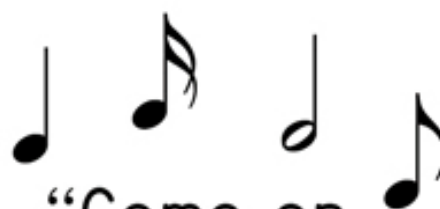


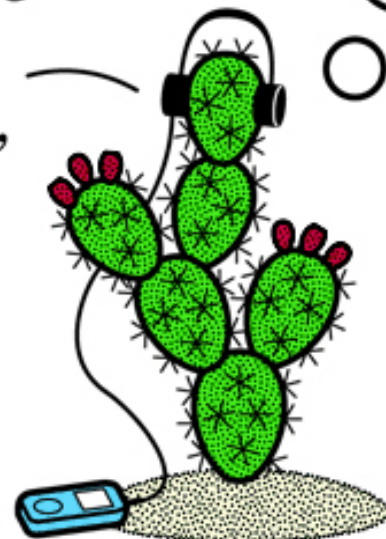
Studies show that classical music stimulates growth in plants.



I'm never growing up then because I think "Midnight at the Oasis" is a classic.



"Come on, Cactus is our friend."



TEDDY HARVIA

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.

NATIONAL MUSIC CENTRE
photos by Dale Speirs

Calgary is home to the National Music Centre, which opened for business this year on Canada Day. It has a museum, recording studios, and various

performance spaces, and incorporates the King Edward Hotel, which for decades was the centre of jazz in Cowtown.

It looks like a giant boom box and straddles 4 Street SE at 9 Avenue. The King Eddie is the building underneath the span.

The Centre is located in East Village, between the downtown core and Fort Calgary. The area is being revitalized with numerous condo towers. In the background of this photo, you can see yet another tower being built.



I took this photo in early 2015 while the Centre was still under construction.



The NMC entered a two-piece float in the 2016 Stampede parade which makes explicit the boom box comparison.

The mandate of the NMR is contemporary Canadian music. It is not an opera house. We already have one of those.



MUSIC HATH CHARMS

photos by Dale Speirs

These photos were all taken on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall in the downtown core. Below: a strolling Mexican band and, further down the mall, the Salvation Army.



This man is a regular on the mall year-round, playing on a weird 2-string Chinese instrument. He only plays two songs, never any other: “Oh Susanna” and “Auld Lang Syne”.



If someone's playing music, then why not dance to it?



This was in the TD Square atrium adjacent to the Stephen Avenue mall. The little girls were dancing about with inexhaustible energy.



Some leftover photos from the 2016 Stampede. At the rodeo grounds there were dozens of musical acts over the ten days. The one-man band was very popular and also inexhaustible. Performing several times daily on the hockey arena steps were the Stampede Show Band. Inside the exhibits pavilion there were a variety of groups at the Window On The West stage.



INGLEWOOD SUNFEST
photos by Dale Speirs



The Inglewood inner-city neighbourhood was Calgary’s first residential neighbourhood, on the east bank of the Elbow River across from Fort Calgary. It is now a gentrified neighbourhood, convenient for those who work downtown. I meandered my way to its main drag, 9 Avenue SE, for their annual street festival.

Like all the street festivals in Calgary, there were about 100 kiosks and food trucks. At every block on a side street, a band was playing. Calgary isn’t called Cowtown without good reason, and the bands are invariably country-and-western. (The photo below was difficult to take because the sun was at the roofline and the band was in deep shadow, hence the flare.)



On the side streets, local car clubs hold Show and Shine displays.



I have a goatee myself, but I passed up this opportunity.



There is always a mascot to frighten the toddlers.



Like many of the kiosks and food trucks, this one shows up at every street festival. They have the best smokies in the city, so I always buy one.



Yes, I know it looks vaguely obscene, but this smokie is top quality. Lean meat, spices, crackly skin, and a meal in itself.

LITTLE LOST TRAIN
by Dale Speirs

“The Lost Special” was an 1898 short story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle about an English train that vanished in mid-track. The original story contains a letter to the editor of THE TIMES (London) written in a style that suggests Sherlock Holmes wrote it, although his name is not mentioned. Not part of the canon, but certainly an item of interest to Sherlockians.

The story was popular with old-time radio (OTR) shows such as SUSPENSE and ESCAPE, and was used by other shows. (These and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from www.archive.org.) It was even made into a 1932 western movie serial, which I have not seen.



