

# OPUNTIA 446



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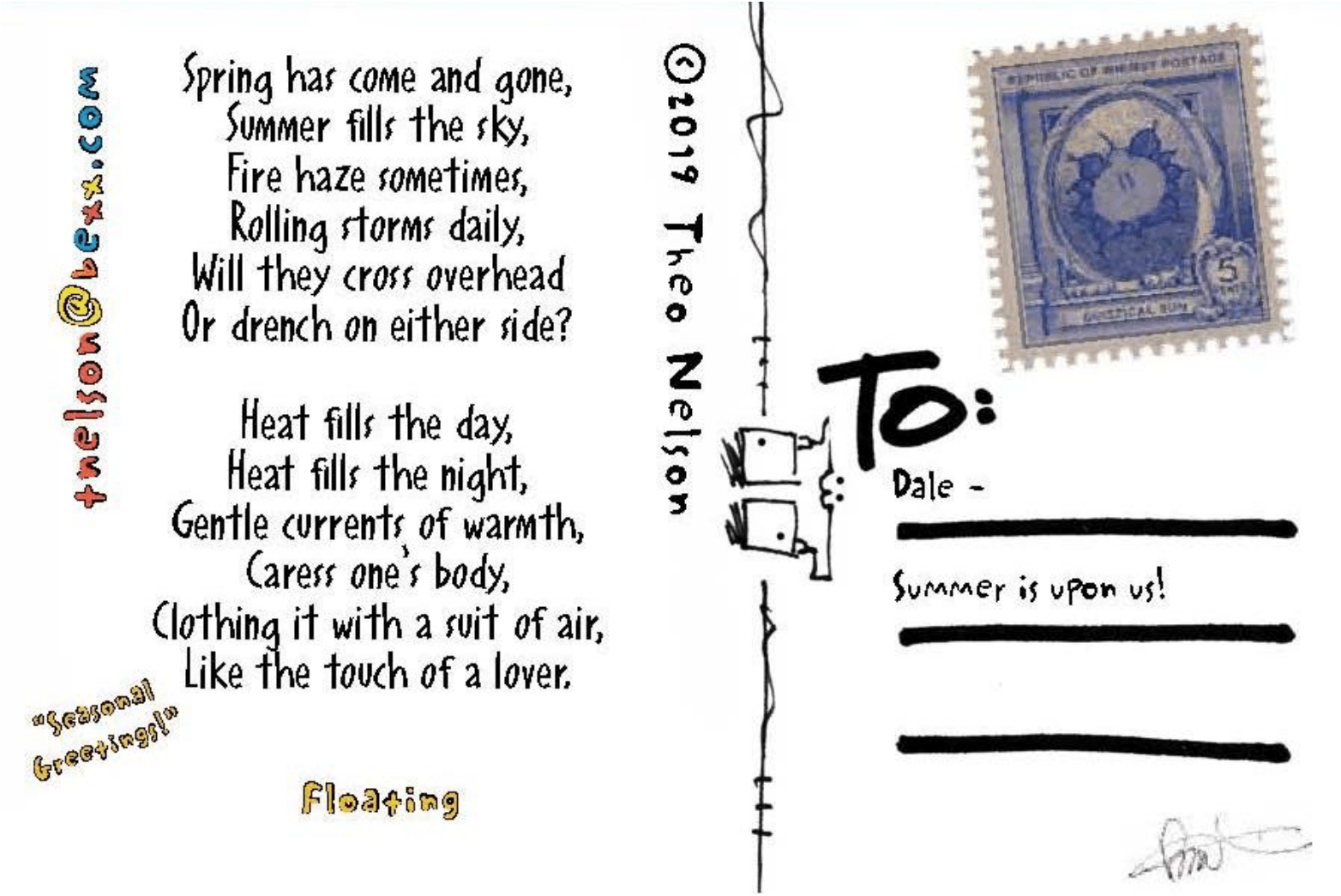
**WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21**

by Dale Speirs

Founded by Benoit Girard (Québec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. 2019 was the 26th year. At 21h00 Mountain Daylight Time, I raised a glass (a can of soda pop, actually) and toasted fellow members of zinedom around the world.

First, I faced to the east and saluted those who had already celebrated. Then I faced north, then south, to toast those in my time zone. Finally, I faced west and raised the glass (pardon me, can) to those who would celebrate WWP in the next hour.

The World Wide Party is on the summer solstice each year. Four times each year, Calgary mail artist Theo Nelson sends me one of his postcards marking an equinox or solstice. The view side of his latest postcard is shown on the cover, and a poem that always goes with his cards on the address side you can see on this page. Thanks, Theo.





LET THE YEEHAWING BEGIN

photos by Dale Speirs

I was almost certainly the only one in Calgary (population 1.2 million) who celebrated the World Wide Party. The rest of the city began gearing up in early June for the Stampede rodeo. It begins the Friday after Canada Day and runs for ten days, with 1.3 million paid admissions.

The whole city gets involved. City slickers deck themselves out like Hollywood cowpokes. Immigrants just off the plane from the Middle East wear cowboy hats, and Hindus strut about in blue jeans and cowboy boots. Little work is done during the event among the skyscrapers of the downtown core.

Every merchant has its window displays. All taverns with an outdoor patio nail up some boards of rough-sawn lumber and set out a few straw bales. Free pancake breakfasts are everywhere. With a bit of planning you can eat free for a fortnight.



 Menu



# Your Complete Listing of All Calgary Stampede Pancake Breakfasts for 2019

Find pancake breakfasts on our [Calgary Stampede 2019 Pancake Calendar](#) or [submit your own event](#). Find all the pancakes you can eat on our website, mobile website or [follow Stampede Breakfast on Twitter](#). Yahoo Calgary!



Merchants put up their Stampede displays in early June, although this is not exceptional since they advertise Halloween in August and Christmas in October. The scene below was the entrance of a pedestrian overpass connecting Brookfield Place skyscraper to the Bow Valley Square skyscrapers. A rather clever design. (Most skyscrapers in downtown Calgary are connected by second-floor pedways. It is possible to walk several kilometres from one end of the core to the other without going outside.)

At right is a scene on 8 Street SW in the Beltline district.





An electronic advertising sign in a downtown parking lot. The mural is painted on the back wall of the Calgary Petroleum Club. Each iteration of the sign was different but my bus came and I didn't have time to photograph them all.

'Yahoo' has been the official cry of the Calgary Stampede for a century, long before those other guys set up a Website. Notwithstanding that, almost all Calgarians use the more traditional 'Yeehaw'. That frustrates the Stampede oligarchy.

(The blurriness of the bottom edge of the sign at right is due to the raster effect of the electronic sign not matching the speed of my smartphone camera.)



# OUT WHERE THE WEST COMMENCES: PART 6

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 5 appeared in OPUNTIA's #68.1D, 356, 418, 419, and 435.]

Western novels are not extinct but certainly are moribund today. The basic problem is that they are mostly gunslinger stories that haven't changed in a century. It didn't help that serious movies, old-time radio series, and television series were swamped by kiddie versions, with singing cowboys who yodeled their way across the prairies.

I have trouble finding anything that isn't a man rides into town, or the evil railroad barons foreclosing on mortgages because they want the land. It was never that way in reality. Even in the American Old West, the townies ruled, and the homesteaders swamped the ranchers.

## Rodeos.

THE CISCO KID was an old-time radio series that ran from 1942 to 1956. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org).) While the accents were atrocious, in fairness it was unusual to have a major show with a Mexican hero. (It still is today. How many prime-time television series or Hollywood movies have Mexican heroes as leading actors?)

The Cisco Kid and his sidekick Pancho roamed across southwestern USA, solving problems and, in Cisco's case at least, getting lucky with señoritas. Not too lucky, for this was a juvenile series, so that yucky romantic stuff had to be toned down.

"Rodeo At Calico Corners" was a 1955 episode written by Larry Hays. The town of Calico Corners was staging its annual rodeo. The episode opened with two bank robbers discussing their forthcoming heist, to be done while the townfolk were distracted by the rodeo. The bank owner was also the sheriff, who was concentrating on the rodeo, and left the management of the bank to his inept cashier.

While radio had to have characters explain their actions, the ones that didn't have sound effects, this show went into great detail. Nobody threw a punch without shouting "Here's a punch for you!". The bank robbers described their plan in excruciating detail, including framing Cisco and Pancho for the robbery.

There was more excitement at the bank than at the rodeo. Lots of galloping about, and not just the horses. The posse, annoyed because they were missing out on the rodeo, were angry men. It all worked out okay, since Cisco and Pancho were booked for the series, as opposed to the bank robbers, who were only hired for the episode.

It was hilarious to hear different characters pronouncing the word 'rodeo'. Some said "rode-eee-oh" and others said "row-day-oh". The pace was fast, especially when the characters had to describe their actions all at once during the final fistfight.

THE ROY ROGERS SHOW aired on old-time radio from 1944 to 1955. Roy Rogers (born Leonard Franklin Slye in Cincinnati, Ohio) and his wife Dale Evans (born Lucille Wood Smith)\*\* were the stars. The episodes opened with multiple gunshots, followed by singers burbling the theme song "Happy Trails To You", an incongruous match. It was a kiddie programme, with lots of singing and breakfast cereal commercials. Rogers and Evans were a friendly couple, so one can't be angry at them, but nonetheless they did to serious westerns what pulp magazine covers and 1950s B-movies did to science fiction.

