

OPUNTIA 459



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

About The Cover: I was standing at a bus stop on 11 Avenue SW in the Beltline district when I noticed the bright colours of this autumnal *Populus tremula* tree. God bless the man who invented the smartphone camera.

AROUND COWTOWN
photos by Dale Speirs



Just clearing out an accumulation of miscellaneous photos I took around Calgary this summer. Nothing fancy, just snapshots with my smartphone camera.

At left was a sign I spotted during the Calgary Stampede on a drywall partition in the Corral Arena.

At right is a study in blue, of Brookfield Place on 7 Avenue SW and 1 Street, where I was waiting for a bus.





Above: Seen on the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall. I laughed at the token attempt at bilingualism, especially since it was unneeded because Alberta is anglophone.

At right: A Chinatown coyote. No plaque or inscription to indicate why it was there. Best estimates by the Parks Dept. is that there are about 400 urban coyotes throughout the city, although few people see them because they are crepuscular.



Parks Dept has been decorating its garbage bins to eliminate graffiti.



Likewise Enmax, the electrical utility.





Vanity licence plates are always fun to collect.

SERIES DETECTIVES: PART 5

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 4 appeared in OPUNTIA's #402, 406, 425, and 448.]

These and hundreds of other old-time radio series are available as free mp3s at www.otrrlibrary.org and www.archive.org. The former has better copies of the shows but the latter often has other episodes not as clear but still listenable.

Candy Matson.

CANDY MATSON, YUKON 28209 was an unusual old-time radio series that aired from 1949 to 1951. It was about a female private detective named Candy Matson. She was not a screamer or fainter, as was the standard in those days for women in mysteries. She lived in a penthouse apartment on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco.

The series was unusual in other ways. Matson's sidekick was an art dealer named Rembrandt Watson, who was a blatant limp-wristed poofter. His role was, however, played seriously and with dignity, not a common thing for homosexual characters in that era or even today in Hollywood. Matson's boyfriend, whom she married in the final episode, was SFPD Detective Ray Mallard.

All the episodes were written, produced, and directed by Monty Masters, whose wife Natalie Park played the lead role. Each episode opened with her answering the telephone by reciting her name and telephone number YUKon 28209.

The first episode aired was "The Donna Dunham Case". It began with a cold teaser of Matson answering the telephone, only to get a threatening call from a thug. As she spoke with him, two shots were fired into her apartment from across the street, so it was an obvious setup. She held on to the telephone long enough to tell the thug thanks for the bullets as they would be sent to the police for ballistics tests.

After that, she went to a neighbourhood tavern to sooth her nerves with a martini or two. The barkeep refused to serve her because it was a respectable restaurant. It was the custom in those days that any unescorted woman in a bar was assumed to be a prostitute. (I am old enough to remember when all taverns in Alberta had a separate "Ladies Only" entrance for unescorted women.)

Matson was approached by Warren Roberts who told the barkeep he was her escort. He was actually a stranger to her. He introduced himself as a steamship line owner and asked Matson to take on a case for him. One wonders how he knew she was a private investigator or that she would be there at that time.

Notwithstanding that, he explained that earlier in the day he had found the body of Donna Dunham in her apartment. He hadn't yet told the police, much to Matson's dismay. Explaining further, he had been sponsoring Dunham's singing career at a local nightclub.

Matson began tracking Dunham's boyfriend, a musician at the same club, and got Watson to help. The usual methodology was followed, such as impersonation, false pretenses, and break-and-enter. When that didn't work, she brought in Mallard as a last resort.

There was the gunpoint denouement when she baited Roberts into confessing he had murdered Dunham out of jealousy. Another case wrapped up. She had insisted he pay her \$500 fee in advance, and as the whole case didn't take a day, she did well from it. Never explained or referred to again were those two shots at beginning of the episode.

"The Fort Ord Case" was a later 1949 episode. The telephone call that opened the story was from an ex-boyfriend of Matson's named Sgt Kenly, stationed at Fort Ord down the coast from San Francisco. He invited her to be Queen of the NCOs Ball. Having been to Fort Ord before, and having practical experience of dating servicemen, she asked who would be her chaperone. An obviously disappointed Kenly recovered by suggesting she bring her mother.

Matson said that was an excellent idea and she knew just the man. Watson, a second mother to her as she said, was delighted. He had a prior engagement so Matson drove ahead on her own while he would catch a train and meet her at the station just before the Ball.

Just before going into the base, she stopped at a bar for a drink, as single women driving a car often did in those days. It wasn't a respectable joint. The barkeep was an ex-GI who kept in touch with base personnel. He recognized her from her picture in yesterday's newspaper announcing her as the Queen of the Ball. Matson was perturbed to learn that Kenly had announced her as Queen the day before he telephoned her.

She went to the station to meet Watson. Looking up the tracks, she saw a man lying on the rails as the train approached. She ran over and dragged him off the tracks, discovering he was dead. Leaving the body by the side of the tracks, she rushed to meet Watson, then to the Sheriff's office to report the incident.

First things first, so off to the ball, dancing with one NCO after another. A sergeant lured her out onto the terrace and slugged her unconscious. It was standard practice in old-time radio that private detectives would be rendered unconscious at least once per episode. For a female detective to be treated so roughly must have raised eyebrows back then.

The army personnel were aghast, as was Watson, but she shrugged it off. Recuperating in a nearby tavern, she allowed herself to be picked up by a corporal who suggested a stroll on the beach. Whether or not his intentions were honourable became irrelevant when they found the body of the sergeant who had slugged her.

From there, events transpired which revealed the existence of a group of ex-GIs with dishonourable discharges who preyed on serving personnel. The gang had army uniforms and because they knew how to behave in military fashion, were able to infiltrate the squaddies. Their racket was to operate clip joints with fixed poker games and soak the regulars after each payday.

The discipline of the rogue GIs wasn't as good as the regulars, hence the two bodies. The ringleader's idea of keeping the gang in line was more severe than what an adjutant would ask for, and without benefit of a court martial.

Pat Novak.

PAT NOVAK, FOR HIRE aired on old-time radio from 1946 to 1949 and first brought Jack Webb to public attention. Strictly speaking, Novak wasn't a private detective. He worked on the San Francisco waterfront doing odd jobs, most of which had a murder in them. Sort of a male Miss Marple, if you'll pardon the comparison.

The episodes were fast paced but if the listeners lost track they needn't worry as Novak would explain all in the epilogue. The series featured lots of snappy lines which elevated it up from a routine mystery show such as: *I wasn't going to make any more headway than a hummingbird in a wind tunnel.*

"Shirt Mixup" was a 1949 episode written by Richard Breen. Pat Novak went to pick up his shirts from a laundry but by mistake was given a package for Earl Hayes which contained some women's blouses and shirts way too big to fit Novak. The remorseful laundry clerk gave him Hayes's address and Novak went over to make the exchange.

He met up first with a woman. *She was in her 30s and pushing 40 hard enough to bruise it. She was as shy as a runaway boxcar.* According to her, the package was missing one shirt and accused Novak of stealing it. He got angry, so she called in goons who got even angrier and rendered him unconscious.

When he regained consciousness, Hayes's corpse was lying next to him and the police were in the midst of their investigation. Novak's nemesis Inspector Hellman was there, and they quickly began arguing. As they did so, two men showed up with a stretcher and hauled away the defunct.

A short time later, the real morgue attendants appeared. The body had been stolen. Since Hellman was the officer in charge, that undercut any moral superiority he may have had with Novak and put him in a serious position. Novak wasn't any happier because he was still missing his shirts. *I couldn't beat a vagrancy rap with a pocket full of annuities.*

The woman had vanished from the scene along with the thugs, but Novak tracked her down. She was no help. Novak burgled the laundry and found the missing shirt the thugs were looking for. It had writing under the collar. The laundry clerk was later found floating in the bay.

More details emerged. Hayes had served time with a friend who now ran a funeral parlour. Novak and the police visited it and found the thugs. It all ended in tears and gunshots. Most of the supporting actors were thinned out. Novak spent five minutes explaining all the loose threads. The collar markings were numbers of bills of lading for smuggled goods.

Jeff Regan.

JEFF REGAN, INVESTIGATOR was a hard-boiled detective series was aired from 1948 to 1950 on radio, one of several precursors to DRAGNET. Jack Webb played the detective Jeff Regan, who worked for the Lyon agency. Nobody had a kind word for anyone else. There was a constant flow of sarcasm and brutal metaphors.

“Two Little Sisters” was a 1949 episode written by William Froug and William Fifield. The setting was a carnival where Mary and Dolly Zamansky were knife throwers. Dolly hired Lyon’s because she feared something might happen to her. Something did happen but not to her. Dolly’s husband got a knife in his back, for which Mary was arrested.

Regan began investigating because the police arrested the wrong person. Otherwise there wouldn’t be a story. He suspected Dolly cleared her husband out of the way. Except he wasn’t her husband anymore, having been divorced a while back. Dolly’s new boyfriend was the next suspect.

The case tied itself into knots when yet another husband was exposed. An overly complicated plot with lots of handwaving, which one expects in a carnival.

I didn’t care much for this series. It was simply too mean-spirited, trying to be noir but only sounding nasty. Jack Webb was still working to find his style and would eventually succeed with DRAGNET.

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.

“Who Is Sylvia?” was a 1948 episode written by David Victor and Herbert Little Jr. The opening letter was from Leslie Graeme, a millionaire who was suspicious of his wife Sylvia. He wanted Valentine to verify if she was faithful or was cheating with Tom Vickers, handsome man about town.

Valentine and Brooksie met Graeme at his mansion. After Valentine heard the story, he told Graeme he didn’t do divorce cases. Sylvia arrived home just then and there was an embarrassing scene.

Brooksie did some research on Sylvia and learned her previous husband had died of food poisoning. After that red flag was waved, Leslie died the next day from supposed suicide by poison. Valentine took on the murder investigation pro bono, constantly tangling with police along the way, who had the idea it was their prerogative.

Valentine learned that Vickers had bought the poison and called out Sylvia on it. She brazened it out and the two men got into a fistfight. Sylvia later showed up at Valentine’s apartment and tried to buy him off, then told him she had just married Vickers so he couldn’t testify against her in court.

Meanwhile, Brooksie had kept researching Sylvia, discovering that was not her real name and she had been committed to a sanitarium for years. Sylvia tried to perjure her way through the coroner’s hearing but failed. Much screaming as the end credits came in. Presumably she went back to an insane asylum.

Everyone in this episode seemed to be overacting, albeit not too much. Sylvia was off the wall but given that she was insane this could be forgiven.

