

# OPUNTIA 472



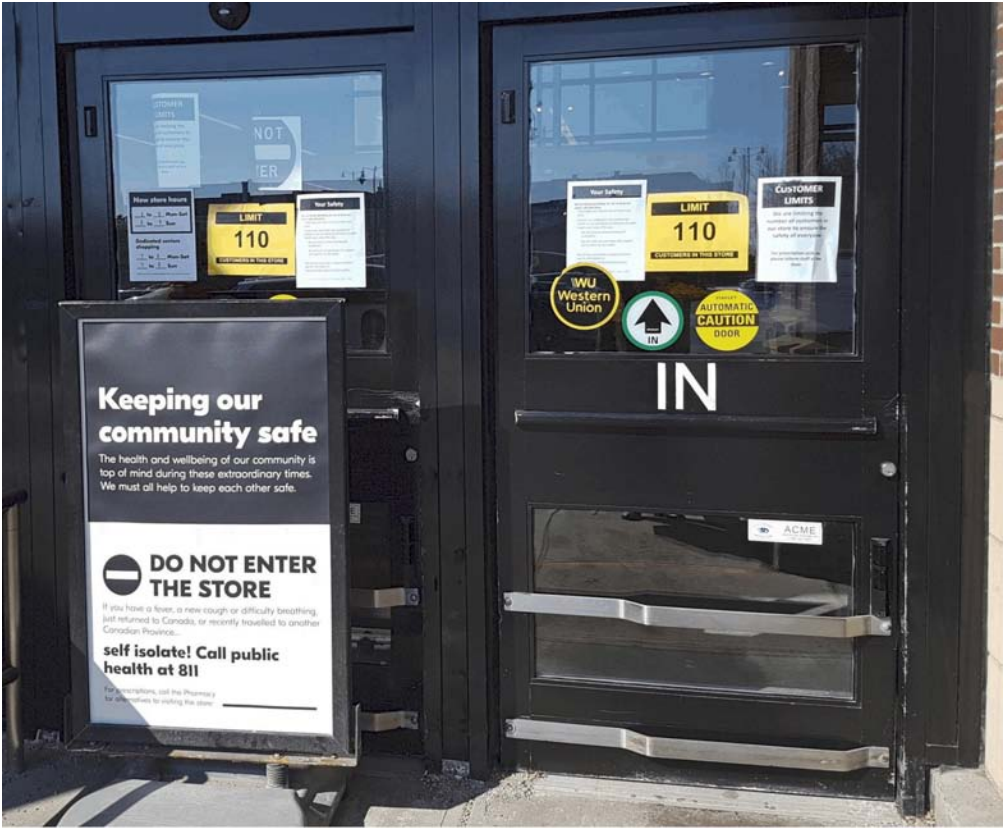


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**About The Cover:** As I strolled about for exercise on April 10, this was seen on Passchendaele Road SW in the Garrison Woods subdivision.

**THE VIRUS: PART 4**  
photos by Dale Speirs

It was incredible how fast Canadian society went from taken-for-granted freedoms to life in Soviet Russia. It only took three weeks to lose freedom of travel, freedom of assembly, and freedom of association. I now do my supermarket shopping early in the morning so that I don't have to line up outside like a Soviet shopper waiting to buy bread. This photo was at my neighbourhood Safeway on April 4.



I've never seen so many people out walking in my neighbourhood. When we approach each other along the sidewalk, the new social etiquette is for one person or pair to step out into the road and pass by 2 metres away. Since there is little or no traffic, this is not dangerous. Joggers puff down the centre line.

Families with small children get sidewalk priority, while a single pedestrian such as myself makes the detour. The children I've seen out with their parents look happy, but then again I live in a comfortable middle-class neighbourhood. One wonders what psychological effect this will have on the young generation in distressed families of poorer neighbourhoods.

Far too many Canadians lived outwardly prosperous lives but only by assuming debt they should not have. I paid off my house in 1997 after fifteen years of rigid economy and self-deprivation, but most Canucks today figured they would always make the monthly payments and still have those two weeks in Cancun. Canadian bank call centres and Websites are now melting down as millions apply for mortgage and loan deferrals.



The first week of social distancing in Canada, what the Americans are calling sheltering in place, I gained a kilo of weight. That prompted me to get serious about exercising in the form of long daily walks.



There are numerous streets only a few blocks from my residence that I have never traversed since I bought my house in 1982. There was no reason to do so, but now I am doing a systematic grid pattern, and finding all sorts of new things.

At left and below: An encouraging word from over on 16A Street SW. What looks like a matchstick on the poster is a child’s rendition of the iconic Calgary Tower.

At right: On 47 Avenue SW were these very cautious homeowners who wired their Little Free Library shut for the duration.





