had serious anger management problems with women. There was a last-second rescue as there always is. What, no recipes appendix? They're my favourite part of food cozies.

Tea For Terror.

Laura Childs (pseudonym of Gerry Schmitt) has a cozy series about Theodosia Browning of Charleston, South Carolina. She operated the Indigo Tea Shop and was the biggest murder magnet in the state.

THE ENGLISH BREAKFAST MURDER (2003) began with Theodosia Browning volunteering with the Sea Turtle Protection League to help shepherd hundreds of newly-hatched loggerheads across the beach into the sea. She brought along Lung Ching tea and a simmering pot of spicy gumbo for the campfire.

Theodosia, to no one's surprise, found a body floating along the shore, that of local art dealer Harper Fisk. After the first responders retrieved the corpse, Theodosia adjourned to her tea shop. There she bravely served cranberry walnut scones, crab salad sandwiches, and Assam tea while fretting about the deceased.

Snooping about the marinas, she learned that Fisk was involved with treasure hunting. One of his suppliers had been looting protected sites of the coast. He tried to eliminate Theodosia but she was booked for the series.

Thence to the recipes appendix, beginning with Sweet Potato Muffins. Next were Blackberry Cobbler, Chilled Peach Soup, Ginger Pear Scones, Almond Cakes, and Planked Salmon.

SHADES OF EARL GREY (2003) began with Theodosia Browning attending a pre-wedding reception which, surprisingly, the tea shop wasn't catering. A storm blew up, collapsing the roof of the facility and killing the groom. Nothing to be done about that but the \$75,000 wedding ring on display went missing.

Notwithstanding the horror, the next morning the tea shop was packed. Apple-ginger muffins, blueberry scones, and cream muffins flew off the shelf as hungry customers gobbled them, washed down with Keemun tea (China) or Nilgiri tea (India).

Theodosia's sleuthing didn't turn up anything, other than a thief was targeting valuables throughout rich neighbourhoods. The thief was finally brought to justice by baiting her with decoys at Theodosia's house. What Theodosia did have was a trained attack dog named Earl Grey.

Plenty of recipes in the appendix. Chicken Perloo, Tea-Marinated Prawns, Tea Smoothies, Hot Sour Green Tea Soup, Pear And Stilton Sandwiches, Cream Scones, Lemon Curd, Green Beans With Garlic And Tea, and Chamomile Tea. The final recipe was Tub Tea, not for drinking but a potpourri for hot baths.

OOLONG DEAD (2009) began with a rush as Theodosia Browning found a body in the first few pages. The deceased was her old nemesis, Abby Davis, who had been shot in the head.

Theodosia got off to a slow start investigating because she was busy in the tea shop, which was catering the forthcoming Opera Society gala.

Six courses, beginning with wild rice soup, then apricot scones, fruit salad, zucchini quiche, shrimp salad, and a cake with four layers of chocolate, three of buttercream, one of ganache, and a glaze.

The Marpleing was in between the baking and was the usual mixture of contaminating evidence, digging up old scandals, and so forth. Theodosia had a gunpoint confrontation with the two killers.

The motive was complicated, with a failed business partnership, a love triangle involving Davis, and lots of illicit money sloshing about.

An implausible ending but nevermind, on to the recipes appendix. Strawberry Cream Cheese Tea Sandwiches, Vegetable Egg Strata, Chocolate Sour Cream Scones, Pineapple Tea Sandwiches, and many more.

A DARK AND STORMY TEA (2022) began with Theodosia Browning witnessing the murder of a young woman during a heavy rainstorm. She didn't get a good look at the killer, who was wearing a hooded raincoat. The victim was the daughter of a friend who owned a bookstore adjacent to the tea shop.

Needless to say, Theodosia went Marpleing. Lots of suspects to investigate. Yes, yes, the police were on the case as well but we all know who would be in the denouement. Theodosia was busy with the tea shop but her advantage was that she could interrogate customers while they were munching on apple scones or quiche.

Chapter 14, where a television news reporter was the next victim, should have been grim reading. However I almost laughed out loud at the scene where Theodosia and several sets of news reporters tried to get past the police line and do their own crime scene investigation.

Theodosia catered a Murder Mystery Tea at Chillingham Manor. The alarms continued apace. As per standard cozy procedure, Theodosia was put in peril by the killer. Since the series would continue, there was no suspense about the outcome.

To relax after those dreadful events, on to the recipes appendix. Leading off were English Tea Biscuits, then Crab Rolls, Cioppino (hot seafood), Banana Cake, Smoked Salmon Sandwiches, Cranberry Scones, Cinnamon Coffee Cake, Drunken Chicken, Carrot Bread, Blueberry Scones, Baked Salmon, and English Pea Salad. Not all for one meal, of course.

LEMON CURD KILLER (2023) was the next novel in the series, occurring during the Charleston Fashion Week. Theodosia Browning catered one of the

events, the Limón Tea Party, held in a lemon orchard, along with the traditional murder.

Pause for digression. Given Theodosia's reputation as a murder magnet, the reader will wonder how her catering business could stay solvent. Think about it. You are hosting a party big enough to require catering.

Word of mouth or Googling should inform you what happens when Theodosia does a contract. Charleston undoubtedly has numerous caterers whose proprietors are not known to police on a first-name basis.

But no, Theodosia got the contract. The tea shop was busy as well. Lemon scones flew off the plates. Out at the orchard, a fashion designer was found dead, face down in a bowl of lemon curd.

The week continued hectic for Theodosia, what with finding a second body and running afoul of drug dealers. About the Tea Trolley Tour and the film production crew, the less said the better for one's nerves. In the final confrontation with the murderer, Theodosia had a large full teapot and knew how to use it.

Then to a lengthy recipes appendix, beginning with Lemon Cream Scones. Following on were Red Pepper Hummus, Lemon Bars, Lemon Curd, English Crumpets, Butterscotch Brownies, Olive Salad Sandwich, Chicken Fruit Salad, Baked Brown Sugar Salmon, and Devonshire Cream Mascarpone Cheese.

A HINT OF MISCHIEF (2022) by Daryl Wood Gerber was a novel in a cozy series about Courtney Kelly, proprietor of a tea shop and fairy garden in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California. She was catering a reunion party at which actress Farrah Lawson was to be a celebrity guest.

The host of the party was Misty Dawn. She and all the guests had been sorority sisters back when. Part of the reunion involved a trip to a day spa, where Lawson was seriously rude to a cosmetician Twyla. When the actress was found dead the next morning from poison, the police made Twyla the prime suspect.

Courtney and the fairies went Marpleing. What with everyone coming and going through the tea shop and garden, the sleuthing went well. Courtney could interrogate and pour tea at the same time.

The police were annoying because they felt they were in charge of the case but that has always been a problem for Miss Marples.

The sorority sisters weren't sisters in arms. Some of them were sisters at arms with each other, with nasty back stories. One of them was really nasty, for the perpetrator settled her grudge against Lawson the extreme way.

After the excitement was over, on to the recipes appendix, nothing under 2,000 calories per serving. Beginning was Apricot Preserves Tea Cake, Brookies (a cross between a cookie and a brownie), Chocolate Crinkles, Fairy Cookies, Raspberry Lemon Scones, Avocado Bacon Toast, and Cauliflower Poppers.

Catering To Crime.

BAKE UNTIL GOLDEN (2011) by Linda Evans Shepherd and Eva Marie Everson was a novel in a series about the Potluck Catering Club of Summit View, Colorado.

They had just won The Great Party Showdown reality television contest in New York City and returned to Summit View as conquering heroes. No rest for them though, as in between baking they were kept busy with soap opera contretemps, a treasure hunt, and a manslaughter charge.

Not just one Miss Marple but a whole flock of them hounded after clues when not cooking. After everything got solved, then on to the recipes appendix. Leading off was Corned Beef Cabbage, which I will always pass by.

For those who don't worry about calories, there followed Chicken Pot Pie, Smothered Pork Chops, Hot Fudge Pie, Pecan Cobbler, Peach Cobbler, Onion Cheese Meatloaf, and 30 more recipes. Enough to satiate any church picnic. Indeed, this book was as much a cookbook as a novel.

TWO WICKED DESSERTS (2021) by Lynn Cahoon was a novel in a cozy series about Mia Malone of Magic Springs, Idaho. She was a caterer and operated a cooking school, plus Marpleing and, not the least, was learning witchcraft from her grandmother.