The Canon.

In Doyle’s original story, Herbert de Lernac is a prisoner in France on death row. In exchange for commutation of his sentence, he offers to explain a mystery that has baffled British police for eight years, the disappearance of a train into thin air. Events began in Liverpool when Louis Caratal, a Frenchman newly arrived at the port, rushed into the train station and asked to rent a special to get him to London in time to make a connection to Dover and hence to Paris. He was carrying important documents that would shake the banks and government of France.

In those days (and possibly still today; I don’t know anything about British Rail) it was possible to rent a private express train, known as a special, that would be

given priority all the way on the line and get the customer there much faster. It was very expensive, of course, but Caratal paid the fee without hesitation.

An engine and two cars were prepared at once, but because it took time to clear the line ahead, Caratal had to wait an hour before departing. After he got on the special, another customer calling himself Horace Moore showed up, asking for a special to London to reach his dying wife. The station master suggested to Caratal that the two men share and split the fee. Caratal would not agree, and Moore had to go away unsatisfied.

The special took off, but somewhere en route between Kenyon Junction and Barton Moss it disappeared. A following train made the trip without incident and saw nothing along the way, so it wasn’t a derailment or track problems.

A search was launched. The body of the engine driver was found along the track, but nothing else. The spur lines and sidings were searched but nothing found. Newspapers ran letters to the editor, one of which is quoted and which uses Sherlockian phrases that could not be a coincidence, though the letter is unsigned.

Amongst the many suggestions put forward by various newspapers or private individuals, there were one or two which were feasible enough to attract the attention of the public. One which appeared in the Times, over the signature of an amateur reasoner of some celebrity at that date, attempted to deal with the matter in a critical and semi-scientific manner. An extract must suffice, although the curious can see the whole letter in the issue of the 3rd of July. ‘It is one of the elementary principles of practical reasoning,’ he remarked, ‘that when the impossible has been eliminated the residuum, however improbable, must contain the truth. ...’

The sensation lasts for weeks but eventually fades away, displaced by a major financial scandal in France involving many important politicians and bankers. It was forgotten until Lernac filled in the rest of the story.

Moore was one of the financial conspirators trying to stop Caratal from exposing them. He snuck on board with confederates. Once the special moved out, they hijacked it. At a spur to an abandoned mine, they switched the train off the main line. They jammed the throttle open, jumped off, and let the train run full speed into a mine shaft.

Caratal was unaware until too late. Down went the train into the hole where the engine exploded and burned, and the debris crushed everything. He didn't have a chance to survive.

The mine shaft was boarded over and the rails of the spur quickly pulled up and the track bed covered over. That was why the searchers found nothing, and that was why the French banks imploded without the culprits being exposed, because Caratal and the documents never made it to Paris.

This is a clever puzzle story, and was reprinted many times thereafter. Doyle's plot was good enough for others, and it was used several times in OTR shows, with or without credit.

Radio.

The OTR series SUSPENSE used this story for a 1943 episode. The format was a prisoner about to be executed, not named but evidently Lernac. His last wish, to which the warden has agreed, is to make a confession on the radio show, and to name names at the end of the show unless the powers-that-be commuted his sentence and gave him safe conduct to a neutral country.

The events were placed in 1925, but the script followed the story reasonably well, allowing for necessary adaptations to fit radio. Orson Welles narrated (the man was everywhere in those days) as Lernac, with a bad French accent.

At the end of the show, with one minute remaining, no clemency has arrived. Lernac therefore is about to announce the names. There is the sound of running footsteps, a struggle, and gunshots. Lernac dies before he can name the guilty parties.

The story was repeated in 1949 on the related OTR series ESCAPE, which often re-used SUSPENSE scripts. This was a standard practice on radio shows of all types, and is not a subject for criticism. In the days before home recordings, and when radio stations didn't have much in the way of good recording devices, it was common to rebroadcast a show several times to different time zones. Listeners only heard a show once, so often the networks would repeat them in future years, sometimes annually for themes such as Christmas and New Year.

The 1949 episode is faster paced, this time narrated by a Scotland Yard detective, Inspector Collins. The studio evidently had an organist on retainer

and figured they might as well use him, so the show is punctuated by dramatic, full-bore organ music. It moves the events back to 1890, the time of the original story. There is no Sherlockian letter to THE TIMES, but Collins's dialogue uses many of those phrases.

