OPUNTIA 467

Late February 2020

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.

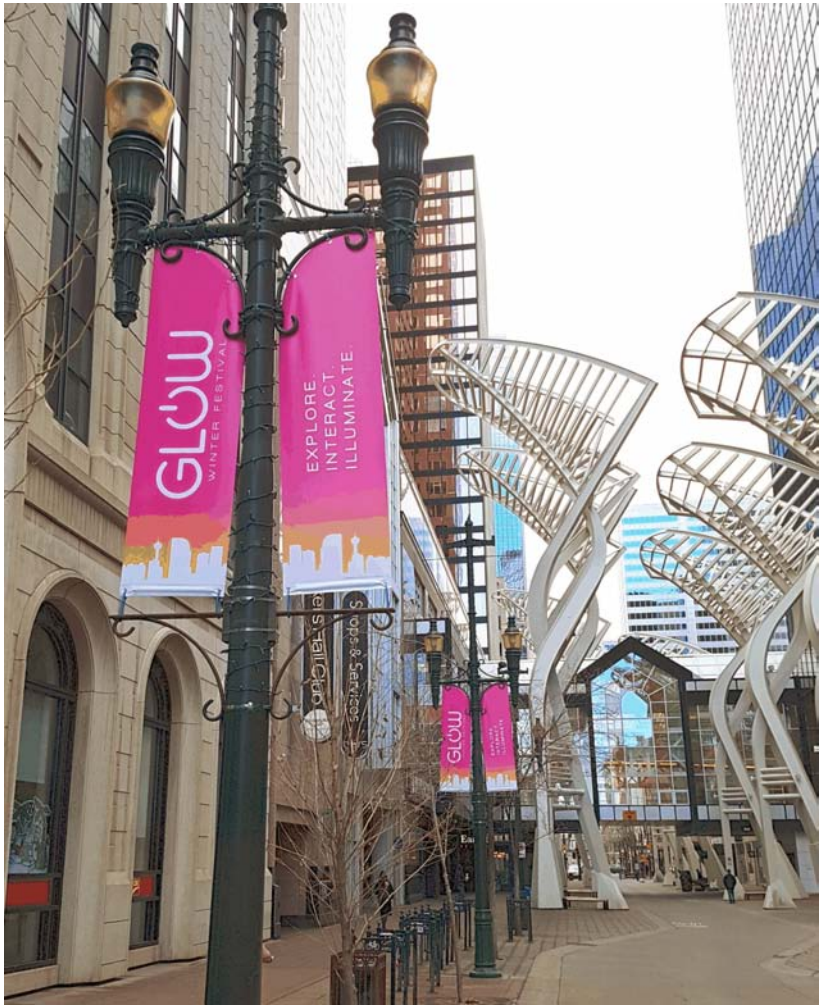
GLOW FESTIVAL 2020

2020-02-14 to 16

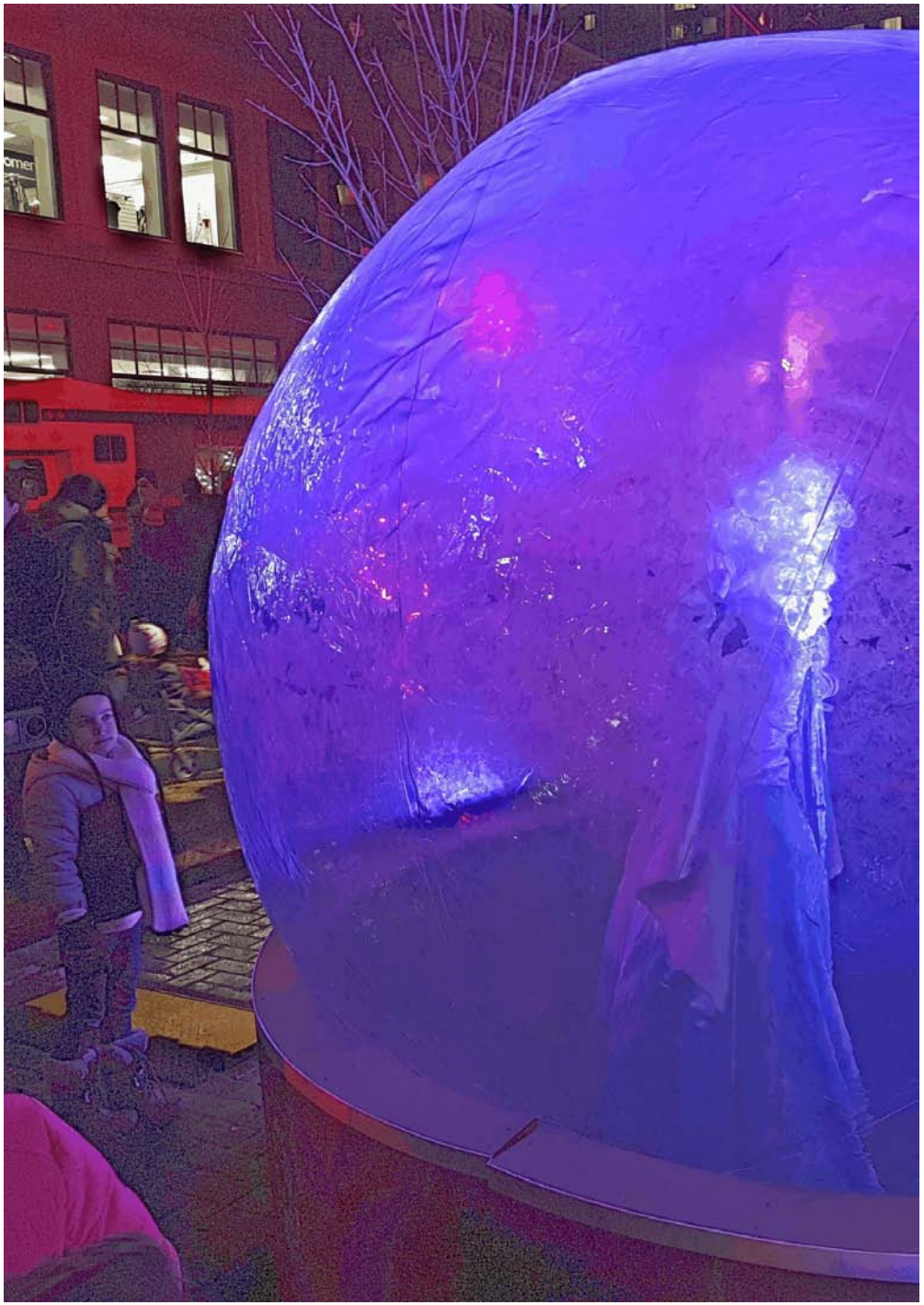
photos by Dale Speirs

[Reports on previous Glow Festivals appeared in OPUNTAs #368 and 436.]

The Family Day weekend was the third Glow Festival, albeit not annual since they had trouble getting funding one year. The light displays were along the Stephen Avenue pedestrian mall in the downtown core. Below is a daytime view.



All along the mall were giant snow globes with young women inside them dressed as ice princesses. They interacted with passersby. As you can seen on the cover, children were particularly awed by them. A different globe is shown below.



One of the women getting into her snow globe. Notice she is warmly dressed under her dress. It wasn't that cold out, only -10°C, but obviously a thin dress would not suffice to stay warm.

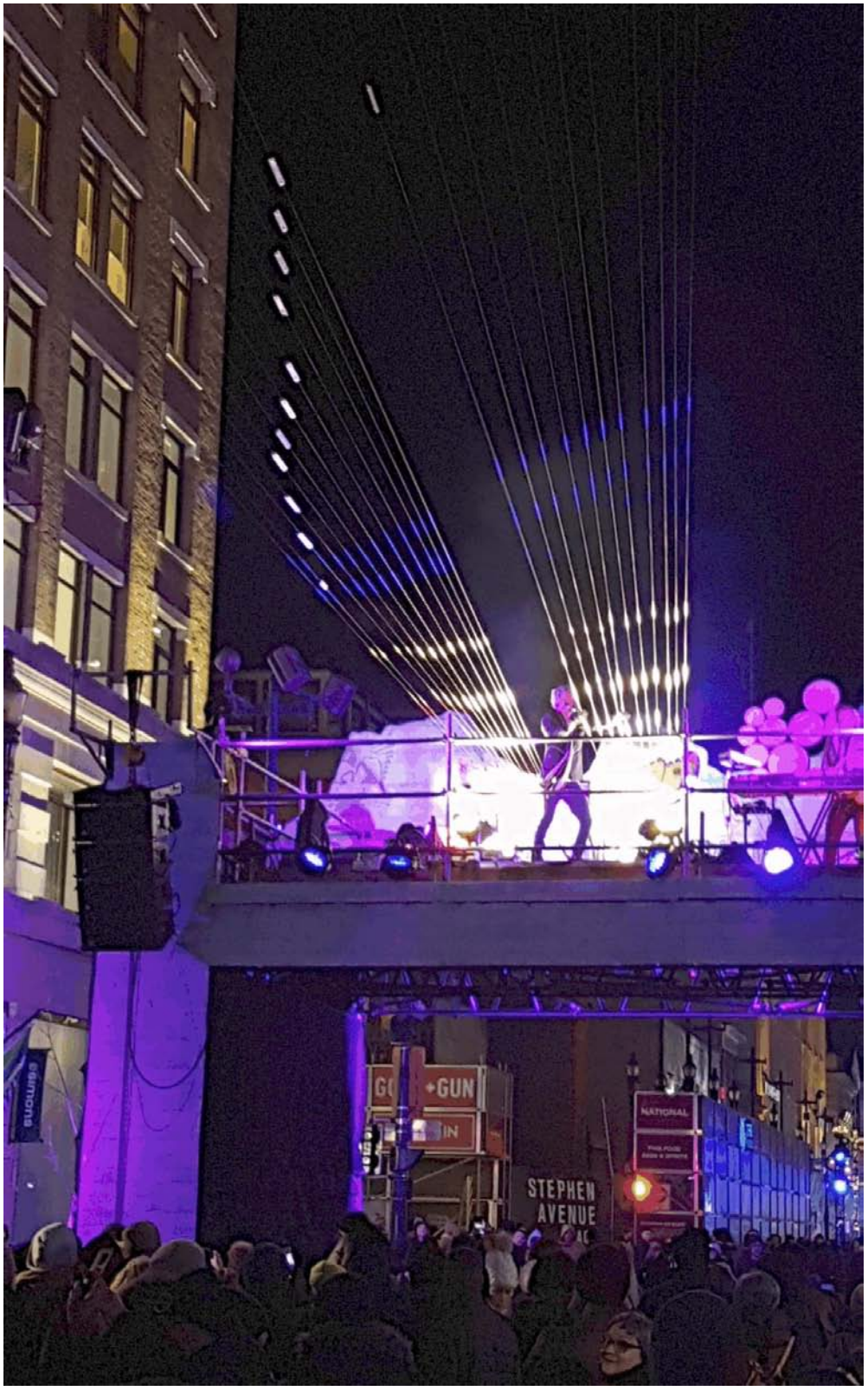
Lots of ice sculptures along the mall, both completed and in progress.