Mia's cat Mr Darcy was possessed by the spirit of warlock Dorian Alexander, who had transferred his spells to a grimoire held by his daughter Cindy. She was using the book to succeed as an actress in Hollywood.

Magic often does not behave itself. As a result, she found herself in Idaho suspected of murdering a man. His body was found in Mia's garden, a common happenstance for Miss Marples. And so to the detecting.

She also had catering contracts to look after, including a baby gender reveal party. There were constant deliveries for small orders. Food not only had to be ordered but had to be synchronized with wholesalers so Mia could serve fresh items.

After Cindy was arrested, Mia kept busy annoying the Deppity Dawgs by constantly being one step ahead of them. The ending was a deus ex machina when the killer's ex-girlfriend brought the murder weapon into the police station.

In the recipes appendix, the two wicked desserts were Pumpkin Cheesecake and Dark Chocolate Christmas Cheesecake. The latter was ordinary cheesecake made Christmasy by adding crushed peppermint sticks.

THE DINNER LADY DETECTIVES (2021) by Hannah Hendy was a first novel about Margery and Clementine of Dewstow, England. They served meals at a secondary school cafeteria.

The kitchen manager Caroline Hughes had been found dead in the walk-in freezer. Blood everywhere. The two women went Marpleing and immediately ran up against real-life police, who took them in for questioning.

They were given a caution and made to understand the consequences should they continue to barge into crime scenes. Only because they were dear old ladies did they escape dismissal from their jobs. That, plus a labour shortage.

Margery's name should have been Nellie because she was so nervous, always gasping or dropping her teacup. Nobody is that nervous about everything. By the time I was one-quarter of the way through the novel, I was sorry she wasn't a victim.

Indeed, someone was attempting to kill the two Marples with various tactics. Nonetheless, Margery and Clementine carried on bravely in the kitchen.

In the denouement, the culprit revealed Hughes' death was accidental but she covered it up for fear of dismissal. When she heard Margery and Clementine

talking about suspicious circumstances, she tried to stage accidental deaths for them.

She and two accessories, all of whom were on the cleaning crew, were given long sentences. This created havoc since the school principal had to hire new cleaning staff for the kitchen. Everything ended well for Margery and Clementine, who celebrated by buying a tub of Quality Street candy.

MUFFIN BUT THE TRUTH (2023) by Ellie Alexander (pseudonym of Katherine Dyer-Seeley) was a novel in a food cozy series about Juliet Capshaw of Ashland, Oregon. Her family bakery catered a weekend camping event in the nearby Rogue River valley.

A group of executives from the big city were going to raft down the river, but one of them involuntarily floated face down in the water. Juliet not only had to Marple but figure out how to bake on a campfire skillet, a talent not required in most bakeries.

Many menu items could be prepared in advance. The first chapter was a detailed rendition of cooking in the bakery. Not to be read on an empty stomach or else you'll go wild with hunger pangs.

By Chapter 5, the executives and Juliet were on the river banks. The former were rafting and the latter was stir-frying over the campfire. The group leader Josie was extremely unpopular with her staff. Everyone was therefore surprised when the victim was staffer Maddy.

She may have been mistakenly killed with Josie as the actual target. Once everyone was back in town, the baking and alarums multiplied. In the denouement, it was revealed that Maddy was murdered by a coworker who was really, really irritated with her.

The epilogue was a sudden right-angle turn into the vineyard harvest and grape stomping. An abrupt transition indeed. But pay no mind and move on to the recipes appendix, which began with Skillet Cookies, then Cowboy Baked Beans.

From there, the recipes moved into a proper kitchen and included Caramel Apple Strudel, Chicken Pot Pie, Lemon Blueberry Muffins, and September Latte.

Chocolate.

COVER ART (2022) by Vanessa Westermann was about Charlotte Scott, who opened a summer pop-up art gallery in Ontario's cottage country. The Cover Art Exhibit was a partnership between her and two friends. One of them was Kayla, whose husband Andrew exited the novel after eating chocolates.

He had been allergic to nuts and had sampled one filled with nougat (nut paste). The chocolates were prepared and sold by local chocolatier Matt Thorn. Scott went Marpleing, and found lots of feuds, family issues, and sharp practice out there on the lake.

Thorn was a psychological mess. His father recently died and he had all kinds of Daddy issues. Andrew and Kayla did not have a happy marriage. The murderer wanted to cover up his misdeeds the difficult way. In the end, the epilogue was with Matt and lots of chocolates.

A CHRISTMAS CANDY KILLING (2022) by Christina Romeril was the debut novel in a food cozy series about twin sisters Alex and Hannah Wright of Harriston, Montana. They opened a combination mystery bookstore and chocolate shop called Murder And Mayhem.

The Sleuth Book Club met in a spare room at the shop, led by retired schoolmarm Jane Burrows. She told Alex she had spotted a cold case killer but instead of just saying the name, she asked Alex to visit her later. Someone got to Jane before then, using a knife.

The deceased had been nibbling on a box of chocolates but fortunately the puncture wounds could not have been done by a chocolate. And so to the Marpleing, stirring up the mountains of Montana.

The killer was a Black Widow, living off the life insurance policies of her three previous husbands. She helped each one into the grave with a smidgeon of poison, then move across country for her next victim. As she explained at great length in the denouement, Jane suspected something and had to be eliminated.

From there to the recipes appendix, starting off with a lecture on the proper way to pour chocolate into moulds. Thence to Candy Cane Coniine Ganache and Poison Pear Ganache (no real poison).

Fudging Around.

HERE COMES THE FUDGE (2021) by Nancy Coco (pseudonym of Nancy J. Parra) was a novel in a food cozy series about Allie McMurphy of Mackinac Island, Michigan. She operated a candy store and Marpled, not necessarily in that order.

Spring had sprung and Allie was preparing her fudge shop for the tourist season. Her friend Jenn was about to marry but her fiancé Shane was run in on a charge of murder. The Marpleing began betwixt and between the fudge shop operations.

The recipes were interspersed between the chapters. Once the corpse was found and Shane arrested, the action paused for Salted Caramel Pretzel Brownies, just as fattening as it sounds.

Chapter 5 concluded with the sentence "*After all, what could possibly go wrong?*" Following on was a recipe for Peanut Butter Chocolate Fudge, with which to think over the import of that question.

The wedding took priority after Shane made bail. The planning for that had about as many alarums and excursions as the murder investigation. As any married person knows, that was normal. Along the way there was time to relax with Vanilla Macadamia Nut Fudge.

Then off to the knife-point confrontation with the killer in a dark alley. Allie was saved, and so was the wedding. Hence to the Hazelnut Fudge.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S FUDGE (2022) began with the island hosting the Midsummer Night's Festival. Winona Higer was in charge of crowning the Queen of the festival but didn't survive long after. Her body was found floating in the lake. No prizes for guessing who discovered the defunct. One of the competitors was evidently very disgruntled at the results.

So ended Chapter 1. But before Chapter 2, a recipe for Fudgy Bottom Boozy Raspberry Swirl Cheesecake. The quarter-cup of vodka will help you forget how many calories you'll be ingesting. 12 tablespoons butter, 3.5 cups sugar, 7 large eggs, 32 ounces of cream cheese. Don't forget your Lipitor.

Allie was bust with her candy shop, where the dark chocolate cherry fudge was a bestseller. She did some of her sleuthing in the shop chatting with visitors, interspersed with strolls around the festival picking up gossip about the vicious competition.

Between chapters were recipes for, to name just a few, Chocolate Rye Cookies (made from rye flour, not the drink), Bourbon Cherry Pie (quarter-cup bourbon), and Cinnamon Mocha Fudge. The alarums multiplied along with the fudges.

The killer was a disgruntled employee of Higer who acted out with a gun. Allie did the traditional Marple thing and got herself trapped but survived. And so to a celebration with friends, gulping down wine and mimosas. What, no fudge?

Food Critics.

DEATH OF A CHEF (2013) by Alexander Campion was a novel in a series about Capucine Le Tellier of the Paris Police Judicaire.

The case was an apparent suicide by shotgun of Chef Jean-Louis Brault. Supposedly he was distraught by vicious reviews of his restaurant from food critic Lucien Folon.

This put Capucine in an awkward position since her husband Alexandre was a professional food critic. That was a more important occupation in France than over here in North America. The news media were on the case and giving her a hard time about the connection.

