

# OPUNTIA 425





## Thanksgiving 2018

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

### THE CALGARY MILITARY MUSEUMS: PART 3. CALGARY INFANTRY UNITS

photos by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #415 and 416.]

The Princess Patricia Canadian Light Infantry are a regular army unit who were stationed in Calgary from their origins in World War One until 1997 when CFB Calgary was closed. They were then transferred to CFB Wainwright, but left behind a legacy displayed in one of the wings of the CMM.

The cover is a miniature diorama depicting the Battle of Frezenberg on May 8, 1915. On this page are life-size dioramas showing other aspects of life in the trenches. Below right is a life-size diorama set during the Battle of Britain in World War Two, when the Canadian Army bolstered British defenses.

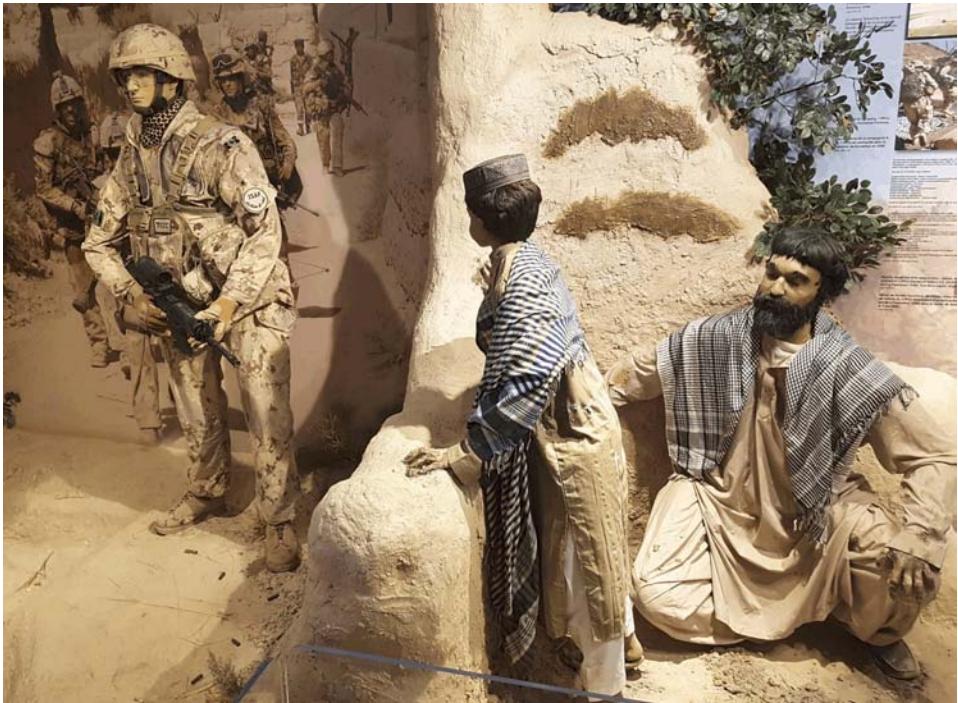




Canadian forces landed at Juno Beach on D-Day. From there, they liberated the Netherlands, crossing the canals with amphibious vehicles as shown in the life-size diorama below. On the left of the diorama is a real armoured vehicle. At bottom is a diorama depicting their service in the Balkan wars of the 1990s.



The PPCLI arrived in Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks, shown in these life-size dioramas.







The Calgary Highlanders are a militia unit who are stationed at the Mewata Armoury at the west end of the downtown core.

Their dress uniform is the kilt but in daily work they wear the same kind of trews as regular personnel.

Above left: A life-size diorama of their training camp during WW1. The tents on the prairie are now southwest Calgary suburbs.



At left: An incident in a Belgium forest during WW1. A dead German is slumped against the tree. A Highlander officer has just been shot by a sniper and will die in the next moment.



Below: Back in Belgium again in World War Two, showing Calgary Highlanders crossing the Albert Canal on what was left of a bridge.

Top right: The Highlanders helped liberate Antwerp and then fought their way through the Netherlands.

Bottom right: A miniature of one of their battles in the Netherlands, trying to cross a causeway at low tide. Note the shell crater blocking their path.





In the 1990s, the Highlanders had to learn urban warfare during their service in the Balkan wars. These life-size dioramas show house-to-house searches for weapons.







No sooner were they done in the Balkans, than the Highlanders were assigned to Afghanistan after the 9/11 attacks.

## **SERIES DETECTIVES: PART 3**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA #402 and 406.]

Dozens of series exist on old-time radio about private detectives. These and hundreds of other OTR shows are available as free mp3s at [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org)

### **Richard Diamond.**

The old-time radio series RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE ran from 1949 to 1953. He was an ex-cop who had a rich girlfriend named Helen Asher. The part of Richard Diamond was played by Dick Powell, a popular singer who wanted to extend his range into acting and did so in both movies and radio. Nonetheless, the radio show always finished with Diamond singing a romantic ballad to Asher.

“The Singing Critic” was a 1949 episode written by Blake Edwards, better remembered for his later Pink Panther movies. It was an extended in-joke, for Diamond did a lot of singing in the series. The episode begins with Diamond and Asher reading complimentary letters from his neighbours about his singing sessions.

His head swollen from the letters, he opens a window and begins burbling a song. As he sang, one neighbour, Ernest Lumpkin, who did not write a complimentary letter, shouted curses at him from across the street. Diamond strained his vocal chords during this scene and temporarily couldn’t sing.

Meanwhile, Lumpkin, who worked shift and wanted quiet so he can sleep, decided on revenge against Diamond. He hired another private investigator, Pat Kosak, a parody of a different radio detective. Kosak didn’t like Diamond getting all the good cases, so he readily accepted the commission.

The two men trap Diamond two different times, once in an ice cooler and the other in a sauna, but Diamond always escaped. The plot complicates and became so self-referential as to be nonsensical. Notwithstanding two cases of forcible confinement, Lumpkin’s plans failed, but nothing happened to him. Diamond went on his merry way, singing for all the world to hear whether they wanted to or not.

A more serious episode was “The Homing Pigeon Case” (1950), written by Joe Moreheim and Harold Jack Bloom. Diamond’s client was Roger Renard, who was being blackmailed by someone called Andy. Renard had been a gigolo who had married a succession of wealthy widows, then skipped out with their cash without the fuss and bother of divorce. He was caught and served eight years in prison as a bigamist.

Now Renard was to be married legitimately to a woman he genuinely loved. He received a letter telling him to have a \$100 bill ready for Andy that night, or else his fiancée would be told about his past.

The problem that blackmailers (and kidnappers) have is getting the money without a connection being made to them. Andy got around that difficulty by sending a basket containing a homing pigeon to carry the payment. Impossible to track it through New York City’s skyscrapers at night.