“Needle In The Haystack”, written by David Victor and Jackson Gillis, was a 1950 episode aired on January 2. Valentine was hired by Ferdinand Vase to investigate the theft of twelve roses just before the Tournament of Roses parade in Pasadena. The roses were a new variety, worth more than the average bloom. As the title suggested, trying to find them in Pasadena at that time would not be an easy task.

Valentine and Brooksie began by tracing the package of roses to a flower shop that had received the delivery by mistake. The store was trashed and the culprit was still in it, waving a gun about and trying to find the roses.

More alarms and excursions followed, as Valentine put it, “*a three-ring circus*”. The shop owner’s brother was found stabbed, apparently having picked up the roses without knowing some very serious people were chasing after them.

Ferdinand Vase dropped out of sight about the same time Valentine and Brooksie discovered he was a phony and had been using the roses as a cover to smuggle something in from Mexico. The chase was on but didn't move out of first gear because the parade was underway and traffic was at a standstill.

It all turned out well, except for the dead man. The roses had diamonds hidden in them. They showed up in the possession of a floral designer who was doing last-minute touch-ups for the parade floats. The bad news was that the roses were mixed in with hundreds of thousands of others. Good luck finding the ones with the diamonds.

Valentine figured it out that the shop owner had stolen them, so they weren't lost as feared. From there to the epilogue where Valentine explained all the loose ends to Brooksie as they inched their way through the traffic jams. Plenty of time for that.

Michael Shayne.

Michael Shayne was a multimedia character, originating from the books of Brett Halliday (pseudonym of Davis Dresser). He appeared in movies, radio, and television. Shayne was a B-grade private detective at best. The other media occasionally used the original stories but most were pastiches.

The emphasis was on action-adventure with lots of fights. He was generally rendered unconscious by bad guys at least once per episode, often twice. The old-time radio shows appeared on several networks between 1944 and 1953. They moved him around to different cities instead of only New York City. In the radio episodes, overacting was the general rule, as it had to be to keep up with the plots.

“The Case Of The Deadly Dough” was a 1953 episode set in New Orleans. Credits were given to everyone except the writer. The story opened with Shayne given \$50 by a guy named Witchita. The job was for Shayne to pick up a briefcase from the bus depot, take it to another address and leave it there, then return to his office where Witchita would be waiting for him.

That done, Shayne found Witchita beaten to death in his office when he returned. The police told him that Witchita had been involved in a 1931 bank robbery of \$100,000 cash. The heist had been masterminded by Dan Bascomb, who had been caught not long after and had just been released after spending a

long stretch in prison. No sooner had the police hauled away the body than Bascomb's estranged wife Joey arrived, fishing for the cash.

At this point I realized something about the cash that modern listeners would not know, but I'll save it for the denouement. In 1953 when the show aired, only older listeners who were adults during the early 1930s would have caught on to this plot point. I knew it because I do a bit of sophisticated investing and picked it up as part of financial history.

Shayne went back to where he had left the briefcase. Dan was there but the cash was not, and he demanded to know what Shayne had done with it. Shayne talked his way out of trouble and Dan let him go. As Shayne walked down the mean streets of New Orleans on his way back to his office, he was kidnapped by goons.

This brought him to the lair of Ed Ferris, another partner in that long-ago bank robbery. They beat him unconscious trying to find out where the cash was. From there, more running about, with an actual excursion out to the country. The cash had been found in another briefcase.

There was a grand party in a remote farmhouse, attended by Dan, Joey, Ed, assorted goons, Shayne, and the police. After the last shot was fired and the survivors tallied, Shayne pointed out something to Dan. In 1934, President Franklin Roosevelt had repudiated all paper currency then in circulation and replaced it with new banknotes at a depreciated rate. The 1931 loot was worthless paper, no better than Confederate dollars.

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. He apparently never took fees, so one wonders what he lived on, especially since he maintained an office, laboratory, house, and a girlfriend.

Nick Carter employed his girlfriend Patsy Bowen as an assistant, who accompanied him to crime scenes. Her main role was to scream and have the plot explained to her in the epilogue. The police were seldom involved or even mentioned. Carter would solve the murder without a uniform in sight.

Each episode began with a man frantically and loudly banging on a door. Bowen would answer and ask what was the matter. “*Another case for Nick Carter, master detective!*” shouted the man.

“The Case Of The Chemical Chickens” was a 1947 episode, written by Alfred Bester. (Yes, that one, the science fiction writer.) The story opened with an hysterical friend bringing a batch of breakfast eggs to Carter, convinced they had been poisoned. A lab test revealed they had minute traces of nitroglycerin in them, obviously not something chickens ordinarily synthesize.

Tracking back the source, they went to the store of purchase, wanting to get more eggs for analysis. The store clerk, who talked like every gangster who infested New York City, immediately apologized to Carter for the bad eggs and offered \$5 to settle the matter. A woman in the store, who talked like every gun moll, identified herself as Janet Steele and told Carter she was a Pure Food Inspector and asked if he wanted to press charges.

Carter was suspicious and left. He didn’t believe a country store clerk would talk like that, and the brief glimpse he caught of the \$5 banknote looked to be counterfeit. He went round the back of the store and found the real clerk in life-threatening condition.

Carter was kind enough to let the police know about the case. He was convinced that somewhere out in the country there was an illicit operation printing fake currency, producing nitroglycerine for safecrackers, and who knew what else for the criminal trade.

The operation was leaking chemicals into the drinking water of the chickens, it being a well known fact that gangsters had little concern for environmental regulations.

The gang was riven by internal feuds and thinned out with gunshots by Steele, smarter than she sounded. After assorted shenanigans and hoorahs, Carter and company got out to the farm by scientific analysis of dust in pants cuffs. With the money he was spending on his laboratory, he was determined to get the value out of it.

It all ended up at the farm with several alarms, brandishing of Tommy guns, and last-second rescues. Carter then explained a few plot lines to Bowen, who as usual didn’t seem to be paying attention to what was going on around her.

Richard Diamond.

RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE was a series with Dick Powell as the leading man. It ran for eighteen months from early 1949 to 1950. The series was created by Blake Edwards, better remembered for his Pink Panther movies in the 1960s. Powell rose to fame as a crooner but was astute enough to realize they were slowly becoming obsolete, so he began appearing in movies and radio shows, usually as a detective.

Richard Diamond was a ex-OSS man who worked as a private investigator but not too seriously. He had a rich girlfriend Helen Asher, who apparently tolerated him because at the end of each episode he would croon a song to her.

“To Guard A Seal”, also known as “Timothy The Seal” was a 1950 episode with uncredited writers. Diamond was hired by Casper Wellington to guard a friend named Timothy until they could catch a train the next morning. He was worried someone would try to kill Timothy.

Shortly after Wellington left to get the train reservations, two goons arrived with malice aforethought. Diamond successfully lied his way out of a beating and they left. Next in his office was a delivery man with a large crate, which was when Diamond discovered that Timothy was a seal.

Diamond took Timothy to the police station in the hope that they could give him a fix on Wellington. There followed an hilarious scene, the police not being used to seals flopping about their quarters. Once all that was straightened out, they ran a background and gave Diamond the last known address of Wellington, down on the waterfront.

Once at the place, Diamond was intercepted by the goons, who stole Timothy and vamoosed. The police arrived and informed Diamond that Wellington had just checked into the morgue, so a search of his house commenced.

The facts fell into place. Wellington had stolen \$50,000 in diamonds from smugglers, stuffed them into fish, and then fed them to Timothy. The goons did not appreciate the theft and killed Wellington. They needed to get out of town fast, and since Wellington already had the train tickets, they decided to use them.

Diamond and the police met them at the station, with an assortment of alarums following on. It all ended well, at least for Diamond, the police, and the seal, if not the smugglers. The ending was different. Instead of singing to Asher, it was Timothy who got Diamond's closing serenade.

Richard Rogue.

Richard Rogue was the private detective of ROGUE'S GALLERY in this short-lived radio series that aired from 1945 to 1946. The gimmick was that every time he was slugged unconscious, once per episode like most detectives, his subconscious voice, named Eugor, would talk to him. Sometimes Eugor (spell it backward) would give him valuable advice on solving the case, while other times he just padding to fill out the episode. All the episodes were written by Ray Buffum.

"The Stark McVey Case" was a 1946 episode which began when Rogue received a telephone call from the said man. McVey wanted Rogue to come out to Minden, California, immediately for a case. As earnest money, he wired \$500 to Rogue (about \$5,000 in today's depreciated currency) which brought the detective hustling out from Los Angeles.

Upon arrival, Rogue checked into a hotel, then bought a newspaper in the lobby whose lead story was the murder of Stark McVey. The Chief of Police soon arrived and accosted Rogue, demanding to know why McVey had hired him. Rogue answered truthfully that he had no idea because McVey hadn't had a chance to brief him. Neither of them knew anything about the deceased, who was a mysterious man with no visible means of support.

The hotel bellhop Buzz was an ambitious man who appointed himself as Rogue's assistant. Since he knew the town and the people, Rogue accepted him as unpaid help. They went over to McVey's house. Entering the premises while Buzz waited outside, Rogue encountered a thug named Shorty. He pulled a gun, Rogue returned the compliment, and the latter was a better shot, wounding Shorty.

As he was examining Shorty, a second thug appeared and slugged him unconscious. Enter Eugor, who said nothing useful. Rogue woke up on a freight train headed out of town. He managed to jump off the train without losing consciousness again and hitched a ride back into Minden.

The driver, seeing his dilapidated condition, took him to the police instead of the hotel. The Chief warmly thanked him, much to the driver's disappointment as he was hoping for a reward.

Rogue and the Chief went back to McVey's house, and found Buzz waiting for them. He had gotten the licence plate number of a suspicious car as it departed the house. They shook the house down for evidence and got lucky. In the basement they found a secret room.

In it was Shorty's body, done in by a second gunshot from his partner in crime. There was also a printing press obviously used for counterfeiting. They found a stack of \$10 fake banknotes, but the printing plates were missing.

The police gave Rogue and Buzz the address of the car from its licence plate, which was back in Los Angeles. The two arrived there just as the remaining conspirators had a falling out they settled with guns. Rogue and Buss busted in and wrapped up the case.

As to why McVey had hired Rogue, it was speculated that he wanted to put away his cohorts via a third party. He didn't want to go to the police directly since snitches have a short life span in the criminal underworld. Not entirely plausible, but then again, neither was the series. A routine P.I. story despite the presence of Eugor.

The Saint.

Leslie Charteris created The Saint and published more than 100 novels and short stories about him between 1928 and 1990. The Saint was Simon Templar, a man of no visible means of support, yet who lived well and was able to travel about and do good deeds. His name was known to police and the general public.