The conclusion was Brault's death was murder. The investigation turned up plenty of suspects, many of whom were, as the saying goes, known to police. Folon was nasty and rude. Everyone was surprised that he wasn't the victim. There followed a different murder in a wine cellar and a kidnapping.

Capucine toured various venues, some of which were rough trade. Something was rotten in the Parisian cuisine business and it wasn't the food. Capucine and Alexandre attended the estate auction of Brault.

Afterward they had a restaurant meal which was described in great detail (Chapter 39, and don't read this on an empty stomach). I sat up straight at the phrase "*vaunted to be made from prime Charolais beef*".

I grew up on a cattle ranch in west-central Alberta that my father named "CJS Charolais", which was the breed of cattle raised. They are a lean beef breed imported from France, pure white or cream coloured.

Setting that aside, some forged artworks were discovered at the Brault auction. That diverted the police investigation from the restaurant trade to the antiques trade, leading them to the murderer. She was trying to cover up her connections to the racket.

The epilogue explained all the loose threads over a dinner of civet de lievre on a bed of flat noodles, marinated in wine. In an American cozy, the meal would have been tarragon chicken and chai-flavoured cupcakes.

CHICKEN CACCIA-KILLER (2013) by Liz Lipperman was a novel in a cozy series about Jordan McAllister of Rancho, Texas. She worked as a food critic for a local newspaper because she couldn't find a better job.

The International Italian Festival was in town and she was to report on the food booths. Her boyfriend Alex had relatives in town to meet her for the first time, his mother Natalie and sister Kate.

The plot began rolling when one of the festival sponsors, wealthy Marco Petrone, dived from an 11th-story hotel suite without a parachute. Everyone agreed he was pushed. Kate had a physical fight with Petrone moments before the fall, so she was arrested.

Jordan began Marpleing the Italian crowd. The denouement was certainly unusual, in a pasture with a very angry bull. She was saved from goring by a dog. In the epilogue, the murderer had been bumped out of a promotion by the deceased. He therefore created a job opening.

The recipes appendix began with Spaghetti And Meatballs, then went on with Baked Ziti, Asparagus Risotto, and, to wash those down, Italian Margaritas. Also Spaghetti Bread (mentioned in the plot) and, as per the book title, Chicken Cacciatore. For dessert, Chocolate Bread Pudding and Cream Cake Balls.

A DISH TO DIE FOR (2022) by Lucy Burdette (pseudonym of Roberta Isleib) was a novel in a cozy series about Hayley Snow's adventures as a food critic and murder magnet. Not necessarily in that order. She lived in Key West, Florida.

The body on the beach was G.G. Garcia, an unpopular real estate developer with a plethora of enemies. Hayley's mother Janet catered his memorial service, using a vintage cookbook.

The usual sleuthing produced the usual back stories. The ending was muddled. The culprit was a woman scorned who hit GGG with a rock but pleaded self-defense. He fell back and hit his head fatally.

The recipes appendix included Banana Cream Pie, to be washed down with Mojito With Simple Sauce (add rum to taste). Various party sandwiches for light eating such as Egg Salad, Cucumber Watercress, and Pimento Cheese. For the bigger appetite there were Pigs In A Blanket (with smokies) and Potato Salad.

Food Festivals.

ACTS OF VIOLETS (2007) by Kate Collins (pseudonym of Linda Tsoutsouris) was technically a horticultural cozy, but the emphasis in the novel was about food, so I'll file it here. This series was about Abby Knight of New Chapel, Indiana, who operated a flower shop and Marpled occasionally.

The town was celebrating its annual Pickle Fest, which seemed exactly like something Indiana would have. There was a parade, festival booths, and other events to celebrate one of the worst-tasting foods invented by humans. The Pickle Fest drew attendees from as far away as Chicago.

Food booths sold pickled beets, dills, pickled tomatoes, pickled watermelon, pickled peppers, pickled herring, and pickled pig's feet. Lots of beer for those who wanted to pickle themselves.

During the event, Snuggles the Clown was murdered. Abby's boyfriend Marco Salvare was among the prime suspects, so off she went Marpleing. While occasionally operating her flower shop, Abby uncovered feuds and past histories people preferred to stay in the past.

The murderer killed the victim because he had killed her dog. A life for a life, in her opinion. The method was powdered castor bean seeds (which contain ricin) on the victim's cake.

Look Not Upon The Wine.

Christine E. Blum had a cozy series about the Rose Avenue Wine Club of Santa Monica, California. They were a collection of Miss Marples led by Annie Hall and her dog Bardot.

The first novel in the series was FULL BODIED MURDER (2017), beginning as Hall moved into a house on Rose Avenue. She was a refugee from New York City, meeting her new neighbours, joining the wine club, and finding a murdered woman in Chapter 2. Well, moving house was never easy.

But off to her first Wine Club meeting, where they discussed the murder over Peach Viognier, spicy Pinot Noir, and bacon-wrapped dates stuffed with almonds and sage cheese. Hall soon found a boyfriend of sorts but his tastes ran to meatball subs and pretzels with mustard.

Meanwhile, back at the murder, Hall was a suspect. The club uncovered lots of neighbourhood feuds but basically the search for the killer went nowhere. Not surprising, since the murderer was in fact a member of the club.

She had murdered the woman because her husband had been having an affair with her. No recipes appendix but there was a glossary of wine terminology.

MURDER MOST FERMENTED (2018) was the sequel. Annie Hall had taken an allotment garden. Digging over her plot, the reader will not be surprised she found the body of an elderly woman, this time only halfway through the first chapter.

The police openly disbelieved Hall, as well they might. To recover from the shock, Hall went to a Wine Club meeting for an Elgin Ridge Chardonnay, served with grilled pineapple skewers, bruschetta, shrimp satay, and deviled eggs.

Since the club had a vacancy, new member Paula was introduced. They did some digging, not in the garden but elsewhere for clues and back stories. Paula and her husband Max had assisted the elderly woman to her death. A hoard of jewelry and watches was discovered but there was an explanation for that.

Instead of recipes in the appendix, there were food/wine pairings, such as avocado toast with Sauvignon Blanc, lobster rolls with Gruner Veltliner, and meatballs with Chianti. Cheese with the port, naturally.

THE NAME OF THE ROSÉ (2018) was the third novel in the series. Yet another new member in the Wine Club, named Mary Ann. Out at the airport a small plane crashed. Police found a packet of narcotics with a club member's name on it. An airport mechanic was murdered and away went the plot.

Before getting down to the case at hand, the Wine Club began with a bottle of Gibbs Obsidian Block Reserve Cabernet. Priorities first, plus the wine soothes the nerves. The drug dealers were busted and the murder was a self-defense plea. Surprisingly, Mary Ann wasn't the culprit.

Again the appendix was a pairings list. Various red wines were suggested with hamburgers, and a Riesling with the Louisiana SHRimp Creole. For Korean barbecue, try a Chilean Syrah.

Spicy Stories.

PEPPERMINT BARKED (2022) by Leslie Budewitz was a novel in a food cozy series about Pepper Reece of Seattle, Washington. She lived up to her name by operating a spice shop in the Pike Place Market.

A young woman was murdered in a wine shop in the market but not have been the intended victim. Reece went into action, uncovering assorted feuds and family connections. She soon attracted the attention of someone nasty.

Twas the Christmas season and the spice shop was busy selling cinnamon and nutmeg. The peppermint bark justified the title of the novel. Strangely, the pumpkin pie spice was a runaway success.

Meanwhile, back at the murder, Reece got herself trapped with the killer. He had been trying to force out the wine shop so he could take over the lease and operate a non-alcoholic brewery. He was obviously deluded in more ways than one.

The recipes appendix included Fisherman's Stew, Double Chocolate Peppermint Bark, Chocolate Peppermint Bars, Peppermint Mocha, Candy Cane Cookies, Sugar And Spice Shortbread, and Sleigh Ride (cognac and cinnamon cocktail).

Kitchenware.

WINED AND DIED IN NEW ORLEANS (2023) by Ellen Bryon was a novel in a food cozy series about Ricki James-Diaz of New Orleans. She was the proprietor of the Vintage Cookbook and Kitchenware Shop, which rented space in the Bon Vee Culinary House Museum.

