

# OPUNTIA

## 268

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### LIFE ON THE BROADCAST WAVES

by Dale Speirs

Thousands of shows from the golden age of radio are available as free mp3 downloads at: [www.archive.org/details/radioprograms](http://www.archive.org/details/radioprograms). There are great comedies such as Jack Benny, DUFFY'S TAVERN, ROUND THE HORNE, Fibber McGee And Molly, and OUR MISS BROOKS, just to name a few of my favourites. Mystery fans will like DRAGNET, INNER SANCTUM, THE DAMON RUNYON THEATER, several Nero Wolfe series, and SUSPENSE. Science fiction fans will like X MINUS ONE, LIGHTS OUT, and DIMENSION X.

CANNED LAUGHTER (1992, hardcover) is a compilation of hundreds of anecdotes from radio and television broadcasting's history. There are far too many to review and since I'm a fan of old-time radio (OTR) I'll stick to those. Priority of accomplishment in OTR is difficult to establish in many cases because so many people were working on the same idea simultaneously. Vaughn de Leath claimed she was the first person to sing over the radio, in 1907, at the request of Dr. Lee De Forest, the inventor of several types of radio tubes. But De Forest himself told a reporter that it was a Swedish concert singer Madame Eugenia Farrar, who sang "I Love You Truly". The broadcast was heard by shortwave operators at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, who had trouble convincing others they heard a woman singing.

David Sarnoff, the giant ego who ran RCA and never let the facts get in the way of a good story about himself, claimed that he had picked up the Titanic's distress calls and stayed on duty 72 hours relaying the messages to his radio station newscasters. One of his own engineers, a brave man if ever there was one, later pointed out that the radio station Sarnoff claimed to be working for was closed at night when the first SOS came in, and like many other stations, voluntarily stayed off the air for a couple of days to allow clear air for rescuers and coastal stations.

Static was a constant problem in the early days due to the primitive radio sets and transmitters, and listeners came up with dozens of terms to describe it. Wow-wow was the howling noise emitted by nearby radio antennas resonating close to the same frequency as the receiving set. Cross-talk was when two broadcasts on nearby channels overlapped into one. Mush was a frying sound.

In the late 1920s, the single most popular radio show was AMOS AND ANDY. It was at the height of this show that Waterworks Departments across North America first noticed a phenomenon that has occurred many times since with other extremely popular shows and sports events. During the commercial breaks, water pressure in cities throughout the continent would suddenly drop, indicating a sudden massive use of water, as listeners visited the washroom. In the days before ratings agencies, the radio networks

actually used these pressure drops as a rough guide to how many people were listening to a show.

There were famous announcers such as Harry Von Zell, Harlow Wilcox, Don Wilson, and Bill Goodwin. The announcers were regular characters in shows as well as doing the commercials. Don Wilson was considered the greatest because of his association with Jack Benny. Bill Goodwin appeared on the Burns and Allen shows. Harlow Wilcox on THE JOHNSON WAX PROGRAM (the actual name for the Fibber McGee and Molly show), and Von Zell was on many shows. Von Zell's most famous fluff was introducing the President of the USA as: "*Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Hoobert Heever*" and then correcting himself with "*Hervie Hooper*".

In those days the middle commercial, and there was only one, was usually written into radio sitcoms with at least a pretense of a segue between the script and the commercial. People tried to avoid a sentimental scene immediately followed by a laxative commercial or a war report about a burning city just before a commercial on the heartbreak of psoriasis. Jack Benny's show was originally THE JELLO PROGRAM and later THE LUCKY STRIKE PROGRAM, an American brand of cigarettes. Don Wilson was supposedly in charge of the middle commercial, using the Sportsmen Quartet to sing a jingle about Lucky Strikes based on some popular song. He was always interrupting Jack to ask him to hear this week's version. Jack would refuse but the Quartet

paid no attention and started singing anyway. As they bumbled along, Jack started protesting, first in a normal voice and then at the top of his lungs, trying unsuccessfully to drown out the group.

Harlow Wilcox plugged Johnson's Wax, and Fibber called him Waxy. He would arrive in the middle scene and play a normal part until Fibber made the mistake of mentioning something lying on the floor or sitting on the furniture. At this point, Wilcox leaped into action and went into a spiel about Johnson's Wax for polishing wood or linoleum, while Fibber muttered audibly in the background about having walked straight into that one. Bill Goodwin was on for Swan Soap, and it wasn't safe for other characters to mention birds within his hearing. The middle commercials were done in good humour and were generally entertaining.