A bison, illuminated with changing lights.

It may not be an iron throne, but set a spell anyway.

Top right: Inflatable igloos were available as warm-up stations, but since the temperatures were mild, few people used them.

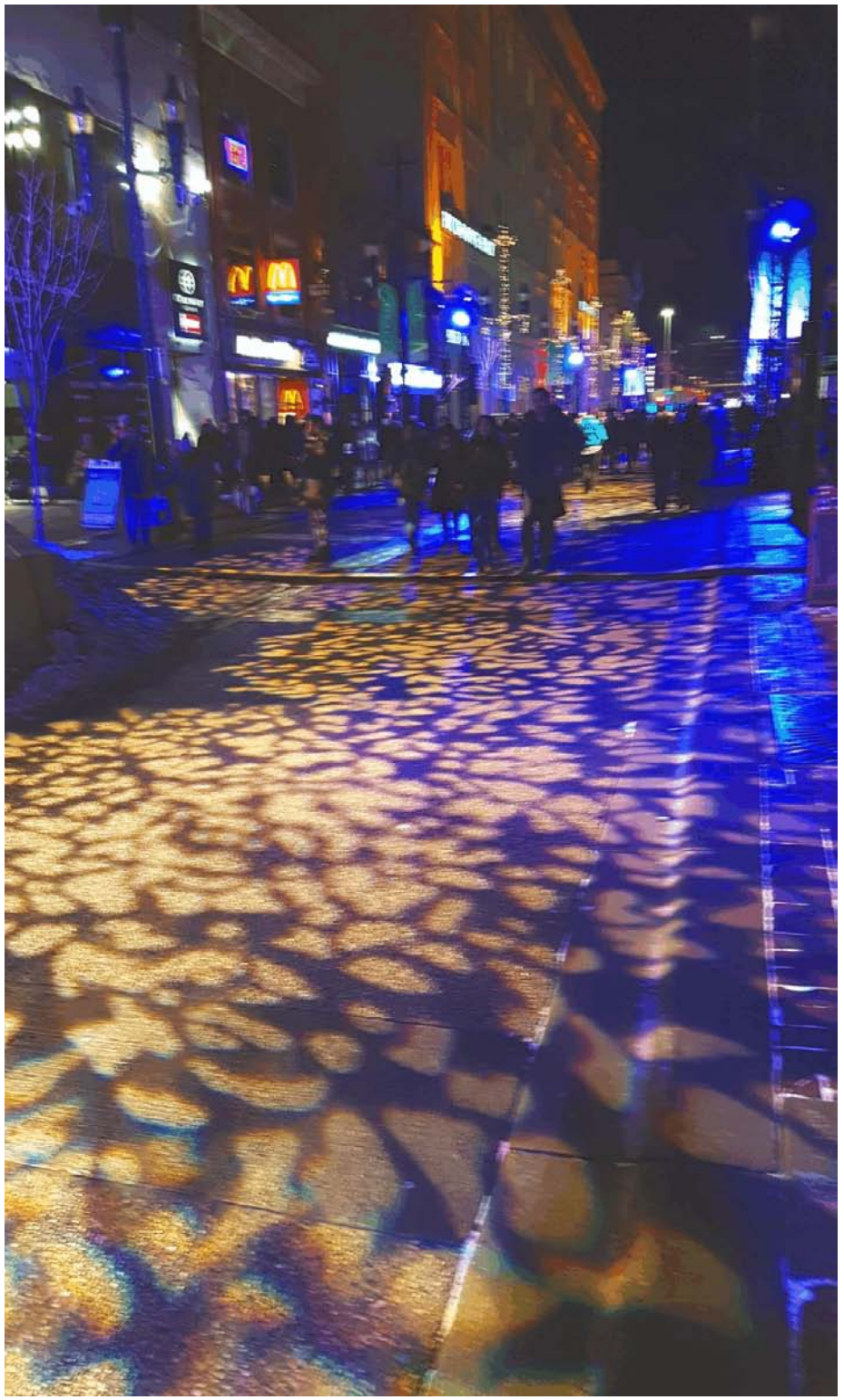
Bottom right: The Stephen Avenue Choo Choo ran at full capacity all night.



The most spectacular musical act was this aeolian harp, strung up to the skyscrapers.

At the other end of the avenue was this band.

Spot the difference between a Canadian jazz musician and a New Orleans player.



SERIES DETECTIVES: PART 6
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 5 appeared in OPUNTIAs #402, 406, 425, 448, and 459.]

The old-time radio series mentioned here are available as free mp3 downloads from www.otrrlibrary.org or www.archive.org.

Barrie Craig.

BARRIE CRAIG, CONFIDENTIAL INVESTIGATOR was probably the only private detective series whose star had actually been a private detective in real life. William Gargan had worked in an investigator's office as a young man, and professed amusement at how script writers depicted private detectives at variance with the real ones.

This series aired from 1951 to 1955. Craig narrated a lot of each episode. The plots often tangled up, but there were several summations during each episode so the listener wouldn't get lost. The episodes are worth listening to once, and the series grows on the listener.

"Kitchens Come With Knives" was a 1953 episode written by Louis Vittes. Craig had been hired by John Griffith to watch the house of Lynn Walters for the arrival of Sam Jenkins, his business partner. The two partners were at odds and Griffith wanted to buy out Jenkins.

Supposedly Jenkins was stealing confidential information and selling it to competitors with Walters as a go-between. Craig, like many detectives, didn't handle divorce cases, but he found out eventually that Griffith was diddling the soon to be former Mrs Jenkins and wanted blackmail to chase away his partner.

While on stakeout, Craig had a run-in with a big bruiser named Frank Baldwin, an ex-boyfriend of Walters. Shortly after, Sam Jenkins was murdered in Walters' kitchen, stabbed with a knife. Baldwin did not long survive him. Craig had to do a bit of running around before he nailed down the murderer. Mrs Jenkins preferred direct action, a methodology that would lead her to the electric chair.

"Never Murder A Mummy" was a 1955 episode written by Louis Vittes. It began with Barrie Craig in his office when an Egyptian mummy was delivered to him. Just after the deliverymen left, a woman arrived, claiming she was Nefertiti and the mummy was her sister.

The conversation was brief and she left. Craig and the building's night watchman Jake tracked her back to a museum. They found the sarcophagus the mummy had been in, but it was now occupied by Osgood, the museum owner. Or rather had been, as he had been murdered a few hours ago.

Snooping about, they eavesdropped on an angry conversation between the woman and two men. Craig and Jake barged in and took them to the case with Osgood's body. They professed surprise, but Craig didn't believe them.

After the police had come and gone, Craig and Jake headed back to the office, only to be greeted with a fusillade of gunshots. The gunmen fled with the mummy back to the museum, with Craig hot on their heels. The mummy was now back inside its case, the police having removed Osgood's body.

Assorted alarums and excursions followed. Osgood had too much money for his own good, hidden inside the mummy. One of the other men wanted it and tried to frame the others for the murder. The logic behind this episode was garbled to say the least, but no worse than a hundred other detective shows.

Boston Blackie.

BOSTON BLACKIE aired on old-time radio from 1944 to 1950, and was also a series of 14 movies. His real name was Horatio Black but everyone, including his girlfriend Mary Wesley, called him Blackie. The shows are leavened with humour and quips.

Blackie had been a jewel thief in Boston and was supposedly reformed now that he lived in New York City. Supposedly, because he had no day job and took no fees as an amateur detective, yet lived well in a nice apartment and squired Wesley around to the fanciest nightclubs.

Blackie's nemesis was NYPD Homicide Inspector Farraday. The name was originally spelt in the usual way with one 'r' but for some reason the extra letter was added after the series got going. In the early episodes of the series, Farraday would arrest Blackie on sight, then gather evidence to fit him. Over time their relationship moderated to being sparring partners.

Blackie liked to barge into hot cases and race Farraday to the solution, while Farraday always had the snappiest lines. One amusing aspect of the series was the berserk organist who provided all the music. Scenes were punctuated, and that is the correct word, by abrupt chords on the organ. Dramatic lines spoken by the cast were followed by crescendos, although the opening and closing themes were more sedate.

"Baseball Player Murder" was a 1946 episode from the era when Farraday tried to railroad Blackie at every opportunity. The opening was in the locker room where the coach announced a last-minute change in the lineup, switching two players in the fourth place of the batting order. The player who took that place was shot dead by a sniper as he slid into base on a hit.

Blackie had been in the audience, which was good enough for Farraday, who made him the prime suspect. He couldn't arrest him though, due to a pesky lack of evidence. Blackie went snooping and figured out the shot had come from the scoreboard. It was there that he found the body of the scorekeeper.