"Roguary At The Rodeo" was a 1952 episode written by Fran Van Hartsfeldt. It was recorded before a live audience at a rodeo in Madison Square Gardens in New York City. The plot was about cowboy Jerry Green, who wanted to win all-round cowboy so he could use the cash to buy a ranch back west.

What he didn't know, but two sharp-practice men did, was that gold had been discovered on the land. If he lost the all-round title, the sharpies would buy the land and the phrase "sitting on a gold mine" wouldn't just be a figure of speech. The men didn't want to leave things to chance, so in the bronco riding event they gave Green's horse an injection. The horse went berserk and Green suffered a broken arm.

Rogers substituted for him in an effort to get the money. The bad guys were exposed and you can guess the plot. Brief pauses during the action for singing and cereal commercials. The show hustled along at a fast pace, as indeed it had to in order to keep the children listening at home interested.

\*\*The only female Dale I've ever heard of. All the Dales I've met were men about my age, born in the 1950s.

“Queen Of The Brentwood Rodeo” was a 1947 episode of the old-time radio comedy series THE JUDY CANOVA SHOW which aired from 1943 to 1953. She was a good singer but because of her thick Southern accent had been stereotyped as a hillbilly in comedy routines. Each episode began with her singing a novelty song, then a set of gags, a middle song, more sketches, and a closing with a serious song.

In this particular episode, written by Fred Fox and Henry Hoople, Canova was competing for the title of rodeo queen against Mrs Fruitwhistle. The two were off and sparring deviously, with assorted gags. Then a break for the middle song, a comic turn about the upcoming Truman-Dewey presidential contest, with Canova asking the electorate to give her a write-in vote.

Back to the other campaign, Canova then went after Mr Gregory, chairman of the rodeo committee, hoping to get his vote. En route, she did gags with her Aunt Aggie and the Mexican gardener Pedro. Gregory asked Canova what her credentials were as a westerner, given her Florida panhandle drawl.

This provided an excuse to segue into a flashback about her ancestors in the Old West, set in a desert village saloon. The theatre audience laughter wasn’t synchronized to the dialogue, which led me to suspect they were doing visual stunts and forgot that listeners couldn’t see them.

What was funny was an inadvertent ad-lib sequence which then followed. Both Canova and another actor missed their cues, and fluffed their lines while trying to find their places in the script. They successfully ad-libbed their way out of the mess, which sent the audience into hysterics.

The sketch staggered to an end and the story reverted to the present day, with Canova getting an assurance from Gregory that she had his vote. With that victory, Canova sang her final song and rode off into the Brentwood sunset.

### **Meanwhile, Back At The Ranch.**

I stumbled across one of the kiddie cowboy stories in a rather surprising place, a 1939 episode of the old-time radio series THE SHADOW. Normally the episodes were about the Shadow’s fight against gangsters and corrupt government officials, but “The Flight Of The Vulture” took place out west. Lamont Cranston and the lovely Margo Lane rode out one day and stumbled into a Roy Rogers episode.

The basic plot was a fraud man who moved about buying old nags and substituting them into a barn where he kept a herd of heavily-insured purebred horses. The insurance company had inspected the purebred horses to verify they were worth the policy amounts.

After getting the policy, the fraudster moved the purebred horses far away, then filled the barn with old broken-down horses that otherwise would have gone to the glue factory. Next he set fire to the barn. One charbroiled horse looked much the same as any other. The man collected the money, moved to a different state, rented another farm, and repeated with a different insurance company.

One of the old horses had been purchased from a farmer who needed the money. The son of the farm, little Bobby, was in tears at seeing his old friend led away, ostensibly to work at another farm. Cranston and Lane were dragged in, for who can go out riding with a clear conscience and ignore a blubbing boy. They investigated and managed to get the old horses out the back way just as the barn was set on fire. Pure melodrama. What else can be said?

CANDY MATSON was an old-time radio series that ran from 1949 to 1951, about a female private investigator. It was unusual for the time. Candy Matson didn’t scream or have fainting spells in her job, and was as tough as her male counterparts when it came to violent situations. The episodes were written and produced by Monte Masters, whose wife Natalie Park played the lead role.

The dialogue was snappy and the action brisk. Matson lived in a penthouse apartment on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco, from where most of her cases began. Her boyfriend was SFPD Detective Ray Mallard.

Her best friend and confidant was Rembrandt Watson. He was a blatant poofter, rather surprising in those days when homosexuality wasn’t just a sin but a felony offense. His part was played seriously, not as a comic turn.

“Valley Of The Moon” was a 1949 episode. Watson invited Matson to go along with him to a Sonoma dude ranch. When they arrived, most of the cabins were taken by a sheriff’s posse, who were searching for the missing owner of the adjacent ranch. Matson made friends with Jeff, one of the cowpokes, and didn’t make friends with his boss and the owner of Moon Valley ranch, who was a grumpy sort. She met another guest at the ranch, the Duchess, once a famous celebrity in Europe and now a lush.



Matson escaped being murdered but the Duchess and the other ranch owner were not so fortunate. Like other episodes of this series, little was explained until the final five minutes, when Matson would launch into a 5-minute monologue explaining who did what to whom.

It seemed that an international winery wanted to buy both ranches and convert them into a huge vineyard. Jeff and the Duchess did some dirty work and when the other ranch owner wouldn't agree to the deal, they silenced him in a quicksand pool. Jeff silenced the Duchess with a poisoned glass of booze, but when Matson exposed him, he blabbed all to the sheriff's posse.

RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE was an old-time radio series from 1949 to 1953. Almost all of the episodes were set in New York City, but Richard Diamond was occasionally hired for out-of-town work. "The Oklahoma Cowboy Murder Case" was a 1950 episode written by Blake Edwards, best remembered today for his Pink Panther movies.

Clay Baxter rode into town from his ranch in Oklahoma, by train, not a horse, and hired Diamond to investigate the suspicious death of his brother Will. Supposedly he was thrown from a horse and fractured his skull on a rock, but Clay didn't believe it. His brother was a good horseman and would have known how to take a fall. Further, he thought Will's wife Wilma did it to inherit the ranch and wealth.

Out west, Diamond visited the fatal site with Clay. He brought back the rock and asked the county coroner to compare it to the wound. No match and the skull fracture would not have killed Will. Re-examination of the body revealed that someone had poked a knitting needle through Will's eye into his brain while he was unconscious, and killed him that way.

Will's horse came back lame, with a cut in its leg, which everyone attributed to a scrape during the incident. Diamond found a bit of the knitting needle in its wound, meaning the horse was deliberately lamed. The body was discovered by a pair of miners who worked diggings nearby. Diamond visited them but they couldn't supply any useful clues.

The ranch foreman was an obvious suspect for conking Will on the head, and only a woman would think of using a knitting needle for the coup de grace. Diamond had a plan though.

On returning to the Baxter ranch, he told Wilma that the miners saw the murder committed, and he was going back out there to get written statements. The miners, armed to the teeth, and Diamond likewise, set up a campfire in the night with straw figures sitting in the shadows. The decoys worked, and the ranch foreman found himself outgunned. From there, the path the two culprits would walk to the gallows was obvious.

The Diamond episodes always had a touch of humour in them. In this episode, when cowhands made jokes about city slickers having trouble riding horses, Diamond replied by inviting them to visit the New York City neighbourhood where he grew up. That quieted them.

THE TWELVE WAYS OF CHRISTMAS (2012) by Sandra M. Odell is a collection of twelve stories founded on the song. "Git Along Little Dogies" is based on the 10 lords a-leaping line. Unfortunately they showed up during a cattle drive in Old Texas, and seemed like to cause a stampede. The trail boss had to speak firmly to the dancers with a six-shooter before they got the idea and vamoosed. A funny story, but a note to the artist who illustrated it; the cattle driven on the old trails were longhorns, not Holsteins.

"A New Genome" by Cathy Smith is a story from the 2017 anthology 49TH PARALLELS, edited by Hayden Trenhom, that could be too true even in our present. A Calgary rancher was harassed by animal rights activists, GMO beef producer corporations, water rights restrictions, and the carbon tax. A realistic story about a society that doesn't understand where their food comes from, extrapolated only slightly.

### **Meanwhile, Back In Town.**

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY was an old-time radio comedy that ran from 1935 to 1953 as a half-hour show before a live audience. The episodes were mostly written by Don Quinn.

Fibber, his real name according to one episode, and his wife Molly lived in the town of Wistful Vista. He was a braggart who more than lived up to his name, and was overconfident of his ability to perform any task. She always called him McGee, understandable in one way but strange for a wife to call her husband by his surname.



“Before A Western Campfire” was a 1949 episode that began with Fibber having read too many pulp Westerns. He got enthusiastic about setting around the campfire, which was awkward since he and Molly lived in town. They did, however, have a fireplace as the next best thing, so he collected logs to build a blaze.

He mentioned that he had gotten good fresh wood but that remark passed by Molly. Green wood is a no-no for fireplaces because it produces creosote in the chimney, a serious fire hazard if it builds up. Fibber said he wanted greasewood like the pulp stories, but none being available, he smeared some transmission grease on the logs. Molly told him she could wrap sewing thread around the logs and thereby make them cottonwoods.

Other characters came and went for their gag routines, all of them talking in phony Texas accents. A couple of songs were interspersed, and Eddie Cantor made a surprise appearance for no apparent reason. The fireplace began smoking and the smoke filled room. Fibber opened a window but that didn’t seem to help much. I have a fireplace and I know the only reason smoke would fill a room would be because the chimney damper hadn’t been opened.