The Saint became a multimedia figure, appearing on stage, in the movies, and later on television. He also had a good run on old-time radio from 1945 to 1951. Several actors portrayed him, the best of whom was Vincent Price, the epitome of savoir faire and wit.

"Contract On The Saint" was a 1950 episode written by Jerome Epstein. It began with Templar being hustled at gunpoint into a car by an ex-con Augie, who told him he was going for a ride and execution. (Rule #1 for hitmen: Don't

tell your victim they are about to die. They tend to fight back.) Templar quipped his way along the ride and found out the contract had been issued by Ronald Stanton.

Templar disarmed Augie and visited Stanton at his home, who reluctantly paid him a \$12,000 sum “as agreed upon”. The Saint had done no such thing, but it was obvious an imposter was using his good name and not stealing trash either. Templar took the money anyway. Stanton said the other \$3,000 would be paid tomorrow but he didn’t have the money at home, so Templar would have to come by his office.

Bright and early at the office, Templar announced himself to the secretary Linda, who recognized the his name and asked him if he really was The Saint. *“I’m really Bulldog Drummond traveling incognito.”* He was escorted into a room by Stanton’s assistant Briggs, who then slugged him unconscious from behind.

After Templar regained consciousness, the hue and cry didn’t last long, for the body of Briggs was soon discovered. Investigation revealed that Stanton was selling doubtful stock to suckers in a shay deal. Briggs used The Saint as a cover for blackmail.

Augie reappeared and kidnapped Saint again, and once more was disarmed. Templar went back to Stanton to find out what was going on. Not much as it transpired. He came back that night to the office with Linda, surmising that Stanton would not be far behind. Stanton arrived, and a Mexican standoff developed with people pointing guns at each other.

An impromptu J’accuse! meeting developed as Templar sorted everything. Linda had killed Briggs in a falling out, for they had been partners in crime. And so to the closing, the whistling music which was a trademark of both the radio and television series.

“The Ghost That Giggled” was a 1950 episode with no writer credited. The announcer told the audience that Vincent Price had been unavoidably detained in Paris, so Barry Sullivan would substitute for him. He did a reasonable imitation of Price’s wit.

Pru Thexter, a middle-aged woman was worried about her brother Warburton, who was haunted by a giggling ghost, and asked The Saint for help. Upon

arrival at the Thexter mansion, Templar noted that ghosts seemed to prefer wealthy people who lived in big houses.

As they stepped into the manor, they heard a woman’s scream. The next few minutes were a melange of footsteps by people wearing tap shoes and reading out loud stage directions, always a sign of sloppy writing. As to the scream, they only found Warburton’s body, his head bashed in.

Templar left but met with the giggler Loraine Anderson, who was the first of many people asking him for the key to a safe-deposit box. She got no satisfaction nor did Galloway the gardener, who was waiting for Templar in his apartment, wanting the same key.

Templar remarked that for once instead of being held at gunpoint, he’d like to be threatened with a machete or a boomerang. Galloway, speaking for goons everywhere, replied *“Don’t you get tired of making wisecracks?”*

More excursions, mostly back at the big house, where Galloway met an untimely death. Meanwhile the police had checked the safe deposit box and found it empty. For lack of anyone else, Pru was identified as the murderer. Her brother had been changing his finances around and she feared being left out of the will.

The episode had entirely too much running about by characters, too much exposition by the writer, and a sound man who must have been paid by the footfall considering how many footsteps were audible.



Sam Spade.

THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE, DETECTIVE was based on the Dashiell Hammett novel. The series aired on old-time radio from 1946 to 1951. The character was played by Howard Duff. The episodes were loud and brash with standard private detective plots. Unfortunately the series was brought down by the Red Scare when both Hammett and Duff were named by the House Committee on Un-American Activities.

“The Wheel Of Life Caper” was a 1948 episode written by Bob Tallman and Gil Doud. Events began with a woman walking into Spade’s office and claiming amnesia. She wanted him to find out who she was and refused his advice to see a doctor. Spade told her he was going to call her Poppy for forgetfulness but she missed the joke.

After a few alarums and tangles with goons, Spade wound up at an apartment whose occupant had been dissected with an electric buzzsaw. From there he had a meeting with a man calling himself Korylenko. He had been in a bad accident in Macau and after surgery had to wear a plaster body cast.

Korylenko’s return to the USA was complicated by what was subsequently discovered to be a trick of smugglers to get a valuable artifact out of China. Poppy had stolen the Wheel of Life, a gold symbol said to have been used by Buddha himself.

When Spade confronted the gang leader about it, he got an unusual story. The man said he was going to use it as a tourist attraction and make his fortune from admission fees paid by Buddhist tourists. Seemed plausible enough, but there had to be a final settlement with all the underworld figures roaming about and there was.

Johnny Dollar.

YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR was an old-time radio series that aired from 1949 to 1962. It was the last old-time radio survivor. For most of its history it was a standard half-hour show, but for a year it aired as a five-part serial each weeknight.

Johnny Dollar was an insurance investigator with an action-packed expense account. He was famous for padding his expenses. Each line item would be

read out loud and served as a bridge to the next scene. Fascinating to today’s listeners, as he would fly cross-country first-class for \$100, stay in a luxury hotel for \$25 a night, and have a steak dinner for \$2.

“The Laughing Matter” was a 1956 episode written by Les Crutchfield. This was in the five-part serial format, so the entire episode was 75 minutes long. This format had its advantages and disadvantages. Characterization was better but each episode began with a repetitious plot recap that chewed up quite a bit of time. In reality, actual plot time was about 60 minutes once the repetition was subtracted.

Johnny Dollar was sent to the west coast of Mexico to protect comedian Charlie Burton who was filming a television series. The sponsors had taken out a \$500,000 policy on his life. When he received a threatening note, that perturbed everyone. Expense item #1 was \$221.50 for airfare from Hartford, Connecticut, to Baja California, Mexico, via several connections.

On arrival, Dollar established there were only three possible suspects. None of the Mexicans had heard of Burton or watched his show, which was recorded in English. The suspects were the producer Frank Maltz, second banana Al Shriver, and female lead actress Gloria Bales. No one who knew Burton liked him, said Bales.

Dollar investigated some of the hotel staff but since they only spoke Spanish and the threatening note was in English, he ruled them out. The back stories were filled in one by one, none of them pleasant. With 75 minutes to fill, the plot and characterization took the scenic route. Events livened up when someone fired a shot through the window of Burton’s hotel room.

Dollar then rehashed the plot at great length with the local police captain. It wasn’t until the final 15-minute installment that the plot rushed to a conclusion. At the last moment, Burton exchanged roles in a sketch with Shriver. The scene had Shriver drinking from a glass of wine which was flavoured with cyanide.

Both Dollar and the police captain came to the conclusion that Burton had set the whole thing up to take out Shriver, whom he felt was upstaging him too much on the television show. They had a confrontation where Burton pulled out a gun. The police captain was faster on the draw and killed Burton.

Since life insurance policies don't pay out where the deceased died while committing a felony, the insurance company didn't have to pay out. So there was a happy ending after all.

"The Matter Of The Medium Well Done" was a 1956 episode written by Jack Johnstone. Johnny Dollar was hired to investigate Carol Sharp, a wealthy heiress who wanted to change her life insurance policy to benefit her boyfriend Tony Ricardo, the son of a Mafioso, and a medium named Madame Morgana.

The insurance agent was fearful that she was being set up to be murdered, so he stalled on the policy change until Dollar could investigate. Carol's brother David, a reckless spender like she was, later became a suspect. His name was frequently mentioned, although he was off stage until about the last ten minutes.

Carol was paying Morgana \$100 per session to talk with her deceased father. Dollar rented a suite next door to hers for \$325 per week, on his expense account needless to say. Both sums were much bigger money back then. Add an extra zero to get today's equivalent in depreciated currency.

Dollar and a police detective first visited another seance where they exposed the medium as a fraud. She admitted her guilt and explained her methods at great length. This came across as a public service announcement from the network to warn the audience about real-life mediums.

Dollar gulled Carol into taking him to a seance with Madame Morgana. He mentioned in passing within her hearing that his brother Richard had died. Morgana brought out Richard's ghost to talk to him, unaware that Dollar had no brother and was testing her. He also had an infrared camera to take photographs in the dark at the seance.

Afterwards, once the film was developed, Dollar met with Carol and showed her the photos of someone manipulating objects for the seance. He told her that Richard never existed. Back to Madame Morgana's place for the final confrontation. David was there and was exposed as part of the plot. Gunshots and alarums followed. The listener did not have to be psychic to predict the conclusion.

"The Wayward Money Matter" was a 1958 episode written by Jack Johnstone. Dollar was investigating the theft of \$112,000 from a company safe in Baltimore, Maryland. He only took the case because the insurance company

promised him as unlimited meals allowance. Dollar figured as long as he was in Baltimore he might as well stuff himself with seafood.

The bookkeeper vanished and was initially suspected, but not after his body was discovered. Some of the money was found with the body. Dollar interviewed the widow, who came across as a loud-mouthed battleaxe but whose diatribe actually made her a sympathetic character.

The circumstances of the death made Dollar suspicious about the owner of the company. He accused the boss of murdering him, keeping most of the money and then filing a claim with the insurance company for the extra amount. The widow was the one who saved Dollar from the murderer. An interesting change from the usual mysteries where the woman had to be saved. Total expense account was \$102.70, with no breakdown for meals.

"The Monticello Mystery Matter" was a 1961 episode written by Jack Johnstone. The client offered Dollar a no-limit expense account, which brought him running to upstate New York. On arrival at the palatial estate of the client and his wife, Rudy and Nancy, the episode turned into a self-referential story. Nancy told Dollar that they listened to his show weekly and being such fans, they wanted to meet him.

Dollar and Rudy went fishing on their private lake but were caught in a squall. They went back to the manor for a grand supper. Dollar became suspicious as to why they invited him, especially when he noticed some marital tension between them. He stayed the night, and was knocked out of a sound sleep when Nancy was discovered missing.

Nancy was the one who had the money. Dollar didn't have to investigate too much to determine that Rudy killed her and dumped the body in the lake. Expense account total was \$71.70. The storyline should not have had the self-referential remarks, which were the radio equivalent of a movie actor looking directly into the camera and mugging at the audience.

In 1962 August, a month before YTJD ended and old-time radio with it, the episode "The Gold Rush Matter" was aired. Written by Jack Johnstone, it sent Dollar to Virginia City, Nevada, to investigate some serious skullduggery at the Scarlet Queen mine. A man had been blinded and another killed, supposedly in dynamite accidents.