It seemed the sniper knew nothing about baseball. He had been told to kill the fourth batter, and at such a distance couldn't recognize who was batting. Blackie figured the wife of the intended victim was in on it, and did some snooping. Farraday chased behind him, finally recognizing that perhaps Blackie hadn't done it. The case was solved and justice done, much to Farraday's regret.

"Dynamite Thompson Murdered" was a 1949 episode, no writer credited. By this time Farraday was friendlier although still very sarcastic to Blackie. It began with an argument between Frank Morgan and Dynamite Thompson, who were rival contractors. Morgan kept losing bids by $500 underbids, and it was obvious that Thompson had some sort of spy in Morgan's office.

Morgan threatened Thompson, who was subsequently murdered in his office. Blackie blabbed to Farraday about witnessing the Morgan and Thompson fight, and mentioned a third contractor named Paul Brent. Farraday went to see Brent, who made a run for it when he saw the inspector. A good way to have police focus their attention.

Two people, Sloane and Palmer, provided alibis for Morgan but were murdered before making depositions. Blackie chatted up Brent's secretary Betty who mentioned Brent was seeing a woman named Mimi. That was why Brent had run, as the affair was illicit and he didn't want the publicity.

Blackie tracked down Brent and Mimi, then set up a J'accuse! meeting in Farraday's office to prove that Morgan was the killer. A lot of bluster and shouting, but the case was solved, leaving only the organist to do his spastic playing for the fadeout.

Casey.

CASEY, CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER aired on radio from 1943 to 1955. The series was based on novels by George Harmon Coxe. The hero was Casey, last name never given, who was a newspaper photographer. He was accompanied by reporter and girlfriend Ann Williams.

"The Case Of The Switched Plates", written by Ashley Buck, was the first episode of the series, aired on July 7, 1943. He was initially referred to as Flash Gun Casey, although that was later dropped. The episode opened with Casey complaining to his editor about having to cover society weddings instead of real news. Casey had just returned with photographs of the nuptials, with story to come later from Ann Williams.

When Casey developed the photos, he discovered someone had switched the films. In those days, press photography was done with large negatives. After each exposure, the photographer transferred the exposed plate to a carrying case and inserted a fresh plate. Casey noticed that the box was similar to his. He and whoever was the other photographer hadn't noticed, and each came away with the other's plates.

The photos showed an industrial laboratory. Casey recognized the place as the supersecret Hartley laboratories. The very same place where a guard was shot dead six hours prior. The editor set Casey on the story. A jump to a conversation between that other photographer and his boss revealed industrial espionage. Hartley was developing a new process, information about which would be a valuable commodity to competitors.

Casey made the rounds of other photographers who were at the wedding. This allowed a fair amount of padding, with at least one ominous foreboding tossed into the plot. From there to alarums and excursions, a wild coincidence that broke the case, and the gunpoint confrontation with the killer. Williams proved her worth when she slugged the killer with a blackjack and saved Casey's life. She was a refreshing change from the usual run of screamers.

"Bright New Star" was a 1947 episode written by Alonzo Deen Cole. Casey and Williams were attending the pre-opening publicity event of a new Broadway show. The show's financial backers had insured Sandra Holiday, the leading lady, for $250,000 to publicize the show. Holiday was a new actress from out of nowhere, rapidly rising and letting it go to her head.

The ominous forebodings were quickly set up. Holiday was mixed up with gangland torpedoes, one of whom, Saleno, wanted to marry her and was rejected in a public humiliation. She had bumped another actress out of the star part, who resented becoming an understudy. There was no surprise when she was found dead in her hotel room the next day.

Saleno skipped town that morning, which made him the prime suspect. Casey and Williams raced the police to a solution. They eventually found the reason for the murder.

Owens, the show's producer, had sold 140% of the show to the backers, expecting it to be a failure as the vast majority of stage shows were. He could then pocket the extra 40%, assuming the 100% was actually spent on the show and not embezzled as well. The investors would take their losses but the matter would go no further. (Mel Brooks later made a movie THE PRODUCERS based on the same premise, except it was a comedy.)

Instead the opening night was a sellout. The show was expected to be a big success because of Holiday. Owens did the calculations and figured that without her it would fail. The insurance policy would cover the initial investments by the backers, so they would at least have their capital returned. Since some of them were gangsters, this was an important point.

When Saleno found out Owens had not only cheated the backers but killed the woman he loved, the second murder took place. Casey and Williams had plenty of copy to turn in to the editor.

Richard Diamond.

RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE aired on radio from 1949 to 1952 as a star vehicle for Dick Powell, who was trying to make a transition from crooner to actor. Private detective Richard Diamond, supported by his rich girlfriend Helen Asher, was an average investigator.

His gimmick was that at the end of each episode he would serenade Asher with a romantic ballad in his rich voice. The dialogue attempted to be snappy and witty but came off as smarmy. Diamond was played as a happy-go-lucky detective who got on well with the police. Noir, it wasn't.

"The Ruby Idol Case" was a 1949 episode, written by Blake Edwards, that perhaps should not have been recorded for posterity. It was, alas, one of those "but it was only a dream" stories.

Richard Diamond was visiting his girlfriend Helen Asher for dinner in her penthouse apartment. She wasn't quite ready in the kitchen so Diamond stretched out on the living room couch, picked up a copy of GORY DETECTIVE she had lying on the coffee table, and read a bit before falling asleep.

The story segued to a character Leland L. Leeds waking up Diamond, telling him his life was in danger. Diamond went out to the manor house where he met Nina, sister of Leland, Dr Roger Miller, his physician, and George Bodeen, suspicious houseguest.

The plot was standard pulp, with an idol stolen from King Tut's tomb, Leland paranoid because Miller kept him on sedatives, a family fortune up for inheritance, and the usual sort of rubbish that people get up to in manor houses. Leland was murdered.

At the J'accuse! meeting in the drawing room, Diamond proposed to smash up the idol since no one cared to claim it. They all thought it was a fake. One of them, the murderer, was lying. When Diamond began to whack it with a fireplace poker, Bodeen leaped forward with a gun to stop him. The rubies were hidden in the idol. Shots were fired and Diamond lay dying.

At least until Asher woke him up to tell him it was only a dream. Ah well, nothing else to do but walk over to her piano and sing to her.

"The Louis Dickson Case" was a 1952 episode written by Richard Carr. It is commonly cited as various combinations of Lewis vs Louis and Dickson vs Dixon. I listened to the pronunciation of the words as closely as possible and concluded the correct variation was as I cite here. Fred Lane hired Diamond to deal with his wife Mary, who was being blackmailed by Louis Dickson, an old college classmate. She confessed to her husband, which ended the blackmail.

Dickson skipped but Fred wanted revenge. Diamond used his contacts with the police and underworld snitches to search for Dickson. While he was doing that, someone murdered Lane in his mansion. Mary said Dickson did it.

Diamond finally found Dickson but Mary didn't identify him. Uncharacteristically Diamond used violence to beat the truth out of Dickson. It was a setup by Mary to eliminate her husband. In the epilogue, Helen Asher urged Diamond to upgrade his operation to a wealthier clientele. She volunteered to be his secretary but he wiggled out of it by bursting into song.

Richard Rogue.

ROGUE'S GALLERY was another star vehicle for Dick Powell. It aired briefly in 1945 and 1946, before Powell moved on to become Richard Diamond. The scripts were written by Ray Buffum.

The gimmick was that at least once each episode he was slugged unconscious. During his blackout he conversed with his alter ego Eugor (spell it backwards) who sometimes gave him a clue about the case but usually just babbled.

"Little Drops Of Rain" was a 1945 episode. The story began with Richard Rogue singing to his girlfriend Liza before his call centre service interrupted him. The case was Mrs Harvey Burgess, who wanted him to track her unfaithful millionaire husband. The other woman was his secretary Helen Stark.

Rogue took Mrs Burgess to the assignation apartment, owned by Clarence Roman. Rogue smelled chloroform in the apartment and searched the place. Someone slugged him unconscious from behind. Eugor appeared but wasn't much help. The slugger was Roman, who thought Rogue was a burglar.

Meanwhile Mrs Burgess found her husband dead upstairs, shot by his own gun. Roman consoled the widow, calling her 'dear' while Rogue went to the telephone to get the police. Rogue missed that but the alert listener will instantly realize who was behind the murders.

Stark lived with her father but he didn't know where she was. As Rogue left the house, he noticed fresh tire tracks into the garage from a recent rain. Inside the garage he found Helen apparently dead from carbon monoxide. Someone had set her up to look like suicide.

Back at the Roman residence, him and the widow were wrapped up as the murderers. Helen survived to testify. As the case concluded, Rogue asked a rhetorical question: *How come a guy as smart as I am gets hit on the head so often?*

"Murder In Drawing Room A" was a 1945 episode. Richard Rogue was on a train when he met an old friend, a newshen named Betty Callahan. Both were en route to Central City for a court trial, he as a witness and she reporting on the story.

Rogue mentioned he had a briefcase full of documents to be used as evidence. It was obvious what the MacGuffin of the episode would be. Rogue busied himself trying to put the moves on her with no success.

A woman named Diane Miller barged into the compartment. "*There's a man on this train who has designs on my life*", she actually said. The dialogue didn't improve thereafter. A goon followed her in, and she departed with him, leaving behind a briefcase as MacGuffin #2.

Callahan made certain to telegraph the plot by remarking that the two briefcases were practically identical. The goon returned, slugged both of them unconscious, and stole a briefcase. He took the wrong one. Eugor didn't help much.

Miller's body was found in another car, in Drawing Room A. Callahan was excited to have a story. The train arrived in Central City, and the alarums moved trackside. Miller was identified as the wife of a gangster awaiting trial.

In a hotel room, Rogue and Callahan opened the briefcase and found $25,000 cash and documents that would put several gangsters away. The goon returned but this time it was him who got slugged unconscious, by Rogue.