Below left: This was on 33 Avenue SW in the Marda Loop district. It seemed to me that the Roads Dept. work crew could simply have removed the manual crosswalk button and instructional sign, then plugged the hole.

Below right: Same supermarket as on page 2, ten days later on April 13.

For many years I worked with a man in the Parks Dept. who had lost an eye in a bad accident as a young man. We were talking once and the incident came up in conversation. He told me that in all the decades since, every morning when he woke up there was a second or two when all seemed normal. Then he remembered he was monocular and the depression hit him.

I know it's not the same, but since the coronavirus shut down society, every morning I wake up and for a second or two it seems a normal day. Then I remember that the libraries are closed so I can't do any research or reading for pleasure. I can't go downtown and have a meal in one of the food courts. The buses are running on Sunday schedules all week, so I have to drive my car much more than I did before. That brief moment when I wake up is the most depressing part of the pandemic for me.







Above: Seen at a different Safeway supermarket, in the Beltline district of central Calgary.

At right: Seen on a light pole near the Beltline Safeway. The area code is Vancouver, but that doesn't mean anything these days since people moving around the country don't have to change their cellphone numbers.

# **WORLD WIDE PARTY ON JUNE 21**

Founded by Benoit Girard (Quebec) and Franz Miklis (Austria) in 1994, the World Wide Party is held on June 21st every year. 2020 will be the 27th year of the WWP. Mark your calendars now!

At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of zinedom around the world. It is important to have it exactly at 21h00 your time. The idea is to get a wave of fellowship circling the planet.



# SERIES DETECTIVES: PART 7

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 6 appeared in OPUNTIA's #402, 406, 425, 448, 459, and 467.]

The old-time radio series mentioned here are available as free mp3 downloads from [www.otrrlibrary.org](http://www.otrrlibrary.org) or [www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org).

## Series Detectives Blurbs.

Many radio series touted their detective as the greatest of them all. Since several such series usually overlapped each other on the air, these blurbs were amusing. I began collecting them, herewith as follow.

Nick Carter: *This is the story of a man known the world over as one of the most daring and resourceful characters in the history of detective fiction.*

Barrie Craig: *America's #1 detective*

Johnny Dollar: *The man with the action-packed expense account, America's fabulous freelance insurance investigator.*

Mr Keen: *One of the most famous characters of American fiction in one of radio's most thrilling dramas.*

Sam Spade: *The greatest private detective of them all.*

Philo Vance: *In all the realm of crime and crime detection, in all the history of murder, mystery, intrigue, the master of them all, Philo Vance.*

Nero Wolfe: *Ladies and gentlemen, it's the bulkiest, balkiest, smartest, and most unpredictable detective in the world, that chair-borne genius.*

## Nick Carter.

NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE aired on old-time radio from 1943 to 1955. The detective first appeared in print in 1886, predating Sherlock Holmes, and often appeared on stage and in movies. Nick Carter appeared in his own pulp magazines and dime novels.

The police seldom appeared in the series. Carter had boundless confidence in his ability and came across as arrogant to all, including his secretary/girlfriend Patsy Bowen. He had his own laboratory, a huge library, and kept better files than the FBI.

“The Professor’s Secret” was a 1944 episode, written by Jock MacGregor. The Professor (no name ever given) was not quite a mad scientist, although he did have a beautiful daughter. He had invented the Z-Ray machine. By shining the beam on flesh, it could restore it to perfect health.

They hardly had time to celebrate when gangsters burst into the laboratory to steal the invention and kidnap them. Gunfire erupted as police made an unsuccessful attempt to stop them. They did kill one of them. Nick Carter was on the scene moments later, a traffic accident having delayed him.

At the gang’s hideout, the Professor told them the device wouldn’t work because the adjuster coil was missing. The gang sent some of their men back to the laboratory to retrieve the part. Carter wasn’t idle, although one wondered where the police were. He got a make on the dead gangster and went to the man’s apartment.

The two groups passed each other in the night. They eventually connected to provide numerous alarms and excursions back and forth across the city, punctuated by gunfire.

Carter talked a lot to himself as a way of explaining the plot to listeners. Everyone did. The Professor had a feeble old man voice, and the gangsters had thick Noo Yawk accents. One of the bit players was a doctor who had an Ah-so Chinese accent.

Patsy Bowen and the Professor’s daughter were about the only ones who weren’t beaten or wounded by gunfire. The surviving gangsters retrieved the coil and got the Professor’s machine going. One of them had a shoulder wound, which was put under the Z-ray.

Just then, Carter and company arrived to disrupt the healing with gunfire. All ended happily but nothing more was said about the fate of the miracle Z-Ray machine. They must have known it would revolutionize medicine, but nothing more seemed to have been done with it. Not surprising since the episodes were zero-reset with no continuity.