That didn’t seem to occur to the McGees, or more correctly to the scriptwriter. The smoke became so dense that the McGees abandoned the house and visited a friend. Quinn obviously churned out this script too close to deadline and didn’t have time to think up a better and more logical ending.

Leslie Charteris made his reputation with his series about The Saint, real name Simon Templar, a Robin Hood character who first appeared in print in 1928 and lasted into the 1990s. Besides about 100 novels and short stories, The Saint appeared in movies, on stage, radio, and television. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrlibrary.org](http://www.otrlibrary.org).)

“Death Of A Cowboy” was a 1951 episode written by Michael Cramoy. It began with Tex McGowan visiting The Saint in New York City after someone took a shot at him as he was getting out of a taxicab. That sent him to Templar asking for protection. Every bad Hollywood cliché about Texas cowboy oil millionaires was trotted out, included a phony accent by an actor who had obviously grown up east of the Mississippi.

McGowan suspected a cattle broker in Chicago had been cheating him, and reckoned to head on up yonder to deal with the varmint. Notwithstanding the

attempted assassination, McGowan wanted to have some fun in all those Manhattan nightclubs he had heard about. Against the advice of Templar, he went out yeehawing until the early morning hours. That terminated when McGowan was terminated, shot dead in front of his hotel.

The murderer was seen by Templar, and in turn was now gunning for him to remove an eyewitness. From there it was the usual to-ing and fro-ing found in any private investigator story. The fro-ing was a train trip to Chicago to finger the hitman.

On arrival in Chicago, Templar and a police detective were met at the train station by gunfire in the streets. Not much change compared to today. More clichés were trotted out, this time the ones about the private investigator being knocked unconscious, held at gunpoint, escaped with a single bound, and all that.

The cattle broker, the boss of the operation, also followed tradition, wanting his bwah-ha!-ha! moment to gloat over Templar and explain his master plan to rule the stockyards, if not the world. It ended poorly for him and once more the rangelands were made safe for the honest cowboy.

“The Guy From Gower Gulch” was an episode of JEFF REGAN, INVESTIGATOR, aired in 1948 and written by Jackson Gillis and Larry Roman. Jeff Regan (pronounced “ree-gun”) was a private investigator who worked for a man named Lyon. Regan was often referred to as the Lyon’s Eye because the boss seldom left his office, much like Nero Wolfe.

Gower Gulch was an actual physical address in Los Angeles, back when the movie studios made their Westerns on ranches in the area, long since urbanized. The cowboy actors were real cowboys, and hung out there in the local taverns when not working.

The episode began with Regan assigned to go down to the county jail to talk to an inmate named Davey Crockett (no relation) who would pay \$100 to have a package delivered. The item was a film canister wrapped inside a sweater.

Regan picked it up but subsequently there were many alarums and excursions, as several other people wanted that film as well. He managed to get it back to Lyon’s office and they watched the reel to see why everyone was chasing after it. The reel was a travelogue about Peru and included a horse race sequence.

Crockett was bailed out by a stranger but was quickly checked into a morgue by another person, so he wasn't able to explain what was in the film to watch for. There was much hue and cry as three different groups contested with Regan and each other.

The case came down to the film having shown a horse winning a race by several lengths. The nag had since been imported into California. Keeping quiet about it would allow some profitable bets to be placed. The problem was that one group tried to pull off an insurance fraud by substituting a different horse without the consent of the owner.

Lots of twists in the plot kept Regan, and the listener, confused. Eventually everything was worked out with the liberal application of bullets and beatings.

DEJA MOO (2018) by Kirsten Weiss was a novel in a cozy series about Madelyn Kosloski, who operated a paranormal museum in the village of San Benedetto, California. I ordinarily would not bother with such a series but since cows and cowbells were mentioned, I'll shove it into this column.

We never had cowbells on any of our cattle back on the ranch, and I never saw any on other ranches or dairy farms. If your eyes are so bad you can't spot the herd out in the pasture, cowbells are pretty much moot.

Meanwhile, back at the cozy, it was the village custom to erect a giant Christmas Cow made of straw and about three stories tall. Despite volunteers guarding it around the clock, it usually went up in flames before the day. Villagers made bets on how long it would last before someone torched it. Kosloski didn't like it because it displaced her museum as the leading tourist attraction.

This time around, troublemakers dressed as gingerbread men shot flaming arrows into the Christmas Cow. One of them also shot a volunteer through the chest, Bill Eldrich, president of the local dairy association. As the police made their enquiries and firemen hosed down the ashes, Kosloski was more concerned with the tourist trade through her museum and gift shop. Her seasonal exhibit was a set of cowbells reputed to bring death to those who heard them.

There were a variety of motives and suspects, such as a rogue farmer selling raw milk who was under investigation by Eldrich. There were business rivalries plus the usual soap operas around the village. Kosloski wasn't the only Miss Marple. Her mother was even more aggressive as an amateur sleuth. That led to serious

trouble, as when someone wired a bomb to the ignition of Mom's car. Fortunately she used a remote starter.

It came down to a real estate developer who wanted those smelly cows out of the way so she could turn the pastures into condos. To her, the only good dairy farmer was a dead one.

**Farm Life Can Be Murderous.**

BARRIE CRAIG, CONFIDENTIAL INVESTIGATOR was an old-time radio series that ran from 1951 to 1955. It was an average detective series, which is not necessarily a criticism. It never reached the heights but is still worth listening to as a standard private investigator show.

"Hay Is For Homicide" is a 1954 episode written by Louis Vittes. Craig was taking a vacation in rural Vermont, accompanied by Jake, who was the elevator operator in Craig's office building back in Manhattan. Jake originally farmed in Vermont but told Craig he didn't like being so close to New Hampshire.

They were out for an evening stroll on a country road when they heard a woman scream. Investigating further, they found a hay wagon in the road, the horse standing idly by, and a man's body in the hay, but no sign of the woman. Craig noted that the man had a pale complexion even though dressed in farm clothes, which seemed suspicious since farmers are well tanned.

Craig and Jake walked down the road to a farmhouse to make a telephone call to the police, and were greeted by a strange young woman. So much for all those farmer's daughter jokes, remarked Jake. She did in fact claim to be the farmer's daughter, but Craig noted her creamy complexion, coiffed hairdo, manicure, and fashionable dress. Not likely.

She told them there was no telephone in the house, as Pappy didn't approve of them, and suggested they walk further down the road to the next farmhouse. Instead, Craig and Jake walked back to the hay wagon, where they found the corpse had gone missing despite the knife in his heart.

Once more to the farmhouse, where the woman had disappeared but a gangster greeted them, waving a gun and demanding to know where the loot was. Since Craig and Jake didn't know, they were in a spot. The gangster called out a woman from a back room, but she was not the one who was there before.



Subsequent conversation revealed that the dead man had hidden \$30,000 from a bank robbery on the farm but a person unknown killed him before he could get it. This was very annoying to all concerned, especially Craig.

At this point, the rotating cast began double-crossing each other in a multiplicity of ways. There were so many twists in the narrative that the listener needed pen and graph paper to keep track of who did what to whom. The gangster was finally tripped up as the one who found the cash, but there were other excursions that tangled the story. It was, however, a clever plot, and worth listening to.

ALL NATURAL MURDER (2013) by Staci McLaughlin was a novel in a cozy series about Dana Lewis of the O’Connell Organic Farm and Spa in Blossom Valley, California. She worked as a jill-of-trades at the farm, which, in addition to growing or milking things, had a health spa, tourist cabins, a restaurant serving items such as curried lentil burgers, and sold organic food and souvenirs. Lewis also posted daily items for the farm’s blog.

Dana and her sister Ashlee were adult women but still lived at home with their mother. Ashlee had the worst taste in men and seldom kept them as boyfriends for more than a few months. Her current guy was Bobby Joe Jones, who drove monster trucks, operated a grill at the fairgrounds, and cheated on Ashlee. They had a very loud and public argument not long before his body was found at the end of Chapter 1.

Ashlee was the only suspect for the police, so Dana had to go into Miss Marple mode. In between, she still had her job at the farm, such as dealing with guests who checked in and expected beef and potatoes for their meals instead of tofu substitutes and salads. The ducklings kept escaping from their pond and had to be rounded up every so often.

Dana’s second run-in, after the police, was with Crusher, a competitor of Jones in the monster truck events. She was caught in his cabin, snooping instead of cleaning the room. There were various alarms and excursions, with many suspects since Jones wasn’t too careful about how he picked his friends. The killer was in the monster truck business, and the motive was theft of a stunt idea.

Dana uncovered so many other stories that it would take the police a while to clear all those cases. The farm settled back into its routine. Fortunately Jones was murdered elsewhere, so that wouldn’t bump up the death statistics for the farm.

A HEALTHY HOMICIDE (2015) had the O’Connell Organic Farm and Spa facing competition from a new rival The Pampered Life. The spa was a very upscale place, at least until its owner Carla Fitzpatrick was suffocated in one of her mud baths. Since several members of the farm had contact with the new spa, the Deppity Dawgs took the easy route and focused suspicion on the farm employees.

That put Dana Lewis busy sleuthing. She went about interrogating and snooping as such amateur detectives often do, coming up with some information on the basis of coincidence or wild surmise. Her list of suspects grew to about ten. The farm owners and staff worried about rumours swirling about town that one of them did it, specifically Gretchen Levitt. She was certainly the main suspect of the police.