Then another blackmail victim appeared in Diamond’s office, also afflicted by Andy. He brought the two men together to determine if they had any connection together. They were strangers to each other, but eventually it was learned they had the same dentist.

Diamond and a police lieutenant visited the dentist’s office, but he seemed innocent. His nurse, however, administered sodium pentothal to patients as part of anesthesia. While they were under the influence, she got them to talk about their troubles, anything they might be ashamed about. A neat procedure, but she was caught when Diamond did his own neat trick.

The series as a whole wasn’t too bad compared to some detective shows, but suffered from too-cute humour that was bland more than it was funny. Worth listening to once.

### **George Valentine.**

LET GEORGE DO IT was an old-time radio series that ran from 1946 to 1954. George Valentine was a private detective who ran a classified ad in the newspapers which was quoted by him in the opening of the show: *Personal notice: Danger’s my stock in trade. If the job’s too tough for you to handle, you’ve got a job for me. Write full details.*



The episode would usually open with the voice of someone writing the letter out loud, appealing for help. Sometimes Valentine would do the opening narration. The cases were not necessarily criminal investigations. The client might need him to courier a package or do some other strange, seemingly innocuous task. His secretary/girlfriend was Claire Brooks, whom everyone called Brooksie. She often accompanied him out into the field on a case.

“The Little Man Who Was Everywhere” was a 1948 episode written by David Victor and Herbert Little Jr. A heiress named Vivian Newcomer was being stalked by a little man named Sterner who sent her threatening notes and followed her around staring at her.

She inherited a collection of tenements and slum apartments, upon which the family fortune was based. Some of them had fires recently, one of which killed the little man’s wife. The company was run by the executor of the estate, a suave man with a cultured voice.

The police couldn’t do much since no proof had been found, so Vivian hired George Valentine. He found Sterner living illegally in the gutted remains of the apartment where his wife died, obsessed with revenge. He freely admitted to Valentine that he was conducting a campaign of psychological warfare against Newcomer.

An attempt was made on Valentine, and Sterner was the obvious suspect. More serious yet, Newcomer’s dog was poisoned. The insurance company was rather blasé about paying out the sums. Valentine interviewed the agent who issued the policies and who was not at all concerned about the coincidences, blaming it on a pyromaniac.

More excursions culminated in the climax when another building was torched. The plot twisted, after much shouting and running about, when the insurance agent was caught out. The fires were a frame-up to allow one final blaze on a Newcomer building next to a flammable warehouse whose owners wanted to pull off a big score, splitting a double-indemnity policy with the agent.

As for Newcomer, she was shown no mercy. Sterner was left to roam the streets and harass her about her firetrap apartments. Poor little rich girl.

“The Bookworm Turns” was a 1950 episode written by David Victor and Jackson Gillis. The client was a book dealer whose store had been broken into

several times. The burglar took nothing, but only read selected books, then departed.

Valentine, Brooksie, and the shopkeeper staked out the store at night. The store clerk was there playing records on a phonograph. She had a key to the place, and occasionally came over since she didn’t own a record player.

The intruder came but was frightened away by the congregation before they could catch him. He was reading a first edition of Robert Burns. Moments later, a fire broke out in the adjacent building but somebody had already called the Fire Department.

Just to complicate the plot a bit, a newspaper critic showed up with a commission to buy the book. Since no one else knew of it, the question was how did he find out about the book. Then the clerk’s husband was shot dead in the street. It may have been because of the book, or because she wanted a faster means of divorce.

Valentine and the police tracked down a connection who specialized in forged books and arson. That brought them back to the fire, where a closer search revealed that some of the rubble was the remains of a small printing press. The dead man had been producing fake Burns editions.

This time it ended in gunfire. The critic was in the game and so were others. The epilogue tried to tie up the loose ends, but it seemed confusing as to who did what to whom. A tangled web they wove when they practiced to deceive.

### **Johnny Dollar.**

YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR was an OTR series about an insurance investigator named Johnny Dollar. It first aired 1949 and was the last OTR show in existence when it signed off in 1962. Each episode opened with Dollar getting a telephone call from an insurance company, wanting him to look into a suspicious claim.

Dollar traveled all over the USA on commission and was known as the man with the action-packed expense account. Each scene began with him quoting a line item from his expense account. The running gag was that he shamelessly padded the account.



Occasionally he would have to argue with the insurance company about an expense, but usually managed to get it through. One episode took place within walking distance of his office in Hartford, Connecticut, which frustrated him because he couldn't submit an expense account for anything.

Modern listeners will be fascinated by the expense accounts, which Dollar totaled at the end of each episode. He traveled first class on airlines and stayed in the best hotels, yet his total expense accounts were in the hundreds, not thousands.

One doesn't realize the cumulative effect of inflation until hearing that Dollar could fly cross-country for \$100 or less. Car rentals might be \$5 a day, good hotel rooms were \$25 a day, and a sirloin steak meal set him back \$2.

Dollar was a brash and impetuous man. He often didn't listen to what people told him, cutting them off or just not paying attention. As a result, many episodes are idiot plots, where the whole case could have been resolved in five minutes had he let someone finish talking. He did, however, cooperate with local police, without the antagonism that many P.I. shows used.

Most of the series used standard 30-minute episodes, but from October 1955 to November 1956 the format changed to 15 minutes every week night, with five-part episodes. This allowed better development of the story, although the same sort of thing could have been done with 30-minute serials.

An example of the 15-minute episodes was "The Picture Postcard Matter", written by Robert Ryf, and aired the week of October 1 to 5, 1956. A batch of uncut diamonds worth \$100,000 was stolen (about \$1 million in today's currency). The gang hightailed with them to Europe.

Honour among thieves being what it is, one gang member named Sebastian offered to return them for a \$25,000 reward. The others disagreed and the death toll began to climb, starting with Sebastian. Another gang found out about the diamonds and was trying to steal them.

The diamonds were hidden by Sebastian. The only clues were a series of picture postcards sent to a gang member. The postcards were coded and the chase was on across Europe. Working with national police, Dollar traveled about, always putting everything on his expense account. Most of the action took place at a Swiss Alps ski resort.

The episodes demonstrated one advantage of OTR, namely being able to stage scenes anywhere in the world at no extra expense since they were all recorded in a radio studio. Television still can't overcome that expense. On the radio, Paris was represented by faint accordion music in the background, and a Swiss ski resort by swishing a whisk broom in a bowl of corn starch to simulate the sound of skis whispering over the snow.

Dollar met up with Ilsa, a friend of Sebastian. She was on no one's side but her own. Dollar reluctantly worked with her, suspicious as she was. There was also a phony Englishman trying to presume friendship with Dollar, but he didn't believe the man was genuine.

It all wrapped up in the fifth episode with a Mexican standoff between Dollar and two different thieves that turned into a free-for-all brawl. No prizes for guessing who won the fight and got the diamonds. Total expense account was \$1,722, of which \$1,200 was for the round trip across the Atlantic.