“The Case Of The Midway Murders” was a 1948 episode, written by Jim Parsons. It began at the Idle Hour Amusement Park. George Hailey, a former prison guard, recognized an escaped convict Joe Lester at the park and called Nick Carter for help. Why didn’t he call the police? Because it wasn’t their show.

A rendezvous was arranged at the roller coaster, but Carter and Patsy Bowen didn’t see him around. After several trips on the ride, they finally spotted him in another car. Just then the roller coaster hit a sharp curve and Hailey was flung to his death.

Unusually, Carter called in the police. Everyone gathered in the park manager’s office to hash out the murder. Carter noted there was no bleeding after the fall, indicating Hailey was already dead.

The ride operator said he would have noticed the dead man because he checked for tickets at each go-around of the roller coaster. There didn’t seem to be any logical place along the track where the body could have been inserted.

A jump cut to the gorilla exhibit, where Woody Reed the wrangler argued with his girl Lillian Latour, who worked with Bongo the gorilla. She suggested he was Lester but he denied it. When the manager John Browden appeared, she accused him of the murder. Her free and easy slanders resulted in her being shot to death by a person unknown.

The plot was exposed in the next scene when a conversation between Reed and Browden revealed that the former had been blackmailing the latter. Reed jacked up his demands to a half-ownership of the park.

While that was ongoing, Carter and Bowen were testing a dark tunnel on the ride as the possible site where Hailey’s body could have been introduced. They found some loose boards. On the other side was Bongo’s cage.

Carter accused Reed, who in turn accused Browden. The affray was settled with gunshots and gorillas. Browden was indeed Lester. The denouement was a lengthy exposition about who was who and who did what. I was surprised Carter didn’t blame Bongo for anything.

## **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 most 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.

“Ghost Of A Chance” was a 1951 episode, written by John Roeburt. An insurance adjuster called in Barrie Craig to investigate a subway fatality named Remo Torch, for which the company had paid the widow double indemnity of \$50,000. After the payout, they got an anonymous telephone call claiming fraud and that someone else had been murdered in Torch’s place.

The widow Mary was suspected but she was dead. Craig got an exhumation order for Remo’s body. Arriving at the cemetery late at night (no one in fiction ever seems to visit cemeteries at high noon), Craig found the elderly caretaker babbling about a dead man getting out of a coffin from Torch’s grave.

Driving back, Craig spotted a man shambling along the road and trailed him. He eavesdropped on a telephone call to Mrs Verna Talbot, then followed the man to her place. Calling her Mary, the man tried to strangle her. Craig intervened and rendered the man unconscious. She said he was Tom Agee, but the man called him Torch.

She left and Craig took him in for questioning. He said he had been pushed on the subway platform by a doppelganger. Craig went back to the cemetery, this time to exhume Mary. The caretaker in the meantime had found the mangled remains of the supposed Remo. Mary’s coffin was empty. Eric Carter was the undertaker who’d buried her and signed the fake death certificate.

The traditional rendering unconscious of the detective then took place as Craig was about to drive out of the cemetery. Someone had wired a bomb to the ignition. Since Craig was booked for the series, he survived the blast and woke up in hospital.

You can't keep a good man down, so Craig dragged himself out of bed and took Remo Torch for a drive to the Talbot residence. Verna's husband George was the doppelganger, which led to a fracas. His alias was Eric Carter.

The denouement was a complicated mess which involved all the characters. Remo knew his wife was planning to murder him and set up an equally elaborate counterstrike. Craig narrated all the details in a massive infodump.

Shots were fired, Craig got one, but he got Carter/Talbot. Given all the beatings and sluggings he got over the series, one wonders why he wasn't a brain-damaged drooling idiot. Also, who made the anonymous telephone call that began the plot? It was not referred to again after the opening sequence but logic suggested it was Remo.

"The Thirteenth Guest" was a 1953 episode, no writer credit given. Barry Craig had been hired by Badger Boris, whose rowdy parties were infamous for concluding with brawls and visits by the police. For \$1,000, Craig was to keep the lid on a masked costume party and, as Boris said, "*exercise a tranquilizing influence*" with a gut punch if necessary. A private room was set aside for disputatious guests rendered horizontal.

At midnight, when else?, Craig found a costumed woman Cora Wilmer murdered in the garden. She was not one of the twelve invited guests, said Boris, but had crashed the party. Boris knew her and filled in the details.

She had been a wealthy middle-aged matron with a young husband Mark who sponged off her. Mark had been invited and had come with Rita Romaine, Miss Cabin Cruiser of 1953. He was dressed as Hamlet and she was barely dressed as the Queen of Sheba.

Presumably the police were called to attend to the murder, but nothing was ever said about them. Craig went over to the Wilmer mansion. He eavesdropped through an open window on a conversation between the widower and Gerko, a private detective. Mark thought, rightly so, that he would be accused of murder. Gerko told him he had been hired by Cora, who feared Mark would kill her. Gerko was offered a bribe and took it.