Airfare from Hartford (presumably from a New York City airport) to San Francisco was \$216, then a short hop by small plane to Reno for \$18.50. Next was \$50 deposit for a rental car to Virginia City and finally \$100 deposit on a horse to get to the mine. They didn't have Uber in those days.

On arrival at the mine, shots were fired but Dollar survived as he would since he was the star of the series. A woman named Leona, whose father was the one blinded, and another insurance investigator named Jake went with Dollar on a tour of the mine. There was a long vertical shaft about which much emphasis was made that he shouldn't fall into it. This was waving a red flag at the listener.

Dollar came back later on his own to explore, but was almost killed when Leona tossed a stick of dynamite into the tunnel. He knew it was her though. Back to town and in company with Jake, he paid a call on Leona and her father. Shots were fired and all the usual etcetera. The duo had been trying to get the mine by scaring off investors, nor was the old man blind.

It all ended well for Dollar, whose final expense account he rounded off to \$700. But wait, what about that bottomless shaft? It was never mentioned again after the first time.

BZZZZZ.

THE GREEN HORNET was an old-time radio series that aired from 1936 to 1952. Britt Reid was the masked man known as the Green Hornet, assisted by his faithful Filipino servant Kato, who drove his high-speed car called the Black Beauty. The series was a spin-off from THE LONE RANGER but set two generations and four decades later.

Britt Reid was the grand-nephew of John Reid, the Lone Ranger. He was a newspaper publisher who used his inside knowledge of breaking news to secretly attack criminals. His star reporter was Ed Lowry, who never seemed to notice that his boss kept hijacking his scoops. Another reporter was Michael Axford, a dumb Irishman whose phony stage accent was obsolete even then. Reid generally used him as cannon fodder to distract criminals.

The episodes were almost entirely about government corruption, gangsters, and conspiracies. Reid was a vigilante who operated outside the law as much as the criminals he chased. Each episode opened with the music "Flight Of The

Bumblebee" played on a theremin, certainly distinctive. The episodes were written by Fran Striker.

"Reservoir For Murder" was a 1942 episode that began when Ed Lowry was visiting a new reservoir in the final stages of construction. There was sabotage and Lowry was slugged unconscious while investigating. Reid entered the scene and stymied a coverup by a Senator, who wanted to blame his political rival Thorndyke.

Undeterred, the Senator and his henchmen began planning further sabotage after the reservoir was full. The Green Hornet and Kato caught one of the henchmen, Bender by name, and made him talk at gunpoint. Reid then telephoned the Senator as the Green Hornet and demanded \$10,000 for his silence.

A rendezvous was arranged downstream of the dam. The Green Hornet collected the cash, slugged the Senator unconscious, and left him to the police. The Senator panicked when the police arrived because he knew the dam could bust at any moment. After the Senator confessed all, the sluices were opened in time before the dam collapsed. Bender turned prosecution's witness. It was presumed that someone fixed the dam.

The plot was pulpish at best and implausible at least. This episode had a problem with the sound balance, as the background noises at times overwhelmed the dialogue. This was in the original, not a defect in the mp3.

Barrie Craig.

BARRIE CRAIG, CONFIDENTIAL INVESTIGATOR aired on radio from 1951 to 1955. It was a standard type of private detective show, not bad but never more than an also-ran. Worth listening to once.

"The Case Of The Naughty Necklace" was a 1951 episode written by Louis Vittes. The MacGuffin of the plot was a \$5,000 pearl necklace (call it \$50,000 in today's depreciated currency). Craig had been hired by John Peter Kendall to buy a necklace from a woman named Wendy Harper for \$5,000. On arrival, he found her dead and no necklace.

It was a set-up to frame him for murder. Craig tracked Kendall to his apartment but he wasn't there. He met his estranged wife, and sniffed out a possible insurance fraud. Almost immediately, shots were fired and another man died

out in the hallway. Excursions followed, not figuratively, as Craig took a taxi out to the country and tracked down Kendall.

More shots fired, this time from another intruder. Indeed, every time the characters stopped to explain the plot, the monologues were pepped up with another round of gunfire.

The whole gang, including the taxi driver and police, showed up. More excursions back to the city. Harper turned out to be Kendall's mistress. The wife pulled off an elaborate double-cross to get rid of her rival, make money on the pearls, and blackmail her husband for the rest of his life. She almost succeeded.

Plot As Entertainment.

The basic idea behind all these detectives series was to catch and keep the attention of an audience, thereby catching and keeping advertisers. As Samuel Johnson remarked a couple of centuries ago, those who live to please must please to live.

Many of the shows are still of interest today. They make better listening for commutes than audiobooks since they were performed by full casts, as opposed to a droning voice of a reader. The price can't be beat either, free as mp3s from www.otrrlibrary.org.

WHEN WORDS COLLIDE

The tenth annual When Words Collide will return to the Delta South Marriott Hotel on the weekend of August 14 to 16, 2020. It will incorporate the Aurora Awards and Convention 40. WWC always sells out by June, as do the banquet and hotel. Details from www.whenwordscollide.org

BOTANICAL FICTION: PART 12

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 11 appeared in OPUNTIA's #316, 317, 320, 323, 325, 334, 369, 380, 402, 412, and 438.]

Botany Made Exciting.

I have a BSc in Horticulture (University of Alberta '78) and spent more than three decades in parks landscape maintenance. While it had its moments, it was not an action-packed career such as being a police constable or astronaut.

I told you that so I could mention my astonishment at the story "The Hollow World" by Frank Belknap Long (1945 Summer, STARTLING STORIES, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org). The blurb certainly caught my eye: *On the frozen Twelfth Planet, five and a quarter billion miles from Earth, a botanist crime-buster grimly battles a frigid race of monsters that menace humanity, and pits himself against a brutal tyrant of the plant kingdom!*

The story was pulp fiction at its worst and I skimmed many pages at high speed. The hero John Carstairs was with the Interplanetary Botanical Gardens, which, among the orchids and ferns, also kept assorted intelligent plants from other planets in the Solar System. Intelligent as in about the level of a small mammal but often vicious.

Beside the pipeline plants of Neptune, the gardens included: *Marine leechweeds from the Ringed Planet, umbrella ferns from two of its ten satellites, asteroidal kling swimmers, little floating jelly blobs from Calisto, decked out with oarlike appendages, frail fungous growths that pulsed with all the colors of the spectrum, jack-knife bottomswimmers from the tidal estuaries of Europa, which propelled themselves through the water by snapping shut and open.*

Certainly beat orchids and ferns. Carstairs was not an ordinary botanist. He was an action-adventure hero who traveled the Solar System helping police solve crimes, exploring strange new habitats, and breeding new varieties of alien plants when he had a spare moment.

Several plots were in this story, basically Bat Durston in a lost world narrative. Or, for my younger readers who don't know who Bat Durston was, Indiana Jones. The blurb pretty much sums up everything, so I don't have to.

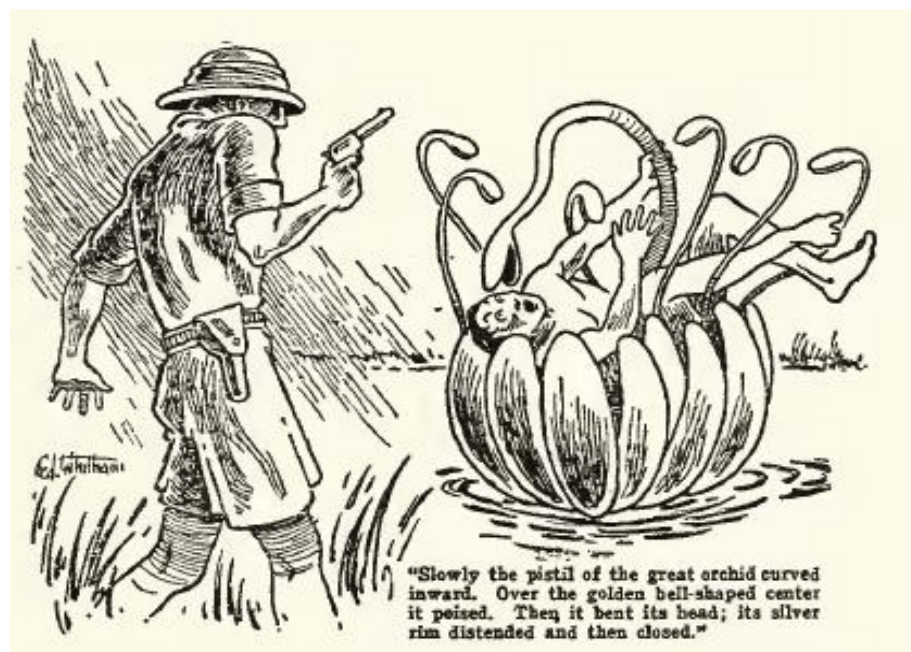
Carnivorous Plants.

Carnivorous trees were long popular in science fiction and action-adventure, some stories of which I have mentioned in previous installments of this column. The stories were based on garbled reports from Southeast Asia about *Nepenthes*, which is a genus of giant pitcher plants. Some of the pitchers are large enough to trap small mammals. The plants are vines that grow up trees, not as parasites but simply for support.

Early European explorers saw the pitchers dangling from trees and made the obvious error. By the time the reports made it back to Europe, the pitcher plants had become man-eating trees. *Nepenthes* is an Asian genus but to pulp writers, all jungles were alike, and thus the man-eating trees frequently appeared in South and Central America and Africa.

“Si Urug Of The Tail” by Oscar Cook (1926 July, WEIRD TALES) was set in the jungles of Borneo where a giant orchid ran amok gobbling up natives. It was obvious that the artist who drew the frontispiece knew zilch about orchids. The flower he drew was nothing like the reproductive structures a real orchid has.

The story was a basic jungle action adventure, with the brave white man trying to keep the natives from becoming too restless. After the village was half depopulated, there was a final confrontation with an aquatic man-eating plant. Shots were fired and all was well.



“Vampires Of The Desert” by A. Hyatt Verrill (1929 December, AMAZING STORIES, available as a pdf from www.archive.org) was set in the Peruvian deserts where no rain had fallen within living memory. There was a record rainfall that caused plants to sprout from seeds that had lain dormant since the last rainfall.

The rains continued, and the desert bloomed, not just figuratively. Giant flowers appeared with tendrils that lassoed any unfortunate animal or human within range. There was doubt as to whether the man-eaters were invertebrates like jellyfish or plants. It didn’t really matter to the victims who got too close to them.

How to kill them was the question. Far too many to chop down with an axe. The hero worked for a petroleum company, so he solved the problem by spraying them with crude oil. Well yes, that certainly was a believable solution.