An incident that tangled up a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio announcer was the 1939 Royal Tour across Canada. King George VI and Queen Elizabeth arrived in Winnipeg where they were greeted by Mayor John Queen and his wife and Prime Minister MacKenzie King. The difficulties in describing on the air the King and Queen greeting King and Queen were what you would expect. Fortunately the Prime Minister was a bachelor so there was no Mrs. King. The radio announcer finally gave up and began referring to the mayor and P.M. by their titles only and the visitors as the Royal Couple.

Another announcer who got flustered was John Snagge of BBC Radio, who for decades did the play-by-play of the annual Cambridge-Oxford boat race. In 1949, he reported the tense moment near the finish as "*It's a very close race. I can't see who is in the lead. It's either Oxford or Cambridge!*".

H.V. Kaltenborn was a news reporter in the golden age of radio. He had a staccato delivery that made him popular with mimics and comedians. If you haven't heard him on tape or mp3, the modern-day version is William Shatner in the original Star Trek, famous for biting ... off ... every ... word ... in ... his ... dialogue. Kaltenborn not only clipped his words, he could talk on-air as fast as 175 words per minute. During World War Two, he once forgot himself and analyzed a prayer for peace by the Archbishop of Canterbury as if it were a political speech.

Eddie Cantor was another great name in OTR. It is widely accepted that he lost more money in the Panic of 1929 than anyone else in Los Angeles. He was contemplating early retirement to a life of luxury when margin calls on his stocks not only wiped him out but put him in debt for years despite his million-dollar income. After the crash, he proposed a new radio show to his network. He would select a name at random from the telephone directory and try to borrow \$20 from that person.



LISTENING IN (1999, hardcover) by Susan Douglas looks at the rise of broadcast radio from two points of view: how listening to radio joined people into a larger community, and how radio was commodified and taken away from amateurs. In the 1920s, radio was for geeks. There were lots of technical problems with home sets and not much good to listen to. From the 1930s to the early 1950s, broadcast radio was a medium of story-telling, via sitcoms, mysteries, and drama. After television killed off OTR, radio became background and dance music. Listening to radio is not uniform. We listen to news and weather for information. Sportscasts invoke the tribal response: "We won!". Stories tug at our emotions or sense of wonder. Music triggers several responses depending on the tempo and volume; peaceful if orchestral, ready to fight if loud rock.

In the early days of radio, DXing was popular with radio fans. This was trying to hear stations from as far away as possible. At night, AM and shortwave signals travel thousands of kilometres further than their daytime range due to nighttime changes in the ionosphere. Initially radio was for men and boys constantly tinkering with crystal sets or, later on, tube sets, while Sis and Mom went out shopping. This was due to the use of headsets for listening, and it wasn't until later that radios had loudspeakers so that all could listen instead of passing a headset around. Hacking, as we call it today, was a serious problem back then, as anyone could clutter the airwaves with chatter or interfere with other

stations because of poor bandwidth control. In 1912, radio transmitters were brought under government control because of this problem. Before broadcast networks developed, DXing was the main reason for listening to radio. It provided the thrill of being part of something greater, much like newspapers in the 1800s or television in the 1950s.

Radio's greatest impact was on music. Before the late 1920s, if you wanted to hear a wide variety of music, you had to buy gramophone records or go to concerts, both expensive. Radio not only supplied free music but introduced the public to new kinds. No respectable homeowner visited night clubs, so they never heard jazz in person. When it first started to be broadcast in the late 1920s, jazz boomed as it never had before, as it entered every home and became a widely accepted type of music. Outside the big cities, few could attend an opera or classical music concert, but from the 1930s onward millions could hear them in the comfort of their own living rooms. "Potted palm music", which was dance music in hotel ballrooms, became popular. Hotels gladly let radio stations broadcast from them in exchange for free publicity. Those listening at home would push back the living room furniture and dance along to the music.

Phonograph records were scratchy and tinny in those days, and sales stagnated as listeners preferred the better quality of live music on radio stations.

It wasn't until the 1940s that recordings became good enough to play over the air with the same quality as live performers.

THOSE RADIO COMMENTATORS (1977, hardcover) by Irving Fang is a collection of extended biographies about fifteen American radio commentators. I won't review all the biographies, which include Dorothy Thompson, Drew Pearson, and Edward Murrow, and other great names from the golden era.

The book starts off with Hans von Kaltenborn, born and raised in Milwaukee of German immigrants. He was best known as a war correspondent, not just World War Two but the overture of the Spanish Civil War. Kaltenborn began his career as a newspaper reporter in the 1890s. Because he spoke German fluently and could pass in French, he became a European correspondent. He returned to the USA and worked on a Brooklyn newspaper and as a public lecturer. World War One forced him to change his byline to the slightly less Prussian name H.V. Kaltenborn due to American prejudice against all things German.