After Gerko left, Craig stepped in through the French windows and interrogated Mark. The dagger that killed Cora came from the Hamlet costume. As Craig drove off, he heard a shot fired. He pulled over a car whose driver was Romaine.

No rifle in her car but there was a bloodstained dagger. She answered his questions. Among other things, she said Boris had proposed marriage to her but she refused him. Craig assumed the dagger had been planted in her car because no murderer would be that careless.

The next meeting was with Gerko, who was under the influence. Probably celebrating his bribe, which had been very substantial. Gerko spoke up for Mark as a fine upstanding young man but to no avail. Boris was unhelpful but grudgingly paid Craig his fee and supplied the photos taken at the party by a society photographer.

After examining the photos, Craig went to see Gerko. The pictures showed Mark had never had a dagger in the scabbard of his costume. The photos also demonstrated there were 14 guests. Cora had not crashed the party as Boris said, and Gerko was the 14th guest. Craig tricked Gerko into a confession that he had murdered Cora so he could blackmail Mark.

The episode did a good job of shifting the blame for the murder back and forth between suspects, keeping the listener guessing. Unfortunately it relied on the last-minute photos to solve the case, but for all that the story wasn't too bad.

### **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 radio shows are leavened with humour and quips. Writers were not credited, although the actors were.

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 after the series got going for some reason the extra letter was added. 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.

“The Case Of The Unused Shoes” was a 1945 episode. Boston Blackie and his friend Shortie were walking through a park on their way to Mary Wesley’s place. They found a man’s body along the riverbank, later identified John Walters. The shoes of the deceased were immaculate and brand new, never used since there was no mud on them.

Farraday suspected the widow Stella Walters, but from force of habit arrested Blackie as a material witness. Blackie escaped custody without much difficulty. He went to see Stella and interrogated her in the best Gestapo tradition about her husband’s life insurance policy. From there he visited the insurance agent Fred Singer to stir up more trouble.

Trouble came to Blackie when he was the object of a drive-by shooting. Shortie tailed the widow and saw her meeting with Singer. Blackie barged in and got the insurance policy, which paid \$50,000 for death, about \$500,000 in today’s depreciated currency. Shortie suddenly recognized Stella for a prior robbery.

Meanwhile the name Tom Jenkins surfaced just as suddenly, a lawyer who had previous connections and was blackmailing Stella for her past. Jenkins had drained her dry, so he thought he could get more money via the insurance policy. He failed because, like every life insurance policy, the company didn’t pay out for suicide or murder. Jenkins didn’t know that, a thing difficult to believe. Since he was a lawyer, he should have learned it in law school.

Farraday had been following in Blackie’s wake back and forth across town. He finally got to put the cuffs on the right man. The story had a few twists which, however, were not based on previous knowledge but on new facts introduced willy-nilly. It was obvious that whenever the scriptwriter got into a bind, he just introduced something de nubibus to keep the plot moving.

“The Merry-Go-Round Murder” was a 1946 episode. It began with Boston Blackie and Mary Wesley enjoying a horse cab ride around the park at 02h00. As they passed the amusement rides, they heard the carousel going, unusual at that time of the morning.

Upon investigation, they found it deserted save for a dead man riding it. He was dressed in a riding habit and had a bullet hole in his head. Blackie recognized the defunct as millionaire John Van Dorn. Blackie figured if he wasn’t going to get any sleep, then neither should Farraday, so he telephoned him at home and got him out of bed.

The next day Blackie visited the amusement concession owner Peter Carson. Van Dorn had complained about Carson to the Parks Commission. Carson clammed up. The next stop was the widow Blanche, but her lawyer Wilcox shut down the conversation. Farraday, as per usual, always seemed to be arriving just as Blackie was leaving.

Farraday took Wesley back to the carousel the next night to recreate what happened, once again at 02h00. It was operating exactly the same as the previous morning but with another dead man, Carson. Blackie and Wesley did some prowling around in the usual break-and-enter style of amateur sleuths. They found papers from a perfume manufacturer who wanted to break a contract with Van Dorn but when he was questioned, he denied killing Van Dorn.

The widow Blanche always seemed to be in the company of Wilcox, who remained as obstructive as always. Blackie staged a re-enactment that drove Blanche to hysteria. She babbled a confession that she had shot her husband so she could be free to marry Wilcox.

The episode ended with Blackie and Wesley taking a ride on the carousel together. In daylight, at 14h00. And so to the organ music.

### **Bulldog Drummond.**

BULLDOG DRUMMOND was based on the novels by H.C. McNeile and aired on old-time radio from 1941 to 1949, with a brief revival in 1954. Drummond was a British detective, but the radio series soon moved to America.