Collins is interpolated into the story as it happens, but is stymied in his investigation. Six months later, Collins stages a re-enactment and hires a special, with the idea of luring out the culprits. It is announced that another man has arrived with the same kind of documents. The special is loaded with heavily-armed men, and off it goes. This time it is diverted onto a temporary spur, the same used for the first one.

The gang that hijacked the previous special get a nasty surprise when they move in for what they think is an easy job and instead find themselves in a gun battle with police. They lose, of course, and with a tremendous burst of organ music the episode concludes with all's well that ends well.

The SUSPENSE episode credited Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at the end. The ESCAPE episode credits the story as by "Conan Doyle", a peculiar way to mention him.

86.

"Old 86 Is Missing" was a 1947 episode of BOSTON BLACKIE, one of the funnier OTR mystery series. The show was intended to be serious, but the behaviour of the characters makes it difficult to take them at face value, and the berserk organ player who did the scene changes is absolutely hysterical.

Boston Blackie is a reformed jewel thief with no visible means of support, and spends his time squiring his girlfriend Mary Wesley about town. Her main duties are screaming in terror, being kidnaped by the bad guys, and listening to Blackie explain the plot to her. They never went anywhere without walking into a murder scene.

Police Inspector Faraday of the Homicide Squad is a loudmouthed bumbler whose first instinct is to arrest Blackie for any and every crime committed within ten city blocks of him. Initially they were vicious enemies, but as the series went on this was tempered, and the two became friendlier.

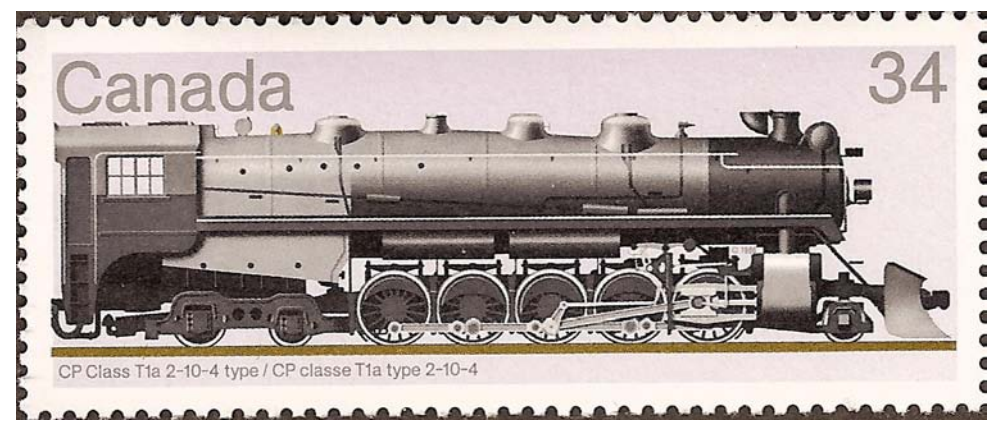
Blackie didn't hesitate to commit assorted felonies such as burglary and assault when investigating a crime. Faraday seldom followed proper police procedure that would withstand a first-year law student in court, nevermind an experienced defence attorney. One wonders how he kept his job.

The episode at hand is not credited to Doyle but the plot is almost identical. Only the names were changed to protect the guilty. It begins with the regular crew of train #86 being coshed, and the train stolen. It vanishes on the line. Not publicized was the fact that it was carrying a million dollars in uncut diamonds, back when a million dollars was real money.

The times being a more modern age, the ground search was complemented by two aerial searches, one by Blackie and the other by Faraday. They both spot a track not connected to the main line, with a gap of about 100 yards. The gap is heavily vegetated, making it invisible from the ground. The disconnected track leads into mountain terrain owned by a diamond merchant named Zachary, who does business in the big city with the wrong kind of people.

Blackie visits Zachary under an alias, inadvertently gives himself away, is taken hostage, and then the alarms and excursions begin. Faraday and Wesley come to the rescue. Everyone, Blackie not excepted, behaves like an idiot, which was necessary because otherwise the episode wouldn't have filled the time. Finally, as no one doubted, justice prevails because of Blackie and in spite of Faraday.

Blackie then explains how it was done. A temporary switch was spiked down to divert the train onto Zachary's spur line. After the train had passed, the switch was removed and the spur planted with potted trees and shrubs. The train was hidden in a tunnel, but the gang didn't have time to enjoy the loot. One wonders why the ground searchers didn't notice the freshly planted forest that sprang up in one day.