He made his first radio broadcast in 1921, and the following year began regular broadcasts on WEAJ Brooklyn. His forthright opinions about Washington politics cost him his first series, and conflicts with his sponsors continued thereafter. By 1929 he was on the CBS network who prudently did not syndicate his show to any Washington stations. He interviewed Hitler in 1932 but

didn't take him seriously. Just another rabble-rouser who would never win an election. By 1935 Kaltenborn had changed his mind and was warning American listeners about the Nazis. In 1936, he managed to get within sight of a battle of the Spanish Civil War, and while hidden in a haystack broadcast live to the accompaniment of machine gun fire. In August 1939 while in Berlin he had the great honour of being deported by the Gestapo because of his commentary.

Kaltenborn's experience and knowledge of Germany made him the obvious war expert at CBS. He would be handed German-language reports at the microphone and would translate them live-to-air with added commentary. In 1940 he moved to NBC, who gave him a free hand as long as he signed an agreement to be legally liable for what he said over the air. After the war, by now an elderly man, he dwindled away from broadcasting, and retired in 1953.

Walter Winchell was the top-rated radio commentator in the USA despite the shoddy nature of his work. He admitted he hadn't read a book since school, and never interviewed newsmakers or did background research. He was a fast talker on the air and said he did so because if he slowed down his listeners would realize how dull he was. His specialty was celebrity gossip, rumours, and unsubstantiated opinion. Facts only got in the way.

He would have been fabulous as an Internet blogger.

An analysis in 1940 demonstrated that of 239 items Winchell mentioned on air, 54 were completely wrong, 24 partly inaccurate, 53 were correct, and 108 were unverifiable anecdotes. Winchell made lots of enemies, and was regularly physically assaulted in nightclubs and theatres by celebrities who resented what he had said about them on the radio. Winchell once had two radio shows simultaneously on different networks, CBS and NBC. He used a telegraph key to highlight gossip items, tapping gibberish while speaking his piece. Listeners who knew Morse Code complained about his tapping but Winchell refused the services of a genuine telegrapher. His signature sign-on was: *"Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. North America and all the ships at sea."*

Winchell was famous for his slang. Celebrities didn't get married, they lohengrined or middle-aisled. They didn't divorce, they "told it to the judge". Expectant women were infanticipating. Winchell invented the phrase "making whoopee" to get around censors when talking about couples who were more than just good friends. His shows had no logical order. An item about a famous couple getting a bundle from heaven (baby) would be followed by a war report, a film plug, and then an attempted suicide of a showgirl. After the war, Winchell gradually declined in influence as the next generation didn't care about him. They preferred to listen to DJs spinning vinyl, not some gossiping old geezer.

RADIO SOUND EFFECTS (1993, hardcover) by Robert Mott is a history of how sound effects were done in the live-to-air years of OTR. Today the sound man has been replaced by an engineer who clicks on mp3 files,. Back then recorded effects on vinyl records were awkward to use and difficult get the correct timing because the needle had to be dropped on a specific groove at exactly the right moment.

Sound effects immediately became essential to broadcast radio when it was born in the early 1920s. When a character said "Come in!", there had to be the sound of knocking first, followed by a door opening and closing with a thunk. Otherwise the silence would jar the listener out of the story. Radio sound men quickly adapted techniques long used in stage theatre, such as shaking a metal sheet to simulate thunder. Many stage effects could not be adapted because the sounds were too stylized and relied on visual imagery to complete the illusion. Stage effects also had to be loud to reach the balcony seats, whereas radio could use soft sounds that a microphone could pick up.

Sound effects were used on an ad-hoc basis in early radio but it wasn't until 1928 that the first full-time sound effects people were hired by radio producers. They were a couple, Arthur and Ona Nichols, who had done sound effects in vaudeville, and are considered as the pioneers of radio sound effects.



Sound men imitated rain by drizzling bird seed from a funnel onto a stretched sheet of waxed paper, and ocean waves with a wooden rocker filled with buckshot. Because so many sound effects were percussion or vibration, drum players were commonly hired as sound men. Drummers not only knew how to create a variety of sounds on their kit, but had the physical stamina for long-duration effects. If a show was set on a train, the sound man had to keep the clickety-clack effect going on a hand-cranked revolving wheel for twenty minutes at a time. Old-time SF fans who published zines on hand-cranked mimeographs can testify that to crank something twenty minutes without pause requires a strong arm.