At that point he seemed to become a paladin, occasionally taking fees as a private detective but often working pro bono. In America he had an assistant named Denny, a blithering idiot Englishman. What they lived on, or why Drummond could act with police powers was never properly explained.

The episodes opened with the sound of footsteps on the waterfront, with the constant boom of fog horns. This was incongruous since most episodes were set inland. The series was generally B-level, worth listening to once. Writers generally were not credited.

“Porcelain Ming Cat” was a 1941 episode. A young woman named Ginny Morris and possessing the aforesaid cat asked Bulldog Drummond for help. Her brother Ralph had been kidnapped and would be killed if she didn’t deliver the porcelain as ransom.

Drummond and Denny accompanied her to the drop. Upon arrival, a sniper opened fire from across the street. During the fracas, Ginny disappeared. There was nothing further to do but return home and await events.

It transpired that events were awaiting them. A gangster’s moll named Haines was in their apartment, with her gun at ready. That she was one could easily be ascertained by her Brooklyn accent. She wanted the cat. On getting it, she smashed it, then demanded to know where the real one was.

The men turned the tables on her and after restraining her, heard out her story. She had smuggled the Ming cat into America but then had it stolen by Morris. Drummond consulted with the police and learned that Haines’ husband Frank had just been murdered. They took her to the morgue but she said the body wasn’t him.

Drummond and Denny searched the building where the unknown man had been murdered. One of the tenants was J.R. Andrews, a dealer in Oriental antiques. His assistant was none other than Ginny Morris. Drummond was rendered unconscious by a gangster who suddenly appeared. When Drummond regained consciousness, Andrews and Morris had been shot dead.

A shill told Drummond that Frank Haines wanted to see him, and so it was arranged. Upon arrival, Frank was discovered to be the gangster who had faked his death. Just to impress Drummond, he shot the shill dead in front of him. What impressed Drummond even more was when a sniper killed Frank a few seconds later.

Back to Mrs Haines’ apartment, along with the cat. Drummond smashed the cat in front of her and extracted from it a bag of white powder worth \$100,000. She had been the sniper. The real mystery was why the opening sequence was

ignored. Ginny probably didn’t have a brother Ralph, and there seemed to be no point for her to contact Drummond in the first place.

The episode managed to tie most of the characters together but left some gaping logic holes. There was more to the episode than this, as will be revealed further down this review in the Rex Saunders section.

“Death Rides A Racehorse” was a 1942 episode which began with Bulldog Drummond receiving a telephone call from a horse jockey named Al Rousseau. He wanted to reveal something but wouldn’t say over the telephone. If he had, this would have been a five minute episode.

Drummond and Denny went down to the racetrack where they saw Rousseau fall off his horse White Star during the race, poisoned by a tiny needle embedded in the saddle. The horse’s owner Miss Peters met Drummond and asked for advice. He told her to run White Star again in a later race to smoke out the murderer.

Jump cut to a conversation between some sharp practice men who wanted to fiddle the betting odds on White Star and another horse. A new jockey named Teddy Lynch was to ride White Star in the next race. Along the way though there was trouble and excitement when the horse was stolen.

Drummond and Denny were trashed in a deliberate car accident to keep them quiet. Drummond arranged for local newspaper coverage to report that they had been killed in the accident so as to make the assailants relax their guard.

The horses were going to be switched about with ringers. Any Sherlockian familiar with the story “Silver Blaze” will guess what the bad guy’s plan was. There were two identical nags, White Star and another horse that looked the same but was much faster. The question was which horse would run and how would the bets go.

And they’re off! White Star won the race, or possibly the ringer did. The gangster didn’t like that and reamed Miss Peters for messing up the bets. He tried to kill her but Drummond and Denny came back from the dead. She and all the others were off to a prison cell. No sign of the police, making one wonder how it was that two British citizens could arrest Americans.



## **Rex Saunders.**

THE PRIVATE FILES OF REX SAUNDERS aired briefly on radio in 1951, with episodes written by Edward Adamson. It was a successor to the Bulldog Drummond series, with Rex Harrison playing the title role. The theme music was identical. The opening sequence was absolutely the same, with the sound of footsteps, apparently by a man walking in tapshoes, followed by a foghorn.

“Game With Death” began on a gambling ship, the SS Lucky, just outside the 3-mile territorial limit (as it then was). There was a confrontation in the casino room between the owner Tony Marco and Jerry Connell, who had been banned from the ship. It wasn’t about the gambling. They were feuding over a woman, Jerry’s sister Helen, whom Marco was courting.

Rex Saunders came into the story on land. He and his assistant Alex were about to board a train to Chicago. A pretty young thing bumped into him, as in stealing his briefcase and slipping a pistol into his pocket, but Saunders was not perturbed. He gave the pistol to Alex and went in search of the woman.