"The P.O. Matter" was a 1960 episode written by Jack Johnstone. Dollar was reluctantly dragged into investigating a \$75,000 heist by a thief known to NYPD police. The problem was, the loot wasn't on him. The thief was heading back home to California. He got a smart lawyer to spring him from New York City jail because he had a good alibi and there was no proof that he had the money.

Dollar not only tracked him back to California, he took the same plane and sat next to him. The thief taunted him. Searching the man and his luggage produced nothing. On arrival in California, Dollar suddenly realized there was one method of getting the cash across the continent, in a self-addressed parcel mailed at the post office. He reached the post office at the same time as the thief, grabbed the package out of his hand, and it was game over.

Dollar's total expense account was \$397.70, which included a round trip flight between New York City and California, plus hotel.

### **Nick Carter.**

Nick Carter was one of the oldest private detective series, beginning in print in 1886 before Sherlock Holmes, and as NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE on radio from 1943 to 1953. Writers of the radio episodes were seldom, if ever, credited.



Carter didn't bother about liaison with police. He investigated murders and solved them with hardly a uniform in sight. What Carter lived on was seldom mentioned either, as he didn't seem to charge fees in most episodes, had an office and laboratory, and employed his girlfriend Patsy Bowen as an assistant.

One case where he did charge a fee was "The Flying Duck Murders", a 1943 episode that took him and Bowen out to Montana. Management asked them to investigate a shortage at the Flying Duck mine. Someone was stealing gold from the mine. Two previous detectives had met their deaths there. They didn't have a radio series and Carter did, so the listener knows in advance who will survive.

Carter arranged to infiltrate the mine as a common labourer. He got a fake letter of recommendation from a mine shareholder to Nate Crosby, the foreman. Before even leaving the building with it, Carter overheard a telephone conversation tipping off Crosby. Sensible man that he was, he hired another detective to impersonate him. His mother didn't raise a fool.

Carter posed as a mining newspaper journalist instead, out there to write up a feature article on the mine. This allowed an infodump to explain how gold was extracted from crushed ore with mercury, producing amalgam. That was then shipped to a refinery, which melted it and separated the gold from the mercury.

Meanwhile, Crosby was preparing caskets, ostensibly to ship the bodies of the two dead men, plus Carter, who had been discovered and was slugged unconscious. The bodies were to be buried out in the wilderness, and the caskets filled with smuggled amalgam for shipment by train. Carter escaped by such an improbable and ridiculous circumstance that I won't dignify it by explaining what happened.

Crosby's gang were rounded up at the train station with the caskets filled with stolen gold. Justice was served. The epilogue was a long-winded explanation that tried to tie up all the loose ends and fill in the plot holes, or at least as many as the writer could think of. Any regular listener of this series knew that one tuned in for the action and adventure, not logic or good sense.

"The Case Of The Vanishing Weapon" was a 1949 episode that began when Carter and Bowen were driving on a country road. A car coming the other way crossed the centre line towards them. They managed to avoid a head-on smash but the woman driving the car wasn't so lucky. When her car hit the ditch, she

went through the windshield, this being decades before seat belts became standard.

She lived long enough to tell them she was running from a serial black widower, that is, a man who married women of wealth, killed them through fake accident setups, and inherited their wealth. He would then move someplace else and repeat.

They had noticed that just before the woman hit the ditch, she was slumped over the steering wheel unconscious. The shock of the accident revived her for a moment before she died. They observed that the car's heater was on full blast, and a bit more detective work leads them to believe that it had been stuffed full of dry ice just before she took the car out.

The dry ice volatilized into carbon dioxide and suffocated her. I have my doubts about that. A huge amount of dry ice would be required to fill up a passenger compartment and suffocate those inside.

Carter and Bowen investigated her husband. Together with the sheriff, for once not a Deppity Dawg type, they visited her farm, where her husband, her brother, and a hired hand lived. All the evidence seemed to point to the husband, especially after the body of the hired hand was discovered.

Carter pulled a trick with the evidence to flush out the real murderer, for it turned out that the black widower was her brother. She had discovered his secret marriages and threatened to expose him. An interesting twist.

## **The Saint.**

Leslie Charteris had a long run of novels and short stories about The Saint, real name Simon Templar, a man with no visible means of support who lived well and solved mysteries for lack of anything better to do. The first appearance of The Saint was in a 1928 novel and continued until 1983, although after 1963 Charteris farmed out the work to ghostwriters. There were radio, movie, and television adaptations, but he mostly left them to other writers.

THE SAINT old-time radio series starred several actors as Simon Templar, of whom the urbane Vincent Price was the best. He was a favourite of Charteris and other writers, who wrote scripts with Price's cultured style in mind. The series ran from 1945 to 1951.



“Author Of Murder” was a 1950 episode written by Louis Vittes. It began with Templar being awakened in his bedroom by a gunman, who sat quietly in the dark and told him to listen and learn. The gunman, who spoke in a distinctive voice, said he wanted Templar’s opinion of a book he was writing about a perfect crime.

The gunman knew a wealthy millionaire who had a heart condition and must take capsules a few times a day to stay alive. The gunman had stolen one of the capsules, emptied the medication out of it, and substituted granular sugar. He then returned the capsule to the medicine bottle and only had to await results.

The beauty of the plan was that an autopsy would reveal nothing. No poison was used, so toxicology tests would be negative. The deceased was known to have a bad heart, and his sudden death would not be a surprise.

After Templar acknowledged that he couldn’t see any flaw in the plan, the gunman bid him adieu and departed still unseen in the dark. The next day Templar began checking the obituary columns and eventually identified a millionaire who died suddenly of a heart condition.

Templar drove out to the mansion and found a household of heirs and sharp-practice men. The principal heiress was glad to see the old man gone, his lawyer was stealing from him, and his male secretary was as shifty of a man as you could hope not to meet.

Templar eventually established that the distinctive voice belonged to the deceased, who knew what was going on in his household and decided to get his revenge from beyond the grave. He knew he would be dead soon from natural causes, not a substituted capsule, and decided to create suspicion of murder. It would be enough to bring down the lawyer and secretary, although his niece got the estate and a date with Templar.

The radio episodes relied on snappy dialogue and subtle humour, and were well written. Worth downloading a few mp3s.

In 1951, Tom Conway took over as The Saint. He had a veddy British accent, as opposed to Price’s Ivy League tones. Conway also performed as Sherlock Holmes on radio. The snappy dialogue disappeared and Conway played Templar as an ordinary private detective. It didn’t work, and most of the episodes are dull.

“Peter The Great” was a 1951 episode about a race horse of that name. Templar was summoned by 15-year-old Annie McIntyre to handle a family dispute with her father. The Saint really must be at loose ends if he was working as a mediator, but not to worry, a corpse soon appears.