Renovations to the building brought forth crates of old and valuable French wines left by the original owner Jean-Louis Charbonnet. His descendants came running for a share of the loot. One of them, with the same name as his ancestor, had his head pulverized by a meat tenderizer from Ricki's shop.

The senior heir, Eugenia Charbonnet Felice, became the prime suspect. The NOPD thought they were in charge of the investigation but Ricki began sleuthing and we know who would solve the case.

The Charbonnet family were mostly grifters or had something to hide. Ricki was also busy filming a cooking video for her shop, a drama in itself. The hurricane didn't help either. There was the usual gunpoint confrontation but Ricki was save because the book series will continue.

The recipes appendix was a selection from old cookbooks from 1942 to 1971. The author commented that some recipes were difficult to reproduce in modern kitchens because ingredients, kitchenware, and tastes have changed over the decades.

Recipes presented were Biscuit Tortoni, Curried Chicken, Barbeque Frankfurters, Barbeque Ground Turkey, and Beer Hush Puppies.

The 1942 recipe for Brownies was modified by adding extra chocolate, as Ellen Bryon found the original was not sweet enough. My suspicion is that because this was a wartime recipe, the cook had to respect that sugar and chocolate were rationed and cut back on the sweets.

NOT FOOD COZIES

by Dale Speirs

These aren't food cozies but are food related so I'll start a new review column.

Funny Business.

Judy Canova was a Florida cracker who played herself as a country bumpkin with a hillbilly accent thick enough to slice. That helped her get started in show business but she was subsequently stereotyped despite having a good singing voice and never rose above her station.

THE JUDY CANOVA SHOW aired on radio from 1943 to 1953. Each episode opened with Canova singing a humorous song in the intro before going into the situation comedy.

"Gurgle Soda Pop Contest" was written by Fred Fox and Henry Hoople, and aired on 1945-11-10. Canova and her maid Geranium had entered the aforesaid contest and were drinking their twentieth case of soda pop. The contest apparently required sending in 450 bottle caps to win a date with Van Johnson.

He was the handsome heartthrob of millions of women who didn't know he was homosexual. Since Canova worked in the industry she probably knew the truth about Van Johnson but remained silent. In those days, homosexuality wasn't just a sin, it was a felony and could destroy careers. Johnson and other actors of that ilk had to keep quiet.

Back at the sketch, Canova's Aunt Aggie speculated how wonderful it would be to have Johnson as a husband. There followed assorted gags about husband hunting, which would rile today's feminists.

Then the gardener Pedro cut in, voiced by Mel Blanc of Bugs Bunny fame. Pedro said his cousin González was helping drink the bottles of Gurgle but they tickled his nose. Canova asked why and was told González was mixing it with Six Feathers, which got a big laugh from the audience.

Pause for digression. This illustrates the problem with topical humour, that it is funniest while fresh but doesn't age well. I did some Googling but couldn't find anything about a drink called Six Feathers. Presumably it was a distilled liquor but I'm just guessing. Otherwise the joke doesn't make sense.

Be that as it may, the episode paused for an instrumental from the orchestra, followed by a cosmetic commercial. Back at the plot, more gags about contests which somehow segued into jokes about large families.

A messenger knocked at the door with a pigeongram from Gurgle. Apparently the judges liked her letter but they didn't receive the bottle tops. Canova calmly sent out for 450 more bottles of Gurgle. She had orange flavour last time but decided to order grape this time.

She called in Pedro and asked him if he had sent the bottle caps. He replied they went by dog sled. Canova said she had ordered him to ship them airmail. He thought she said Airedale.

The next 450 bottles then arrived, minutes after they had been ordered. "*Ain't reconversion wonderful?*" said Canova. That was more topical humour which got a laugh then but would puzzle today's listener. Hint: look at the air date of this episode.

She began pulling off caps with her teeth. After several times she broke a tooth. Canova then sang her second song, romantic, as was her custom. What, with a broken tooth?

The sketch resumed with her visiting a dentist. He gave her anesthetic before pulling the tooth. This led into a dream sequence where she was a castaway on a tropical island. Various nonsense scenes followed which got the audience laughing. Again, many topical references.

The writers ran out of ideas and the sketch cut off. We never did find out if she won the Gurgle contest. Canova's final song was a sentimental song for returned veterans.

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY aired as a 30-minute hit comedy series from 1935 to 1953. Fibber was the blithering idiot and Molly was his long-suffering wife. Available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary.

"National Pancake Week" was written by Don Quinn and Phil Leslie, and aired on 1951-02-06. The series sponsor at the time was PET Milk, an evaporated milk still produced today.

The company began in 1885 before home refrigerators were available, so its canned condensed milk was a healthy source for city dwellers.

In the 1950s, sales dwindled and the milk was only used for baking instead of drinking. The concentrated milk, used undiluted out of the can, added richness and creaminess to baked goods.

All that is an important prologue to this episode. The comedy was about Fibber McGee making pancakes and a big mess, using, as frequently mentioned, PET Milk for the batter. Since it was National Pancake Week, there was a perfect fit all around.

Fibber told Molly to stay in bed and he would make her breakfast in bed. She wasn't happy, remembering the mess he left behind the last time, both in the kitchen and the bed. That time, he tripped entering the bedroom and dropped the tray. She said that was the first time she got an egg shampoo sunny side up.

She made frequent trips downstairs to see how the pancakes were coming along and to visit with other characters stopping by the house to say hello. Fibber pressed every plate and pan into service, filling up the sink with dirty dishes. Everyone offered advice on the best way to make pancakes, which Fibber ignored.

The hours went by but still no pancakes. Molly was starving but Fibber kept sending her back upstairs to bed because the pancakes were almost ready. After the final commercial, Fibber succeeded.

He and a friend were chowing down on delicious pancakes. By now it was late evening. Fibber suddenly remembered Molly and took a tray upstairs for her. She was sound asleep. So Fibber ate the pancakes.

Not So Funny.

“Murder At The Automat” (1937) by Cornell Woolrich was reprinted 2022 in the anthology *GOLDEN AGE LOCKED ROOM MYSTERIES*, edited by Otto Penzler, which is where I read it.. The story began with the death of a customer in an Automat, a self-serve café.

The deceased ate a salami sandwich spiced with cyanide by someone unknown. This was a police procedural, following a detective as he made his way step by

step to the murderer. The man's wife was a Black Widow, who had disposed of her previous husband the same way in another city.

The method of getting the poisoned sandwich into the Automat where only her husband could eat it was a complicated plan. She used her boyfriend by promising to share the estate. He didn't know about her past or that after he married her he would eventually become dead husband #3.

Although the detective was able to satisfy himself of her guilt, he had nothing to prove the case in court. He visited her and as he suspected, she offered him a cup of coffee. Flavoured with cyanide of course, but he switched their cups when she wasn't looking and saved the state the cost of a trial.

Sherlock Dines Out.

Sherlock Holmes was very successful on radio. He aired on several networks with several sets of actors from 1930 to 1956, encompassing the entire lifespan of old-time radio.

Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce had a long run, but others played the parts before and after. These episodes are available as free mp3s from www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary.

“The Case Of The Very Best Butter” was written by Edith Meiser and aired on 1948-04-18. A wealthy and overweight matron had married a young French violinist Hubert Depapan. He was infatuated with her stepdaughter from her first marriage. As Holmes remarked, the situation seemed complicated.

Madame Depapan (no first name given) was convinced Hubert was trying to kill her by slow poison in her food. She therefore hired a cook for herself and would eat nothing else that wasn't served from a common plate. She suspected arsenic.

Hubert was about to leave for a European concert tour. There would be one last dinner before he left, at which Madame suspected Hubert would make his move with some new poison. She invited Holmes and Watson to the dinner.

The Depapans lived at Rathbone Place, a not so subtle joke by the script writer. By this time in the series, John Stanley had taken over the part of Holmes from Basil Rathbone. I checked Google Maps and there really is a Rathbone Place. Wikipedia said it was named after a different Rathbone from the 1600s.

Hubert greeted Holmes and Watson effusively. Holmes noticed on a side table two tickets to Europe, one for that night and the other a week later. The dinner was hilarious.

Everyone was suspicious about Hubert, who knew perfectly well why they were there. No one would eat or drink anything until he did. The wine bottle had to be opened in front of all, and poured out under close watch.