Footsteps were important in just about every show. Sound men kept their shoes well-heeled and never let the soles or heels become worn. They walked in place on marble slabs (for sidewalks), wood planks (for house floors), or boxes filled with clean gravel (for outdoor scenes). There was a joke that if you believed radio, no one in the world had carpets, but since walking on a carpet is dead air, every show character on air had only hardwood floors and apparently wore tap shoes around the house. Horses were universally imitated by clip-clopping with coconut shell halves. The sound of a large fire burning out of control was, strangely enough, usually a vinyl recording of the Mogambi Falls in Africa. When this recording was played at slow speed with maximum bass, it doubled as an earthquake. At high speed with maximum treble, it was a high-speed plane.

Sound effects were often used to “sweeten” news broadcasts. H.V. Kaltenborn’s report from the middle of a Spanish Civil War battle had conditioned audiences to expect the continuous clatter of machine guns in the background as the excited correspondent reported the action. In most battles, however, especially street fighting, soldiers fired their rifles in single-shot mode. Otherwise they would spend more time reloading with fresh clips than fighting. The news broadcasts had extra machine gun fire added to make it sound more like what the public thought a battle was.

In 1936, sound men joined the American Federation of Radio Artists, which touched off a controversy over job demarcation. Until then, anyone could do vocal effects such as barking like a dog or whinnying like a horse. Job demarcation meant that actors could do vocal effects and sound men could only do mechanical or electronic effects. If a sound man whinnied like a horse, the studio had to pay him an extra acting fee.

Some of the sound effects became stars in their own right, and were so identified with one particular show that others did not attempt to duplicate them. INNER SANCTUM began each episode to the sound of a creaking door slowly opening. The sound was done by the producer sitting in an old wooden chair with a rusted swivel and slowly turning in the chair to produce the creaking sound. Once a new janitor at the studio noticed the squeaky chair and oiled it, making it soundless.

This wasn't noticed until air time, as a result of which the sound man had to try and imitate the creaking with his voice.

Fibber McGee would whip open a closet door and be buried under a long cacophony of falling objects. ("Gotta straighten up that closet one of these days", he would mutter afterwards.) The sound man set up a tall stepladder on a metal sheet, filled each step with cutlery, glass, and pans, and knocked them off in fast sequence to produce an endless cascade of rattling and crashing. Mel Blanc, the voice of Bugs Bunny, was famous on Jack Benny's show for vocally imitating the asthmatic sound of a 1924 Maxwell car with a balky engine that always started with a great dealing of wheezing, coughing, and sputtering.

On radio, you didn't have to be pretty or physically match your character as long as you had a good voice and could ad-lib. The character Baby Snooks was played by a middle-aged woman. Amos and Andy were two white men. The little girl Teeny who annoyed Fibber McGee was voiced by his wife. Their black maid Beulah was done by a white man who always sent the theatre audience into hysterics when he did her southern Negro accent, while the listening audience at home was baffled about why they were laughing so hard at her. Marshal Dillon on GUNSMOKE was played by the portly William Conrad, which was why he didn't get the part when it became a television series.

THE GREAT RADIO HEROES (2001, trade paperback) -8-  
by Jim Harmon looks at mystery and drama shows of OTR, which were the sonic equivalent of pulp magazines. Many of the radio heroes did have pulp fiction for those who wanted more, just as Star Trek has thousands of paperback novels. Pulp were more important in those days because few people had recording devices in the home. You listened to a radio show once and that was it, whereas pulp magazines could be stored on the shelf for re-reading at convenience. Harmon starts this book off by reminiscing about his love affair with OTR and how he became a fan and later a serious researcher.

Getting to the subject of the title, the book proper begins with GANGBUSTERS, created in 1935 by Phillips H. Lord. The show was originally based on FBI cases but Lord put in so many gun battles in each show that J. Edgar Hoover himself pulled the plug after six months of bang-bang-bang shows. Hoover tried to impress on Lord that real police work was much quieter and agents seldom got into gun fights. Lord was unfazed and immediately switched to local police for case files, highlighting city forces from around the USA. He never met a sound effect he didn't use, and GANGBUSTERS was the noisiest show on the air. This was where the phrase "going like gangbusters" came from. The cases were real, but the police chiefs who commented at the end of each show "by proxy" were radio actors. Lord didn't trust real officers to hit their cues on time.