From there, Callahan impersonated Miller to draw out a juror on the take for $25,000. He was dumb enough to sign an agreement while Rogue and a sheriff hid in a closet to listen. The case was closed with a twist that earned Rogue $5,000 as a reward.

The plot was standard and the dialogue stilted even by pulp standards. Attempted witticisms did not come off well. Eugor only had a bit part, rather pointless.

Johnny Dollar.

YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR was the last of the old-time radio series, airing from 1949 to 1962. Almost all the OTR shows had died off by 1955. The episodes were standard half-hour weekly shows except for a year starting in 1955 October, when it aired as daily 15-minute installments comprising one complete episode each week, or in other words, 75 minute episodes.

Johnny Dollar was an insurance investigator based in Hartford, Connecticut. Each episode began with a claims adjustor from an insurance company ringing him up and asking him to take on a case.

The running joke of this series was that Dollar shamelessly padded his expense account. Each scene was introduced by Dollar reciting a line item from his expense report, followed by a segue to the action.

"The Birdy Baskerville Matter" was a 1951 episode written by Blake Edwards, who later became famous for his Pink Panther movies. Carl Baskerville was a retired millionaire whose hobby was feeding birds. His brother William had done six years for embezzling from the family firm and had just been released. The insurance company that hired Johnny Dollar had written a $500,000 life policy on Carl and were now very nervous.

Upon arrival at the Baskerville mansion, Dollar was greeted by Collins, the confidential secretary, who showed him into the library where Carl met him. After shooing Collins out of the room, Carl said he was going to change both his will and the life insurance policy and cut William out of both. He was going to leave everything to a bird charity, since he and William were the last of the Baskervilles.

Dollar pointed out that if William didn't know that, Carl was going to end up dead for no good reason. Carl said he'd get on it immediately, but that was too late. As Dollar walked out of the mansion, he heard gunshots and ran back inside to find Carl dead. No surprise there for the listener.

Collins said he saw William running away from the scene. After the police had come and gone, Dollar went sleuthing and tracked down a scarlet woman Virginia Carter, who had known William. From there he went to a couple more places, mainly to fill in the time, and finally found William in his apartment. William never got a speaking part, on account of someone hanging him from a rafter. Back to Carter's place but she only got a few lines before Collins arrived and shot her dead. He tried to kill Dollar but forgot the series hero always survives to the next episode, while the guest actors don't make it past the closing commercial.

Collins' gasped out a dying confession that he and William had been in on the embezzlement. Collins got greedy, then tried to clean house. Final expenses total was $227.77. No hounds or any other type of dog appeared in this episode. That was the real mystery.

"The Midas Touch Matter" was a five-part episode aired in 1956 when the show was daily 15-minute segments, written by the producer Jack Johnstone. Johnny Dollar was hustled out west to Kingman, Arizona, to check out a potential $3 million claim.

The Midas Touch gold mine near Lake Mead had been promoted by a sharp-practice man named Hard Luck Dennis. He got the three Haskell brothers to grubstake the mine. The brothers were wealthy retirees who dabbled in ranching at the 2 Lazy 2.

The prevailing belief was that Dennis had faked the gold, taken the cash investment from the Haskells, then killed them when they became suspicious and wanted additional ore samples.

While examining the mine for more assay specimens, the brothers were crushed by a cave-in that wasn't natural. They each had $500,000 life insurance, double indemnity if an accident, no payment if murder. The insurance company called in Dollar to ascertain the facts.

Dollar drove out to a desert rendevous with Dennis, who was paranoid about being accused of the murders and salting the mine with gold. The desert was busier than it looked because Dennis was shot by a drive-by assailant before he could name a suspect. He wasn't killed but wound up in a coma.

Dollar visited the mine, traveled about wasting time, and got in some fishing on Lake Mohave. He swung by the hospital when Dennis revived, who named as the murderer Alex Bundy. He was the ranch foreman at the 2 Lazy 2, in love with Dora Haskell, widow of one of the brothers. She was the beneficiary of all three brothers since two of them were bachelors.

Dennis was murdered in his hospital room before he could swear a deposition, so Dollar had nothing to stop a claim in court. More alarums, including someone firing at Dollar's fishing boat. Whenever the dialogue ran low, shots were fired to pep up the plot.

Dora was shocked, shocked that she was under suspicion because she was the only one who would benefit. Dollar blundered into a trap when Dora and Bundy pulled guns on him. Those two blamed each other at length. Bundy shot Dora dead and ran for it.

The outcome was obvious. An excursion across the lake was made just as a storm blew up. Bundy went to the bottom, so the State of Arizona was saved the cost of a trial. The insurance company, however, was on the hook for Dollar's expense account, total $978.35.

The Falcon.

THE FALCON aired on radio from 1943 to 1954. It was based on a popular series of movies which in turn were based on a story by Michael Arlen. As with The Shadow series, there was no continuity between the different media appearances.

The Falcon was Gay Lawrence in the movies, then later Lawrence's brother, and for radio he became Michael Waring. Why he was called The Falcon was one of the mysteries, since he never operated in disguise and was otherwise just a regular private investigator.

"Murder Is A Family Affair" was a 1945 episode, no writer credited. Brenda Sinclair tried to leave her husband Raymond, but in her presence he shot her boyfriend Kenny dead. He was sentenced to the electric chair. Michael Waring tried to help but couldn't get commutation to a life sentence from the governor.

The Sinclair saga then turned its attention to younger brother Danny and his wife Gloria. Raymond was worried that Danny might go off the deep end after the execution. Brenda claimed the body, which only enraged him further. Gloria was fed up with his self-pity.

Danny grabbed Waring's gun and went off to kill Brenda. Characters dashed about hither and yon. Waring didn't want to call the police because he was worried about a scandal in the newspapers.

A rather strange concern, and cold-blooded considering that Danny was still out there hunting Brenda. It wasn't just Danny after Brenda. She had borrowed $12,000 from a loan shark named De Silva who was anxious for repayment.

Brenda had expected to repay him from the estate, only to learn that Raymond had died a pauper. Tommy De Silva was very nice about it. He would forgive the debt if she married him. She rejected him with scorn.

Waring arrived to warn her about Danny but she said she could handle him. He left and Danny arrived. In later testimony, Danny said he argued with her then left, but someone pumped some bullets into her. The police figured they had another open-and-shut case, as well they might, but Waring figured differently.

The case hinged on how many bullets were fired from whose gun. With his girlfriend Nancy, Waring went to Brenda's apartment to study the matter, and contaminate the evidence. De Silva arrived, but Waring pulled a gun on him. He told Nancy to call the police and have them bring Danny and Gloria to his apartment, while he escorted De Silva there at gunpoint.

Nancy suggested that was highly irregular. Waring agreed but since this was an old-time radio show, what did it matter? All and sundry assembled in Waring's apartment for a J'accuse! meeting. The explanation by Waring was elaborate and convoluted. After highlighting De Silva, he accused Gloria, who to her credit refused to confess at first. He bluffed her with a ridiculous story but it worked.

Gloria's motive, however, was unbelievable. She thought Danny would inherit Raymond's estate, but it was clear that there was no divorce and thus the estate would go to the wife, not the brother. Gloria expected to get Danny's estate in turn after he was executed.

"The Invisible Thug" aired on 1951-01-07, written by Jerome Epstein. It opened with Vera and Ernie Castro terrified in their apartment by the arrival of Pete Lloyd. He had just arrived in town and had some nasty business with them. During the confrontation, Ernie was shot dead.

The next day Lloyd hired Michael Waring to prove his innocence. Waring talked to Vera but she insisted Lloyd did it. Waring took a look around her living room and found an urn with a gun inside it. Lloyd had mentioned the name George Richards and suggested he was her boyfriend but she denied that.

All sorts of interconnections between the characters developed, including a subsequent meeting between Lloyd and Vera in her apartment. Lloyd admitted he killed Ernie, then noticed Richards in an adjacent room. What he didn't notice was Richards' tape recorder hidden in the living room. Vera telephoned Waring but before she could tell him about the tape recording, she was slugged unconscious in mid-conversation and the tape stolen.

The complications piled up. Ballistics tests showed the gun was the murder weapon. The characters and the plot went back and forth, back and forth. Lloyd became the second murder victim. Waring lost a client but immediately gained a new one when Vera hired him to prove her innocence in Lloyd's murder.

By now the plot was so convoluted that the listener could do little but be swept along in the torrent. Richards had tried to blackmail Lloyd with the tape. They fought and Lloyd was killed in the struggle. Richards invented an imaginary intruder who did it. He was caught out because he invented too many details. If a stranger jumps you in the dark, you're not going to notice what type of trim his belt buckle had.

After Richards was hauled away for his eventual trip up the river to sit in Old Sparky, the episode ended with Waring making a pass at Vera. She gracefully declined, but did not seem to be a grieving widow.

Philip Marlowe.

THE ADVENTURES OF PHILIP MARLOWE was based on the character created by Raymond Chandler. It aired on radio from 1947 to 1951. The series was slightly darker than most mystery shows, although never as dark as the noir novels on which it was based.

"The Sound And The Unsound" was a 1951 episode, written by Kathleen Hite. Lucille Bellows, a sturdy woman in her twilight years, as Marlowe described her, hired him. She had been hearing strange sounds in the bungalow court apartments of which she was the landlady. She was a chatterbox and mentioned her husband Homer had left her four months ago. She couldn't think why.

On arrival at her unit, she and Marlowe heard a tapping noise from the adjacent unit. The noises were as if someone had been tapping along the drywall trying to find something. They investigated and found Clinton Rogers, the tenant, in the unit where the noise was coming from. That wouldn't be strange except that he was supposedly out of town on a job. His excuse was that he had to come back and pick up some equipment. Rogers was evasive and aroused Marlowe's suspicions.