A variation of the theme was “The Thing In The Woods” by Fletcher Pratt and B.F. Ruby (1935 February, AMAZING STORIES). A laboratory scientist working for a cellulose company was breeding fungi for mutants when he got a good one. It was a spherical fungus that could move itself around and grab prey with its tentacles.

The usual contretemps followed. It started small, then got bigger, then got really big. From there it busted out of the laboratory and ran wild, growing by the minute as it ate cattle, humans, and other animals. The villagers were terrorized, as they usually are. Finally the hero found something that would dissolve cellulose. Spraying the stuff on the fungus turned it into jelly, and not a moment too soon.

Weeds.

H.G. Wells’ WAR OF THE WORLDS wasn’t just about those tripods making a mess. They also released a red weed that created havoc briefly. That idea was taken up by Stanton A. Coblentz in “The Gas-Weed” (1929 May, AMAZING STORIES) Not terribly original but a mildly interesting read.

The story began with a meteorite crashing into a California beach, leaving a big crater and scattering some funny looking rocks about. It was a three-day wonder in the newspapers, scientists came and dug around, and then it was more or less forgotten.

A funny looking red plant began growing along the beach. Few paid attention. The weeds spread further and grew taller. More people paid attention. The weeds began spreading worldwide. As they matured, they vented poison gas. That got everyone's attention.

Trying to kill the gas weeds was not easy. They were based on silicon life, and since sand (silicon dioxide) is the most abundant type of mineral on Earth, the weeds spread exponentially. A great hue and cry as one might expect, and tribulations everywhere.

The cure was unbelievable. The heroic young scientist of the hour, a medical man, accidentally discovered that cancer cells killed the weed rapidly. The answer was therefore to spray cultured cancer cells onto the weeds. Such cells would not long survive exposure to dry air, much less the time needed to coat the weeds and then be absorbed. As to how cancer cells did it, the author only shook his head and said it was a mystery. Indeed.

Seeds.

“Sailors Of The Second Sun” by David L. Clements (2019 July/August, ANALOG) was a rewrite of the old story about of plants dispersing seeds through space. In this version, space explorers found a brown dwarf star with life on it. It had vegetative forms that fired seeds out into space, to drift for millions of years before finding a place to grow.

Such life forms are not entirely improbable, which is why the panspermia theory developed, that life on Earth was seeded from outer space. This particular story only rang a change on the habitat.

Trees.

“The Tree Terror” by David H. Keller (1933 October, AMAZING STORIES) seemed relevant to today's society. We all know that carbon dioxide is a bad thing that can be counteracted by planting trees. Well no, because while young trees absorb carbon dioxide, old-growth forests release it as they die and decay.

In this story, a conglomerate tycoon wanted more cellulose with which to make products for the consumer market. He hired a botanist who decided to emulate the giant forests of the Carboniferous era, when lycopods and club mosses grew bigger than sequoias and redwoods. The botanist was only too successful.

The lycopod trees covered the planet, sending roots far down into aquifers and draining them dry. Earth's land was covered by impenetrable jungle. More serious was the fact that the land was taken out of food production. Starving city slickers became angry mobs.

The ending was far too abrupt and unbelievable. The author wrote himself into a corner, so in the last few paragraphs someone invented a method of making cellulose digestible to humans. They would eat their way through the trees.

I'm an old cowhand from the Red Deer River. Like any farm boy, I could have told them halfway through the story about how and why farm livestock can eat grass, which is made of cellulose. It wouldn't have been difficult for the superscience of the story to come up with a method of giving humans the ability to digest cellulose.

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. (This and other old-time radio series are available as free mp3s from www.otrrlibrary.org.)

Nick Carter employed his girlfriend Patsy Bowen as an assistant, who accompanied him to crime scenes. Her main role was to scream and have the plot explained to her in the epilogue. The police were seldom involved or even mentioned. Carter would solve the murder without a uniform in sight. He apparently never took fees, so one wonders what he lived on, especially since he maintained an office, laboratory, house, and a girlfriend.

“The Case Of The Talking Tree” was a 1945 episode, written by Alfred Bester, a name well known to science fiction fans. It began with a cabby coming into his office saying that a passenger had been knifed to death in the back of the cab by another man, who then got out and fled.

Carter and Bowen went out and examined the body. There was no identification but the deceased had a large lump of opal in his pocket. Carter told the cabby to call the police, then left the scene with the opal.

Carter and Bowen visited a jeweler in an effort to get an idea about the opal's origin. Of the hundreds of jewelers in the big city, the very first one they visited was able to identify the stone and tell them about it. He identified a university professor as the man who had accompanied the deceased, so Carter and Bowen

went to the campus. In the professor's office they found a body with its head blown off by a shotgun.

Evidence led them to a rural location upstate to Dead Tree Valley, named for a reason. There was a patch of sand dunes with semi-buried fossilized trees, one of which had turned to opal over the millennia and was now being eroded out.

It was worth a fortune, enough to kill for. The wind blowing through the branches of the dead tree made eerie sounds, hence the talking tree. Carter was able to nab the culprit, the professor himself, who had killed another partner in crime to make it look like he was dead, as well as the man in the taxi.

Cozies.

From the horticultural side of cozies was ONE BAD APPLE (2008) by Sheila Connolly. It was the first novel in a cozy series about Meg Corey, who lost her job, apartment, and boyfriend in the big city. She fled to Granford, Massachusetts, to begin life over again in a 200-year-old fixer-upper which came with an apple orchard.

It was not an easy start. The house repairs would be massive and expensive. Real estate developers, represented by her ex-boyfriend Chandler Hale, were pestering her to sell the orchard for a shopping mall. The pestering stopped when Hale was found dead in the septic tank. Corey was having enough trouble making friends in her new home and this didn't help.

Much of the novel was taken up by the fight against the developer, now represented by Hale's current girlfriend. His death was accidental, but in arranging for someone to dispose of the body, she made it murder.

It all worked out well for Corey, if not the culprits, and she decided to go into the apple business. As incentive, the recipes followed. Caneton Aux Pommes Et Poivre Vert was duck with apples and peppercorns; food sounds better in French. On a more mundane level but just as tasty were Apple Muffins, Apple Pie, and Apple Cake for your eating pleasure.

GOLDEN MALICIOUS (2013) began with worries aplenty for Meg Corey's apple business. The summer was hot and dry, so she had to irrigate the orchard by water tank. Fortunately she had her own well but it was tedious manual labour.

Her boyfriend Seth Chapin was a contractor. While tagging along with him on a supply run, she naturally found a corpse. Chapin had been with her long enough to have the state police on speed dial. Even more worrying was that Asian longhorned beetle was spotted in the area, which could destroy the orchard and thus Corey's only source of income.

The dead man was David Clapp, a freelance lumberjack. No one knew who he was working for. The middle portion of the novel was filled out with extensive infodumps on pest control and irrigation. Chapin was the one who got into trouble with the culprit and had to be saved.

I used the term 'culprit' because the guilty man claimed Clapp's death was accidental and it would be almost impossible to prove otherwise. He worked in a USDA insect pest control laboratory and spread the insects to keep his job in the face of budget cutbacks. The novel faded out to an inconclusive ending.

The three recipes were: Raspberry Shrub (a drink with no apples), Spatchcocked Chicken (no apples), and Puffed Apple Pancakes. The pancakes were stated thus in the recipe: *It resembles Toad In The Hole, a savoury pub dish with sausages in England, but this recipe is sweet.* Having eaten Toad In The Hole prepared by an Englishwoman, I understand why the British lost their empire.

PICKED TO DIE (2014) was the next installment in the series. Meg Corey was busy with the apple harvest and her now-fiancé Seth Chapin had a contract to restore an old building in the village of Granford. A skeleton was found under the building, and a fresher corpse was found over by the feed mill.

Corey's Marpleing had to yield to the harvest. She was learning that farming is real hard labour with no surcease until the job was done. That was why I left the ranch for the simple life of a city dweller.

The suspect was a young man whose mother was an apple picker. He was innocent of course. There were some social dynamics in operation, but the truth was outed. The victim had it coming. Not homicide but, shall we say, a justifiable accident.

Another three recipes finished up the book. Grilled Chicken Indian Style was marinated chicken with a few spices. Baked Grated Beets should be outlawed by federal governments everywhere. No one could complain about the Apple Cream Pie.

A GALA EVENT (2015) took place after the apple harvest was in. No rest for Meg Corey though, because she and Seth Chapin had set the date for their wedding. Lots of alarums, and those were just the wedding plans.

Most of the village were invited. One unexpected visitor was Aaron Eastman, just released after 25 years in prison and back in Granford trying to prove his innocence. As if Corey didn't have enough work running her farm (she had goats now), renovating the house, and planning a wedding, she took on the cold case to help Eastman.

The case was murder and arson of the Eastman house. The fire had been set by Eastman's father for the insurance money. He was accidently trapped in the blaze with the rest of the family except Aaron, who was blamed for it.

Not much about the apple business either, other than to dream of an automatic irrigation system, paid for with the profits from the harvest. Off to the recipes, with Spicy Fish, Toffee Crunch Blondies, and, specifically mentioned for the wedding, Apple Cider Cake.

A LATE FROST (2017) took place in the depths of winter when Granford was shaken out of its off-season slumber by the arrival of go-getter Monica Whitman. She convinced the local council to establish a new festival to break up the winter dullness and bring in tourists. WinterFare was to feature local foods, crafts, and entertainment.

Meg Corey Chapin (now married to Seth) was happy to supply apples from her orchard. She was busy with a new hire for the orchard and was still settling into married life after the honeymoon. Her problems were nothing compared to Whitman, who died of poisoning just after WinterFare. It wasn't in the food since no one else suffered, so the police called it murder.

The ending was complicated and unusual for a cozy. Whitman had been taking pills for a genetic condition, her husband was in early dementia, and the pill supplier had been fiddling the dosage. Whitman may have committed suicide by deliberately overdosing, or died by negligence of others. No one could say.

None of the recipes in the appendix had apples in them. The Roasted Carrot Soup had beets in it, which vegetable I think should be outlawed. The Almond Cheesecake Pound Cake will fatten you up in a hurry, but it would go well with the Sautéed Chicken French Style.

CONVENTIONAL FICTION: PART 11

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 10 appeared in OPUNTIA's #70.1A, 270, 285, 313, 364, 385, 398, 414, 421, and 439.]

Our Next Speaker ...

“The Triage Conference” comes from WHY I HUNT FLYING SAUCERS AND OTHER FANTASTICALS, a 2016 collection of short stories by Hugh A.D. Spencer. It is a hilarious report on a convention of sociologists that isn't too far from reality. If you've ever attended trade conferences for your profession or job training, this will strike a familiar note.