Considering that Lewis was doing all the break-and-enter and criminal trespass while hunting for clues, perhaps the police should have concentrated on her. She hardly had time for farm work, although she did talk to the pigs to externalize her thoughts about the case. The pigs said nothing, being wiser animals than humans.

Lewis got herself trapped with the murderer, the jealous wife of a man who had been having an affair with Fitzpatrick. Insert the standard clause “with a single bound she was free”, and so back to the farm for a hearty helping of Tater Tot Casserole and Tangy Mustard Sauce.

MURDER MOST WHOLESOME (2016) brought in Zennia Patrakio, a farm co-worker of Dana Lewis, for a star turn in the series. Patrakio met up with an ex-lover Birch Keller, who lived in a nearby commune and died in Patrakio’s front yard.

The two women began sleuthing, for you know who the police suspected. They soon latched on to Keller’s sister Olive, who didn’t get on well with him. Patrakio took a leave of absence from the farm restaurant where she was the cook, leaving Lewis to substitute. Lewis was not a good cook, but the farm manager was no cook at all, so they improvised.

The commune was in financial trouble and in danger of losing its land. Lewis had to deal with her nutcase sister Ashlee, and farm animals needed care no matter what. The story shifted to the commune and its problems. Nature tripping was all very well, but somebody had to do the work and pay the bills.

It was there that the murderer lived, who had personal resentments that did not go away with herbal tea or meditation. Fortunately the death toll didn't count against the O'Connell Farm, although police would have noticed that pesky Lewis woman hanging about again.

From there to the organic recipes, starting off with a Tofu Stir Fry, with homemade flavoured water and lemon curd. I had a cheeseburger and fries just before I read this book, so I wasn't perturbed.

SOWED TO DEATH (2017) by Peg Cochran was a novel in a cozy series about Shelby McDonald of the Love Blossom Farm, near the village of Lovett, Michigan. On the side, she picked up spot cash by blogging as The Farmer's Daughter.

The county fair was in progress. McDonald had high hopes for her jams and jellies to win a blue ribbon. As might be expected, there were all sorts of displays and demonstrations. One was put on by volunteer fireman Jake Taylor, who demonstrated the Jaws of Life on a scrapped car. Instead of extricating a dummy, he found the body of Zeke Barnstable, an old enemy.

That made him suspect #1, and sent McDonald into Miss Marple mode. Lots of entanglements were uncovered. Barnstable had a long list of sins and in turn was sinned against by others. Each chapter started with blog comments by McDonald about cooking or market gardening. She did have to get in some farming in between bouts of sleuthing.

The county fair had its excitements as well. Someone sabotaged a competitor at the pie baking contest by sprinkling pepper into the pie. You laugh, but rural baking contests are vicious enough to frighten a big-city gangster. The body count climbed, although more from skeletons excavated on farms (not McDonald's) than fresh corpses.

The murderer had been blackmailed by Barnstable, whose wife had run over the murderer's son, after which he killed her and buried the body in a pasture. The ground in the fields around Lovett was well fertilized by blood. The final confrontation involved a stampeded horse, followed by a with-a-single-bound-she-was-free photo finish.

From there to some recipes, starting off with apple crisp, then peach kuchen, and turkey tetrazzini. Purge the memory of the dead with comfort food.

**Barnyard Humour.**

"Down On The Farm" was a 1937 episode of FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY where the couple were vacationing at a dude farm. When they arrived, Fibber thought he'd be able to give the farmer the benefit of his experience as a farm boy from Peoria, Illinois. Instead, he found out with a shock that farming had moved on since his day.

Farmhouses had running hot and cold water, for instance. Dairy cows were milked with machinery, not by hand as in his day, which would have been the 1890s. The farmhands knew more about farming than Fibber, much to his astonishment.

The episode was a series of gags as Fibber repeatedly got his comeuppance. Finally he told Molly to pack up. They'd go to Manhattan, where he would still feel a rube but with better reason. He'd be shocked at today's farming, with livestock chipped and DNAed for identification, computer-guided tractors, and Webcams so the farmer can watch the livestock without having to leave his house.

"World Premiere Of LASSO LAW", written by Phil Leslie and Leonard Levenson, was a 1954 episode from the non-audience episodes of the series declining days as OTR slouched to its death. Quite funny, even without an audience to tell the listener when to laugh.

McGee and Molly took some friends to a drive-in theatre to watch a new Western movie. The dialogue alternated between the car's occupants and the movie. It was the latter which was the funnier, as it parodied the genre, not too difficult to do.

Each scene of the movie featured Wild Will Wyoming talking to someone victimized by the villains. All through the movie, no matter if it was grand theft, rape, or cattle rustling, Wyoming's response to the tearful victim's heartrending story was: "*Well, we'll see about that.*" He then mounted his horse and galloped off without actually doing anything.

Even McGee had to wonder, but finally Wyoming rode into a box canyon where the villains were hiding. He was one man against a gang, and armed only with a guitar, but naturally triumphed.



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 early shows, however, got off to a different start. They were recorded before a live audience as comedy, instead of being detective drama. This was illustrated by the second episode “Cousin Jeff And The Pigs”, written by Pauline Hopkins.

Valentine's cousin Jeff was a pig farmer who took the city newspapers and noticed his advertisement. He came into town and offered Valentine \$100 to help him find a wife. Since the practice wasn't doing well, the deal was made. Jeff couldn't find a woman back home because singles were scarce; they quickly married or were being courted by other farmers.

This episode was not a mystery but a sitcom. Valentine had trouble lining up single women who would be interested in marrying a pig farmer, no matter how well to do. He tried showgirls from a Broadway musical, waitresses, and dared to even pimp Brooksie. She didn't mind and dated Jeff even though she had no intention of going out into the country.

Valentine was perturbed because he suddenly realized he loved Brooksie. When he heard through the grapevine that Jeff had suddenly been married overnight by a Justice of the Peace, he panicked. But it all turned out well. The woman Jeff married turned out to be one of Valentine's earlier selections, who wanted out of the big city and back to the farm country where she had been raised.

That cleared the air, and henceforth Valentine was free to squire Brooksie about town. If you first started listening to the later episodes, as I did, it was jarring to come back to the earlier ones and hear a comedy with audience laughter.

## THE DAWN OF TELEVISION: PART 3

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #309 and 367.]

### Factual.

Television had troubles being born. If it had appeared when it was supposed to, old-time radio shows would have died two decades before they did in our timeline. THE GREAT TELEVISION RACE (1982) by Joseph H. Udelson covers the history of television from 1925 to 1941. The narrative is filled with false starts, side tracks, bitter legal feuds that frightened away further development, and preemption by events such as the Great Depression and World War Two. Not until 1948 did television finally become a mass-market phenomenon.

The earliest experiments in transmitting moving visual images began in the 1870s, but the first practical television sets didn't appear until 1925. A brief boom in television took place, with broadcasters transmitting scheduled programmes announced in advance. There was a flurry of receiving sets sold to homeowners. The industry failed by 1933 because by then movies made the transition to sound and had far better image resolution.

The hard times of the Great Depression didn't help. Complicating matters was a feud between RCA and Philo T. Farnsworth over conflicting patents. That wasn't settled until 1939, when the two rivals agreed to cross-license their patents with each other.

Another problem was the small image. Television screens were only 4 to 7 inches wide. That precluded the family gathering around the set unless they sat with their knees against the cabinet.

Just as RCA settled back to enjoy the fruits of their labours, other broadcasters began demanding a common and technically better system to be implemented, so that all receivers could see all transmissions. That dispute was resolved on July 1, 1941. The industry looked forward to the glorious dawn that was breaking as the sun finally rose on television. On December 7, the Rising Sun came up over the horizon from the west, not the east, and delayed the advent of mass television another five years.



## In This New Issue Complete Instructions For Building a Television Receiver

There can be no question but that Television is here to stay. Like radio, its sudden popularity came practically overnight. It has taken a decided grip on public opinion and bids fair to sweep the entire country in a never-before-witnessed blaze of enthusiasm. So, fans! Dig out the old soldering iron, the bus bar, and the rest of your paraphernalia and get to work on the latest hobby. Build yourself a Television Receiver.

Of course, Television is far from perfected. It is still in a most elementary stage. There is little use in trying to gloss over the truth. But a start has been made and it remains for the "fans" to do their share, as in radio, in helping to develop the new art.

In the last issue of TELEVISION there are full instructions from which you ambitious enthusiasts can construct an efficient experimental set. With this set you will be able to receive some of the Television programs now being broadcast. Experimenting will continually improve reception. Get your copy of this new issue today! Start to work on your Television tonight! Be the first in your neighborhood to have a Television set. The old "fan days" are here again. Don't miss the fun!

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Please say you saw it in AMAZING STORIES

It took a couple of years for the television manufacturers to get going after the war. Early sets were very expensive, and screens were still small. The first adopters were taverns, which put them up over the bars to attract and keep drinkers, especially for sports contests. Sports bars are nothing new and were around long before the large-screens of today. They began in the days of radio, when sports fans gathered to listen while having a beer or two or ten.

Like personal computers in the early 1980s, it was best to wait for the technology to improve. Television didn't affect radio until the early 1950s, but after that the change was exponential. Larger screens and better reception made it more acceptable to home viewers. By 1955, old-time radio was dead. In the late 1950s, larger screens were common and while not cheap, were affordable on time payments.