THE SHADOW is by general agreement of OTR fans the greatest of the dramatic pulp shows. As the introduction intoned each week, the Shadow was in reality Lamont Cranston, wealthy young man about town, who had learned the mystical art of clouding men's minds so they could not see him. The only person who knew his real identity was his companion the lovely Margo Lane. In an era of extreme prudishness, the show was remarkable for pulling off some risque stunts without the censor noticing. Never explicitly stated but proven by close listening is that Lamont and Margo were more than just good friends. They constantly traveled cross-country or overseas together and stayed in hotels without chaperones. They called each other "darling" and frequently had breakfast together.

The show was unusual in that the Shadow wasn't created out of whole cloth but evolved. The character began on Street & Smith's DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE HOUR as an announcer who simply read out loud a story from the current issue. The voice was distinctive enough that the character became a full-fledged leading man. In 1931, Street & Smith began publishing THE SHADOW DETECTIVE MAGAZINE in response to audience demand. The pulp magazine and the radio show reinforced each other, and by the late 1930s the Shadow storyline had become established in the form it is best remembered as. Most of the culprits brought to justice by the Shadow were ordinary gangsters or lunatics, but the Shadow frequently dealt with werewolves, zombies, and mad

scientists. Margo Lane was constantly being kidnapped by evil henchmen who wanted to have their way with her, so that kept the Shadow busy as well. The radio show lasted until 1954 but kept going in syndication, while the pulp magazine died in 1949.

INNER SANCTUM was more famous for its host Raymond Edward Johnson, who provided the introduction and running commentary on the stories. The shows ran from 1941 to 1952 and were weird fiction, horror, and Edgar Allan Poe. They all began with the sound of a creaking door slowly opening into the inner sanctum, where Raymond would be sitting in an armchair, loaded with puns and smarmy jokes. He would invite the listener in, cautioning him not to slip in that puddle of blood on the floor, and telling him to sit back and hear the story of a man who was wrong, dead wrong, ha-ha-ha-ha. The scripts were bizarre, with as much blood and detail about the murders as the network censor would allow. The plots often concluded with unbelievable coincidences or random turns. Raymond would then wrap up at the end with the moral of the story, saying that everyone's dead but the cat and it survived only because they couldn't find its hiding place.

I won't go into detail about all the radio heroes mentioned in this book. There were the detectives such as Sherlock Holmes, Ellery Queen, The Thin Man, The Fat Man, and Sam Spade. Many superheroes were on OTR, such as Superman, Buck Rogers, and Dick Tracey.

For fans of the Old West, Roy Rogers, The Lone Ranger, and Gene Autry galloped across the airwaves.

RADIO DAYS (1989, trade paperback) by Patti Crocker is a personal look at the early days of broadcast radio in Australia. For those of us Up Over, the old-time radio of Terra Australis is Terra Incognita. Crocker starts off with her biography, growing up in Australia during the Great Depression, and performing on stage as a youngster in local competitions. She started in radio on THE YOUTH SHOW in 1940 as a child actress, then moved to THE ARGONAUT'S CLUB, also a children's show.

In the 1930s, most serials broadcast in Australia were imported transcriptions of American soap operas, brought in by the 2GB network. World War Two forced Australian radio to develop its own shows due to import restrictions. Actors were poorly paid on a per-show basis but most did several shows daily, commercials, or spot announcing throughout the day. They therefore earned a reasonably good wage, plus had the glamour and fame that few outside jobs could provide. Australian daily serials were sold in 52-episode packages. The majority were not renewed but some lasted for up to 2,000 episodes.

Continuity was often no better than North American shows. Crocker performed in a 1940s serial, WHEN A GIRL MARRIES, as a young daughter. Early in the series, her character's brother on

the show was sent upstairs to bed and never came back down or was mentioned again for the rest of the 20-year run. In the show DAD AND DAVE, Crocker played both of twins, a boy and a girl. Her agent included the line in her biography "*Patricia does little boys as well as little girls.*", but she quickly got him to re-write the sentence in a less suggestive way. -10-

She later worked for the George Edwards Players, who did multiple serials straight to acetate records, which were then syndicated to radio stations. In the days before tape recorders, any mistake during the show meant redoing the whole show from start to finish again because the acetate master could not be edited. The actors had to rehearse at home, so the day before the show they would stop by the studio and pick up their scripts. No photocopiers or mimeographs were available, and scripts were done as 15-copy carbons. The producer got the top copy, and the rest were distributed according to the length of the part. If an actor had only a bit part, he would get the fifteenth copy. It was usually so faint that he had to ink in the words by hand so he could read it in the studio.