The dispute was between Annie and her father. He didn’t want Peter the Great to run, saying he wasn’t ready. Annie pointed out that the horse was eight years old, so he’d better be raced sooner rather than later.

The jockey Vic had a questionable character but agreed with Annie that the horse should run. Dad became the body, found dead in the stables and apparently kicked to death by the horse. Setting grief aside, Annie ran Peter the Great in a race the next day, with Vic riding. She wasn’t aware of some sharp practice in the background. The episode ended with a twist. Peter the Great won despite a buildup suggesting otherwise.

### **Casey, Crime Photographer.**

Casey, no other name given, was a newspaper photographer who busily solved crimes for an incompetent police force, all in the name of getting scoops. His girlfriend Ann Williams was a reporter and accompanied him in his travels. The OTR series was based on the novels by George Harmon Coxe, and ran from 1943 to 1955.

The pace of the shows was snappy, and if loose threads were left over, no one worried about them. As action-adventure stories, they are worth listening to.

“Key Witness” was a 1948 episode written by Alonzo Deen Cole. Casey and Ann were returning to the city after a rural assignment during a blizzard. They stopped at a roadhouse called Sharky’s Place, run by a gangster. In the parking lot, they see two men ‘helping’ a third man into a car.

The third man dropped a hotel key. Casey picked it up but the car drove off, so he took it inside. Only then did he discover that the key was covered with blood. The bartender noticed, Sharky noticed, and Casey and Ann were invited into a back room. Sharky’s men had just bumped off a competitor who had been staying at the hotel.

Casey and Ann managed to escape with the key, and came back with the police. The roadhouse was deserted. Casey was confident that the case was solved, but



Sharky had other ideas. After a near hit-and-run, and dynamite wired to his car starter, Casey was prepared to concede that his life was in danger.

A trap was set with the usual excitement and last-minute survival. Since Casey was the star, and Sharky a single-episode guest, there was no suspense about the outcome. However, the story moved quickly.

Sharky's method of operation was to kill his enemies with their own weapons. If they had a gun, they would be shot with it, likewise with a knife. His idea was that if he was caught, his lawyer could raise reasonable doubts about whether or not the victim had committed suicide.

Casey coordinated a plan with the police for him to hole up in his apartment, while letting it be known that he had a hunting rifle. The bodyguard protecting him would always take an hour's break at exactly the same time each night.

Sharky and his men soon noticed that, since they were watching Casey's place from a distance. The rifle barrel was plugged. When Sharky entered and held Casey at gunpoint, the police were nearby. On pulling the trigger, the rifle blew up in Sharky's face, and justice was served.

"The Upholsterer" was a 1949 episode written by Alonzo Deen Cole. The tradesman of that ilk, Goldblatt, was working in his shop when he was shot dead. The neighbour shop keeper heard the shots and a thump. Police couldn't get in, and had to get a small boy to climb through a tiny side window.

The door was blocked by an armchair jammed against it. No sign of a gun, so it wasn't suicide. No adult could have gone out the window. In other words, that favourite trope of detective fiction, the locked room mystery.

The police, inept as usual, miss something that Casey picks up on immediately. The back of the armchair was slashed in an X, by the murderer looking for something concealed within. Goldblatt hadn't been robbed; his wallet was intact, and the cash register was undisturbed.

The armchair had been on a bench. When Goldblatt fell against it after being shot, and as the killer ran out the door, the armchair was knocked against the door, making it look as if someone had jammed it there.

Casey figured out the armchair was part of a set, and after looking through Goldblatt's record book, determined who the customer was. Off he and Ann went, finding the address was a boarding house. Posing as a couple looking for a room, they browse the house and find another armchair from the set. The murderer, who had been doing his own detective work, arrived and threatened Casey and Ann with a gun but was overcome by the usual "with a single bound" method.

The murderer had hidden \$80,000 in stolen cash inside the armchair. When his landlady sent the armchair to the upholstery shop without warning, that triggered the subsequent events. All was well, save for poor Goldblatt. A brisk and mostly plausible episode.

### **Barrie Craig, Confidential Investigator.**

This old-time radio series ran from 1951 to 1955. An average detective series, which is not a criticism. It never reached the heights but is still worth listening to as a standard private investigator show.

"Death And The Purple Cow" is a 1951 episode written by Louis Vittes. Craig was having coffee and doughnuts in a diner late one night when a gunman arrived who told Craig he may have a client coming, from whom the gunman didn't want Craig to accept a case. While all were waiting for the supposed client, someone shot and killed the gunman from a distance and escaped unidentified.

After dealing with the police, Craig headed back to his office. He talked to Jake, the night shift elevator operator, an old geezer who remarked in passing that he left his farm in Vermont because it was too close to New Hampshire. Jake said there was a client waiting in Craig's office.

She turned out to be Sally Marlin, sister of Donald, who got himself into trouble. He had acquired an antique statuette, a cow made of purple glass, but neglected to get clear legal title to it or, for that matter, the consent of the previous owner to take it away.

From there, the usual sorts of hoorahs and excitement, punctuated by fist fights and gun fire. Craig caught up with Donald, who disposed of the obvious by telling him that he had the purple cow appraised. It was made of cheap glass, no jewels were hidden in it, and was worth only a few dollars.



The plot zigzagged about, but finally it was revealed that the purple cow was part of a haul that included real jewels, now stored in a safe deposit box. As Craig remarked, the purple cow was a red herring.

On that note, the story ended and justice was done. As a private detective story, it met the standards of the genre but went no further. The twists and turns in the plot were based on alternative interpretations of the same facts.

“Microfilm In The Fish Tank” is a 1951 episode written by Ernest Kinoy, with an unfortunate title that gives away the ending. It opened with Craig being asked for help by a shop keeper who had been threatened by a protection racket. The shop keeper didn’t make it past the 3-minute mark, dying when his place was firebombed.

Even before the flames were out, Craig was hired by a newspaper editor who had been ordered by his publisher to run a series on the protection racket and expose it. The editor’s apartment was a luxurious suite which had specialized equipment for his hobby of photography, and a large aquarium.

Since the title of this episode waved a red flag about where the plot will end up, there was no suspense about the end result, only mild curiosity about the path taken to get there.

Craig went hunting arsonists, all of whom claimed they were retired. He did stumble across a front for the racket, in a dentist’s office. Not a real dentist, and no patients, but he found and stole their financial records, hidden as microfilm on supposed X-rays of teeth.

From there, gunshots, car chases, and general disrespect for the public peace. Craig brought the records back to the editor. I need not specify where he decided to hide them for safekeeping. The twist, and there was one, was that the editor was the brains behind the racket and used Craig to retrieve the records that would convict himself. The police arrived in the nick of time.