### The Early Days.

In earlier installments of this column, I mentioned 1930s movies where television was superscience fiction. An example from the pulp magazines is "Television Hill" by George McLociard (1931 February and March issues, AMAZING STORIES, available as a free pdf from [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)).

The inventors were Wentworth (no first name given), Cyrus King, and his son Jim, who had developed a liquid-film television, using photographic emulsions which accepted an image, displayed it on a glass screen, then wiped it via electrical charges and in a split second display the next image. Not too far off today's liquid crystal large screens, in fact.

What was different was that the television set could receive images not from a transmitting camera but by focusing two superscience beams on a distant target. In other words, a spying device, range unlimited. If the beams were made too powerful, they became charged-particle beams and would set fire nearby targets and heat up farther away targets. Tesla would be proud.

Wentworth then cackled: *We have sole possession of a machine by means of which we can follow any movement on the surface, or under the surface, within the range of our power. There is no such thing as solid walls to television! Everything from here to New York could be laid on our screen as though the walls of the house and buildings were made of glass. We could at will, give a complete X-ray examination of any person or object anywhere in a radius of seven thousand miles. That is television!*



*“And, then, McManus,” Wentworth’s voice lowered as he leaned closer, “to climax that, the rays, the carrier beam of the projectors, are potential weapons, by which we can strike as well as see. Cathode rays with all their reputed destructiveness are a mere child’s play toy compared to the awful beam issuing from the mouths of our projectors.. But, never you fear, McManus! We have those rays under control so that no harm comes when we are in operation ...*

I was surprised he didn’t go bwah-ha!-ha!. Television Hill, as the research laboratory and transmitters were named, was heavily fortified with machine-gun nests and hard men, the very place from which to rule the world, bwah-ha!-ha! The next stage of the television was to explore the planets, since its range was unlimited given sufficient electrical power.

Finances were a problem, so Television Hill set up a news reel subsidiary and was able to snoop into any news event without sending a cameraman. Distance was abolished, and so was privacy, as the device could see into any house of office without the occupants being aware of it.

The Hill was plagued by industrial espionage and dirty tricks, but those were a minor sideshow when the main shock came. Someone else had television, possibly even before them, and was spying on the spies.

There was war in heaven and earth, fought with transmitter beams powered up into particle beams. It seemed to be a draw as the story drew to a close, but the conclusion left several threads dangling for a possible serial.

### **The Transition.**

Since the radio networks were racing to get into television, there was no taboo in old-time radio programmes about mentioning television. Many series appeared in both media. Comedian Jack Benny, for example, would finish his radio show with the announcement that in a few minutes he would be appearing on his television show.

DUFFY’S TAVERN was a comedy OTR series that straddled the transition. (This and other OTR shows are available as free mp3s from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org).) It was a failure on television, but later television series such as CHEERS owe a debt to it. The radio version tavern did not have a television set itself.

The tavern was a run-down dive on 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue in Manhattan. The lead character was Archie the manager, equally run down. Duffy was the owner, but he was never heard on the show, although often referred to. His ugly daughter Miss Duffy was the waitress, who was offended only when customers didn’t make a pass at her.

Supporting characters were Eddie the waiter and Clancy the foot patrol cop. Finnegan was the village idiot, if Manhattan is considered as a village. The Mad Russian, originally from Eddie Cantor’s show, made frequent appearances.

A 1949 episode guest starring Mickey Rooney was an example of the joking about early television. Rooney visited the tavern because Archie the manager was trying to interest him in financing a television play which Archie would produce. Archie thought Rooney would be a natural for television because he was a short man and would easily fit on a 7-inch screen.

Eddie says television was all right while sitting at a bar watching it, but he didn’t like the after-effects. “*You mean the eye strain*” said Archie. “*No, I mean the hangover*”, replied Eddie. Sports bars, by the way, are nothing new. Previous generations had them, first listening to contests on radio, then watching the early television sets, which were expensive and beyond the reach of most people.

Finnegan arrived in the middle of the discussion. He said he couldn’t watch it because the screen was 7 inches wide and his sister sat in front of him. She had a 12-inch head. A minor character appeared and Archie asked his opinion about television. “*I don’t know. I don’t drink.*”, he replied.

These jokes were funny to the contemporary audience who understood the context of television in those days. Modern listeners who don’t know how television initially spread will be baffled.

Across the Atlantic, Tony Hancock made fun of the teething troubles of television in a June 1955 episode of his radio series HANCOCK’S HALF HOUR, written by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, titled “The Television Set”. Hancock and several supporting characters used their real names but different lifestyles.

In the series, Hancock was a failed stand-up comedian who only worked occasionally. He took in boarders such as Sidney James (a spiv who operated

on the wrong side of the law), Bill Kerr (an Australian who played the village idiot), and a live-in cook or secretary played by various actresses, in this episode Andree Melly, a francophone.

The episode opened with Hancock regretting that his was the last household on the street to get a television set. He visited a High Street shop but the prices were too dear. James was willing to supply a set, no questions to be asked, but even for Hancock's tiny budget he couldn't do any better than a DIY set that needed to be assembled.

The set had 5,000 parts to be fitted. Hancock demurred but James assured him that a 3-year-old could put the set together. Hancock was a complete failure at constructing the set. After the situation had been milked for laughs, he called in the next-door neighbour's 3-year-old son to do the job properly.

Hancock then watched his first television programmes, providing a running commentary on what he saw. He didn't like the weatherman. Too smarmy, all teeth and trousers, and, especially annoying, he laughed when he said rain was predicted.

Now to sit back and relax, and enjoy a mystery play on the telly. Another neighbour, who might be called a boor if he weren't already a blithering idiot, came by to enjoy the entertainment. Just as the climax of the play approached, the set went wonky. The neighbour barged in and tried to fix the set, causing an electrical fire that burned down Hancock's house.

Not to worry though. The episodes were zero-reset shows, so the following week Hancock was back in his house on another adventure. But no television set.

*At right: 18-month-old Dale takes a close look at the first television set the Speirs family owned, purchased in 1957. At that time we still lived in the rural village of Eckville, in west-central Alberta. Because the area was halfway between the big cities of Edmonton and Calgary, we could pick up quite a few stations, not to mention Red Deer, where we moved in 1963 to a ranch just north of it.*

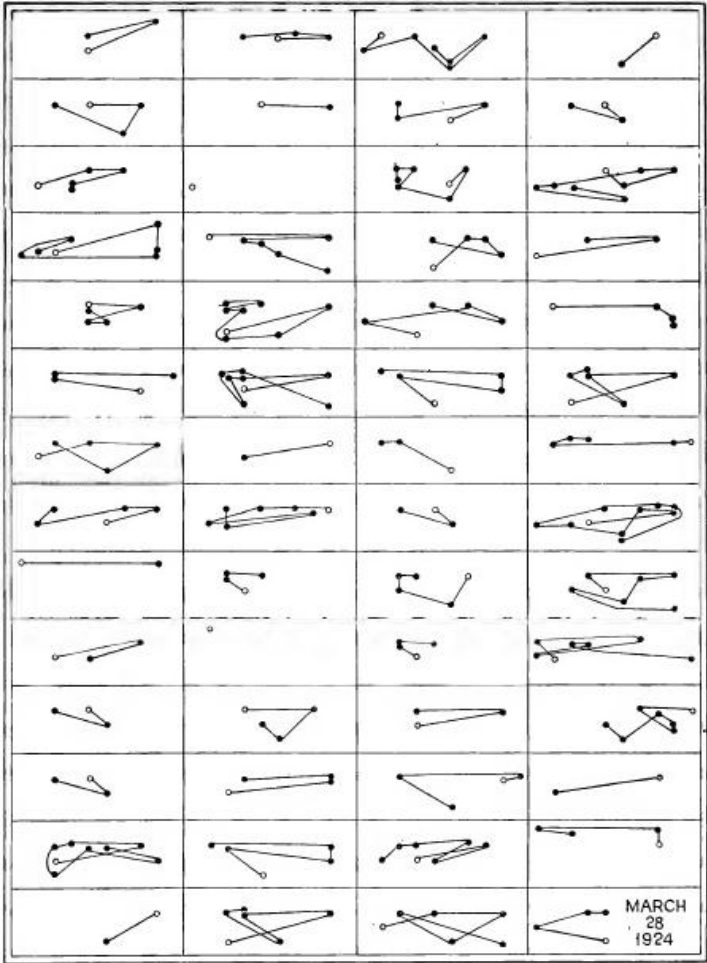


[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #335 and 409.]

Qwerty.

Numerous science fiction pulp magazines have been and are being scanned as free downloads from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org) and [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org). Well worth browsing, either by title or theme on the site search engines. In the 1929 April issue of AMAZING STORIES was "Buried Treasure" by Miles J. Breuer.

A group of university students in the year 3008 were excavating a site dating from 1924. They found a piece of paper inside an iron cylinder which had some sort of cipher, which used zigzag lines, as opposed to letters, numbers, or dancing men. The paper was helpfully illustrated, as shown below.



Eventually the clever lads deduced that it was based on an ancient writing machine called the typewriter. The paper was placed over the keyboard and the nodes of the zigzags corresponded to letters on the keyboard. The decrypt read as follows:

*Got your warning in time to hide the stuff, a hundred thousand dollars' worth. Built air-tight concrete vault, will keep forever, below corner stone of new power house, outside the foundation, 20 feet under ground. Dig three feet square; the ring for pulling the door open is directly below figures 1924 on corner stone. Bart. March 28 1924*

It was a large horde of liquor bottles hidden during the Prohibition years, inside a chamber designed to preserve the booze indefinitely. Alcoholic beverages were no longer drunk in 3008, so the students had no idea what the liquid was for. They tested it, then tried a sip, then another, and soon got roaring drunk.