More peculiar yet, a pickpocket got the pistol away from Alex in the crowd. Saunders and Alex cancelled their trip and drove away. A car followed them so they did a loop and snagged it. To their surprise the driver was the woman. She said she was Helen Connell. The pistol was used to fire shots at her brother Jerry, which she found at the scene. A nonsensical way to hire a detective.

In the meantime, Jerry got himself kidnapped by one of Marco’s henchmen Rocky, who took him for a one-way swim. While that was happening, Saunders went out to the SS Lucky for a confrontation. It proved to be nothing but a meet-and-greet for the characters.

Marco had his own problems, as it appeared Jerry’s death would be pinned on him. Another woman named Vera Peters was after Marco, and she was a jealous possessive type. She was his business partner so he could hardly throw her off the ship.

Much to-ing and fro-ing on both land and water. Peters was the next victim, stabbed to death on a pier. Saunders went back out to the ship where he interrogated Marco again, who surprised him and the listeners by saying he and Helen were secretly married two months prior.

Saunders took Rocky’s launch back to shore but with alarums, as Rocky tried to kill him en route. More alarums on shore with Saunders, Helen, Tony, and Rocky. It was all her scheme to take over everything. Saunders’ tagline was: “*The shock you had at seeing me alive is nothing compared to the shock the State will give you.*”

“Worth More Than Its Weight In Murder” took in the antiques trade. Saunders came out to his new car, a Nash (pause while Millennials look that one up on Google), and found a beautiful woman sitting in it. She was in distress, as they usually are, and identified herself as Virginia Morris.

Her brother Ralph had brought back a Ming cat from Hong Kong, and was now being held hostage in exchange for the cat. At that point, the penny dropped and I remembered I had heard this episode before. It was, in fact, a re-use of the 1941 BULLDOG DRUMMOND script “Porcelain Ming Cat”.

Pause for explanation. My review columns are written incrementally. Each column is a separate document. As I listen to OTR shows or read books, I add each review to the appropriate column one by one. When the column is long enough, it gets printed.

For example, in this column on series detectives, I did not listen to all the shows in one day and type the reviews in a marathon session. They were added bit by bit, in between other items such as cozies or science fiction that were added into their respective columns.

This was the same script, with Saunders and Alex instead of Drummond and Denny. I listened to the Drummond version about a month before the Saunders episode. There were a few minor revisions but the script was followed as before. Ed Adamson was given the writing credit, which was not in the Drummond version.

## **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 an 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. That was unusual for the times. Back then, homosexuality wasn't just a sin but a felony offense.

“Eric Spaulding Concert” was a 1950 episode which began with Rembrandt Watson inviting Matson over to meet the aforementioned concert conductor. Spaulding had requested the meeting but wouldn't tell Watson why.

At the dinner, before they got down to business, Spaulding mentioned he was in line to take over the San Francisco orchestra. He also told of an innovation he was using for one piece of music, a fluorescent baton during a blackout. That told, he explained that someone was sabotaging him.

Twice so far, each time during the fluorescent turn, the entire orchestra hit a sour note that made the audience titter. Spaulding checked over the sheet music later and found nothing. All the musicians swore they had played the sheets correctly.

Matson agreed to the job, with her fee being half of Spaulding's contract for the current concerts. She wasn't in it pro bono and was not a delicate shrinking female. Even back then apartments on Telegraph Hill were not cheap. Spaulding was shocked but had no choice if he wanted to get on permanent with the San Francisco orchestra.

The next day Matson went to the performance. Before it started she went backstage and chatted with some of the musicians. She discovered that one was a woman named Nona Spalding, without the 'u'. The rehearsal went without a hitch. The evening performance didn't. The sour note re-occurred and the music came to a crashing halt.

After the debacle, Matson checked the sheet music, then did a test. The rehearsal had been under normal light and the music looked okay. When seen under the blackout lighting, the music changed and extra notes appeared in one particular chord, causing the discordance. Someone had been using a special ink that was not visible in incandescent light.

Who that someone was, was a former violinist who had lost three fingers years ago in a car accident, ending his career. Spaulding had been driving. It was not enough to kill Spaulding; his reputation had to be destroyed.

An inadvertently funny moment was that the discordant chord was played with an organ. Candy Matson verbally described how the orchestra played smoothly

until the discordant chord, at which instant the organist went berserk. Then back to narration, without any actual orchestral music.

Orchestras had become too expensive for old-time radio shows due to unions. They fell out of favour and were replaced by organists. At the same time, old-time radio was dying as television began to spread. Budgets were cut and radio orchestras were replaced by organists. This was, incidently, why 4-piece rock-and-roll bands came into existence.

Continuing on the musical theme, “Symphony Of Death” was a 1950 episode which began with a publicity puff announcing that the readers of the SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER newspaper had voted the CANDY MATSON series as the best radio or television series originating from San Francisco. The competition couldn't have been too stiff.