Lucille mentioned she kept large sums in her apartment, so Marlowe cautioned her that habit was dangerous. She promised to take the cash to the bank the next day. As he left the apartment court, he was accosted by Mr Larry, a blatant poofter who designed hats, and who had some gossip. Marlowe shrugged him off and continued his exit. Mr Larry was miffed and threw a hissy fit.

A loud gunshot reversed Marlowe's course at high speed. Rogers had been wounded but remained reticent. Lucille took the events in stride but Mr Larry had conniptions.

His investigation took Marlowe to the movie studio where Rogers worked. Much to his surprise he discovered Homer Bellows was the night watchman. They chatted and Homer said Lucille had the money and he wanted some of it as part of the divorce settlement.

Marlowe snuck back to Rogers' apartment for some more snooping, in the process meeting Barbara and Bud, other tenants who were snooping. Many alarums occurred and Bud was exposed as the killer. Rogers had stolen loot from back east, for which Barbara and Bud had been independently searching. Bud was Rogers' insane brother. With a few more gunshots, everything wrapped up, although quite a few loose threads were left dangling.

The Saint.

Leslie Charteris had a long series of novels about Simon Templar, alias The Saint, an amateur detective with no visible means of support who traveled the world and lived well. From 1945 to 1951, THE SAINT was an old-time radio series. Several actors played the role. It is agreed that Vincent Price was the best, with snappy quips and flashes of wit that elevated the routine plots into something better.

"Color Blind Murderer Aboard Ship" was a 1947 episode with Vincent Price, written by Michael Cramoy. The story opened one foggy morning on board a ship where Simon Templar was chatting with an actress named Barbara Brooks. She told him she was retiring from her career because she was tired of it. Her nervous disposition suggested some other reason but she wouldn't tell him.

A moment later a shadowy figure threw her overboard, then slugged The Saint unconscious. He woke up in sickbay with Dr Norman hovering over him. The plot then sagged as Templar reminisced about his meeting with Brooks. It was too soppy to qualify as an infodump, especially with the orchestra playing in the background.

Phil Rayder was the prime suspect, a man Templar knew was a gangster. Lil Miller, a card shark, had been a prior murder victim, as Templar told Norman in the flashback. Throughout his tale, Templar kept stalling as Norman repeatedly offered him a sedative drink to deal with his concussion.

The next flashback revealed that the current concussion Templar was recovering from wasn't the first. He had previously been slugged unconscious by Rayder in an argument about Brooks. But was it Rayder who slugged Templar? It was not like him, and never would be, for when Templar talked to him later, Rayder was shot dead by someone behind Templar. Rayder lived long enough to say the killer was wearing a brown tie on a blue shirt.

The alert listener will have guessed from a number of clues that Norman was colour blind. Templar continued with the flashbacks, telling Norman that Brooks had jilted a man who became quite angry at her.

Finally there was the confrontation. The sedative which Norman had been trying to get Templar to drink was obviously poisoned. A final struggle and Norman was dealt justice. He had been wearing a green shirt, blue tie, and grey handkerchief.

The flashback format is one that has always annoyed me. It is a phony method of creating mystery or suspense. In this episode, it also telegraphed the identity of the murderer.

"The Cake That Killed" was a 1950 episode from the Vincent Price years, written by Louis Vittes. It began with Simon Templar entering a bakery for a loaf of bread. The clerk, named Peggy, became frightened when two men followed him in.

She gave Templar a cake and tried to hustle him out. He didn't take the hint but the two men forced him into a cab so they could transact their business with Peggy privately. Said The Saint: *I feel terribly self-conscious about this.* Little wonder that the underworld didn't like him. All those quips got on the nerves.

The goons didn't pay any attention to the cake Peggy put into his hands. The cabby, named Benny, reluctantly looped around after a threat from Templar. The bakery was closed. Templar let himself in by smashing the glass door in lieu of a key. He found one of the two men dead inside.

Templar eventually returned to his apartment to find Peggy, who demanded the cake. She said it was made from a special mix which contained smuggled diamonds. Templar had forgotten the cake in the cab. The other man from the bakery arrived. He wanted those diamonds and was annoyed to learn the cake was riding around in the back seat of a cab somewhere in the city.

He was even more annoyed by Templar's constant flow of witticisms. There was a contretemps during which Templar slugged the man unconscious, then Peggy slugged Templar. He awoke with a gun in his hand and the man shot dead. Peggy had tried to frame him but he took off before the police arrived on her anonymous telephone tipoff.

From there Templar went searching for Benny, quipping along the way. Peggy had found Benny first and the cake. Leaving him unconscious for Templar to find, the plot and the characters zigzagged back and forth across the city before everyone arrived back at Templar's apartment. Presumably the police had come and gone since the body was no longer there.

A new character made his debut. The bakery owner Hector Vanderpoor did a bit of diamond smuggling on the side. He wanted those diamonds. Peggy had them, so everyone's attention turned to her. She was too pretty to kill. Templar and Peggy were the only characters who escaped death or arrest. They sat down for some cake. *Is the cake any good?* was the final line.

The Shadow.

The Shadow, as the opening blurb put it, was in reality Lamont Cranston, wealthy young man about town. He had traveled to Tibet where he learned how to cloud minds so that people could not see him, only hear him. His voice also changed when he became invisible, courtesy of switching to a crystal microphone. He always announced himself as The Shadow with maniacal laughter.

The lovely Margo Lane was the only one who knew his real identity. Her main functions were to scream every time she saw a corpse, be frequently kidnapped

or trapped with a killer, and to have the loose threads explained to her in the denouement.

What was interesting for those days was that she and Cranston were supposedly single and living in different apartments, but they commonly had scenes where they ate breakfast or stayed in hotels together. The network executives and sponsors of those times weren't as prudish as often thought.

The Shadow began as a narrator on a radio show. He then became a character in his own right and spawned a monthly magazine, followed by books and movies. There was no continuity between his appearances in different media. In the movies he was a middle-aged radio reporter who used the Shadow name as the title of his show but was known to his coworkers by his real name.

The radio series had a complicated genealogy that began in 1930 and didn't evolve the final version of The Shadow until 1933. The series lasted until 1954. Like the print stories, no real-name credit was given to writers. Sometimes a house name was credited, but usually nothing was said in the closing credits about who the writer was. Never expect logical plots.

"Phantom Fingerprints" was a 1939 episode. It opened with Lamont Cranston typing a revision of a mystery play, trying to polish the lines. Margo Lane came in to hustle him out of the house and off to the performance.

En route they stopped by the office of Police Commissioner Weston to talk him into attending the play's premiere. He had just been admonishing the elderly Medical Examiner Dr Kilgore, trying to get him to retire. The pressure didn't succeed, so he left Kilgore in his office looking over some files and went away with Cranston and Lane. Shortly after, Kilgore was forcibly retired by a murderer with a throwing knife.

The Commissioner took the murder, in his own office, as a personal insult. The Assistant M.E. arrived, young Dr Giles. The suspicion was raised that the method of operation matched that of a murderer named Norvelli, who had been executed in 1931. He had been a vaudeville knife thrower. Nonsense of course.

An obvious suspect was run in, but the fingerprints at the crime scene matched Norvelli. The Shadow visited the widow of Norvelli, who said she had taught another man how to use throwing knives. Before she could name him, she caught a knife in her throat.

Cranston figured out that Giles was the murderer. The doctor had done the autopsy on Norvelli and had skinned off the man's fingerprints, attached them to gloves, and waited eight years. In the presence of witnesses, Giles broke down under questioning from The Shadow and blabbed all.

Giles had tired of waiting for Kilgore to shuffle off, so he helped him along. Giles then committed suicide with one of his knives. All too convenient but not very plausible. Then again, neither was The Shadow.

Michael Shayne.

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF MICHAEL SHAYNE aired on old-time radio from 1944 to 1953. The series was based on the novels by Brett Halliday, although the episodes were pastiches.

Shayne narrated the show, always in tones of rising hysteria, even if he was just crossing the street. He was slugged unconscious at least once per episode, usually twice. Unlike the vast majority of private investigators who were located in New York City, Shayne moved around, and many of the episodes took place in New Orleans.

"The Case Of The Popular Corpse" was a 1948 episode written by Bob Ryf. It began with a woman who wanted Shayne to find her niece June Lawson, who had run away from home. Auntie gave him a photo of Lawson, and the detail that June collected epithets as a hobby. Pay attention to that.

Moments after Auntie left, a rough man named Kennelly came in to Shayne's office, also wanting to find Lawson. Shayne began detecting at hotels and lurking about General Delivery at the post office to try and spot her when she picked up her mail.

He noticed he was being tailed by a big ugly guy he called Bull Neck. Shayne later got into a fight with Bull Neck, who admitted under duress that he was hired by Kennelly.

The initial working hypothesis was that Lawson was being blackmailed by Kennelly. Shayne tracked down Lawson in a cemetery where she was browsing tombstones for epithets. Much to-ing and fro-ing ensued and shots were fired. Shayne caught the woman who looked like Lawson but turned out to be her maid.

There was something rotten in the state of Louisiana, so Shayne went to the Lawson place out in the bayous. He found the body of Lawson, murdered by her aunt for her inheritance. Kennelly was Lawson's cousin, convinced that she had been hard done by. After a few more alarums and gunshots, the case was wrapped up and Auntie got what she deserved.

"The Bloodstained Pearls" was a 1948 episode, no writer credited. A cranky old man named George Peters hired Shayne to protect a bag of pearls worth a million dollars. Peters was paranoid that his roommates were going to steal them. The pearls were only worth $5, said a jeweler named Forester, but someone killed Peters anyway while looking for them. Shayne pocketed the pearls before calling the police. Then Shayne's office was broken into. After that, someone tried to break into his apartment.

Shayne went to Peter's houseboat and met a motley bunch of characters who didn't advance the plot much. After leaving them, he was ambushed by a knife wielding assailant but survived the attack. He went back to the houseboat and tried to romance Eve, the damsel of the story, whose uncle was the villain. So was she, as she gave him a poisoned cup of coffee. The police arrived in the nick of time and got him to hospital.