In 1949, Crocker began working for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on the soap opera BLUE HILLS. It was a typical small-town family drama. The actress who played Granny Bishop was in her twenties, while the actress who played her daughter was a middle-aged woman. This disillusioned radio fans who met

them in person and discovered that Granny was young enough to be her daughter's daughter. Crocker played Mandy, the bad daughter of the household who was always mouthing off at her elders. One listener wrote in and asked why someone didn't push Mandy under a train. If an actor was only on for part of a show, he would help out elsewhere in the plot. One actor playing Jesus in a religious drama read a note in the script by the writer; "*Christ not on until page eleven, can also help with crowd noises.*" The actor therefore shouted from the background crowd watching Jesus carrying the cross such phrases as "*Crucify him!*" until his part arrived, at which moment he stepped closer to the microphone and entered the play as Jesus.

Television entered Australia in the early 1950s and had the same effect on OTR as elsewhere. Some radio shows struggled on until the 1960s, but most died out long before then. Crocker made the move to television in the middle 1950s, where, as a matronly woman, she adapted to supporting roles.

## ZINE LISTINGS

by Dale Speirs

[The Usual means \$4 cash (\$6 overseas) or trade for your zine. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid

for postage outside USA). US\$ banknotes are still acceptable around the world. SF means science fiction. An apazine is a zine for an amateur press association distro, a perzine is a personal zine, sercon is serious-constructive, and a genzine is a general zine]

**Brooklyn! #81** (US\$10 cash for four issues, from Fred Argoff, Penthouse L, 1170 Ocean Parkway, Brooklyn, New York 11230) This issue is about doors on Brooklyn buildings, with all kinds of photos of various buildings. However, for me the highlight was a brief hilarious paragraph Fred wrote about an incident when he was employed on the MTA train: "*One afternoon, working on the F line, I observed a man on the platform at 23 Street in Manhattan attempt to drop-kick my train. Why a human being would want to do such a thing, I cannot hope to understand. But he obtained some impressive elevation, and just as he got his leg extended fully, I did something he may not have expected: I popped the doors back open. He shot into the train like a bullet. I re-closed the doors and the train rumbled out of the station. What became of the drop-kicker I never knew.*"

**Probe #156** (The Usual from Science Fiction and Fantasy South Africa, Box 781401, Sandton 2146, South Africa) SF clubzine with a few news, notes, and letters of comment, but mainly carrying short fiction by its members.



**Alexiad (2013 August)** (The Usual from Lisa and Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, Kentucky 40204-2040) Various reviews, convention reports, and letters of comment. There is some speculation about Robert Heinlein's military career. It reminds me of an anecdote from decades ago. My step-grandfather had served in the European theatre during WW2 with a Canadian service battalion. In the late 1960s, I loaned him a copy of one of Heinlein's military SF novels (can't remember which one). He did not know who Heinlein was and probably the novel I lent him was the only SF he ever read. When he returned the book to me, he commented that it seemed like it was written by someone who thought he was a good soldier but had never been under enemy fire.

**Cuneiform #4 to #5** (US\$2 plus 40 copies of your 8.5 x 11 zine, to James Dawson, Box 950, Spokane, Washington 99210) Not an apazine but the actual apa (amateur press association) itself, which is a type of zine distro dating back to the late 1800s. Members' zines are stapled together and redistributed back to the members as collated bundles. Cheaper than mailing your zines individually. This particular apa is devoted to discussion of the Papernet, from zinedom to lesser-known books, reading, and all the philosophical aspects of life away from the chattering classes.

**Les Carnets de Rastapopoulos #9** (The Usual from Robert Gauvin, 2 - 7 Larch Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1R 6W4) A

fascinating issue of this perzine as Rob attempted to re-establish contact with all his various penpals from his teenage years. He wrote to their last known addresses, and while some had died or moved, he was able to reconnect with a surprising number of them. An Internet search brought to light some of the others. Many of his penpals had been behind the Iron Curtain when he first corresponded with them.

**Tightbeam #266** (The Usual from National Fantasy Fan Federation, c/o David Speakman, Box 1925, Mountain View, California 94042) SF clubzine with news, reviews, convention reports, and short fiction.

**The New Port News #271 and Who Is The Star-Spangled Torquernada Now? #523** (The Usual from Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, Georgia 30047-4720) Apazines with comments on a wide variety of topics.

**Fadeaway #36 and #37** (The Usual from Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Road, Oxford, Massachusetts 01540-2035) Issue #36 has articles on Roger Ebert (who started as an SF fan), a genealogy of the song "One Meat Ball", a gaming convention report, book reviews, and letters of comment. #37 discusses John W. Campbell Jr when he was a writer of space opera, but most of the issue is taken up by an extended history of Groucho Marx's transition from movies to radio.