The plot was predictable and trivial but the cipher was interesting. I've read a fair bit about cryptography but don't recall any codes using typewriter keyboards.

Tipsu Tupsjft.

"The Information Stealers" by Frederick C. Dyer (1968 January, THE MAN FROM UNCLE MAGAZINE) was visionary in some ways but poorly thought out in others. A company called in a private detective because their sensitive business information was being stolen by insiders and sold to competitors.

The detective discovered the method the hackers (although that word hadn't been coined yet) were using was to encrypt the stolen data as Irish runes along the sides of display screens. Users assumed that the runes were either hash marks due to a defect in the computer or sysop markings for techie purposes. The culprits had another CRT monitor slaved to the one displaying the runes and photographed the screen. That made no sense. If they were slaving computer monitors, why not just photograph the data itself instead of runes?

It wasn't well thought out, but the next few pages are prescient for a 1968 story. The detective named the culprit and expected the company executives to call the police. Instead, they quietly got rid of the wayward employee by dismissing him without a reference.



Company executives pointed out to the detective that prosecuting the man would cost big money, probably get him a suspended sentence as a first-time offender, and publicly embarrass the company. Customers would shift to a more secure supplier. It would be better to identify the competitors who were buying the stolen data and deal with them informally. That still happens today.

**Pme-Ujnf Sbejp.**

“Library Book”, based on a story by Cornell Woolrich, was a 1945 episode of the old-time radio show SUSPENSE. (This and hundreds of other OTR shows are available as free downloads at [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org)) A librarian received a returned book that had one page torn out. The adjacent page had score marks from a razor, indicating that whomever did it, was cutting out certain words on the missing page.

Prudence Roberts, the librarian, deduced the words using a second copy of the book. She first collected the words, then sorted them in logical order as subject-verb-object, and collated what appears to be a ransom message.

The next step was to see who last checked out the book. She backtracked to a missing woman and then went into full gear as Miss Marple. The decoded message led her into a kidnap case with various alarms and excursions. All ended well with the rescue of the distressed dame.

“Hot New Year’s Party” was an episode of the old-time radio series CASEY, CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER, written by Alonzo Dean Cole, based on characters created by novelist George Harmon Coxe. The episode aired on New Year’s Day, 1948, and was set on that day.

As most people recovered from the festivities, Casey and his girlfriend, reporter Ann Williams, were coming off duty from a long night covering a warehouse fire believed to be arson. A fireman died in the blaze, so if the arsonists are caught, they will face murder charges.

The duo were immediately sent off by their editor to investigate a report of a university professor who went missing on his way home from a party. Casey figured out that the professor witnessed the setting of the fire and was kidnapped by the arsonists. They now had a problem because if they killed him outright, that would touch off a public outcry that would not end until the arsonists were sent to the electric chair.

Casey was caught by the arsonists and taken away to be terminated. He escaped but the search for the professor proved futile. Police found the professor’s wallet, with a coded message in it. The professor didn’t want to leave a message in the clear that the arsonists would find.

He coded it in ancient Greek using a technique known to them as a scytale, where the message was written on a piece of cloth wrapped around the arm. When the cloth was unspiraled, it appeared to have random markings. The recipient then rewrapped it and read the message.

The gangsters were unschooled in such things. Actually they were unschooled period, and so the rest of the plot was predictable. Someone who knew Greek read the message, the police went to the hideout, and freed the hostage. Like most coded message stories, it relied too much on overly subtle codes that no one in real life would decrypt. Nonetheless it ended well. A few months later, Sparky got a good workout up the river in Sing Sing.

Philo Vance was a private investigator in a series of novels by S.S. Van Dine. The character was very popular back when although he is mostly forgotten today. There were movies and, from 1945 to 1950, a radio series. From the 1949 season of the series was “Cipher Murder Case”, writer uncredited.

A gang was raiding high-society parties, holding the attendees at gunpoint and taking their jewels and cash. The episode opened with the police shooting it out with a couple of robbers, one of whom was left behind dead. In his pocket was a piece of paper with the words “live on”.

The District Attorney asked Vance to investigate since the police were stymied. He immediately decoded the message and told them the house number and street of the place the men had raided, but refused to explain how he knew. This was the typical methodology of the show, where knowledge was hidden from the listener until the denouement, when all was explained.

The police wiretapped the suspected gang leader’s telephone and heard him say another code phrase. Once again, Vance immediately decoded it as an address. The police caught up to the crooks, but still hadn’t found the ringleader who was giving orders to the gang. Third time lucky at the next party, attended by Vance in white tie and tails, which enabled him to expose a society matron as the brains behind the operation.

The code was the key phrase or Playfair method, whereby a phrase was used to encode a message. Vance said the thieves were using his name as the key phrase. It is easier to use his example than to explain it in words:

PHILO        VANCE  
1 2 3 4 5        6 7 8 9 0

“live on” was the house number and street for the gang to hit: 4360 58. Clever enough for the average listener, although an enormous coincidence and/or burst of ego to have his name as the key phrase.

“The Mathematical Murder Case” aired in 1950, again writer uncredited, was another Philo Vance decrypt. It opened with an underworld character named Eddie Stone working on a new fraud scheme based on mathematical tricks invented by the ancient Greek mathematician Euclid.

Adapting his methods to cards, Stone used it to win bets predicting what a card was. I tried it out myself, not for bets mind you, and it actually does work. I won’t explain it; you can download the mp3 and hear it for yourself. Memorize it and impress all your friends at parties.

Stone unfortunately did not live long enough to impress his friends at the next party. The District Attorney, who in this series did not trust the local police, once more called in Philo Vance, who of course knew everything about the mathematical tricks.

After assorted alarums and excursions, Vance trapped the murderer by getting him to admit the killing while standing next to a live telephone that had a wire recorder connected to the other end. And the card you are holding is the 8 of clubs. Am I right?

**Qvaamft.**

I reviewed a batch of cozy mysteries about The Puzzle Lady in the previous installment of this column in OPUNTIA #409. This is a series by Parnell Hall about Cora Felton, a battleaxe in the village of Bakerhaven, Connecticut, who had a nationally syndicated column about puzzles. She had a multiplicity of ex-husbands, and a dubious past as an alcoholic and several other things.

Her real dirty secret was that she was not good at solving, much less constructing, crosswords and sudokus. Her niece Sherry Carter actually wrote

the column using Felton’s name. Carter preferred to remain in the background because she was trying to avoid an abusive ex-husband.

The bizarre nature of this series was that murderers in this village left crossword puzzles at the scene of the crime. When solved, they contained clues about the case. Presumably the killers knew Felton was the village Miss Marple and wanted to taunt or threaten her.

This is not an M.O. in police files anywhere else in the world. The local Deppity Dawgs therefore had to keep calling Felton in as a consultant, not knowing that she had to get help from others to solve the puzzles.

AND A PUZZLE TO DIE ON (2004) had Cora Felton working on a cold case. A young woman had been raped and murdered two decades ago and a man sentenced to life imprisonment for it. Felton figured she would find the real killer. So it was that a stream of murders and crosswords began threading their way through the novel.

As she sleuthed her way through the old evidence, Felton began receiving emails with crossword attachments. Clues multiplied and alarums diversified, from broken windows to road rage incidents. One crossword was solved in which every word was ‘murder’, and illustrated for the benefit of the doubtful reader that such a puzzle could be constructed.

Some of the crosswords were plain useless as clues, while others only meant something in retrospect. Felton worked in traditional Miss Marple mode, such as break-and-enter while searching for clues. The novel ended with a dramatic courtroom trial, at least as Hollywood imagines them. Judicial procedure and rules of evidence weren’t just violated, they were crumpled into a ball and tossed into a wastebasket. Perry Mason was never like this even at his worst.

STALKING THE PUZZLE LADY (2005) had Cora Felton and Sherry Carter taking a bus tour for televised appearances by The Puzzle Lady. The sponsor was Granville Grains, makers of Corn Toasties breakfast cereal. Felton needed the money, so she had to take the tour and flog the stuff at supermarkets along the way.

The television crew traveling with her was third-rate at best, people who didn’t qualify to film anything better than breakfast cereal commercials. The producer was a weak-chinned man who wore a jet-black rug that would frighten a

wolverine. The director was a small woman whose temperament made Felton look like a diplomat. Two child actors were along to play happy children eating Corn Toasties, but they were slightly too old to play their parts convincingly. The publicist was a Sparkle Plenty optimist who always saw the bright side in any event from a bowl of cereal to a gun battle.

The tour got off to a bad start when someone stuck a knife in Felton’s door and left a threatening crossword puzzle, illustrated for the reader to solve. A disturbed fan was stalking her, of the “If I can’t have her, then nobody can” type. The crowds were respectable at the tour stops, the kids were rotten, and the crew job steward was constantly filing grievances with the union.

The bodies and crosswords began flowing through the narrative like buckets of blood. The cast and crew bickered endlessly about budgets and job demarcation rules. The story ended in a gun battle in a supermarket between Felton and her stalker. She put the kibosh on both him and the tour. The publicist couldn’t put a positive spin on a spokeswoman who packed heat and used it.