Forester had lied about the pearls. They really were worth millions but he was trying to get them on the cheap. There was another confrontation during which most if not all of the cast were present. Lots of claimants to the pearls, none legitimate.

Shayne threw the pearls into the fire. Forester dived into the fire to rescue them and died from burns. He was the murderer, who deceived Peters in an effort to get them. He got a coffin instead. Shayne got Eve, apparently having forgiven her for the poisoning.

Shayne had been knifed, then poisoned, but shrugged it all off like he was Keith Richards. His narration was on the edge of hysteria most of the time, although given what happened to him, that wasn't surprising.

George Valentine.

LET GEORGE DO IT aired on radio from 1946 to 1954, sponsored by Standard Oil. The series was about George Valentine, a private investigator. He solicited clients with a running newspaper classified advertisement in the Personals column that he cited in the opening credits: *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.*

Valentine's secretary/girlfriend was Claire Brooks, whom everyone called Brooksie. Her main function was to act as a sounding bound for Valentine and have the plot explained to her at intervals.

"The Joe Logan Case" was a 1948 episode written by David Victor and Herbert Little Jr. It began with a letter and $100 cash from another private investigator named Joe Logan. He said he was on a dangerous case and if anything were to happen to him, then Valentine was to cry murder. $100 then would be about $1,000 now.

Logan was in fact run over by a car while walking down a road to a motel. The police were more concerned about the death of Frank Potter, a banker who was a close personal friend of the police commissioner. When a witness at the motel said she saw Logan kill Potter, that combined both cases into one.

Valentine talked to Logan's secretary Maggie, who misled him, although neither Valentine nor the listener would realize it until later. From there, he went to see the witness. She was deep in debt to a bookie and an obvious liar. Valentine concluded that Potter was murdered by someone who, after leaving the motel, then saw Logan and ran him over with a car to prevent identification.

At this point there was a commercial break by Standard Oil, which urged motorists to keep their cars in good condition by visiting a Standard or Chevron service station. Valentine did some more interrogating with all the subtlety of a Gestapo agent. Brooksie questioned Mrs Potter about the same way.

The widow didn't seem to be grieving much. Logan had been a ladies man who dallied with both the witness and the widow. The plot thickened, if I may coin a phrase, but one part was predictable as soon as Valentine decided to walk along the road where Logan was killed. A car tried to run him over. We wouldn't have thought of a twist like that.

Valentine set up a J'accuse! meeting in Logan's office with the police present and most of the characters. After summarizing the plot once more for the benefit of those who tuned in late, he browbeat Maggie into confessing that she did it for love and blackmail opportunities.

"The Prairie Dog" was a 1951 episode written by David Victor and Jackson Gillis. A friend of Valentine named Jerry Mace was murdered in the opening scene. Mace was an insurance investigator, and it was obvious that his sleuthing had made someone very uncomfortable.

Valentine met the police detective at the morgue. In the dead man's pocket was a pawn ticket. The officer had his own line of enquiries, and let Valentine have the pawn ticket to trace. Good police procedure that, loaning out physical evidence to friends.

At the pawn shop, Valentine and Brooks observed a scene where a pickpocket named Sniffy was trying to pass off a wristwatch as his grandmother's. When Valentine confronted Sniffy, he ran, but the police were called and set up an immediate dragnet. Sniffy tried to escape through a barber shop but Tony the proprietor sandbagged him and turned him over to police.

Mace had been investigating a series of safecrackings by an unknown thief nicknamed The Prairie Dog. The cracker smoked a rare brand of cigarettes while doing his jobs, and used an equally rare brand of Swedish wooden matches to light them. He left cigarette butts and match sticks at every job, apparently chain-smoking while he worked away at the safe.

Sniffy was found with the same type of cigarettes and matches, but said he had lifted them from an unknown man in a crowd. It was a fair claim. Further hampering the case was that Sniffy was positively placed at some of the safecracking jobs but had unbreakable alibis for others.

Valentine finally figured out what the real method of operation was. There were two safecrackers, deliberately staging the crime scenes with the cigarettes so that police would think it was a single perpetrator.

Sniffy was one, and his partner was none other than Tony the barber. The scene in the barbershop had been staged when they realized Sniffy couldn't escape the dragnet. Better he should be run in for pickpocket theft than killing Mace.

A somewhat bizarre plot, although it did hang together, especially after Valentine tied up the loose threads for Brooks and the listeners in the denouement.

Philo Vance.

The PHILO VANCE series aired on old-time radio from 1945 to 1950, based on the novels by S.S. Van Dine. The detective was also found in a series of movies. Philo Vance was a know-it-all amateur sleuth, a wealthy man who moved in high society. In the radio series he was usually asked by District Attorney Markham to investigate, as apparently the local police could not be trusted to find the killer. Writer credits were not given.

"The Bulletin Murder Case" was a 1948 episode. A gruff newspaper editor Mike Abbott assigned a female reporter Myrna Harkins to interview Philo Vance after she turned in a non-story about a concert pianist named Lillian White. The latter denied inheriting a half-million dollars, contrary to a tipoff the newspaper had received, which didn't leave much of a hook for a story.

White was married to Joe McGough, a fact that just about every character mentioned for no apparent reason. Everyone had trouble spelling his name, and used the phonetic rendition McGuff before being corrected. Talk about an ominous foreboding.

Harkins took a cab to Vance's house but was stabbed to death in the back seat en route. The cab driver said he didn't see anything. Further investigation was stymied when the cabbie was stabbed to death in his home. Vance and the District Attorney Markham chatted about the dead driver. They concluded that the cabbie had indeed seen the murderer but was trying for blackmail. Instead he got himself a coffin.

The scene switched to a telephone conversation between White and her estranged husband McGough. He heard the news about her inheritance and wanted a share. McGough had been living out west but read about the murder in the newspapers. His name had been mentioned when the original report about the murder mentioned the non-story that Harkins had been murdered over.

White had more problems. Another newspaper reporter named Eddie Henderson was putting on the heat and trying to blackmail her. Vance barged in and out of apartments and offices. McGough was looking to settle accounts with a man named Bill Gregory, who had betrayed him five years prior.

Back to the newspaper, where Vance bluffed Abbott into exposing himself as Gregory, the real murderer. Harkins was murdered to create a national story

that would bring McGough out of hiding. Gregory wanted McGough gone as much as vice versa. Blackmail and all that. When reporting the murder, Gregory ran Harkins' unfinished story, which mentioned White and McGough.

Harkins had only ever heard the latter's name pronounced, so she had spelled it phonetically as McGuff. Gregory edited in the correct spelling to be certain the man himself would notice the story. Vance caught that because all through the episode people were mis-spelling the word to each other. Only Gregory would have known the truth.

Now this was an episode I could relate to. In our family, we spend our lives telling people Speirs with an 'ei' and watching them write down Spiers instead.

Another 1948 episode was "The Star Studded Murder Case". It opened as Dr Morton Kent received a medal from the International Astronomical Society for discovering a new planet. His assistants Dr Lloyd Devon and Dr Diane Peters had done all the work and made the actual discovery. Devon in particular was angry and uttered threats.

The subplots were then enumerated. Oscar the janitor was into astrology, which annoyed Kent. The old man predicted death for Kent. Oscar then tried to shake Devon down for $300 to pay for an operation, but was rudely rebuffed. Devon and Peters weren't just laboratory co-workers, they were also lovers. He was in a bad mood after the medal ceremony and broke off their relationship. Needless to say, she was angry.

Philo Vance came into the scene when Devon was murdered in the observatory. There followed an infodump about spectroscopes and how planets were discovered. Since few listeners knew about the subject, the emphasis on the technical details seemed to foreshadow something.

Vance interviewed the three remaining in the laboratory. Nothing new was elucidated, and this was obvious padding to fill out the time. Oscar kept busy with demands for money, now hitting on Kent, trying to blackmail him but unsuccessfully. Vance went to the library and did biographical searches on the three astronomers, Google not yet been invented. This allowed him to set up a J'accuse! meeting.

The cheat came in here. Everyone else had their full names mentioned earlier in the episode, but only now was it revealed that Oscar's last name was Devon, and Lloyd was his son. Since Kent must have signed Oscar's timesheets for the payroll, it was unbelievable that he didn't know and didn't mention the connection.

Oscar killed his son in anger, which seemed to run in the family. The police ran him in. Kent repented and confessed his theft of the planet data. The aforementioned foreshadowing? Absolutely no further mention of it, so it was more padding.

Candy Matson.

CANDY MATSON aired from 1949 to 1951, written and produced by Monte Masters. His wife Natalie Park played the title role as a private detective. Candy Matson lived in a penthouse apartment on Telegraph Hill in San Francisco.

She worked alone but was dating SFPD Inspector Ray Mallard, whom she married in the final episode. Her sidekick was Rembrandt Watson, a flaming poofter whose role was played seriously. This was unusual for the times because back then homosexuality wasn't just a sin but a felony offense.

"The Devil In The Deep Freeze" was a 1949 episode. It began with a restaurant owner named Carlo Martinello hiring Candy Matson. He had found a corpse in the walk-in freezer in the basement, but did not want to notify the police because he had a past record.

As he told her, he ran a respectable place and didn't want the notoriety. He asked Matson to dispose of the body on the quiet. He said he did not know who the victim was, dressed in a devil costume. As Matson narrated the story, she mentioned that she learned a long time ago to always be paid in advance. Her fee to Martinello was $2,000, say about $20,000 in today's depreciated currency. He grumbled but gave her a cheque.

She confided in Rembrandt Watson, who couldn't resist saying: *Many are cold but few are frozen.* That pun seemed inevitable under the circumstances. Having gotten it out of the way, Matson went over to SFPD to talk to Insp. Ray Mallard. Nothing much happened in what was obvious padding.