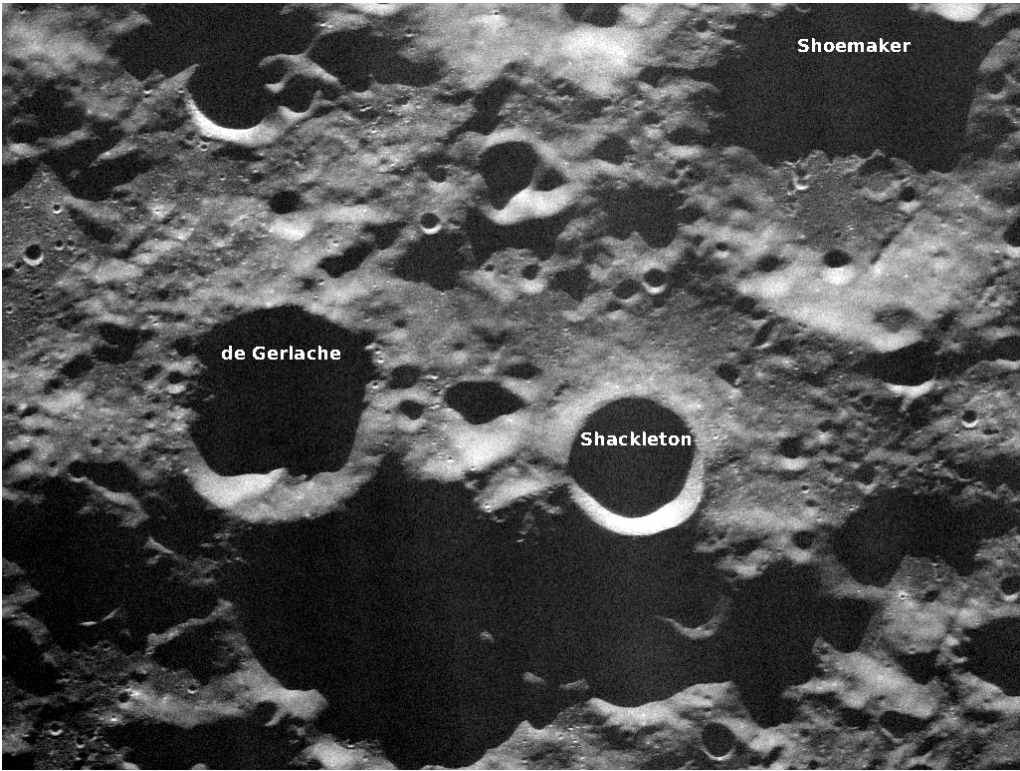
SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Schultz, P.H., and D.A. Crawford (2016) **Origin and implications of non-radial Imbrium Sculpture on the Moon.** NATURE 535:391-394

Authors' abstract: *“Rimmed grooves, lineations and elongate craters around Mare Imbrium shape much of the nearside Moon. This pattern was coined the Imbrium Sculpture, and it was originally argued that it must have been formed by a giant oblique (~30°) impact, a conclusion echoed by later studies. Some investigators, however, noticed that many elements of the Imbrium Sculpture are not radial to Imbrium, thereby implicating an endogenic or structural origin. Here we use these non-radial trends to conclude that the Imbrium impactor was a proto-planet (half the diameter of Vesta), once part of a population of large proto-planets in the asteroid belt. Such independent constraints on the sizes of the Imbrium and other basin-forming impactors markedly increase estimates for the mass in the asteroid belt before depletion caused by the orbital migration of Jupiter and Saturn. Moreover, laboratory impact experiments, shock physics codes and the groove widths indicate that multiple fragments (up to 2% of the initial diameter) from each oblique basin-forming impactor, such as the one that formed Imbrium, should have survived planetary collisions and contributed to the heavy impact bombardment between 4.3 and 3.8 billion years ago.”*



Authors’ abstract: “The present paper attempts to assess the characteristics of the impactor that formed the Shackleton crater, located at the south pole of the Moon. The crater’s morphometric parameters were analyzed based on the data of the Lunar Orbiter Laser Altimeter aboard the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter. ... It was shown that the Shackleton crater could have been formed by an impact of a low-velocity (3 km/s) comets with diameter 4-4.5 km, chondrite or achondrite with a diameter of 2 km at a 45-50 degree angle, whose velocity did not exceed 6 km/s, as well as stony-iron or iron-nickel impactors with a 1-2 km diameter for stony-iron asteroids and 1-1.5 km for iron–nickel asteroids. The impact velocity of stony-iron impactors, according to the authors’ calculations, can reach 12 km/s. The impact velocities of iron–nickel asteroids range from 6 to 9 km/s. The impactor’s substance mass that could have remained in the crater after it was formed was assessed.”