After a round of applause, the episode got underway. A diffident Willa Gray approaching Matson about her brother Gordon. He was a songwriter who seemed off his feed, playing gibberish at his piano all day long and telling his sister he was working on a new song called “Symphony Of Death”.

Matson made a social call to Gordon. He denied being suicidal but did say someone was going to kill him. He then played a selection of bad notes while giggling insanely. Returning home, she found her boyfriend Inspector Ray Mallard waiting for her. As they, uh, chatted, Willa rang the doorbell. She filled in some more details about Gordon, including that his latest Broadway musical score had been rejected.

Matson said she knew a judge who would have Gordon committed to a sanitarium. She went back to Gordon's apartment, where he professed to see her for the first time and asked her when she had returned from Europe.

He told her the symphony had been completed and Toscanini had accepted it. There followed padding of the episode in the form of Gordon explaining the movements while a recording of “Moonlight Sonata” softly played in the background.

The climax, he said, would be the audience calling Author! Author! and then being told he was dead. The world would never hear another composition by the greatest composer who ever lived. Matson told him Willa was going to put him away, to which he replied that he knew a killer was coming for him.



A few hours later, the radio news announced that Gordon had been found dead. Matson headed for his apartment, picking up Rembrandt Watson along the way because he played the cello and knew how to read music. She asked him to play out the notes of the symphony manuscript one by one on the piano. They were a code but the words made no sense.

Willa arrived. Matson said they would adjourn to Mallard's office since the apartment was a crime scene. That didn't stop her from taking the manuscript. She asked Watson to bring along a heavy plaster bust of Beethoven since he was the only man in the group. He was quite flattered when she told him that.

At police headquarters, Matson said she thought the death was suicide. She broke open the bust, which held a fortune in currency and a suicide note. Willa was distraught, as well she might be.

The death was not only unexplained, it was said that Gordon willed himself to death. No amount of explanation by Matson in the denouement could make the ending believable.

### **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, other name never given, who was a newspaper photographer. He was accompanied by reporter and girlfriend Ann Williams.

"The Blonde's Lipstick" was a 1947 episode written by Milton Kramer. Laura Neely introduced herself to Casey as a fan. She wanted free publicity for the City Welfare Fund, for which she was a canvasser. He agreed to do so, flattered by her. Ann Williams was a bit jealous.

Neely disappeared with \$10,000. Williams said she skipped with the money, while Casey thought it was foul play. The police investigation was doubtful. Casey worried he would be relegated to taking baby pictures because he had boosted her fund. If the story was published as is, his editor would not be pleased.

Casey and Williams called on Neely's boss Thomas Stevens. They hoped Neely might have left hints as to where she wanted to go, but got nothing. Williams found a lipstick in the Stevens house that belonged to Neely.

Williams was the one who did the detecting, explaining to Casey that the lipstick shade was only used by blonde women, while Stevens' wife was a brunette. They saw Stevens leave and went back to the big house to snoop around.

Jump cut to Stevens and his wife in their cabin, where they had kidnapped Neely. Stevens had neglected to pay \$1,000,000 in taxes. Neely had discovered the evasion. The Stevenses were going to frame her, then murder her.

Casey saved the damsel in distress, as we knew he would. His methodology was difficult to believe. He painted a big X on the roof of Stevens car, then had a helicopter search for it. Granted that cars were taller in those days, I find it difficult to believe that Stevens wouldn't have noticed the X when getting in or out of the car. I drove one-tonne crewcabs when a working man, which are tall enough, and I know I would have noticed such a thing walking up to it.

"The Grey Kitten" was a 1947 episode written by Alonzo Deen Cole. The story began in the cottage district of Greenwood Lake. Petra Simmons had a sister Jessica who married a much younger gigolo Carlos Devasos but had mysteriously disappeared. There was a grey kitten in the house which Carlos didn't want and gave to Petra.

Petra hired private detectives who couldn't find Jessica, so she went to the police. Casey and Williams tagged along. The group found Carlos at home with a hussy named Vera Laval. The police took Carlos in for suspicion of murder but he was soon released. No proof, which the courts are insistent upon. He sued Ann Williams for \$100,000 libel for publishing the story.

The grey kitten re-appeared in a nightclub, sending Carlos out in a panic. Casey talked it over with Petra, who said that Jessica believed in reincarnation and thought she would come back as a cat. Carlos had heard her say that many times, and was thus perturbed by the grey kitten. The kitten had a white streak on its forehead. Jessica had a white streak in her hair.

The police and the reporters agreed to use the kitten as psychological warfare against Carlos. The trouble was, Carlos had dropped out of sight and no one knew where he was. Three months later, the story resumed. Carlos and Vera had set up in a nearby town. They had changed their names and Carlos had married another rich old woman named Isobel. Her fate was to be the same as Jessica.