She returned to Watson's place for tea. He apologized for the mess, saying he had a meeting of philatelists last night. She was surprised they would be so

rowdy. Watson said: *You don't know philatelists*. As a long-time member of the Calgary Philatelic Society, I had to conclude that San Francisco stamp collectors must have been a noisy bunch in those days.

Mallard eventually found out about the body but it was gone. He said he couldn't open a murder case without proof a murder had happened. Instead he went back upstairs and had the scallopini. Matson did some investigating but with no results.

Watson invited her to the opera, "Tales Of Hoffmann". Mallard stopped by just before she left to tell her the body had been found floating in the bay. He was identified as the second baritone from the opera. Matson knew the prima dona, so after the opera she took Watson backstage. The replacement baritone stopped by but he didn't last long, becoming second deceased instead of second baritone.

What followed was a lengthy and detailed narration by Matson of a foot chase through the opera house after the murderer. She cornered him and discovered he was Martinello. She wounded him with gunfire and he later went to the gas chamber.

The epilogue was an explanation that Martinello was a frustrated singer who had hopes of becoming a baritone at the opera. As the current singers were healthy men, he decided to create a job vacancy. The corpse affair was an attempt to distract.

Natalie Park read her narration at full speed, as a result of which she tripped over her lines three times. Her dialogues were okay and better paced.

"NC9-8012 " was a subsequent 1949 episode that began with Mallard referring a case to her from an insurance investigator Gordon Ayres. A few months prior, a man named Folger and his wife crashed in their private plane. She died in the wreck but the insurance company was suspicious.

Ayres took Candy Matson up in a plane to look at the crash site. The airstrip where the Folger plane smashed was clear of any obstacles. Yet Ayres wanted Matson to certify she had inspected the site so he could get the company to pay out. She wasn't going to do it.

She returned by land with Rembrandt Watson to take a closer look at the wreckage and meet Folger. In his office was a parrot that repeated phrases it heard, including the number NC9-8012. Matson did some more sleuthing, including similar fatal crashes elsewhere.

She asked to have both Ayres and Folger with her in another flight. In midair, she challenged Folger to take over the controls from Ayres and fly the plane. He refused and confessed that he couldn't pilot a plane. Ayres had a gun and tried to use it in midair. He got Folger but she got him. Since she didn't know how to fly either, she had to be talked down via radio. Successfully because she was booked for the series.

The case was indeed insurance fraud, as Folger had a rich wife to get rid of. Ayres flew the plane and split the loot. NC9-8012 was the registration number of an airplane Folger's previous wife had owned and died in. The parrot had been her bird. The two men were serial killers.

ZINE LISTINGS

[I only list zines I receive from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on www.efanzines.com or www.fanac.org, then I don't mention it since you can read it directly.]

THE FOSSIL #382 (US$10 for 1-year subscription from The Fossils Inc, c/o Tom Parson, 157 South Logan Street, Denver, Colorado 80209) The history of zinedom is covered in this publication. The lead-off article is a fascinating account of a National Amateur Press Association member who planted pine trees on his Michigan farm in 1934 to form the letters NAPA. The acronym was visible in aerial photos for many decades thereafter. Alas, the grove was destroyed in the 1970s by urbanization.

Sasselov, D.D., et al (2020) **The origin of life as a planetary phenomenon.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 6:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax3419

Authors' abstract: *We advocate an integrative approach between laboratory experiments in prebiotic chemistry and geologic, geochemical, and astrophysical observations to help assemble a robust chemical pathway to life that can be reproduced in the laboratory. The cyanosulfidic chemistry scenario described here was developed by such an integrative iterative process.*

We discuss how it maps onto evolving planetary surface environments on early Earth and Mars and the value of comparative planetary evolution. The results indicate that Mars can offer direct evidence for geochemical conditions similar to prebiotic Earth, whose early record has been erased. The Jezero crater is now the chosen landing site for NASA's Mars 2020 rover, making this an extraordinary opportunity for a breakthrough in understanding life's origins.

We begin with the premise that life emerged on Earth from chemistry that led to the synthesis of molecular building blocks, which, in turn, self-assembled to form cells. This prebiotic chemistry must have been a natural and robust extension of the geochemical and environmental conditions readily available somewhere on the planet.

Here, we focus on the prebiotic synthesis of the nucleotides, amino acids, and lipids needed for life as we know it and the planetary environmental context that makes that synthesis possible. We will not address the steps to self-assembly into cells but neither do we intend to draw a line of any scientific importance between the two stages. We simply envisage chemistry morphing smoothly into biology.

However, there is a point further down the path that does have significance in which RNA and peptides exceed a certain length so that exploration of sequence space by the system can no longer be exhaustive, and nascent biology thus proceeds along a pathway dictated by contingency.

Up to that point, prebiotic chemistry and early biology most likely followed a deterministic trajectory, and if similar sequences of conditions prevailed upon other planets, we might expect the same chemistry and early biology to play out.

Speirs: This paper is available as a free pdf; the DOI number will probably get you there from Google. If I understand correctly, the thesis is that all life on any planet would start out the same with short pieces of RNA and protein. (DNA is a derivative that came much later.) Once the length of these RNA and proteins exceeded a certain quantity, then life would branch out in different ways on different planets.

Castillo-Rogez, J.C., et al (2020) **Ceres: Astrobiological target and possible ocean world.** ASTROBIOLOGY 20:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2018.1999

Authors' abstract: *Ceres, the most water-rich body in the inner solar system after Earth, has recently been recognized to have astrobiological importance. Chemical and physical measurements obtained by the Dawn mission enabled the quantification of key parameters, which helped to constrain the habitability of the inner solar system's only dwarf planet.*

The surface chemistry and internal structure of Ceres testify to a protracted history of reactions between liquid water, rock, and likely organic compounds. We review the clues on chemical composition, temperature, and prospects for long-term occurrence of liquid and chemical gradients. Comparisons with giant planet satellites indicate similarities both from a chemical evolution standpoint and in the physical mechanisms driving Ceres' internal evolution.

Del Cortona, A., et al (2020) **Neoproterozoic origin and multiple transitions to macroscopic growth in green seaweeds.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 117:2551-2559

[The Tonian period was 1,000 to 720 megayears ago when there was only a single supercontinent Rodinia, which began to break up at the end of the period. The Cryogenian was 720 to 635 megayears ago during Snowball Earth.]

Authors' abstract: *Green seaweeds are important primary producers along coastlines worldwide. Their diversification played a key role in the evolution of animals. To understand their origin and diversification, we resolve key relationships among extant green algae using a phylotranscriptomic approach.*

A time-calibrated tree, inferred from available fossil data, reconstructs important evolutionary events, such as transitions to benthic environments and

the evolution of macroscopic growth in the late Tonian/Cryogenian periods, followed by a marked Ordovician [488.3 to 443.7 megayears ago] *diversification of macroscopic forms. This ancient proliferation of green seaweeds likely modified shallow marine ecosystems, which set off an evolutionary arms race between ever larger seaweeds and grazers.*

The Neoproterozoic Era [1,000 to 542 megayears ago] *records the transition from a largely bacterial to a predominantly eukaryotic phototrophic world, creating the foundation for the complex benthic ecosystems that have sustained Metazoa from the Ediacaran Period* [600 to 542 megayears ago] *onward.*

This study focuses on the evolutionary origins of green seaweeds, which play an important ecological role in the benthos of modern sunlit oceans and likely played a crucial part in the evolution of early animals by structuring benthic habitats and providing novel niches.

By applying a phylogenomic approach, we resolve deep relationships of the core Chlorophyta (Ulvophyceae or green seaweeds, and freshwater or terrestrial Chlorophyceae and Trebouxiophyceae) and unveil a rapid radiation of Chlorophyceae and the principal lineages of the Ulvophyceae late in the Neoproterozoic Era.

Our time-calibrated tree points to an origin and early diversification of green seaweeds in the late Tonian and Cryogenian periods, an interval marked by two global glaciations with strong consequent changes in the amount of available marine benthic habitat.

We hypothesize that unicellular and simple multicellular ancestors of green seaweeds survived these extreme climate events in isolated refugia, and diversified in benthic environments that became increasingly available as ice retreated.

An increased supply of nutrients and biotic interactions, such as grazing pressure, likely triggered the independent evolution of macroscopic growth via different strategies, including true multicellularity, and multiple types of giant-celled forms.

Bowles, A.M.C., et al (2020) **The origin of land plants is rooted in two bursts of genomic novelty.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 30:530-536

Authors' abstract: *Comparing 208 genomes gives insight into the role of gene novelty in plant evolution. Two bursts of genomic novelty played a major role in the evolution of land plants. Functions linked to these novelties are multicellularity and terrestrialization. The backbone of hormone signaling either predates or accompanies this transition*

Over the last 470 Ma, plant evolution has seen major evolutionary transitions, such as the move fromwater to land and the origins of vascular tissues, seeds, and flowers. These have resulted in the evolution of terrestrial flora that has shaped modern ecosystems and the diversification of the Plant Kingdom, Viridiplantae, into over 374,000 described species.

Each of these transitions was accompanied by the gain and loss of genes in plant genomes. For example, whole-genome duplications are known to be fundamental to the origins of both seed and flowering plants. With the ever-increasing quality and quantity of whole-genome data, evolutionary insight into origins of distinct plant groups using comparative genomic techniques is now feasible.

Here, using an evolutionary genomics pipeline to compare 208 complete genomes, we analyze the gene content of the ancestral genomes of the last common ancestor of land plants and all other major groups of plants.

This approach reveals an unprecedented level of fundamental genomic novelties in two nodes related to the origin of land plants: the first in the origin of streptophytes during the Ediacaran and another in the ancestor of land plants in the Ordovician.

Our findings highlight the biological processes that evolved with the origin of land plants and emphasize the importance of conserved gene novelties in plant diversification. Comparisons to other eukaryotic studies suggest a separation of the genomic origins of multicellularity and terrestrialization in plants.