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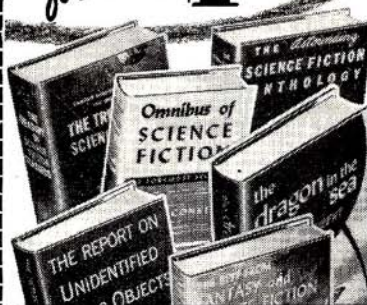
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4. Distance to the Moon is about: 93,000,000 miles — 238,000 miles — 9,000 miles.
5. Scientists have proved that human life does — does not exist on the Moon.
6. Surface of the Moon is rough — smooth — covered with water.

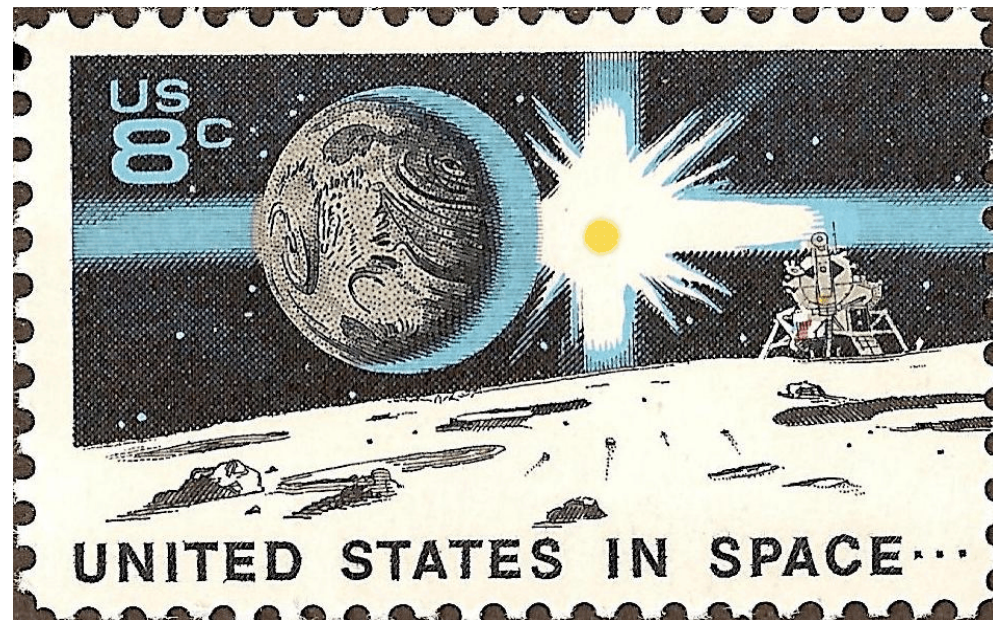
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David, T.J., et al (2016) A Neptune-sized transiting planet closely orbiting a 5 to 10-million-year-old star. NATURE 534:658-661

Authors' abstract: "Theories of the formation and early evolution of planetary systems postulate that planets are born in circumstellar disks, and undergo radial migration during and after dissipation of the dust and gas disk from which they formed. The precise ages of meteorites indicate that planetesimals, the building blocks of planets, are produced within the first million years of a star's life. Fully formed planets are frequently detected on short orbital periods around mature stars. Some theories suggest that the in situ formation of planets close to their host stars is unlikely and that the existence of such planets is therefore evidence of large-scale migration. Other theories posit that planet assembly at small orbital separations may be common."

"Here we report a newly born, transiting planet orbiting its star with a period of 5.4 days. The planet is 50 per cent larger than Neptune, and its mass is less than 3.6 times that of Jupiter (at 99.7 per cent confidence), with a true mass likely to be similar to that of Neptune. The star is 5 to 10 million years old and has a tenuous dust disk extending outward from about twice the Earth-Sun separation, in addition to the fully formed planet located at less than one-twentieth of the Earth-Sun separation."