**OSFS Statement #411 to #414** (The Usual from Ottawa SF Society, 18 Norice Street, Ottawa, Ontario K2G 2X5) SF clubzine with news and letters of comment. Always strong on astronomy events.

**Short Fuse** (The Usual from Rodney Dickinson, 3019 East 23 Avenue, Vancouver, British Columbia V5R 1B2) One-shot perzine about working a summer job in an electronics factory to earn tuition for next year's classes. No boss-from-Hell stories, but rather Rodney comes to appreciate that lots of people have boring rote-work jobs, and that's just the way it is.

**Christian New Age Quarterly V21#1** (US\$5 from Catherine Groves, Box 276, Clifton, New Jersey 07015-0276) This issue looks at whether or not the Gospel of John can be considered as Gnostic. Gnosticism has been plagued by all kinds of different sects and interpretations, but roughly speaking is the idea that the material world is evil and the spiritual world is only for the chosen few. Also in this issue are letters of comment and some reviews.

**The Ken Chronicles #28** (The Usual from Ken Bausert, 2140 Erma Drive, East Meadow, New York 11554-1120) Perzine with articles on a Florida retirement complex called The Villages that has a bizarre culture that would fit right into an SF movie. Also travel reports to sunny climes, air conditioner problems (I'm glad we don't need them in Calgary), and letters of comment.

**Flag #1 to #9** (The Usual from Andy Hooper, 11032 - 30 Avenue NE, Seattle, Washington 98125) Commentary on SF fandom history, the FAAn Awards, convention reports, and letters of comment.

**BCSFazine #483 to #485** (The Usual from British Columbia SF Association, c/o Felicity Walker, 3851 Francis Road #209, Richmond, British Columbia V7C 1J6) SF clubzine with lots of event listings, some letters of comment, event reports, and a few reviews.

**For The Clerisy - 2013 Sept** (The Usual from Brant Kresovich, Box 404, Getzville, New York 14068-0404) Book reviews of old or neglected works for those who read books because they want to, not because they have to.

**The Life Of Rodney Year 64 #5** (The Usual from Rodney Leighton, 11 Branch Road, R.R. 3, Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia B0K 1V0) Perzine with book and zine reviews.

**Banana Rag #43** (\$15 for two issues from Anna Banana, 3747 Highway 101, Roberts Creek, British Columbia V0N 2W2) mail art zine with news and reports about mail artists and exhibitions, publication listings, and news about bananas.

**The Great Stereopticon #6 to #7** (The Usual from James Dawson, Box 292, Malden, Washington 99149) Apazine with some reviews and memories of life in Washington State.

**One Swell Foop #8 to #9** (The Usual from Garth Spencer, 7250 Gladstone Street, Vancouver, British Columbia V5P 4G6) Perzine with angst about the search for true fandom, thoughts on becoming a mad scientist, and letters of comment.

**Spartacus #1** (The Usual from Guy Lillian, 5915 River Road, Shreveport, Louisiana 71105) Perzine of opinions and commentary, ranging from gay rights to trial cases (Guy is a barrister) and sexual harassment.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Spiegel, D.S., and E.L. Turner<sup>b</sup> (2012) **Bayesian analysis of the astrobiological implications of life's early emergence on Earth.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 109:395–400

*"Life arose on Earth sometime in the first few hundred million years after the young planet had cooled to the point that it could support water-based organisms on its surface. The early emergence of life on Earth has been taken as evidence that the*

*probability of abiogenesis is high, if starting from young Earth-like conditions. We revisit this argument quantitatively in a Bayesian statistical framework. By constructing a simple model of the probability of abiogenesis, we calculate a Bayesian estimate of its posterior probability, given the data that life emerged fairly early in Earth's history and that, billions of years later, curious creatures noted this fact and considered its implications. We find that, given only this very limited empirical information, the choice of Bayesian prior for the abiogenesis probability parameter has a dominant influence on the computed posterior probability. Although terrestrial life's early emergence provides evidence that life might be abundant in the universe if early-Earth-like conditions are common, the evidence is inconclusive and indeed is consistent with an arbitrarily low intrinsic probability of abiogenesis for plausible uninformative priors. Finding a single case of life arising independently of our lineage (on Earth, elsewhere in the solar system, or on an extrasolar planet) would provide much stronger evidence that abiogenesis is not extremely rare in the universe."* **-14-**

Speirs: As this paper notes, all speculation about the origin of life is based on the fact that we only have a sample size of one. If ever we discover life elsewhere, then we will have a better grasp of the probabilities. My belief is there are many planets that have microscopic life, a few that have sentient life, and no evidence that there are any space-faring civilizations other than ours.