Hubert blethered about the butter and waxed lyrical, quoting the tea party dialogue from ALICE IN WONDERLAND. He offered to cut a slice for Madame but she said she would cut it herself from the other end of the stick.

Holmes upset the wine, a supposed accident he blamed on Watson. The meal finished with everyone still alive. Hubert had to leave for his journey. The next day at 221B, the newspaper reported Hubert's death en route to Europe. Holmes confirmed that the butter had been poisoned at one end with antimony.

Hubert, knowing his wife, had served from the non-poisoned end so she would take the poisoned end. Holmes spilled the wine to distract everyone while he rotated the butter dish. Hubert got a dose of his own poison.

The Future Of Food.

A HIGHLY UNLIKELY SCENARIO (2014) by Rachel Cantor was set in a near future where fast food businesses ruled. Not really science fiction when you think about it. This novel should be required reading for Skip The Dishes or Door Dash drivers.

The text was somewhat incoherent, chopped up in the New Wave style of the 1960s. The protagonists went on an epic quest to build "a post-denominational society where no citizen would be judged by the food they ate".

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Planets.

Greene, T.P., et al (2023) **Thermal emission from the Earth-sized exoplanet TRAPPIST-1 b using JWST.** NATURE 618:39-42

[TRAPPIST-1 is a cold dwarf star 40.7 light years from Earth, with seven planets. It is so-called because it was discovered by a Chilean telescope known as Transiting Planets And Planetismals Small Telescope.]

Authors' abstract: *The TRAPPIST-1 system is remarkable for its seven planets that are similar in size, mass, density and stellar heating to the rocky planets Venus, Earth and Mars in the Solar System.*

All the TRAPPIST-1 planets have been observed with transmission spectroscopy using the Hubble or Spitzer space telescopes, but no atmospheric features have been detected or strongly constrained.

TRAPPIST-1b is the closest planet to the M-dwarf star of the system, and it receives four times as much radiation as Earth receives from the Sun. This relatively large amount of stellar heating suggests that its thermal emission may be measurable.

Here we present photometric secondary eclipse observations of the Earth-sized exoplanet TRAPPIST-1b using the F1500W filter of the mid-infrared instrument on the James Webb Space Telescope.

We detect the secondary eclipses in five separate observations with 8.7s confidence when all data are combined. These measurements are most consistent with re-radiation of the incident flux of the TRAPPIST-1 star from only the dayside hemisphere of the planet.

The most straightforward interpretation is that there is little or no planetary atmosphere redistributing radiation from the host star and also no detectable atmospheric absorption of carbon dioxide or other species.

Akins, A., et al (2023) **Evidence of a polar cyclone on Uranus from VLA observations.** GEOPHYSICAL RESEARCH LETTERS 50:doi.org/10.1029/2023GL102872 (available as a free pdf)

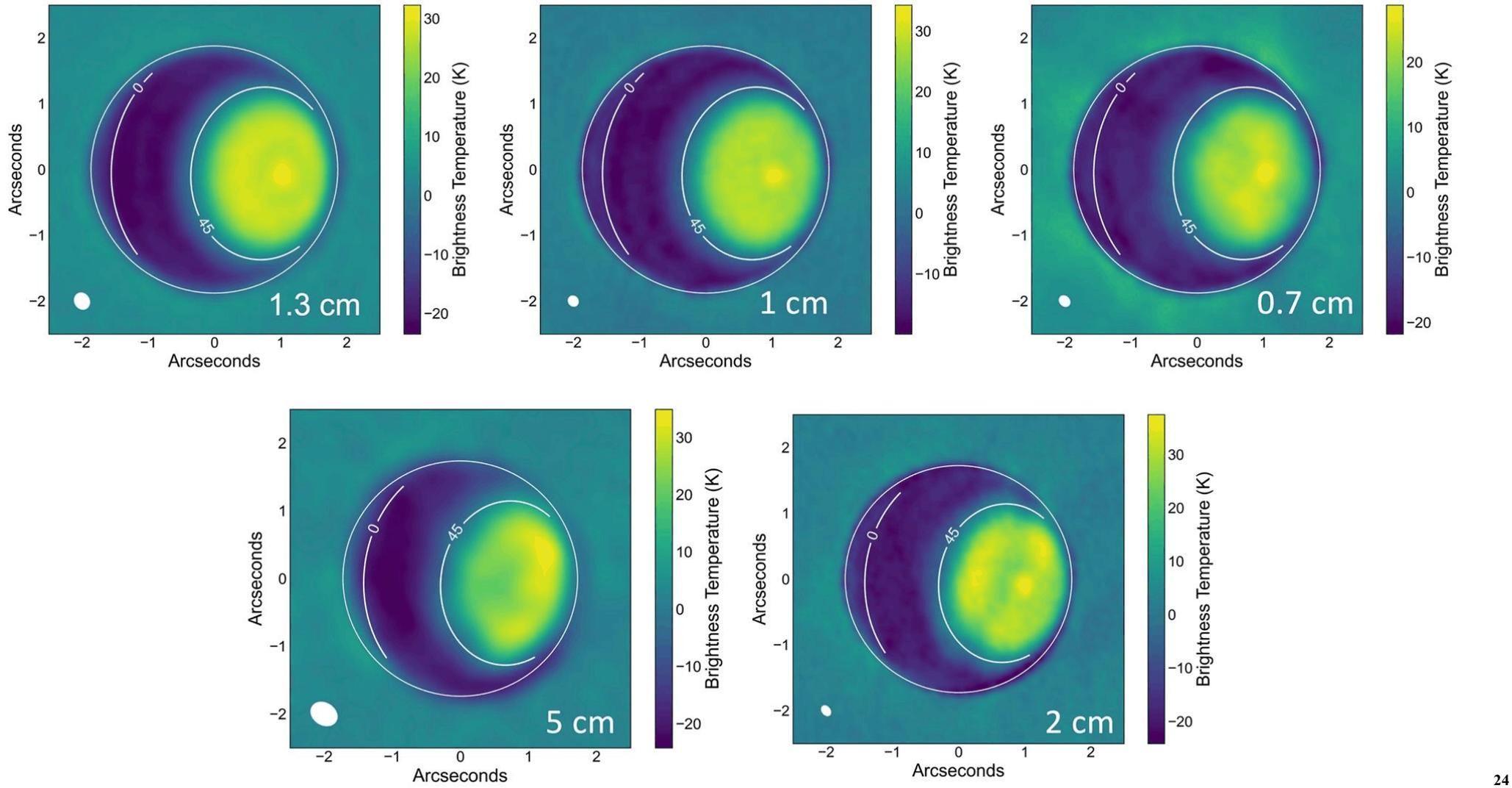
Authors' abstract: *We present observations of Uranus in northern spring with the Very Large Array from 0.7 to 5 cm. These observations reveal details in thermal emission from Uranus' north pole at 10s of bars, including a dark collar near 80°N and a bright spot at the polar center.*

The bright central spot resembles observations of polar emission on Saturn and Neptune at shallower pressures. We constrain the variations in temperature and NH3/H2S abundances which could explain these features.

We find that the brightness temperature of the polar spot can be recreated through 5 K temperature gradients and/or 10× depletion of NH3 or H2S vapor between 10 and 20 bars, both consistent with the presence of a cyclonic polar vortex.

The contrast of the polar spot may have increased since 2015, which would suggest seasonal evolution of Uranus' polar circulation at depth.

[Images are from this paper. Remember that Uranus is tilted 98° onto its side relative to its orbit around the Sun. Thus the view in the images is a direct look at its pole.]



Kolmasová, I., et al (2023) **Lightning at Jupiter pulsates with a similar rhythm as in-cloud lightning at Earth.** NATURE COMMUNICATIONS 14:doi.org/10.1038/s41467-023-38351-6 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Recent observations of the Juno mission revealed electromagnetic signals of Jovian rapid whistlers at a cadence of a few lightning discharges per second, comparable to observations of return strokes at Earth.*

The duration of these discharges was below a few milliseconds and below one millisecond in the case of Jovian dispersed pulses, which were also discovered by Juno. However, it was still uncertain if Jovian lightning processes have the fine structure of steps corresponding to phenomena known from thunderstorms at Earth.

Here we show results collected by the Juno Waves instrument during 5 years of measurements at 125-microsecond resolution. We identify radio pulses with typical time separations of one millisecond, which suggest step-like extensions of lightning channels and indicate that Jovian lightning initiation processes are similar to the initiation of intracloud lightning at Earth.