Papers presented included: “The Slave State: Regrettable Necessity Or Future Opportunity?” and “Selection Criteria For Orbital Communities: Application Models From Country Clubs And Luxury Condominiums”. We never see panels like that at Worldcons.

Murderous Affairs.

Several novels have been published about murders at conventions, which I have reviewed in previous installments of this column. Another one for the list is QUEEN CITY CORPSE (2017) by Dan Andriacco, about foul play during QueenCon (named after Ellery Queen), a mystery genre convention held in Cincinnati, Ohio.

An elderly author was murdered during the convention. He was in the final stages of cancer and it was widely known that he would not survive the convention by more than a few weeks. The puzzle was why anyone would kill a man on his deathbed.

The police were hampered by a hotel full of amateur detectives, all of whom thought they could do a better job investigating the case. The reaction of many to the news of the death was to begin plotting a murder-at-the-con book.

Two married couples went detecting despite being warned off by police. As is traditional with standard mysteries, the list of suspects was enumerated and then the waters muddied to cast as much doubt as possible on them. The finale was improbable, based on a short stocky woman being able to impersonate a tall thin woman without anyone noticing the disguise.

However the book reads well. I've never been to a purely mystery convention but have attended many readercons and general science fiction conventions. The description of events and people at QueenCon are accurate and match the conventions I have enjoyed, minus the murders of course.

Workshops.

There is an entire industry of writers' workshops across Canada and the USA because half the adults on this continent have a novel in progress. The good news is that anyone can now publish on the Internet. The bad news is that anyone can now publish on the Internet.

I mention that because of something I noticed years ago in my attendance of science fiction conventions and readercons. (My first convention was Con-Version 3 in 1986 in Calgary.) Those events all had writer workshops, invariably booked up solid before the convention even opened. The members were often the same year after year, and never actually published anything. They just liked workshoping.

Which brings me to *A STORY TO KILL* (2016) by Lynn Cahoon, which was the first novel in a cozy series about Cat Latimer. She was a former English literature professor who moved back to her old hometown of Aspen Hills, Colorado. She inherited a big house from her ex-husband Michael, who never got around to changing his will after the divorce.

Latimer converted it into a bed-and-breakfast conference centre. As the novel began, she was hosting its first function, a writers' workshop. Latimer herself was a published novelist, currently writing her third book. Among the first arrivals for the retreat was a New York City author Tom Cook. The poor fellow didn't make it past Chapter 3, murdered in his room.

Fortunately for Latimer, the Deppity Dawg was her Uncle Pete. Things got busy. Another guest was the prime suspect, a man who had accused Cook of stealing his ideas. There was an elderly fangirl, and several wannabe writers more interested in getting their manuscripts published with Cook's help.

When the other writers learned how messed up Latimer's life was, that was grist for the mill, and they began using her for their plots. It wasn't just them. Cook had just started on a new book, a roman-a-clef about one of the other writers, accusing him of murdering a co-ed years ago. This suggested that a useful

lesson to be learned at a workshop was that anyone writing a roman-a-clef should keep their mouth shut until after publication.

The murderer was wrapped up but the novel was not. It ended with a to-be-continued cliffhanger. Cook's murder prompted Uncle Pete to re-open the file on Michael's death, originally thought to have been a heart attack. The police investigating at the time found the room where Michael died had been wiped clean of all fingerprints, even his. Uncle Pete decided to think about that.

Fatal Festivals.

A FETE WORSE THAN DEATH (2013) by Claudia Bishop (pseudonym of Mary Stanton) was a novel in a cozy series about sisters Meg and Sarah Quilliam, innkeepers at Hemlock Falls, upstate New York. They were actively involved in the annual Finger Lakes Autumn Fete, which was going through a rough patch.

The chairwoman Adela Henry suddenly resigned a week before the Fete. There was infighting within the organization, and much politicking about the programme. It's a good thing that science fiction conventions don't have that sort of trouble.

The Hemlock Falls Chamber of Commerce quickly brought in a professional consultant Linda Connelly to take command. There were 15 food contests to be judged, 120 dealer booths to rent, plus the ticket sales. About that time it was discovered that \$100,000 was missing from the Fete bank account and Henry was nowhere to be found. Someone put a bullet in the back of Connelly's head and stuffed her body into the trunk of a car. And you thought your SF convention had problems.

The sisters Quilliam went snooping, digging up evidence and racing the police to solve the case and get the Fete back on track. The event seemed to be all right on the day. Since the denouement hadn't arrived, the reader could guess there was more excitement scheduled.

There was. The Furry Friends pet contest was uncaged by a saboteur. The dogs got into the pie contest and turned it into a pie eating contest. The novel veered into SF when the plot motivator was revealed to be an atomic warhead the Manhattan Project had carelessly dropped into the lake in the 1940s.

They could never find it, but local entrepreneurs did. They wanted to sell it on the black market to the highest bidder, so they created diversions at the Fete while they hauled out the warhead. Worldcons never have this sort of trouble.

The recipes appendix had the winners of the Fete food contests, except Fruit and Berry Pies. A laconic note was appended: *No award given this year due to unsportsmanlike behavior of participants.*

DEATH AL DENTE (2013) by Leslie Budewitz was the first novel in a cozy series set in Jewel Bay, northwestern Montana. Erin Murphy took over the family general store Murphy's Mercantile, which she remade into a gourmet food boutique. The very thing a rural Montana village needed. She organized the Festa di Pasta to highlight good cooking, including the pasta recipes of her mother, who was of Italian descent.

Murphy's predecessor Claudette Randall had run off to Las Vegas with the local chiropractor, leaving an angry wife behind. She had the gall to return after her boyfriend dumped her but she didn't make trouble for much longer.

Randall was murdered the opening night of Festa di Pasta. As is traditional practice in cozies, her body was dumped behind Miss Marple's store, pardon me, the Mercantile.

The noisy presence of police and forensic technicians put a minor crimp into the Festa but the show must go on. Especially when they were serving shrimp and tapenades. Not exactly the standard chuckwagon fare of cowboys back in the old days of Montana Territory.

The Marpleing commenced, timelines of who was where and when were compiled, and the white-trash biography of Randall brought to light. The killer was a man she done wronged and the usual alarums took place. A subplot, mostly irrelevant, was a rival chef who tried to put Murphy out of business with slander and assorted dirty tricks. Didn't work.

The appendix contained assorted non-Montana recipes. Nothing barbecued but food that every Italian family has sat down to many times. Caprese Salad, Fennel And Shrimp Prosciutto Wraps, Olive Tapenade, Pasta Primavera, Spaghetti Carbonara to name a few. For dessert, Grilled Peaches With Balsamic Vinaigrette.

CRIME RIB (2014) was the sequel, and this time the author made a nod to plausible Montana diets. Erin Murphy had convinced the television show FOOD PRENEURS to film an episode in Jewel Bay. For part of the content, she organized a steak-grilling contest between three local chefs within a local festival being held that weekend.

The Grill-Off had a rough start with accusations of recipe theft but Murphy was able to smooth that over. What she couldn't smooth over was finding the body of the show producer Stacia Duval. Murphy began snooping, as she had to since the compulsion to be the village Miss Marple was embedded in her genes.

Duval's body had just cooled off at the morgue when chef Drew Baker, one of the three Grill-Off contestants, was beaten to death with a meat tenderizer. Both the festival and the filming continued. The former because the village merchants had too much invested in planning it, and the latter because the crew had to go back to the studio with something.

Duval's successor producer remarked: *If everyone ate just one huckleberry truffle, world peace would break out.* Setting aside the logistics of distributing 7 billion truffles, one doubts the huckleberry growers of the world could supply the demand.

Getting back to the plot, there were two murderers with different motives, and so from there to the recipes appendix. The Baked Stuffed Brie was something that only a city slicker would eat. For the cowfolk, there was Grilled Flank Steak. Somewhere in between, consider the Huckleberry Morel Tenderloin.

More havoc was lashed on the village in BUTTER OFF DEAD (2015). Erin Murphy decided to organize the First Annual Food Lovers Film Festival. Apparently there were enough movies out there with food themes, although most of them seemed to be European. (I leave it to someone else to review such movies in their zine.)

Days before the festival, co-organizer Christine Vandeberg was murdered. She was the girlfriend of Murphy's brother, so it became personal. The plot was complicated enough that Murphy set up a spreadsheet to track the details. A thoroughly modern Miss Marple. Vandeberg had stumbled across a grow-op, while simultaneously a thief was scrambling to loot valuable collectibles from locals.

Murphy was also busy trying to come up with new food lines for her restaurant. So was the recipes appendix. The first two were for Huckleberry Martinis and Huckleberry Margaritas. At this point, I went to Google to double-check and yes, the huckleberry is indeed the official fruit of Montana.

Next was Sunday Morning Scones, something to be sobering up with after all those huckleberry drinks. Following on was Fennel And Blood Orange Salad. If you still haven't sobered up, try the Pumpkin Spice Coffee Blend.

TURKEY TROT MURDER (2017) by Leslie Meier began with local part-time news reporter Lucy Stone in training for the Tinker's Cove, Maine, annual Turkey Trot 5K footrace. The Harvest Festival was on, and it being a Maine fishing village with a resident Jessica Fletcher, the murder rate had soared.

Stone's main activity, finding every murder victim in the county, was fulfilled by page 9 (hardcover edition). She spotted the corpse of Alison Franklin floating in Blueberry Pond.

The Franklin family was rich but they had their troubles. Stone sniffed about for scandals in between everything else. The Harvest Festival had conscripted her into preparing six dozen apple cider doughnuts. She managed to delegate that task to her daughter, who in turn convinced her boyfriend to do the work. Fortunately he was a culinary student and the doughnuts turned out well.

The cast of characters got complicated, and not just the ones on the doughnut production line. Alarums included a riot against a proposed Mexican restaurant and a pistol-packing mama who after church went out back and did target practice with her Glock 9mm. The Franklins seemed to be mixed up in all the trouble, although their ranks were thinned out as the body count rose.

All was explained in the denouement over turkey burritos, spicy pumpkin soup, roast pork with cranberry salsa, and pumpkin flan. Disfruta tu comida!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Joe Siclari
FANAC Fan History Project

2019-10-29

Our big news is that we have received a request from the Library of Congress to archive our site. From the letter: "*The Library of Congress preserves important cultural artifacts and provides enduring access to them...The Library will make this collection available to researchers at Library facilities and by special arrangement.*" They may later make it publicly available as well.

We've all seen the loss of many websites that showcase the hard work and outstanding accomplishments of fans and historians in our field. This archiving request from the Library of Congress will ensure that the work we've been doing with your help will be available, even after the current class of fan historians has bit the dust. Color us ecstatic. We'll let you know when the process has completed.