THE PURLOINED PUZZLE (2018) began with 16-year-old Peggy Dawson asking Felton to solve a puzzle that some mysterious person had left for her. Dawson was promiscuous white trash who looked like she was legal age, in short, jailbait. The puzzle was stolen from her before she could give it to Felton. The latter had her own problems. Melvin Crabtree, one of her ex-husbands, arrived in the village, undoubtedly up to no good.

Fred Winkler, a young man in his 20s, had an even worse problem. Someone stabbed him and left the body lying on Main Street. That touched off a competition between the Deppity Dawgs and Felton over who would get credit for solving the case.

The police were arresting anyone who even only walked down the street, including Crabtree. What perturbed Felton most was that Crabtree had been stiffing her on alimony, but was able to come up with \$500,000 for cash bail. She snooped about his motel room and discovered he had a contract for an expose on The Puzzle Lady, with an \$800,000 advance.

Finally, about one-third of the way through the novel, somebody remembered Dawson’s stolen puzzle. Felton recovered it with yet another break-and-enter, as per standard Miss Marple investigative practices. The blank crossword was illustrated after Chapter 28 as fair play for the reader to find clues.

The solution was provided after Chapter 29 but provided no useful information. Crosswords and sudokus began turning up everywhere any suspect might have gone, including a second murder. Dawson and Crabtree were equally suspected but Felton proved the girl was the murderer and puzzle creator, using some convoluted arguments.

More importantly to Felton, she was able to get at her ex-husband for his book. Not to suppress it, because she wanted to get her hands on some of that \$800,000, but to ensure it was properly edited her way.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN PUZZLED (2006) illustrated what a tangled web could be weaved when practicing to deceive. Cora Felton was accused of plagiarism by a ne’er-do-well named Benny Southstreet. Since she was fronting for her publicity-shy niece Sherry Carter, the lawsuit put both of them in an awkward spot. After Southstreet was found dead, the police decided that Felton was The Usual Suspect, not just The Puzzle Lady, and charged her with murder.

The crosswords began appearing after Chapter 8 while the plot set-up was still in progress. Southstreet didn’t depart this life until Chapter 36, halfway through the novel, at which point the crosswords became grimmer and littered every crime scene. The plot diverted momentarily to a theft from an antiques store, which gave Felton some more break-and-enter opportunities.

She staged a J’accuse! meeting not in the living room of a manor house, but a town hall meeting, live in front of television cameras. It was indeed a tangled web, which began with Southstreet stealing antiques and being mistaken for a blackmailer, and ended with the murderer killing the wrong person for the wrong reasons.

It transpired that the plagiarism of the crosswords wasn’t. Through a convoluted path, they had actually been stolen from Carter. A complicated finish that might require some note-taking by the reader.

\$10,000 IN SMALL UNMARKED PUZZLES (2012) began with Cora Felton being asked by an attorney to deliver a blackmail payment of \$10,000 on behalf of a client. The demand letter contained a sudoku, which had been interpreted as meaning the blackmailer wanted Felton to do the drop. Seemed logical enough.



The cash drop went badly, what with a corpse and another sudoku. The Deppity Dawg’s investigation was hindered because someone borrowed the police camera and hadn’t returned it. Felton once again spent the night in the slammer but was soon freed to go Marpleing.

The dead man had a crossword in his pockets, much to the surprise of Felton and the police, who were expecting another sudoku. The plot then began alternating between crosswords and sudokus to a very blood finish. Unlike most cozies, this Miss Marple carried a handgun and wasn’t afraid to use it. Not just inflicting flesh wounds, but kill shots to the culprit’s head, thereby saving the cost of a trial.

1	2	9	8	3	5	6	7	4
7	8	3	2	4	6	5	1	9
5	4	6	7	1	9	2	8	3
9	6	1	5	7		8	3	2
3	5	2	1	9	8	4	6	7
8	7	4	6	2	3	9	5	1
2	3	8	4	5	1	7	9	6
6	9	7	3	8	2	1	4	5
4	1	5	9	6	7	3	2	8

The late unlamented murderer had purposely made the puzzles meaningless ro confuse both Felton and the reader. There was one critical turning point hinging on a cellphone which was valid when this book was published in 2012, but has since been rendered obsolete by advances in today’s smartphones. The ending of this book would have to be rewritten today, only seven short years later.

*Two sudokus I made for you. One is easy and the other is extremely difficult.*

			5					

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Ward, L.M., et al (2019) **Follow the oxygen: Comparative histories of planetary oxygenation and opportunities for aerobic life.** ASTROBIOLOGY 19:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2017.1779

Authors’ abstract: *Aerobic respiration, the reduction of molecular oxygen (O<sub>2</sub>) coupled to the oxidation of reduced compounds such as organic carbon, ferrous iron, reduced sulfur compounds, or molecular hydrogen while conserving energy to drive cellular processes, is the most widespread and bioenergetically favorable metabolism on Earth today.*

*Aerobic respiration is essential for the development of complex multicellular life; thus the presence of abundant O<sub>2</sub> is an important metric for planetary habitability. O<sub>2</sub> on Earth is supplied by oxygenic photosynthesis, but it is becoming more widely understood that abiotic processes may supply meaningful amounts of O<sub>2</sub> on other worlds.*

*The modern atmosphere and rock record of Mars suggest a history of relatively high O<sub>2</sub> as a result of photochemical processes, potentially overlapping with the range of O<sub>2</sub> concentrations used by biology. Europa may have accumulated high O<sub>2</sub> concentrations in its subsurface ocean due to the radiolysis of water ice at its surface.*

*Recent modeling efforts suggest that coexisting water and O<sub>2</sub> may be common on exoplanets, with confirmation from measurements of exoplanet atmospheres potentially coming soon. In all these cases, O<sub>2</sub> accumulates through abiotic processes, independent of water-oxidizing photosynthesis.*

*We hypothesize that abiogenic O<sub>2</sub> may enhance the habitability of some planetary environments, allowing highly energetic aerobic respiration and potentially even the development of complex multicellular life which depends on it, without the need to first evolve oxygenic photosynthesis.*

*This hypothesis is testable with further exploration and life-detection efforts on O<sub>2</sub>-rich worlds such as Mars and Europa, and comparison to O<sub>2</sub>-poor worlds such as Enceladus.*

Amor, K., et al (2019) **The Mesoproterozoic Stac Fada proximal ejecta blanket, NW Scotland: constraints on crater location from field observations, anisotropy of magnetic susceptibility, petrography and geochemistry.** JOURNAL OF THE GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY 176:doi.org/10.1144/jgs2018-093

Authors’ abstract: *The Stac Fada Member of the Mesoproterozoic Stoer Group (Torridon Supergroup) in NW Scotland is a proximal ejecta blanket surrounding an unidentified asteroid impact crater. A combination of field observations of the ejecta deposit and underlying strata, the geographical distribution of terrane-identified basement clasts found embedded in the impactite, and anisotropy of magnetic susceptibility of the impact melt rocks at different locations can constrain the crater location to be about 15 to 20 km WNW of Enard Bay and thus buried under Mesozoic sediments in The Minch.*

*Syncompressional structures within the suevite at Stattic Point give a clear indication of a southeasterly direction of mass motion. The signatures of two different terranes within the Lewisian gneiss help identify the origin of clasts found in the impactite at three locations. These clasts are unshocked and interpreted as having been swept up by the density current post-impact; their geographical distribution provides an important clue to ejecta emplacement pathways crossing the Assynt and Gruinard terranes.*

*It is assumed that the proximal ejecta blanket originally formed a toroidal deposit surrounding the impact crater, whose thickness decreases in all directions away from the crater, and that the present day nearly linear outcrop of the Stac Fada Member forms a chord through that ejecta blanket.*

*The age of the Stac Fada Member has been estimated at 1177 ± 5 Ma based on Ar–Ar ages of authigenic potassium feldspars precipitated in hydrothermal veins within the Stac Fada Member. ... That the bulk of the matrix of the Stac Fada Member appears to have been derived from Stoer Group sediments indicates that the asteroid impact must have been into this rift basin or an equivalent sedimentary basin of fluvial and lacustrine sediments.*

Speirs: As the Scots say, bang went saxpence. The asteroid smacked into Scotland 1.177 gigayears ago when life was still single-celled marine organisms. The impact ejected huge amounts of sediment in a ring around the crater and triggered a tsunami that swept up massive amounts of sediment.