During the Jupiter flyby of Voyager 1 in 1979, the onboard radio receiver observed several seconds long radio wave signals at a slowly decreasing frequency from approximately 7 kHz down to 1 kHz.

All these detections were obtained in the Io torus, and their similarity with the terrestrial lightning whistlers led to the discovery of Jovian lightning.

The cadence of these signals gave a maximum of one lightning per second, and the analysis of the whistler traces gave an upper limit of 40 ms for the time scales of underlying lightning processes. The Juno spacecraft has orbited Jupiter since 2016, diving down to a few thousand kilometers above the clouds.

Its Waves investigation instrument discovered Jovian rapid whistlers at frequencies below 20 kHz as a form of dispersed atmospherics at short time scales of less than a few milliseconds to a few tens of milliseconds, and Jupiter dispersed pulses (JDP) below 150 kHz, propagating in the ordinary mode at even shorter time scales from less than 0.4 milliseconds to several milliseconds.

Origin Of Life.

Rockwell, N.C., et al (2023) **GUN4 appeared early in cyanobacterial evolution.** PNAS NEXUS 2:doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad131 (available as a free pdf)

[Chlorophyll and hemoglobin have remarkably similar chemical structures, a lattice of carbon atoms surrounding a metal atom. They apparently evolved from the same ancestor.]

Authors' abstract: *Photosynthesis relies on chlorophylls, which are synthesized via a common tetrapyrrole trunk pathway also leading to heme, vitamin B12, and other pigmented cofactors.*

The first committed step for chlorophyll biosynthesis is insertion of magnesium into protoporphyrin IX by magnesium chelatase. Magnesium chelatase is composed of H-, I-, and D-subunits, with the tetrapyrrole substrate binding to the H-subunit.

This subunit is rapidly inactivated in the presence of substrate, light, and oxygen, so oxygenic photosynthetic organisms require mechanisms to protect magnesium chelatase from similar loss of function.

An additional protein, GUN4, binds to the H-subunit and to tetrapyrroles. GUN4 has been proposed to serve this protective role via its ability to bind linear tetrapyrroles (bilins).

In the current work, we probe the origins of bilin binding by GUN4 via comparative phylogenetic analysis and biochemical validation of a conserved bilin-binding motif.

Based on our results, we propose that bilin-binding GUN4 proteins arose early in cyanobacterial evolution and that this early acquisition represents an ancient adaptation for maintaining chlorophyll biosynthesis in the presence of light and oxygen.

Paleobiology.

Kammerer, C.F., et al (2023) **Rapid turnover of top predators in African terrestrial faunas around the Permian-Triassic mass extinction.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 33:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2023.04.007

Authors' abstract: *Catastrophic ecosystem disruption in the late Permian period resulted in the greatest loss of biodiversity in Earth's history, the Permian-Triassic mass extinction (PTME). The dominant terrestrial vertebrates of the Permian (synapsids) suffered major losses at this time, leading to their replacement by reptiles in the Triassic.*

The dominant late Permian predatory synapsids, gorgonopsians, were completely extirpated by the PTME. The largest African gorgonopsians, the Rubidgeinae, have traditionally been assumed to go extinct at the Permo-Triassic boundary (PTB).

However, this apparent persistence through the sustained extinction interval characterizing the continental PTME is at odds with ecological theory indicating that top predators have high extinction risk.

Here, we report the youngest known large-bodied gorgonopsians, gigantic specimens from the PTB site of Nooitgedacht 68 in South Africa. These specimens are not rubidgeine, and instead are referable to Inostrancevia, a taxon previously thought to be a Russian endemic.

Based on comprehensive review of the South African gorgonopsian record, we show that rubidgeines were early victims of ecosystem disruption preceding the PTME and were replaced as top predators by Laurasian immigrant inostranceviines.

The reign of this latter group was shortlived, however; by the PTB, gorgonopsians were extinct, and a different group (therocephalians) became the largest synapsid predators, before themselves going extinct.

The extinction and replacement of top predators in rapid succession at the clade level underlines the extreme degree of ecosystem instability in the latest Permian and earliest Triassic, a phenomenon that was likely global in extent.

Dinosaurs.

Sander, P.M. (2023) **Plesiosaurs.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 33:R377-R397 (available as a free pdf)

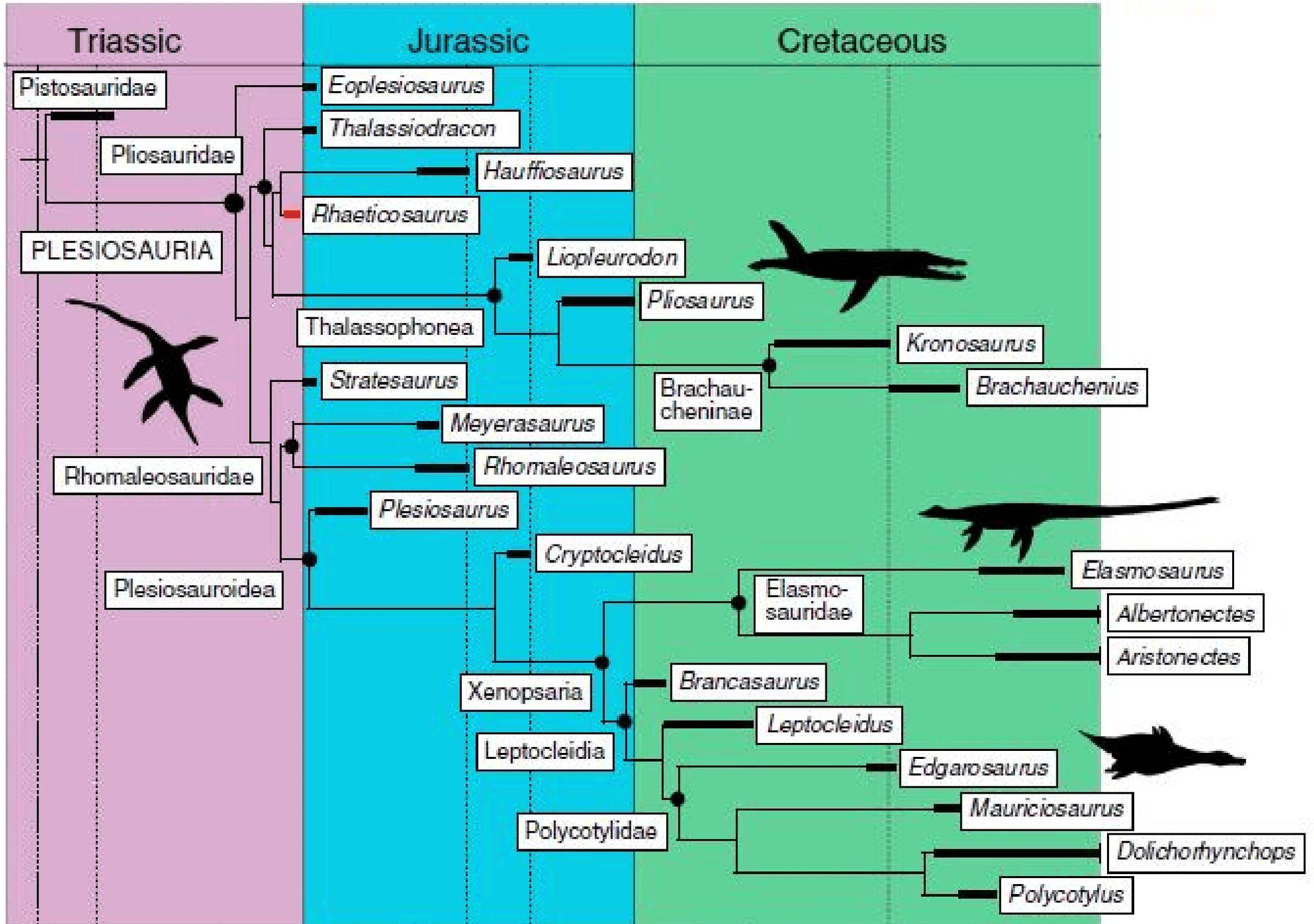
Author's extracts: *Plesiosaurs were medium-sized to very large marine reptiles, ranging in total length from under two meters to over 12 meters.*

Whereas their long neck intuitively looks very flexible, modern research indicates a surprisingly stiff structure based on the tight articulation of the vertebrae with each other.