Another 1951 episode is “Corpse On Delivery”, written by John Roeburt. Craig was hired as a skip tracer by a bail bondsman who was on the hook for \$50,000 after a client named Joey Florio failed to appear in court. The search stretched out with no luck. Then one night Craig returned to his office to find a fresh corpse sitting in his chair.

Before he could call the police, others arrived to take an interest in the defunct. That diversion aside, when the police arrived, they identified the victim as a professional informer. Craig piled up clues but they seemed to have no connection with Florio at first. Eventually the intricacies of the plot tied together and led Craig to the waterfront.

Florio finally appeared but didn’t get a speaking part, on account of a passerby emptying a clip into him at the dockside. The final twist was that the bondsman was in on the murder because Florio was squiring his daughter and being a bad influence on her. ‘squirring’, because this was 1951 and radio shows couldn’t say that he was \*\*\*\*ing her. The payoff to the plot that then followed was wishy-washy. Worth listening to once.

“Murder By Threes” is a 1952 episode written by John Roeburt. The client called himself Julius Caesar, and said his wife Cleo was going to die. Several attempts had been made on her life, such as poisoning her medicine and soaping the stairs in her house. Caesar overacted all the way through the episode, making the listener wish he was the murder victim, and within the first three minutes. Alas, Caesar made it to the end of the episode.

The motive seemed to be a \$20,000 pie baking contest, with some other contestant trying to gain an advantage. Cleo departed this world without ever having had a speaking part. It was murder, made to look like a car crash.

The contest was staged in a resort hotel where all the contestants were staying. They used the hotel kitchen and pie fillings supplied by the sponsor Willowbee. The man himself advised Craig that Cleo was well in the lead on the points scale, with Lois LaRue a close second, and the rest of the competitors as also-rans. LaRue’s husband Zack violently resented Craig questioning his wife, which led to a minute or two filling the time with sounds of a fist fight. No prizes for guessing who won this particular contest.

The surprise came when Craig questioned the contest judge Vincent Cornell, who admitted that influence was used on him to help Cleo get ahead of Lois. Cornell was shot by a rifle sniper before he can tell Craig who was influencing him. Craig subsequently found that everyone has something to hide.

He tricked Willowbee into revealing himself as the murderer. The alert listener will have guessed this just before. Cleo was blackmailing Willowbee over the murder of his wife 17 years ago, from which he had evaded the law. And so to



the orchestral crescendo and closing credits. The action was steady, and the final clue gave the listener a fair chance at identifying the murderer.

“Death’s Bargain Basement” is a 1954 episode written by Louis Vittes. Craig was hired by a department store accountant who was fired by the store owner after pointing out a \$37,000 shortfall in the latest quarterly report. (Add an extra zero for today’s inflated currency.)

Craig took on the case but nothing was said about his retainer or how much he would charge for the investigation. Nor was it explained why he would take a unemployed client instead of telling him to go to the police. Hold that thought: it will be revisited at the end of the episode.

Craig and the accountant went to the stately mansion of the store owner but were too late. Someone preceded them and stuck a knife into the man’s back while he was sitting at a desk. Leaving the butler to take care of the tedious details, such as notifying the police, the two men headed over to the department store. They found the night watchman had been slugged unconscious, and incriminating financial files burned in a metal wastebasket.

Craig decided to infiltrate the store by being hired with the help of a forged letter of recommendation from one of the stockholders. His first task, demonstrating a dishwasher, didn’t go well. That scene appears to have been inserted in an attempt at humour. I didn’t laugh, much less chuckle. While that was going on, the accountant was a hit-and-run victim, not dying but winding up in hospital.

Craig was transferred to accounting, closer to what he wanted. More than close, for he learned from his new colleagues that the store staff knew who he was and what he was doing. Someone had recognized him. He decided to force the issue by retrieving the accountant from the hospital and wheeling him around in a wheelchair through the store. The idea was that everyone would be happy to see him except the murderer.

It didn’t work but Craig learned enough about the suspects to realize there was only one person among them who could have walked around the owner’s desk and stab him from behind. A desk is a man’s castle, and since he was on the odds with all the other suspects, had they attempted to do so, he would have swivelled his chair to face them. A fair to middling episode.

**Not Sherlockiana.**

MEET MISS SHERLOCK was an old-time radio series that aired in the summer of 1946 and in October 1947. It was about Jane Sherlock, an amateur detective whose day job was a buyer for personal shopping service company. Absolutely nothing to do with the Great Detective, but the name was obviously chosen to attract listeners, as Jane Smith or Jane Brown would not have.

She was a scatterbrained young woman whose boyfriend Peter Blossom was constantly proposing marriage to her without success. Every case she was mixed up in was attended by Captain Dingle of the NYPD Homicide Squad.

The vital clue was often something she announced in the early part of the episode, but couldn’t remember all the details until just before solving the case with her withheld information.

“The Case Of The Deadman’s Chest” was a 1946 episode written by Don Thompson. Sherlock bought a \$300 rosewood chest at an estate auction of a man named Slater, who had disappeared seven years ago after becoming involved in a sex scandal with a showgirl. His wife had him declared dead.

The chest was delivered to Sherlock’s workplace and was placed in a storage room. Hardly had it been set down than the telephone began ringing. First a woman offered Sherlock \$750 for the chest. Then a gangster appeared in person, upping the bid to \$1,500.

A third claimant doesn’t bother with money. He broke into the room and smashed the lock off the chest. Sherlock and Blossom heard the noise, and upon investigating scared him away.

The chest contained a skeleton with two bullet holes in the bones. Dingle first thought it was Slater’s body but the identification didn’t work. The skeleton was a harbinger, for soon the showgirl and others who knew Slater were murdered. Someone was cleaning house.

That someone was Slater, who came out of hiding after learning his wife had him declared dead. He murdered the man in the chest, the showgirl knew about it, and the gangster was the skeleton’s brother, seeking revenge.

Sherlock and Blossom wandered in and out of the carnage, were kidnapped, and endured assorted alarms and excursions. Slater got his, and Sherlock decided to assuage her stress by going shopping.

“Wilmer And The Widow” is a 1946 episode written by E. Jack Neuman. Yvonne Randolph was the widow, whose husband was shot to death. Dingle arrested her on suspicion because she would inherit his wealth. Sherlock knew better, and in fact could have proved it in the first quarter of the episode had she bothered to mention the clue.

Yvonne’s old boyfriend Andre was in town. Andre was a suspect until he too departed this world involuntarily. Meanwhile, the Randolph’s accountant Wilmer was buzzing around the scene. He asked Sherlock to do an errand for him, getting a gold engagement ring engraved. That part was announced early. Near the end of the episode, Sherlock suddenly remembered the inscription was “From W to Y”, and that Wilmer had given her the ring the day before Randolph was shot dead. A plot cheat by the script writer.

Lots of dialogue among the characters. No one ever finished a sentence without being interrupted by someone else or going off on a long irrelevant digression. Very annoying to the listener. The dialogue was evidently intended to be humorous but merely dragged out the story unnecessarily.