FANAC Fan History Project website: <http://fanac.org>
We have been on a bit of a roll lately. As of October 23, we have 8,959 fanzines online, with over 117,000 pages. That's 890 fanzines added since Worldcon and 2,000 since our Flash Update in February. Of the total, 3,055 are newszines. For all the updates in excruciating detail, see www.fanac.org/history.

CoNZeland and the Retro Hugos for 1944:
We are working with the next Worldcon, CoNZeland, to provide as complete a list as possible of 1944 fanzines for the Retro Hugo Awards. We have nearly 300 online already. We are building a list that will include links to other sites with relevant material, as we did in previous years. As part of the 1944 effort, we have added more Cosmic Circle related material.

Core Fanzines to Scan:
As we mentioned at the end of the August newsletter, we have built a priority target list of Core Fanzines to scan. The intent is to focus on scanning the major fanzines that shaped fandom over time. My guess is that when the list is stable, there will be about 150 titles, altogether representing about 4,000 issues. A few

of the titles are already online elsewhere, and for some we don't yet have permission. We have about 60% of the remainder online at FANAC.org now.

The Core list does not include most newszines. That's a separate priority project. This list doesn't stop us from scanning other good zines but rather helps us to focus on publications that we agree are necessary to the understanding of the field through the decades.

Searchable Pavlat-Evans Index:

I've created a searchable PDF file of the Pavlat-Evans Fanzine Index. It makes it a lot easier to find the details on most zines. The OCR is not perfect, but it is a great improvement. So when you are trying to find out exactly how many issues of THE BROOKLYN REPORTER were published, now you can go right to it.

Lest you think we've entered a new golden age, remember that Pavlat-Evans was published in December 1952. Information about later zines can be found in a variety of collection lists we have at http://www.fanac.org/Fannish_Reference_Works/Bibliographies/. And, of course, look them up on Fancyclopedia.org.

Music, Musicals, and their related ephemera:

We've had several recent additions to our collection of musicals including 1986, a Lunacon 23 production (provided by Linda Deneroff), The Purple Pastures script, a Pittcon (1960) production, provided by Andy Hooper and Songs from Space by Eric Bentcliffe (provided by Rob Hansen).

Check them out, they range from 1957 to 1989, and are a charming corner of our subculture. In 2019, the genre is very much alive. Dublin2019 presented the world premiere of the stage musical adaptation of THE ENCHANTED DUPLICATOR, that enduring classic of Irish fanwriting. We'll try to get that one too.

Website Changes:

We've switched over to scanning fanzines exclusively as PDFs. The technology has improved to the point that we now can provide searchable PDFs even for fanzines from the 1930s. ... Our goal is to put fanzines up in easily readable format, retaining the original look of the publication.

With searchable PDFs, not only you, but eventually Google will be able to find almost anything or anyone mentioned. With our new equipment and software, we are literally adding over a hundred zines per month and providing better access to those searching for the thousands of people and publications mentioned.

Since the new scans are now PDF files, it does mean that larger fanzines will take a few seconds to download. We will keep each file as small as we can without reducing visual quality. As time permits, we will replace existing fanzine JPG scans with PDFs but this will be a slow process as we are focused on archiving the fanzines not yet scanned.

Thanks also to Mark Olson for providing software to make it easier to modify the fanzine index pages. We are now adding columns to the pages for who scanned an issue, and to indicate whether an issue is a PDF or not.

FANAC Fan History YouTube Channel:

<https://youtube.com/c/FANACFanHistory> Today's stats: over 68,000 views and 480 subscribers. We've added two recordings since our August update for a total of 72 altogether. Our latest video has gone "viral" (in fan history terms). In the three weeks since we posted it, our video of Julia Ecklar's filk concert at Tropicon 8 (1989) has had 1,137 views.

Our other video is not as melodic but it is filled with fascinating history. From the YouTube description: "In this video, Rusty Hevelin interviews author Jack Williamson. Jack talks candidly about his life and career, from his experiences with psychoanalysis to his apprenticeship with (early SF writer) Miles J. Breuer to how he changed with the market over 50 years". Jack speaks quietly so you do have to listen. It's a bit slow to start but picks up midway.

Fancyclopedia.org:

There are too many entries in Fancyclopedia.org to read them all but try this: type in the name of your favorite well-known fan. There's a good chance there will be info in their Fancyclopedia bio that you never knew about them. If you spot something missing that's important, please let us know. If they're not listed, then send us a note with what you know about them and we will try to find more.

When Mark Olson took over this project 10 years ago, it was a formidable challenge. It still is, but now there's so much information on the site that it's the

first place to go in order to get questions answered about fannish topics. There's still more to do, so take the "look up your favorite fan" challenge and help us add to the Fancyclopedia.

As always, thanks for the contributions (both of material and financial donations). Remember: Those that don't know fannish history may be condemned to repeat it, but those that do also know that fannish love camps in the Ozarks were a hot topic decades before the Summer of Love <http://fancyclopedia.org/ozarks>

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Watson, D., et al (2019) **Identification of strontium in the merger of two neutron stars.** NATURE 574:497-500

Authors' abstract: *Half of all of the elements in the Universe that are heavier than iron were created by rapid neutron capture. The theory underlying this astrophysical r-process was worked out six decades ago, and requires an enormous neutron flux to make the bulk of the elements. Where this happens is still debated. A key piece of evidence would be the discovery of freshly synthesized r-process elements in an astrophysical site.*

Existing models and circumstantial evidence point to neutron-star mergers as a probable r-process site; the optical/infrared transient known as a 'kilonova' that emerges in the days after a merger is a likely place to detect the spectral signatures of newly created neutron-capture elements.

The kilonova AT2017gfo, which was found following the discovery of the neutron-star merger GW170817 by gravitational-wave detectors, was the first kilonova for which detailed spectra were recorded. When these spectra were first reported, it was argued that they were broadly consistent with an outflow of radioactive heavy elements; however, there was no robust identification of any one element.

Here we report the identification of the neutron-capture element strontium in a reanalysis of these spectra. The detection of a neutron-capture element

associated with the collision of two extreme-density stars establishes the origin of r-process elements in neutron-star mergers, and shows that neutron stars are made of neutron-rich matter.

Speirs: Any element heavier than iron (that is, more protons and neutrons in its core) cannot be created by normal fusion processes of a star, only by extraordinary events such as supernovas or collisions between neutron stars. In other words, if you wear a gold ring, the gold atoms in it were created by such events early in the history of the Universe.

Beznosov, P.A., et al (2019) **Morphology of the earliest reconstructable tetrapod *Parmastega aelidae*.** NATURE 574:527-531

Authors' abstract: *Here we describe *Parmastega aelidae* gen. et sp. nov., a tetrapod from Russia dated to the earliest Famennian age (about 372 million years ago), represented by three-dimensional material that enables the reconstruction of the skull and shoulder girdle. The raised orbits, lateral line canals and weakly ossified postcranial skeleton of *P. aelidae* suggest a largely aquatic, surface-cruising animal. In Bayesian and parsimony-based phylogenetic analyses, the majority of trees place *Parmastega* as a sister group to all other tetrapods.*

Speirs: Not quite the ancestor to four-legged land animals but a cousin.

Lindström, S., et al (2019) **Volcanic mercury and mutagenesis in land plants during the end-Triassic mass extinction.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 5:eaaw4018

[The end-Triassic extinction took place 199.6 megayears ago.]

Authors' abstract: *During the past 600 million years of Earth history, four of five major extinction events were synchronous with volcanism in large igneous provinces. Despite improved temporal frameworks for these events, the mechanisms causing extinctions remain unclear. Volcanic emissions of greenhouse gases, SO₂, and halocarbons are generally considered as major factors in the biotic crises, resulting in global warming, acid deposition, and ozone layer depletion.*

Here, we show that pulsed elevated concentrations of mercury in marine and terrestrial sediments across the Triassic-Jurassic boundary in southern Scandinavia and northern Germany correlate with intense volcanic activity in the Central Atlantic Magmatic Province.

The increased levels of mercury, the most genotoxic element on Earth, also correlate with high occurrences of abnormal fern spores, indicating severe environmental stress and genetic disturbance in the parent plants. We conclude that this offers compelling evidence that emissions of toxic volcanogenic substances contributed to the end-Triassic biotic crisis.

Paxman, G.J.G., et al (2019) **Reconstructions of Antarctic topography since the Eocene-Oligocene boundary.** PALAEOGEOGRAPHY, PALAEOCLIMATOLOGY, PALAEOECOLOGY 535:doi.org/10.1016/j.palaeo.2019.109346

Authors' abstract: *Accurate models of past Antarctic ice sheet behaviour require realistic reconstructions of the evolution of bedrock topography. However, other than a preliminary attempt to reconstruct Antarctic topography at the Eocene-Oligocene boundary, the long-term evolution of Antarctica's subglacial topography throughout its glacial history has not previously been quantified.*

Here, we derive new reconstructions of Antarctic topography for four key time slices in Antarctica's climate and glacial history: the Eocene-Oligocene boundary (ca. 34 Ma), the Oligocene-Miocene boundary (ca. 23 Ma), the mid-Miocene climate transition (ca. 14 Ma), and the mid- Pliocene warm period (ca. 3.5 Ma).

To reconstruct past topography, we consider a series of processes including ice sheet loading, volcanism, thermal subsidence, horizontal plate motion, erosion, sedimentation and flexural isostatic adjustment, and validate our models where possible using onshore and offshore geological constraints. Our reconstructions show that the land area of Antarctica situated above sea level was ~25% larger at the Eocene–Oligocene boundary than at the present-day.

Offshore sediment records and terrestrial constraints indicate that the incision of deep subglacial topographic troughs around the margin of East Antarctica occurred predominantly in the Oligocene and early Miocene, whereas in West

Antarctica erosion and sedimentation rates accelerated after the mid-Miocene. Changes to the topography after the mid-Pliocene were comparatively minor.

Our new palaeotopography reconstructions provide a critical boundary condition for models seeking to understand past behaviour of the Antarctic Ice Sheet, and have implications for estimating changes in global ice volume, temperature, and sea level across major Cenozoic climate transitions.

Bianucci, G., et al (2019) **A new Monodontidae (Cetacea, Delphinoidea) from the Lower Pliocene of Italy supports a warm-water origin for narwhals and white whales.** JOURNAL OF VERTEBRATE PALEONTOLOGY 39:doi.org/10.1080/02724634.2019.1645148

[Narwhals are monodontids.]