The function of the long, stiff neck probably was for visual and hydrodynamic concealment of the large body from the prey, allowing efficient harvesting of small, schooling fish from a distance.

[Images on the next two pages are from this paper.]





Zoology.

Freire, M., et al (2023) **Absence of visual cues motivates desert ants to build their own landmarks.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 33:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2023.05.019

Authors' abstract: *The desert ants *Cataglyphis fortis* inhabit the harsh salt pans of Tunisia. The individually foraging ants rely on path integration to navigate back to their nest. However, as path integration accumulates errors at a rate that increases with distance traveled, it is supplemented by visual and olfactory cues.*

We show that despite their impressive homing accuracy, ants returning from long foraging journeys face a mortality rate of up to 20%. To facilitate homing, colonies inhabiting the featureless center of the salt pan build tall nest hills as visual cues.

Removing these hills triggers rebuilding, but visual artificial landmarks placed near the nest entrance are sufficient to suppress the ants' rebuilding activity. Our data suggest that the desert ant builds its own landmark on purpose in a featureless environment to increase its chances of successful homing and survival.

Environmental Science.

Parsons, T., et al (2023) **The weight of New York City: Possible contributions to subsidence from anthropogenic sources.** EARTH'S FUTURE 11:doi.org/10.1029/2022EF003465 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *New York City faces accelerating inundation risk from sea level rise, subsidence, and increasing storm intensity from natural and anthropogenic causes.*

Here we calculate a previously unquantified contribution to subsidence from the cumulative mass and downward pressure exerted by the built environment of the city.

We enforce that load distribution in a multiphysics finite element model to calculate expected subsidence. Complex surface geology requires multiple

rheological soil models to be applied. Clay rich soils and artificial fill are calculated to have the highest post-construction subsidence as compared with more elastic soils.

Minimum and maximum calculated building subsidence ranges from 0 to 600 mm depending on soil/rock physical parameters and foundation modes. We compare modeled subsidence and surface geology to observed subsidence rates from satellite data.

The comparison is complicated because the urban load has accumulated across a much longer period than measured subsidence rates, and there are multiple causes of subsidence.

Geodetic measurements show a mean subsidence rate of 1 to 2 mm/year across the city that is consistent with regional post-glacial deformation, though we find some areas of significantly greater subsidence rates.

Some of this deformation is consistent with internal consolidation of artificial fill and other soft sediment that may be exacerbated by recent building loads, though there are many possible causes.

New York is emblematic of growing coastal cities all over the world that are observed to be subsiding, meaning there is a shared global challenge of mitigation against a growing inundation hazard.

Bonnet, S., et al (2023) **Natural iron fertilization by shallow hydrothermal sources fuels diazotroph blooms in the ocean.** SCIENCE 380:doi.org/10.1126/science.abq4654

[Diazotrophs are microbes that convert atmospheric nitrogen into useful nutrients.]

Authors' abstract: *Iron is an essential nutrient that regulates productivity in ~30% of the ocean.*

Compared with deep (>2000 meter) hydrothermal activity at mid-ocean ridges that provide iron to the ocean's interior, shallow (<500 meter) hydrothermal fluids are likely to influence the surface's ecosystem. However, their effect is unknown.

In this work, we show that fluids emitted along the Tonga volcanic arc (South Pacific) have a substantial impact on iron concentrations in the photic layer through vertical diffusion. This enrichment stimulates biological activity, resulting in an extensive patch of chlorophyll (360,000 square kilometers).

Diazotroph activity is two to eight times higher and carbon export fluxes are two to three times higher in iron-enriched waters than in adjacent unfertilized waters. Such findings reveal a previously undescribed mechanism of natural iron fertilization in the ocean that fuels regional hotspot sinks for atmospheric CO₂.

Bisson, K., et al (2023) Five reasons to take the precautionary approach to deep sea exploitation. COMMUNICATIONS EARTH & ENVIRONMENT 4:doi.org/10.1038/s43247-023-00823-4 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: Food and energy insecurity have been exacerbated by climate change, conflict, and disease, with global energy demands only expected to grow. Seabed mining and deep-sea fishing have been suggested as ways to support shifting to renewable energy and increasing food supply.

These industries are likely to impact one of the largest habitats on Earth, our ocean's mesopelagic zone, at depths between ~200 and 1000 metres. Once assumed to be lifeless, we now know the mesopelagic zone is rich with life and a vital component of the global ecosystem.

Recently, industries have begun exploratory extractive activities, while our scientific understanding of the impacts of these activities on the mesopelagic zone is trailing behind. Here, we outline five reasons why we advocate for a precautionary approach to deep-sea exploitation in order to make evidence based decisions.

The mesopelagic zone is one of the largest habitats on Earth The mesopelagic zone is estimated to host 1.8 to 16 billion metric tons of fish biomass, which is roughly 50 to 90% of the total mass of fish on Earth.

The mesopelagic zone is closely connected to the ocean above and below The mesopelagic zone is crucial for climate regulation, and for supporting commercially and ecologically important species.

The oceans absorb about a quarter of our carbon dioxide emissions, and for carbon to be stored on climate-relevant time scales, it must pass through the mesopelagic zone to the deep sea.

Mesopelagic fish do not make good food for humans Many mesopelagic fishes are not suitable for direct human consumption as they contain high proportions of indigestible fats.

Moreover, although mesopelagic fish have high global biomass, their densities in a given location can be low, requiring extraction on a significant scale to be economically feasible.

Deep seabed mining can generate large sediment plumes Mining can redistribute sediments tens or hundreds of miles via suspension and return of wastewater following ore removal.

Cost-benefitting deep seabed mining is premature Conducting full cost-benefit analyses of the environmental impacts of deep-sea mining of metals is currently not possible.

[Image on next page is from this paper.]

a. The mesopelagic zone is closely connected to the ocean above and below.

d. Cost-benefitting deep seabed mining is premature.

c. Mesopelagic fish do not make good food for humans.

b. The mesopelagic zone is one of the largest habitats on Earth.

e. Deep seabed mining can generate large sediment plumes.