Jane Sherlock was played as a breathless young idiot who stumbled over the resolution rather than deducing it. One can understand why the series never caught on. Worth listening to once if you’ve been through all the other detective series.

Not worthy of interest to dedicated Sherlockians or even casual OTR fans. The amazing thing is that the series was brought back the following year after its initial short run, when instead all the scripts should have been burnt and the transcription disks tossed into a landfill.

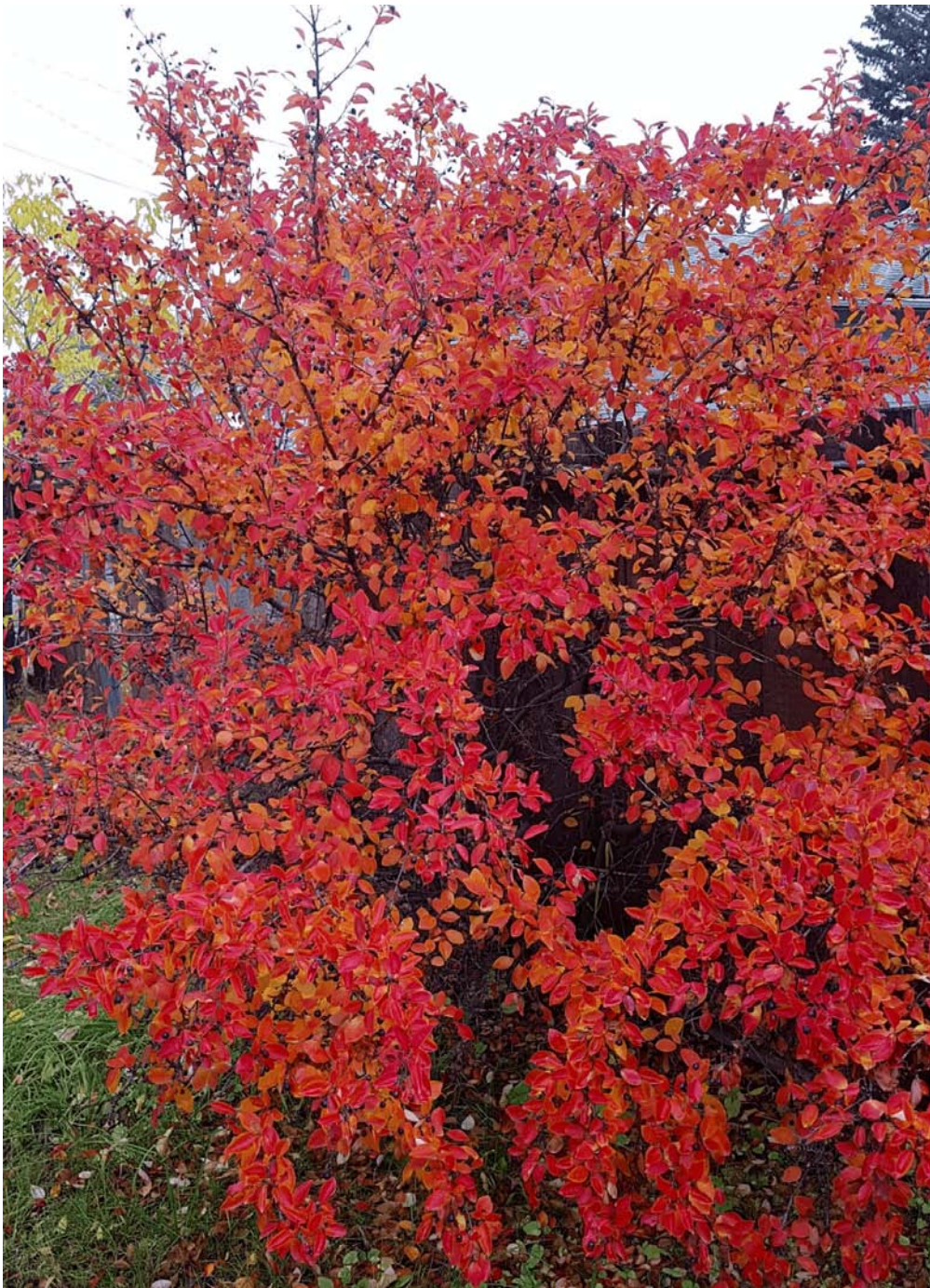
**AUTUMN COLOURS AT CHEZ OPUNTIA**  
photos by Dale Speirs

Normally September is a dry month but this year we’ve had constant cloud and showers, with occasional dusts of snow. The photos below are of a wild peony in my backyard, species name lost but originally started from field-collected seed in 1983. It was photographed in bloom on May 25 and again on September 29 after it went into hibernation.





*Cotoneaster lucidus* in my back yard.



*Acer ginnala* in my front yard.





SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

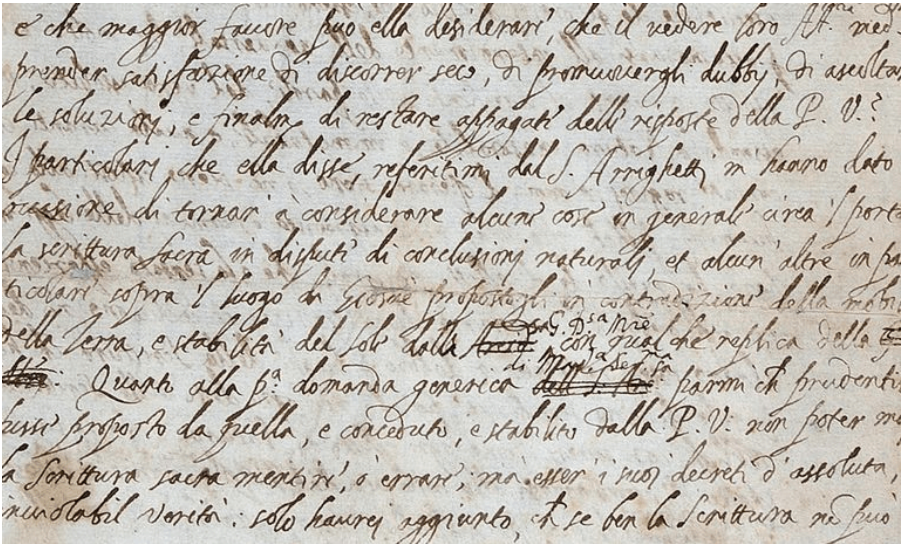
Abbott, Alison (2018-09-27) **Lost Galileo letter reveals he tried to dodge Inquisition.** NATURE 561:441-442

Extracts: *The original letter, long thought lost, in which Galileo Galilei first set down his arguments against the church's doctrine that the Sun orbits Earth has been discovered in a misdated library catalogue in London. Its unearthing and analysis expose critical new details about the saga that led to the astronomer's condemnation for heresy in 1633.*