Stein, W.E., et al (2020) **Mid-Devonian Archaeopteris roots signal revolutionary change in earliest fossil forests.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 30:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2019.11.067

[Lignophytes are woody plants.]

Authors' abstract: *The earliest fossil forest to date is recovered from the Devonian of New York. Three types of trees are identified from fossil soil evidence in plan view. Early lignophyte relatives of seed plants have surprisingly modern root systems. Advanced energetics in this group suggests a unique role in changing Earth history.*

The origin of trees and forests in the Mid Devonian (393 to 383 Ma) was a turning point in Earth history, marking permanent changes to terrestrial ecology, geochemical cycles, atmospheric CO_2 levels, and climate. However, how all these factors interrelate remains largely unknown. From a fossil soil (palaeosol) in the Catskill region near Cairo NY, USA, we report evidence of the oldest forest (mid Givetian) yet identified worldwide.

Similar to the famous site at Gilboa, NY, we find treefern-like Eospermatopteris (Cladoxylopsida). However, the environment at Cairo appears to have been periodically drier. Along with a single enigmatic root system potentially belonging to a very early rhizomorphic lycopsid, we see spectacularly extensive root systems here assigned to the lignophyte group containing the genus Archaeopteris.

This group appears pivotal to the subsequent evolutionary history of forests due to possession of multiple advanced features and likely relationship to subsequently dominant seed plants. Here we show that Archaeopteris had a highly advanced root system essentially comparable to modern seed plants.

This suggests a unique ecological role for the group involving greatly expanded energy and resource utilization, with consequent influence on global processes much greater than expected from tree size or rooting depth alone.

Benavides-Lopez, J.L., et al (2020) **Novel system of communication in crickets originated at the same time as bat echolocation and includes male-male multimodal communication.** THE SCIENCE OF NATURE 107:doi.org/10.1007/s00114-020-1666-1

Authors' abstract: *Most cricket species produce low-frequency calls for mate attraction, whereas they startle to high frequency sounds similar to bat echolocation. Male crickets in the tribe Lebinthini produce high frequency calls, to which females reply with vibrational signals.*

This novel communication system likely evolved by male sensory exploitation of acoustic startle to high-frequency sounds in females. This behavior was previously described for the Lebinthini from Asia.

Here we demonstrate that this novel communication system is found in a Neotropical species, Ponca hebardi, and is therefore likely shared by the whole tribe Lebinthini, dating the origin of this behavior to coincide with the origin of echolocation in bats. Furthermore, we document male duets involving both acoustic and vibratory signals not previously described in crickets, and we tentatively interpret it as competitive masking between males.

Sallon, S., et al (2020) **Origins and insights into the historic Judean date palm based on genetic analysis of germinated ancient seeds and morphometric studies.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 6:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aax0384

Authors' abstract: *Germination of 2,000-year-old seeds of Phoenix dactylifera from Judean desert archaeological sites provides a unique opportunity to study the Judean date palm, described in antiquity for the quality, size, and medicinal properties of its fruit, but lost for centuries.*

Microsatellite genotyping of germinated seeds indicates that exchanges of genetic material occurred between the Middle East (eastern) and North Africa (western) date palm gene pools, with older seeds exhibiting a more eastern nuclear genome on a gradient from east to west of genetic contributions.

Ancient seeds were significantly longer and wider than modern varieties, supporting historical records of the large size of the Judean date. These findings, in accord with the region's location between east and west date palm

gene pools, suggest that sophisticated agricultural practices may have contributed to the Judean date's historical reputation. Given its exceptional storage potentialities, the date palm is a remarkable model for seed longevity research.

The date palm (Phoenix dactylifera), a dioecious species in the Arecaceae (formerly Palmae) family has a historical distribution stretching from Mauritania in the west to the Indus Valley in the east. A major fruit crop in hot and arid regions of North Africa and the Middle East and one of the earliest domesticated tree crops, archaeobotanical records suggest that the earliest exploitation and consumption of dates is from the Arabian Neolithic some 7000 years before the present (yr B.P.).

Evidence of cultivation in Mesopotamia and Upper Arabian Gulf approximately 6700 to 6000 yr B.P. support these centers as the ancient origin of date palm domestication in this region, with a later establishment of oasis agriculture in North Africa.

The Kingdom of Judah (Judea) that arose in the southern part of the historic Land of Israel in the 11th century BCE was particularly renowned for the quality and quantity of its dates. These so-called "Judean dates" grown in plantations around Jericho and the Dead Sea were recognized by classical writers for their large size, sweet taste, extended storage, and medicinal properties.

While evidence suggests that Judean date culture continued during the Byzantine and Arab periods (4th to 11th century CE), further waves of conquest proved so destructive that by the 19th century, no traces of these historic plantations remained.

Macias-Fauria, M., et al (2020) **Pleistocene Arctic megafaunal ecological engineering as a natural climate solution?** PHILOSOPHICAL TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF LONDON 375B:doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2019.0122

Authors' abstract: *Natural climate solutions (NCS) in the Arctic hold the potential to be implemented at a scale able to substantially affect the global climate. The strong feedbacks between carbon-rich permafrost, climate and herbivory suggest an NCS consisting of reverting the current wet/moist moss and shrub-dominated tundra and the sparse forest-tundra ecotone to grassland through a guild of large herbivores. Grassland-dominated systems might delay permafrost thaw and reduce carbon emissions, especially in Yedoma regions, while increasing carbon capture through increased productivity and grass and forb deep root systems.*

Here we review the environmental context of megafaunal ecological engineering in the Arctic; explore the mechanisms through which it can help mitigate climate change; and estimate its potential, based on bison and horse, with the aim of evaluating the feasibility of generating an ecosystem shift that is economically viable in terms of carbon benefits and of sufficient scale to play a significant role in global climate change mitigation.

Assuming a megafaunal-driven ecosystem shift we find support for a megafauna-based arctic NCS yielding substantial income in carbon markets. However, scaling up such projects to have a significant effect on the global climate is challenging given the large number of animals required over a short period of time.

A first-cut business plan is presented based on practical information, costs and infrastructure, from Pleistocene Park (northeastern Yakutia, Russia). A 10 yr experimental phase incorporating three separate introductions of herds of approximately 1,000 individuals each is costed at US$114 million, with potential returns of approximately 0.3–0.4% yr^{-1} towards the end of the period, and greater than 1% yr^{-1} after it.

Speirs: As an old cowhand from the Red Deer River of west-central Alberta, this paper caught my eye. Save the world by ranching bison on the tundra. Yeehaw!

Sangha, L. (2020) **The social, personal, and spiritual dynamics of ghost stories in early modern England.** HISTORICAL JOURNAL 63:339-359

Author's abstract: *In early modern England, spectral figures were regular visitors to the world of the living and a vibrant variety of beliefs and expectations clustered around these questionable shapes.*

Yet whilst historians have established the importance of ghosts as cultural resources that were used to articulate a range of contemporary concerns about

worldly life, we know less about the social and personal dynamics that underpinned the telling, recording, and circulation of ghost stories at the time.

This article therefore focuses on a unique set of manuscript sources relating to apparitions in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England to uncover a different vantage point. Drawing on the life-writing and correspondence of the antiquarian who collected the narratives, it lays bare concerns about familial relations and gender that ghost stories were bound up with.

Tracing the way that belief in ghosts functioned at an individual level also allows the recovery of the personal religious sensibilities and spiritual imperatives that sustained and nourished continuing belief in ghosts. This subjective angle demonstrates that ghost stories were closely intertwined with processes of grieving and remembering the dead, and they continued to be associated with theological understandings of the afterlife and the fate of the soul.

Robinson, C., et al (2020) **Modeling migration patterns in the USA under sea level rise.** PLOS ONE 15:doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0227436

Authors' extracts: *We introduce and discuss our framework in the context of sea level rise impacts on human migration. Sea level rise (SLR) will affect millions of people living in coastal areas. Different studies have highlighted likely scenarios of sea level rise by 2100, varying in their projections of severity.*

The impacts of SLR are potentially catastrophic. About 30% of the urban land on earth was located in high-frequency flood zones in 2000, and it is projected to increase to 40% by 2030 taking urban growth and SLR into account.

In the United States alone, 123.3 million people, or 39% of the total population, lived in coastal counties in 2010, with a predicted 8% increase by the year 2020. By the year 2100, a projected 13.1 million people in the United States alone would be living on land that will be considered flooded with a SLR of 6 feet (1.8 m).

As oceans expand and encroach into previously habitable land, affected people, climate migrants, will move towards locations further inland, looking for food and shelter in areas that are less susceptible to increased flooding or extreme weather events. In this paper, we argue that the comprehensive impacts of SLR on human populations, when considering migration, expand far beyond the coastal areas.

Most effects are seen in the Eastern US, where there are more vulnerable coastal populations. Of particular note are southern Mississippi and southeastern Georgia, where large groups of counties are estimated to see indirect effects in the >9% category.

The Midwest is also projected to see large indirect effects, even though the magnitudes of incoming migrants are smaller than counties closer to the coast. This can be explained by the relatively small populations and baseline levels of incoming migrants. The greater magnitudes of migrations from higher population areas causes some migrants to select these midwestern areas as destination, which could cause disproportionally larger indirect effects.

In general, we find that previously "unpopular" migrant destinations (areas with relatively low numbers of incoming migrants) would be more popular solely due to their close proximity to counties that experience "direct effects". The East Coast will experience larger effects than the West coast because of the large coastal population centers and shallower coastlines, indeed, all counties adjacent to coastal counties on the East coast are marked as indirectly affected.

Existing urban areas will receive the largest magnitudes of migrants, as they represent the most attractive destinations, which will accelerate the existing trends of urbanization. We find that the southeast portion of the United States will experience disproportionately high effects from SLR-driven flooding due to the large vulnerable populations in New Orleans and Miami.

These results show that by driving human migration, the impacts of SLR have the potential to be much farther reaching than the coastal areas which they will flood.