Authors' abstract: *A new taxon of monodontid cetacean, Casatia thermophila, gen. et sp. nov., is here described on the basis of a partial skull from lower Pliocene (5.1 to 4.5 megayears ago) marginal-marine deposits of Tuscany (central Italy).*

This new taxon belongs to Monodontidae based on the presence of a medial exposure of the maxillae anterior and lateral to the external bony nares; it mainly differs from all other named monodontids by the presence of a median depression of the premaxillae anterior to the premaxillary sac fossae and by a medial margin of the premaxillary-maxillary suture that does not parallel the anterolateral profile of the external bony nares.

Our phylogenetic analysis, the first including all taxa of Monodontidae, recovers Casatia as a crown monodontid, more closely related to Delphinapterus than to Monodon and sister group of an unnamed taxon from the North Sea. The holotype of Casatia represents the first and only fossil monodontid from the Mediterranean Basin.

Taking its place beside abundant fossils of strongly thermophilic marine vertebrates, such as the bull shark Carcharhinus leucas, the tiger shark Galeocerdo cuvier, and the extinct sirenian Metaxytherium subapenninum, Casatia thermophila represents the strongest evidence supporting the hypothesis that monodontids once thrived in low-latitude, warm-water habitats.

On the basis of our phylogenetic reconstruction, early relatives of the extant monodontids might have adapted independently to the high-latitude, cold-water environments they currently master. The definitive disappearance of the Neogene thermophilic monodontids could be attributed to the cooling episode that accompanied the onset of long-term Northern Hemisphere glaciation around 3 Ma.

Liu, P., et al (2019) Flies land upside down on a ceiling using rapid visually mediated rotational maneuvers. SCIENCE ADVANCES 5:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax1877

Authors' abstract: Flies and other insects routinely land upside down on a ceiling. These inverted landing maneuvers are among the most remarkable aerobatic feats, yet the full range of these behaviors and their underlying sensorimotor processes remain largely unknown.

Here, we report that successful inverted landing in flies involves a serial sequence of well-coordinated behavioral modules, consisting of an initial upward acceleration followed by rapid body rotation and leg extension, before terminating with a leg-assisted body swing pivoted around legs firmly attached to the ceiling.

Statistical analyses suggest that rotational maneuvers are triggered when flies' relative retinal expansion velocity reaches a threshold. Also, flies exhibit highly variable pitch and roll rates, which are strongly correlated to and likely mediated by multiple sensory cues. When flying with higher forward or lower upward velocities, flies decrease the pitch rate but increase the degree of leg-assisted swing, thereby leveraging the transfer of body linear momentum.

Shave, R.E., et al (2019) Selection of endurance capabilities and the trade-off between pressure and volume in the evolution of the human heart. PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1906902116

Authors' abstract: Chimpanzees and gorillas, when not inactive, engage primarily in short bursts of resistance physical activity (RPA), such as climbing and fighting, that creates pressure stress on the cardiovascular system. In contrast, to initially hunt and gather and later to farm, it is thought that

preindustrial human survival was dependent on lifelong moderate-intensity endurance physical activity (EPA), which creates a cardiovascular volume stress.

Although derived musculoskeletal and thermoregulatory adaptations for EPA in humans have been documented, it is unknown if selection acted similarly on the heart. To test this hypothesis, we compared left ventricular (LV) structure and function across semiwild sanctuary chimpanzees, gorillas, and a sample of humans exposed to markedly different physical activity patterns.

We show the human LV possesses derived features that help augment cardiac output thereby enabling EPA. However, the human LV also demonstrates phenotypic plasticity and, hence, variability, across a wide range of habitual physical activity.

We show that the human LV's propensity to remodel differentially in response to chronic pressure or volume stimuli associated with intense RPA and EPA as well as physical inactivity represents an evolutionary trade-off with potential implications for contemporary cardiovascular health.

Specifically, the human LV trades off pressure adaptations for volume capabilities and converges on a chimpanzee-like phenotype in response to physical inactivity or sustained pressure loading. Consequently, the derived LV and lifelong low blood pressure appear to be partly sustained by regular moderate-intensity EPA whose decline in postindustrial societies likely contributes to the modern epidemic of hypertensive heart disease.

Faith, J.T., et al (2019) Early hominins evolved within non-analog ecosystems. PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:21478-21483

Authors' abstract: Present-day African ecosystems serve as referential models for conceptualizing the environmental context of early hominin evolution, but the degree to which modern ecosystems are representative of those in the past is unclear.

A growing body of evidence from eastern Africa's rich and well-dated late Cenozoic fossil record documents communities of large bodied mammalian herbivores with ecological structures differing dramatically from those of the

present day, implying that modern communities may not be suitable analogs for the ancient ecosystems of hominin evolution.

To determine when and why the ecological structure of eastern Africa's herbivore faunas came to resemble those of the present, here we analyze functional trait changes in a comprehensive dataset of 305 modern and fossil herbivore communities spanning the last ~7 Myr. We show that nearly all communities prior to ~700 ka were functionally non-analog, largely due to a greater richness of non-ruminants and megaherbivores (species >1,000 kg).

The emergence of functionally modern communities precedes that of taxonomically modern communities by 100,000s of years, and can be attributed to the combined influence of Plio-Pleistocene C4 grassland expansion and pulses of aridity after ~1 Ma.

Given the disproportionate ecological impacts of large-bodied herbivores on factors such as vegetation structure, hydrology, and fire regimes, it follows that the vast majority of early hominin evolution transpired in the context of ecosystems that functioned unlike any today. Identifying how past ecosystems differed compositionally and functionally from those today is key to conceptualizing ancient African environments and testing ecological hypotheses of hominin evolution.

Through analyses of a fossil data set spanning the last 7 Myr, we show that eastern African communities of large-bodied mammalian herbivores differed markedly from those today until ~700,000 y ago. Because large herbivores are ecosystem engineers and shape biotic communities in ways that impact a wide variety of species, this implies that the vast majority of early human evolution transpired in the context of ecosystems that functioned unlike any known today.

Niekus, M.J.L.T., et al (2019) **Middle Paleolithic complex technology and a Neandertal tar-backed tool from the Dutch North Sea.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:22081-22087

Authors' abstract: We report the discovery of a 50,000-year-old birch tar-hafted flint tool found off the present-day coastline of The Netherlands. The production of adhesives and multicomponent tools is considered complex technology and has a prominent place in discussions about the evolution of human behavior. This find provides evidence on the technological capabilities

of Neandertals and illuminates the currently debated conditions under which these technologies could be maintained.

C-accelerator mass spectrometry dating and the geological provenance of the artifact firmly associates it with a host of Middle Paleolithic stone tools and a Neandertal fossil. The find was analyzed using pyrolysis-gas chromatography-mass spectrometry, X-ray micro-computed tomography, and optical light microscopy. The object is a piece of birch tar, encompassing one-third of a flint flake. This find is from northwestern Europe and complements a small set of well-dated and chemically identified adhesives from Middle Paleolithic/Middle Stone Age contexts.

Together with data from experiments and other Middle Paleolithic adhesives, it demonstrates that Neandertals mastered complex adhesive production strategies and composite tool use at the northern edge of their range. Thus, a large population size is not a necessary condition for complex behavior and technology. The mitigation of ecological risk, as demonstrated by the challenging conditions during Marine Isotope Stage 4 and 3, provides a better explanation for the transmission and maintenance of technological complexity.

Toniello, G., et al (2019) **11,500 y of human-clam relationships provide long-term context for intertidal management in the Salish Sea, British Columbia.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:22106-22114

Authors' abstract: We bring together paleoecological, archaeological, and modern clam records to explore the relationship between humans and butter clams (*Saxidomus gigantea*) throughout the Holocene in the northern Salish Sea of British Columbia, Canada.

We compare butter clam size and growth patterns from different temporal, environmental, and cultural contexts spanning 11,500 y to present. Butter clam size and growth were restricted in early postglacial times but increased over the next few millennia. During the early-Late Holocene, humans took increasing advantage of robust clam populations and after 3.5 ka, began constructing clam gardens (intertidal rock-walled terraces).

Environmental and cultural variables, including coarse substrate, stabilized sea surface temperature, and the presence of a clam garden wall, increased clam

growth throughout the Holocene. Measurements of clams collected in active clam gardens and deposited in middens suggest that clam gardens as well as other mariculture activities enhanced clam production despite increased harvesting pressure.

Since European contact, decline of traditional management practices and increases in industrial activities are associated with reduced clam size and growth similar to those of the early postglacial clams.

Beach, T., et al (2019) **Ancient Maya wetland fields revealed under tropical forest canopy from laser scanning and multiproxy evidence.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 116:21469-21477

Authors’ abstract: *We report on a large area of ancient Maya wetland field systems in Belize, Central America, based on airborne lidar survey coupled with multiple proxies and radiocarbon dates that reveal ancient field uses and chronology. The lidar survey indicated four main areas of wetland complexes, including the Birds of Paradise wetland field complex that is five times larger than earlier remote and ground survey had indicated, and revealed a previously unknown wetland field complex that is even larger.*

The field systems date mainly to the Maya Late and Terminal Classic (~1,400–1,000 y ago), but with evidence from as early as the Late Preclassic (~1,800 y ago) and as late as the Early Postclassic (~900 y ago). Previous study showed that these were polycultural systems that grew typical ancient Maya crops including maize, arrowroot, squash, avocado, and other fruits and harvested fauna.

The wetland fields were active at a time of population expansion, landscape alteration, and droughts and could have been adaptations to all of these major shifts in Maya civilization. These wetland-farming systems add to the evidence for early and extensive human impacts on the global tropics.

Broader evidence suggests a wide distribution of wetland agroecosystems across the Maya Lowlands and Americas, and we hypothesize the increase of atmospheric carbon dioxide and methane from burning, preparing, and maintaining these field systems contributed to the Early Anthropocene.

Arute, F., et al (2019) **Quantum supremacy using a programmable superconducting processor.** NATURE 574:505-510

Authors’ abstract: *Here we report the use of a processor with programmable superconducting qubits to create quantum states on 53 qubits, corresponding to a computational state-space of dimension 2^{53} (about 10^{16}). Measurements from repeated experiments sample the resulting probability distribution, which we verify using classical simulations.*

Our Sycamore processor takes about 200 seconds to sample one instance of a quantum circuit a million times. Our benchmarks currently indicate that the equivalent task for a state-of-the-art classical supercomputer would take approximately 10,000 years. This dramatic increase in speed compared to all known classical algorithms is an experimental realization of quantum supremacy for this specific computational task, heralding a much anticipated computing paradigm.

Speirs: The first thought that ran through my mind was whether this computer could be used to mine all the remaining available Bitcoins in a day or so. Not only that, the research team could then sell the Bitcoins for real currency and thereby defray the cost of their research.