*The seven-page letter, written to a friend on 21 December 1613 and signed "G.G.", provides the strongest evidence yet that, at the start of his battle with the religious authorities, Galileo actively engaged in damage control and tried to spread a toned-down version of his claims.*

*Many copies of the letter were made, and two differing versions exist, one that was sent to the Inquisition in Rome and another with less inflammatory language. But because the original letter was assumed to be lost, it wasn't clear whether incensed clergymen had doctored the letter to strengthen their case for heresy, something Galileo complained about to friends, or whether Galileo wrote the strong version, then decided to soften his own words.*

*Galileo did the editing, it seems. The newly unearthed letter is dotted with amendments, and handwriting analysis suggests that Galileo wrote it. He shared a copy of this softened version with a friend, claiming it was his original, and urged him to send it to the Vatican.*



Sugitani, K., et al (2018) **Speciation of Paleoarchean life demonstrated by analysis off the morphological variation of lenticular microfossils from the Pilbara Craton, Australia.** ASTROBIOLOGY 18:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2017.1799

Authors' abstract: *The ca 3.4 gigayears-old Strelley Pool Formation (SPF) of the Pilbara Craton, Australia, represents a Paleoarchean sedimentary succession preserving well-described and morphologically diverse biosignatures such as stromatolites and cellularly preserved microfossils. The SPF microfossil assemblage identified from three greenstone belts includes relatively large (20-80 µm in width), acid-resistant, organic-walled lenticular microfossils, which can be extracted using a palynological technique.*

*In this study, we present results of measurements of over 800 palynomorphic specimens of SPF lenticular microfossils from 2 remote (~80 km apart) localities that represent different depositional environments and thus different habitats, as evidenced by their distinct lithostratigraphic association and trace element geochemistry.*

*We demonstrate statistically that the two populations are distinct in oblateness from a polar view and furthermore that each population comprises subpopulations defined by different areas and oblateness. This study may provide the earliest morphological evidence for speciation of unicellular organisms, which could have been allopatric (geographic) and adaptive. It can also be suggested that SPF lenticular microbes had highly organized cytoskeleton indispensable for strict control of the cell morphology of large and robust microbes, which in turn were likely advantageous to their prosperity and diversification.*

Deline, B., et al (2018) **Evolution of metazoan morphological disparity.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 115:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1810575115

[Morphospace is all the possible variations in shape and size a group of related animals could reasonably evolve. A clade is a branch of evolution.]

Authors' abstract: *The animal kingdom exhibits a great diversity of organismal form (i.e., disparity). Whether the extremes of disparity were achieved early in animal evolutionary history or clades continually explore the limits of possible*



*morphospace is subject to continuing debate. Here we show, through analysis of the disparity of the animal kingdom, that, even though many clades exhibit maximal initial disparity, arthropods, chordates, annelids, echinoderms, and mollusks have continued to explore and expand the limits of morphospace throughout the Phanerozoic, expanding dramatically the envelope of disparity occupied in the Cambrian.*

*The clumpiness of morphospace occupation by living clades is a consequence of the extinction of phylogenetic intermediates, indicating that the original distribution of morphologies was more homogeneous. The morphological distances between phyla mirror differences in complexity, body size, and species-level diversity across the animal kingdom. Causal hypotheses of morphologic expansion include time since origination, increases in genome size, protein repertoire, gene family expansion, and gene regulation.*

*We find a strong correlation between increasing morphological disparity, genome size, and microRNA repertoire, but no correlation to protein domain diversity. Our results are compatible with the view that the evolution of gene regulation has been influential in shaping metazoan disparity whereas the invasion of terrestrial ecospace appears to represent an additional gestalt, underpinning the post-Cambrian expansion of metazoan disparity.*

**Bobrovskiy, I., et al (2018) Ancient steroids establish the Ediacaran fossil Dickinsonia as one of the earliest animals. SCIENCE 361:1246-1249**

*Authors' abstract: The first complex organisms emerged during the Ediacaran period, around 600 million years ago. The taxonomic affiliation of many of these organisms has been difficult to discern. Fossils of Dickinsonia, bilaterally symmetrical oval organisms, have been particularly difficult to classify.*

*Bobrovskiy et al. conducted an analysis using lipid biomarkers obtained from Dickinsonia fossils and found that the fossils contained almost exclusively cholesteroloids, a marker found only in animals. Thus, Dickinsonia were basal animals. This supports the idea that the Ediacaran biota may have been a precursor to the explosion of animal forms later observed in the Cambrian, about 500 million years ago.*

*The enigmatic Ediacara biota (571 million to 541 million years ago) represents the first macroscopic complex organisms in the geological record and may hold*

*the key to our understanding of the origin of animals. Ediacaran macrofossils are as “strange as life on another planet” and have evaded taxonomic classification, with interpretations ranging from marine animals or giant single-celled protists to terrestrial lichens.*

*Here, we show that lipid biomarkers extracted from organically preserved Ediacaran macrofossils unambiguously clarify their phylogeny. Dickinsonia and its relatives solely produced cholesteroloids, a hallmark of animals. Our results make these iconic members of the Ediacara biota the oldest confirmed macroscopic animals in the rock record, indicating that the appearance of the Ediacara biota was indeed a prelude to the Cambrian explosion of animal life.*

**Ronholm, J., et al (2018) Characterization of microbial communities hosted in quartzofeldspathic and serpentinite lithologies in Jeffrey Mine, Canada. ASTROBIOLOGY 18:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2017.1685**

*[Serpentine rocks are hydrated minerals that incorporate water inside them but not necessarily chemically bound. As a result, they can host microbes if there is a heat or chemical energy source nearby. If Mars has serpentinite rocks, then it is possible that microbes might be sheltering within them.]*

*Authors' abstract: The microbial ecology and activity of serpentinite deposits and associated hydrated minerals are largely unknown. Previous research has largely focused on microbial communities in active serpentinitizing systems, whereas relatively little research has demonstrated the ability of serpentinite deposits to host microbial communities after the cessation of serpentinitization.*

*Given the potential role of serpentinitization reactions fueling primitive microbial metabolisms on early Earth and the identification of serpentinite deposits on Mars, knowledge of these geobiological relationships and potential for serpentinite to host extant microbial communities and preserve biosignatures is increasingly important for planetary exploration seeking signs of life.*

*The selection of habitable sites most likely to yield putative biosignatures is crucial to mission success. In this study, we aimed to characterize, on the basis of both metabolic activity and taxonomic composition, the microbial communities hosted in two naturally co-occurring and mineralogically distinct substrates within the serpentinite-rich Jeffrey Mine pit–igneous quartzofeldspathic intrusives and serpentinite.*

*Detection of heterotrophic activity in both lithologies at 24°C, and in serpentinite at -5°C, demonstrated that each substrate had the ability to host a viable microbial community, at Mars-relevant temperatures.*

*Targeted amplicon sequencing subsequently showed the presence of bacterial, fungal, and photosynthetic microbial communities in both substrates. Here, we have demonstrated the presence of a viable lithic microbial community within two rock types in the Jeffrey Mine and provided evidence that lithologies associated with serpentine deposits and proximal hydrated minerals have the ability to support diverse prokaryotic and eukaryotic microbial colonization.*

Cockell, C.S., et al (2018) **Rapid colonization of artificial endolithic uninhabited habitats.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 17:386-401

[Endolithic microbes are those which live inside rocks. They are found in polar and desert regions.]