Loron, C.C., et al (2019) **Early fungi from the Proterozoic era in Arctic Canada.** NATURE 570:232-235

Authors' abstract: *Fungi are crucial components of modern ecosystems. They may have had an important role in the colonization of land by eukaryotes, and in the appearance and success of land plants and metazoans. Nevertheless, fossils that can unambiguously be identified as fungi are absent from the fossil record until the middle of the Palaeozoic era.*

*Here we show, using morphological, ultrastructural and spectroscopic analyses, that multicellular organic-walled microfossils preserved in shale of the Grassy Bay Formation (Shaler Supergroup, Arctic Canada), which dates to approximately 1,010 to 890 million years ago, have a fungal affinity.*

*These microfossils are more than half a billion years older than previously reported unambiguous occurrences of fungi, a date which is consistent with data from molecular clocks for the emergence of this clade. In extending the fossil record of the fungi, this finding also pushes back the minimum date for the appearance of eukaryotic crown group Opisthokonta, which comprises metazoans, fungi and their protist relatives.*

Ganti, V., et al (2019) **Low-gradient, single-threaded rivers prior to greening of the continents.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:11652-11657

Authors' abstract: *The Silurian-age [443.7 to 416.0 megayears ago] rise of land plants is hypothesized to have caused a global revolution in the mechanics of rivers. In the absence of vegetation controlled bank stabilization effects, pre-Silurian rivers are thought to be characterized by shallow, multithreaded flows, and steep river gradients.*

*This hypothesis, however, is at odds with the pancontinental scale of early Neoproterozoic river systems that would have necessitated extraordinarily high mountains if such river gradients were commonplace at continental scale, which is inconsistent with constraints on lithospheric thickness. To reconcile these observations, we generated estimates of paleogradients and morphologies of pre-Silurian rivers using a well-developed quantitative framework based on the formation of river bars and dunes.*

*We combined data from previous work with original field measurements of the scale, texture, and structure of fluvial deposits in Proterozoic-age Torridonian Group, Scotland, a type-example of pancontinental, prevegetation fluvial systems. Results showed that these rivers were low sloping, relatively deep (4 to 15 m), and had morphology similar to modern, lowland rivers.*

*Our results provide mechanistic evidence for the abundance of low gradient, single-threaded rivers in the Proterozoic eon, at a time well before the evolution and radiation of land plants, despite the absence of muddy and vegetated floodplains. Single-threaded rivers with stable floodplains appear to have been a persistent feature of our planet despite singular changes in its terrestrial biota.*

Melott, A.L., et al (2019) **Hypothesis: Muon radiation dose and marine megafaunal extinction at the end-Pliocene supernova.** ASTROBIOLOGY 19:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2018.1902

Authors' abstract: *Considerable data and analysis support the detection of one or more supernovae at a distance of about 50 parsecs, ~2.6 million years ago. This is possibly related to the extinction event around that time and is a member of a series of explosions that formed the Local Bubble in the interstellar medium.*

*We build on previous work, and propagate the muon flux from supernova-initiated cosmic rays from the surface to the depths of the ocean. We find that the radiation dose from the muons will exceed the total present surface dose from all sources at depths up to 1 km and will persist for at least the lifetime of marine megafauna. It is reasonable to hypothesize that this increase in radiation load may have contributed to a newly documented marine megafaunal extinction at that time.*

Godwin, C.M., et al (2019) **Tree Swallow (Tachycineta bicolor) nest success and nestling growth near oil sands mining operations in northeastern Alberta, Canada.** CANADIAN JOURNAL OF ZOOLOGY 97:547-557

Authors' abstract: *Industrial development and contaminant exposure may affect reproductive success and food quality for birds. Tree Swallows (Tachycineta bicolor) nesting near oil sands development in northern Alberta (Canada)*



*potentially experience elevated environmental stressors that could influence reproduction. We measured reproductive and growth endpoints in Tree Swallows, predicting reduced reproductive success and nestling growth near oil sands operations compared with reference sites. We also identified the invertebrate prey in the stomach contents of nestlings to understand variability in the diet and its potential effect on growth and survival of nestlings.*

*From 2012 to 2015, clutch initiation varied among years but was not influenced by proximity to oil sands operations. Hatching and fledging success decreased in response to increased precipitation, regardless of location. Measurements of nestling growth reflected the variation associated with nestling sex and possibly asynchronous hatching.*

*The composition of the nestling diet was significantly different; birds near oil sands development consumed Odonata [dragonflies], whereas birds at reference sites consumed Ephemeroptera [mayflies]. Nestlings from all sites consumed relatively high quantities of terrestrial insects. Our results demonstrate that factors such as weather conditions, diet, hatching order, and nestling sex are important when interpreting the potential effects of oil sands development on nest success and nestling growth.*

Daly, P., et al (2019) **Archaeological evidence that a late 14th-century tsunami devastated the coast of northern Sumatra and redirected history.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1902241116

*Authors' abstract: Archaeological evidence shows that a predecessor of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami devastated nine distinct communities along a 40-km section of the northern coast of Sumatra in about 1394 CE. Our evidence is the spatial and temporal distribution of tens of thousands of medieval ceramic sherds and over 5,000 carved gravestones, collected and recorded during a systematic landscape archaeology survey near the modern city of Banda Aceh. Only the trading settlement of Lamri, perched on a headland above the reach of the tsunami, survived into and through the subsequent 15th century.*

*It is of historical and political interest that by the 16th century, however, Lamri was abandoned, while low-lying coastal sites destroyed by the 1394 tsunami were resettled as the population center of the new economically and politically ascendant Aceh Sultanate. Our evidence implies that the 1394 tsunami was*

*large enough to impact severely many of the areas inundated by the 2004 tsunami and to provoke a significant reconfiguration of the region's political and economic landscape that shaped the history of the region in subsequent centuries.*

Grant, J.L., et al (2019) **Path dependencies affecting suburban density, mix, and diversity in Halifax.** CANADIAN GEOGRAPHER 63:doi.org/10.1111/cag.12496

*Authors' abstract: This paper examines path dependencies in suburban development outcomes in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Findings suggest that development patterns are constrained by geography and spatial configuration, the legacy of institutions and decisions, transportation technologies, political culture, the development industry, population growth and characteristics, economic conditions, and cultural and lifestyle preferences.*

*Planning policies and practices that seek to promote greater density, mix, and land use integration in master-planned communities encounter resistance from a path-dependent system driven by different expectations and priorities.*

Speirs: I worked 31 years for the City of Calgary Parks Dept. and this was a familiar story. Some city councillor or outside consultant would come up with a grandiose plan for Parks Dept. that neglected the realities on the ground because the proposer didn't know what the real world was like. More commonly, the planner only looked at the capital costs and failed to say how the added maintenance and repairs would be paid for.

My favourite example was an elaborate tree planting project in the 1980s that was to turn freeway boulevards into green forests. No money was allocated for tree watering, a necessity in Calgary's arid climate. When the pioneers arrived after Calgary was founded in 1875, the land was treeless for a reason.

Other than along river banks, all trees in Calgary were planted, and cannot survive in the long run without irrigation. The freeway trees were all dead and gone five years later. By that time, the consultant was someplace else.

Another common failing was winding paved pathways through a park. Humans everywhere prefer the shortest route, so quickly straight-line footpaths across the grass would develop and wear ruts into the turf. Some landscape architects

realized this and planted shrub beds to force people to stay on the pathway, the result of which the shrub beds were trampled into oblivion.

Afshinnekoo, E., et al (2015) **Geospatial resolution of human and bacterial diversity with city-scale metagenomics.** CELL SYSTEMS doi.org/10.1016/j.cels.2015.01.001

Authors' abstract: *The panoply of microorganisms and other species present in our environment influence human health and disease, especially in cities, but have not been profiled with metagenomics at a city-wide scale. We sequenced DNA from surfaces across the entire New York City (NYC) subway system, the Gowanus Canal, and public parks.*

*Nearly half of the DNA (48%) does not match any known organism; identified organisms spanned 1,688 bacterial, viral, archaeal, and eukaryotic taxa, which were enriched for harmless genera associated with skin (e.g., Acinetobacter). Predicted ancestry of human DNA left on subway surfaces can recapitulate U.S. Census demographic data, and bacterial signatures can reveal a station's history, such as marine-associated bacteria in a hurricane-flooded station.*

*Some evidence of pathogens was found (Bacillus anthracis), but a lack of reported cases in NYC suggests that the pathogens represent a normal, urban microbiome. This baseline metagenomic map of NYC could help long-term disease surveillance, bioterrorism threat mitigation, and health management in the built environment of cities.*

*Hundreds of species of bacteria are in the subway, mostly harmless. More riders bring more diversity. One station flooded during Hurricane Sandy still resembles a marine environment. Human allele frequencies in DNA on surfaces can mirror US Census data.*

Lordier, L., et al (2019) **Music in premature infants enhances high-level cognitive brain networks.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1817536116

Authors' abstract: *Preterm babies are cared for in neonatal intensive care units (NICU), which are busy places with a lot of mechanical noise increasingly recognized to disrupt normal brain development. NICUs therefore invest in*

*developmental care procedures, with music for example, but neurobiological evidence for these interventions is missing.*

*We present results from a clinical trial to study the effects of a music intervention on preterm infants' brain development. Based on resting-state fMRI, we provide evidence that music enhanced connectivity in a brain circuitry involving the salience network with regions implicated in sensory and higher-order cognitive functions, previously found to be altered in preterm infants. To our knowledge, this study is unique in observing an impact of music on brain development in preterm newborns.*

*Neonatal intensive care units are willing to apply environmental enrichment via music for preterm newborns. However, no evidence of an effect of music on preterm brain development has been reported to date.*

*Using resting-state fMRI, we characterized a circuitry of interest consisting of three network modules interconnected by the salience network that displays reduced network coupling in preterm compared with full-term newborns. Interestingly, preterm infants exposed to music in the neonatal intensive care units have significantly increased coupling between brain networks previously shown to be decreased in premature infants: the salience network with the superior frontal, auditory, and sensorimotor networks, and the salience network with the thalamus and precuneus networks.*

*The newborns in the present study listened to recorded music specifically composed by A.V. (www.vollenweider.com) using instruments (i.e., harp, pungi, and bells) that have produced behavioral and brain responses in preterm newborns in a previous study to determine the effects of music listening on the preterm brain.*

*Therefore, music exposure leads to functional brain architectures that are more similar to those of full-term newborns, providing evidence for a beneficial effect of music on the preterm brain.*