waste sediment after extraction

suspended sediment from extraction

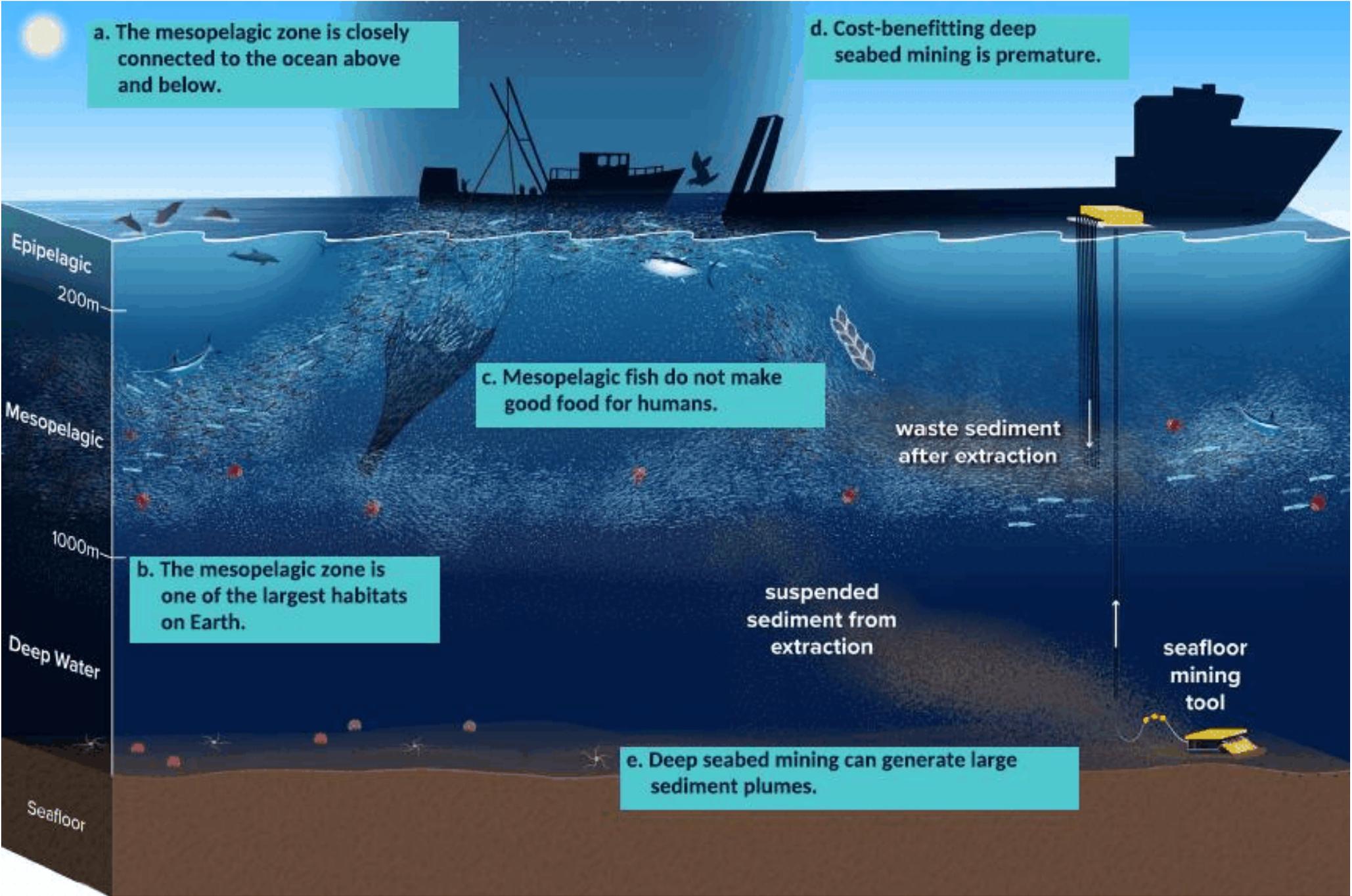
seafloor mining tool

Epipelagic
200m

Mesopelagic
1000m

Deep Water

Seafloor



Sysolyatina, M.A., and A.S. Olkova (2023) **Sources of rare earth elements in the environment and their impact on living organisms.** ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS 31:doi.org/10.1139/er-2022-0081

[Every electronic device, whether smartphone, laptop, or large-screen television set uses rare earth elements (REEs). Electric automobiles use kilogrammes of the stuff.]

Authors' abstract: *At present, both natural positive geochemical anomalies of REEs and “spots” of anthropogenic origin are discovered. There is a relationship between natural and anthropogenic sources of REEs in the environment.*

Increasing REE mining leads to the exposure of rock layers rich in target elements, which are then leached from natural and waste rocks. As a result, the total content of REEs in soils of their extraction areas reaches 2.3 µg/kg, and in the snow of cities it ranges from 0.411 to 1.463 µg/kg, which is comparable with natural anomalies of elements.

Most often such levels of REE accumulation are not dangerous for biota. REEs, like many trace elements, have an essential effect in low concentrations and have harmful effects only when the dose is increased.

However, stimulation effects proven for agricultural plants and animals in the natural environment can influence the change in population and community structures.

The effects of REE compounds have many uncertainties under the conditions of their joint action with each other and with other substances containing biogenic or potentially toxic elements. The article provides examples of additive, synergistic, and antagonistic actions of a mixture of elements.

Further, it is shown that the bioaccumulation of REEs is comparable to the accumulation of heavy metals in living organisms. Data on the transfer of REEs along trophic chains are single and contradictory. Thus, REEs contribute to the toxic load on living organisms.

Human Prehistory.

Tobler, R., et al (2023) **The role of genetic selection and climatic factors in the dispersal of anatomically modern humans out of Africa.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 120:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2213061120

Authors' abstract: *The evolutionarily recent dispersal of anatomically modern humans (AMH) out of Africa (OoA) and across Eurasia provides a unique opportunity to examine the impacts of genetic selection as humans adapted to multiple new environments.*

Analysis of ancient Eurasian genomic datasets (~1,000 to 45,000 years old) reveals signatures of strong selection, including at least 57 hard sweeps after the initial AMH movement OoA, which have been obscured in modern populations by extensive admixture during the Holocene.

The spatiotemporal patterns of these hard sweeps provide a means to reconstruct early AMH population dispersals OoA.

We identify a previously unsuspected extended period of genetic adaptation lasting ~30,000 years, potentially in the Arabian Peninsula area, prior to a major Neandertal genetic introgression and subsequent rapid dispersal across Eurasia as far as Australia.

Consistent functional targets of selection initiated during this period, which we term the Arabian Standstill, include loci involved in the regulation of fat storage, neural development, skin physiology, and cilia function.

Similar adaptive signatures are also evident in introgressed archaic hominin loci and modern Arctic human groups, and we suggest that this signal represents selection for cold adaptation.

Surprisingly, many of the candidate selected loci across these groups appear to directly interact and coordinately regulate biological processes, with a number associated with major modern diseases including the ciliopathies, metabolic syndrome, and neurodegenerative disorders.

Modern Humans.

Kaaronen, R.O., et al (2023) **Body-based units of measure in cultural evolution.** SCIENCE 380:948-954

Authors' abstract: *Measurement systems are important drivers of cultural and technological evolution. However, the evolution of measurement is still insufficiently understood.*

Many early standardized measurement systems evolved from body-based units of measure, such as the cubit and fathom, but researchers have rarely studied how or why body-based measurement has been used.

We documented body-based units of measure in 186 cultures, illustrating how body-based measurement is an activity common to cultures around the world. Here, we describe the cultural and technological domains these units are used in.

We argue that body-based units have had, and may still have, advantages over standardized systems, such as in the design of ergonomic technologies. This helps explain the persistence of body-based measurement centuries after the first standardized measurement systems emerged.

Tessier, A.J., et al (2023) **Lifestyle behavior changes and associated risk factors during the COVID-19 pandemic: results from the Canadian COVIDiet Online Cohort Study.** JMIR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SURVEILLANCE 9:doi.org/10.2196/43786 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Analyses were conducted on 1609 adults (18 to 89 years old; n=1450, 90.1%, women; n=1316, 81.8%, White) of the Canadian COVIDiet study baseline data (May-December 2020).*

Self-reported current and prepandemic weight, physical activity, smoking status, perceived eating habits, alcohol intake, and sleep quality were collected through online questionnaires.

Based on these 6 indicator variables, latent class analysis (LCA) was used to identify lifestyle behavior change patterns.

Associations with potential risk factors, including age, gender, ethnicity, education, income, chronic diseases, body image perception, and changes in the stress level, living situation, and work arrangement, were examined with logistic regressions.

Of the 1609 participants, 980 (60.9%) had a bachelor's degree or above. Since the pandemic, 563 (35%) had decreased income and 788 (49%) changed their work arrangement.

Most participants reported unchanged weight, sleep quality, physical activity level, and smoking and alcohol consumption, yet 708 (44%) reported a perceived decrease in eating habit quality.

From LCA, 2 classes of lifestyle behavior change emerged: healthy and less healthy. The healthy lifestyle behavior change group more frequently reported unchanged weight, sleep quality, smoking and alcohol intake, unchanged/improved eating habits, and increased physical activity.

The less healthy lifestyle behavior change group reported significant weight gain, deteriorated eating habits and sleep quality, unchanged/increased alcohol intake and smoking, and decreased physical activity.

Among risk factors, body image dissatisfaction, depression, increased stress level, and gender minority identity were associated with adopting less healthy behaviors in adjusted models.

The COVID-19 pandemic has appeared to have influenced lifestyle behaviors unfavorably in some but favorably in others. Body image perception, change in stress level, and gender identity are factors associated with behavior change patterns; whether these will sustain over time remains to be studied.

Findings provide insights into developing strategies for supporting adults with poorer mental well-being in the postpandemic context and promoting healthful behaviors during future disease outbreaks.

WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. 2023 will be the 30th year of the WWP. Mark your calendars now!

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

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

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

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

I'm not on any of the social media such as Facebook, Twitter, or Tik Tok, so perhaps my readers could post this announcement there.

FREE STUFF ONLINE

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

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

For scientific papers for which free pdfs are available, the easiest method is to Google either the title of the paper or its digital object identifier, the phrase beginning with doi.org.

Many papers are behind a paywall, so unless you have access to a university library computer, you can only get the abstract. However, the abstract is often enough to understand the gist of the article.

Every scientific periodical has free email notifications of each new issue's table of contents. I subscribe to dozens of notification services, in case you were wondering how I manage to keep up with the literature.

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

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

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

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