*Authors' abstract: To test the rate at which a lifeless but habitable environment (uninhabited habitat) can be colonized, artificial endolithic habitats were constructed in the laboratory and exposed to the natural environment. They were composed of sterile stacked sintered glass discs (stacks) containing CHNOPS elements, liquid water, energy and a carbon source, making them habitable for aerobic respiring organisms and phototrophs. One set of stacks was exposed fully to atmospheric conditions and one set was covered from direct overhead atmospheric input and precipitation.*

*The process of colonization was heterogeneous across the stacks. After 3 months, all uninhabited habitats were colonized at all depths in both fully exposed and covered stacks. However, uninhabited habitable conditions persisted in covered stacks after 1 month, demonstrating the importance of the hydrological cycle in the connection between inhabited habitats and uninhabited habitats. Low porosity rocks were found to retard the extent of colonization compared with higher porosity rocks.*

*Examination of genomic DNA demonstrated that the habitats were colonized by a community dominated by Proteobacteria. Covered stacks had a higher abundance of fungal sequences among eukaryotic colonizers. These data demonstrate the tight coupling between the appearance of habitable conditions*

*and life and the reasons for the rarity of uninhabited habitats on the present-day Earth.*

*On other planetary bodies, such as Mars, with more inclement atmospheres and less vigorous hydrological cycles or a lack of life, uninhabited habitats could persist for longer with consequences for the interpretation of data sent back by planetary science missions.*

Michels, J., et al (2018) **Rapid aggregation of biofilm-covered microplastics with marine biogenic particles.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON 285B:doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2018.1203

*Authors' abstract: Ocean plastic pollution has resulted in a substantial accumulation of microplastics in the marine environment. Today, this plastic litter is ubiquitous in the oceans, including even remote habitats such as deep-sea sediments and polar sea ice, and it is believed to pose a threat to ecosystem health.*

*However, the concentration of microplastics in the surface layer of the oceans is considerably lower than expected, given the ongoing replenishment of microplastics and the tendency of many plastic types to float. It has been hypothesized that microplastics leave the upper ocean by aggregation and subsequent sedimentation.*

*We tested this hypothesis by investigating the interactions of microplastics with marine biogenic particles collected in the southwestern Baltic Sea. Our laboratory experiments revealed a large potential of microplastics to rapidly coagulate with biogenic particles, which substantiates this hypothesis. Together with the biogenic particles, the microplastics efficiently formed pronounced aggregates within a few days.*

*The aggregation of microplastics and biogenic particles was significantly accelerated by microbial biofilms that had formed on the plastic surfaces. We assume that the demonstrated aggregation behaviour facilitates the export of microplastics from the surface layer of the oceans and plays an important role in the redistribution of microplastics in the oceans.*



[Editor's remarks in square brackets. Please include your name and town when sending a comment. Email to opuntia57@hotmail.com]

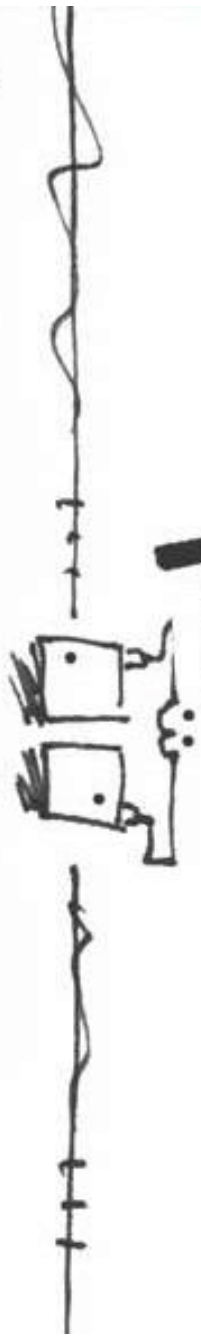
tnelson@bexx.com

Once again, Spaceship Earth  
Reaches a bi-annual magic point.  
Equinox! Autumn in the north,  
Spring in the south this time.  
The colours of harvest  
Will blanket the north,  
While in the south  
Greens will herald  
The birth of new life.  
Ponder upon the twelve hours  
Of Day and Night!

"Seasonal  
Greetings!"

Harvest 2

©2018 Theo Nelson



To:

Date - \_\_\_\_\_  
Keeping it equal,  
\_\_\_\_\_   
twice a year!  
\_\_\_\_\_

*[Handwritten signature]*



[The view side of Theo's equinox postcard with his art.]





**THANKSGIVING SNOW IN COWTOWN**  
photos by Dale Speirs

On Tuesday, October 2, a few days before Thanksgiving, Calgarians weren't feeling very thankful for a record-breaking snowfall for the month of October. After I took the photo below of the Opuntiamobile, I measured the snow pack on the trunk at 36 cm.



I then did a very foolish thing. I go downtown on weekdays to run errands, have lunch, and then to the library for research. Slogging through the snow to the bus stop, I waited for the #7 bus. Normally it passes by every 15 minutes, but after an hour it was obvious that it wasn't running. I was about to give it up and walk back home when I saw the #13 bus, which crosses further down at the next intersection. I managed to beat it to the stop and got on board.

Both buses go downtown, but #13 takes the scenic route through the Mount Royal residential neighbourhood, built across several coulees. With all the up and down streets, I thought for sure the bus would spin out. Surprisingly, it made it through to 8 Street SW, which drops down to the valley floor where the downtown core is.

Alas, not three blocks from the bottomlands, the bus spun out against the curb and slid into a snowbank. A black car behind it made a right-angle turn into the curb to avoid hitting the bus. A block down the hill, a semi-trailer spun out trying to go up the street, and slid into a parked car. The bus driver told us that's all there is and there ain't no more, so we got out and began walking. Fortunately it was only a 15-minute walk to the core. I always carry a collapsible umbrella in my satchel, which came in handy for the falling snow.

God gave us smartphones for a reason, so as I walked away, I took a few photos. The first one was just after I got off the bus. Notice the blue car on the other side of the street, sliding back down the hill at a 45° angle. Fortunately it didn't hit anything.







Below:  
Looking back at the bus.  
From only a half block  
away it was barely  
visible through the  
heavy snowfall.