Rosado, H., et al (2012) **Rotating wall vessel exposure alters protein secretion and global gene expression in *Staphylococcus aureus***. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 11:71-81

*"Staphylococcus aureus is routinely recovered from air and surface samples taken aboard the International Space Station and poses a health threat to crew. As bacteria respond to the low shear forces engendered by continuous rotation conditions in a Rotating Wall Vessel (RWV) and the reduced gravitational field of near-Earth flight by altering gene expression, we examined the effect of low-shear RWV growth on protein secretion and gene expression by three S. aureus isolates. When cultured under 1 g, the total amount of protein secreted by these strains varied up to fourfold; under continuous rotation conditions, protein secretion by all three strains was significantly reduced. If such changes to the bacterial phenotype occur during spaceflight, they will compromise the capacity of staphylococci to cause systemic infection and to circumvent antibacterial chemotherapy."*

Speirs: There had been fears that the long-term effects of space travel would lead to increased infections in the spacecraft to astronauts by antibiotic-resistant bacteria mutating under the influence of micro-gravity and radiation. However, this study suggests that the threat doesn't exist.

Meachena, J.A., and J.X. Samuels (2012) **Evolution in coyotes (*Canis latrans*) in response to the megafaunal extinctions. PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 109:4191-4196**

*"We examined the evolution of coyotes and wolves through time from the late Pleistocene, during which many large carnivorous species coexisted as predators and competitors, to the Recent. This allowed us to investigate evolutionary changes in these species in response to climate change and megafaunal extinctions at the end of the Pleistocene. We measured postcranial skeletal morphologies of wolves (*Canis lupus*) and coyotes (*C. latrans*) from Pleistocene-aged tar deposits, as well as early, mid, and recent Holocene populations of both. We found few morphological differences between Pleistocene and Holocene wolf populations. Conversely, we found many differences in coyotes: Pleistocene coyotes were larger and more robust than Holocene populations. However, within 1,000 y of the megafaunal extinctions, coyotes are morphologically indistinguishable from modern populations. We cannot attribute these differences directly to climate change because modern coyotes do not follow Bergmann's rule, which states body size increases with decreasing temperature. Instead, we suggest that Pleistocene coyotes may have been larger and more robust in response to larger competitors and a larger-bodied prey base."*

Ratcliff, W.C., et al (2012) **Experimental evolution of multicellularity.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 109:1595–1600

*"We subjected the unicellular yeast Saccharomyces cerevisiae to an environment in which we expected multicellularity to be adaptive. We observed the rapid evolution of clustering genotypes that display a novel multicellular life history characterized by reproduction via multicellular propagules, a juvenile phase, and determinate growth. The multicellular clusters are uniclonal, minimizing within-cluster genetic conflicts of interest. Simple among-cell division of labor rapidly evolved. Early multicellular strains were composed of physiologically similar cells, but these subsequently evolved higher rates of programmed cell death (apoptosis), an adaptation that increases propagule production. These results show that key aspects of multicellular complexity, a subject of central importance to biology, can readily evolve from unicellular eukaryotes. ... Prior experimental work with de novo transitions to multicellularity have focused mainly on the ecological conditions that would favor the evolution of cellular clusters. Boraas et al have shown that predation by a small-mouthed ciliate results in the evolution of eight-celled clusters of the previously single-celled algae Chlorella. Koschwanez et al have shown that metabolic cooperation among cluster-forming yeast allows them to grow at low densities prohibitive to growth of single-celled yeast. ... We used gravity*

*to select for primitive multicellularity in the unicellular yeast Saccharomyces cerevisiae. Clusters of cells settle through liquid more quickly than do single cells, allowing us to easily select for clustering genotypes. Settling selection was chosen not because it is widespread in nature, but rather because it is an experimentally tractable method to select for larger size. ... We observed rapid increases in settling rate over the course of selection. After 60 transfers, all populations were dominated by roughly spherical snowflake-like phenotypes consisting of multiple attached cells"* -16-

Carter, Simon (2012) **The medicalization of sunlight in the early Twentieth Century.** JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY 25:83-105

*"This paper traces the emergence of the therapeutic use of sunlight in medicine during the first half of the twentieth century. Drawing on two case studies of sunlight therapy, both artificial (actinotherapy) and natural (heliotherapy), in the treatment of rickets and tuberculosis this paper will explore how medicine was constituted within these regimes. ... The growth in the use of such sunlight therapies was partially based on the idea of "nature" being curative of the diseased body."*