At this point, all logic was thrown out the window and the plot became too fantastic. When a plot element is made up of whole cloth and suddenly inserted into the middle of the story, it just becomes too unbelievable. The grey cat showed up and Carlos died in a freak accident. This time it was Vera who was run in for murder. In the epilogue, Casey and Williams wondered where the cat came from. It wasn't them who brought in the cat.

### **Richard Diamond.**

RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE aired on radio from 1949 to 1952 as a star vehicle for singer 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. If they were in his apartment, the next-door neighbour would complain in loud counterpoint to Diamond's singing, a very funny running gag through the series. Diamond and Asher were night people, so they constantly woke up the neighbour out of his sleep.

The dialogue attempted to be snappy and witty but generally 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 Van Dyke Seance Case" was a 1949 episode, written by Blake Edwards (later of Pink Panther movie fame). A trio of fraudsters were running a seance, using the voices of dearly departed to convince gullible victims to part with their jewels. Mrs Myrna Van Dyke was one of the latter. Her niece came to Richard Diamond for help.

Professor Leonardo, as the medium called himself, was assisted by the equally phony Doctor Langley and a somewhat unreliable woman who did the ghostly voices. Diamond infiltrated the next seance, accompanied by Helen Asher.

They presented themselves as country hicks Mr Appleknocker and Lulubelle. They couldn't keep up the pretense for long without bursting into laughter. The fakes had produced a ghost who claimed to know Appleknocker's brother, which was all the proof Diamond needed.

From there, Diamond went to the Van Dyke mansion to report on the caper. He found Myrna dead from a bloody murder, probably an hour before. After the police arrived, Diamond tracked down Langley's address, only to find he had flown the coop.

Not just figuratively, for in a wastebasket was a receipt for the rental of a private airplane. Diamond caught Langley at an airstrip but someone caught him with a whap on the back of the head. That someone then put a bullet into Langley and fled.

Diamond searched the aircraft hangers just as the police arrived. The killer was trapped and wounded in a gun fight. It was Leonardo, who gasped in his dying throes that he was searching for the Van Dyke jewels but couldn't find them.

That left one obvious suspect, who would inherit the estate as well as the jewels. The niece, of course, who was hoping her setup would put the blame on the seance fakers. She failed, for a couple of twist reasons that trapped her. From there to Diamond's serenade of Asher in his apartment. The neighbour's voice could be heard shouting oaths from off stage at Diamond's singing.

"The Tom Waxman Bombing Case" was a 1949 episode, no writer credited. The story began ugly, with union corruption, racketeers infiltrating, and a crusader against evil killed by a bomb. The murder of Tom Waxman by a mail bomb was blamed on his brother Phil because of falsified evidence.

The Waxman family were old friends of Richard Diamond, which brought him into the case. Most of the episode was taken up with pathos amongst family and friends as they dealt with the aftermath of the bombing. A darker than normal episode.

The Jewishness of the Waxmans and Diamond was explicitly mentioned in this episode. That was unusual for broadcasting in that era. It was common for Jews in Hollywood to take anglicized names due to prejudice.

Diamond was uncharacteristically violent, savagely beating the truth out of the suspect. He was avenging the Waxman family. He couldn't get the name of the ringleader but it didn't matter because the ringleader came to him. The death toll soared amongst the local mobsters.



Since mailing a bomb was a federal offense, the big boys got involved. It took several weeks but the feds cleaned up the mess. Normally each episode ended with Diamond serenading Helen Asher but this time he sang a Yiddish song for the Waxmans at a celebratory dinner.

### **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. All the scripts were written by Ray Buffum.

The gimmick of the series 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 and padded out the story.

“Special Added Attraction” was a 1946 episode, sometimes listed as “Carlotta The Magnificent”. The initial client was a circus manager named Pop Price, who was worried about a death threat against the star aerial acrobat Carlotta. It was mentioned by Price that Carlotta was the kind of person who made enemies easily because of her abrasive personality.

Richard Rogue thought it was just a publicity gag but Price had \$500 and two passes as an inducement. Rogue asked newspaper reporter Betty Callahan to accompany him. Upon arrival, they asked the way to Carlotta’s tent. The actor who played the carny they talked with stumbled over one of his lines. Dick Powell did an hilarious ad-lib when he thanked the carny and added: “*You stutter a little bit there, don’t you.*” The carny said “*Sorry*” and then picked up on the script where he left off.

Rogue and Callahan found Carlotta in her dressing room with her manager Frank Davis. She answered the door grumpily but immediately switched to smiles and sunshine when Rogue told her they were reporters. She wasn’t worried about the death threats. She said she was quitting the circus and tonight would be her last performance.

It was indeed her last performance, as she fell to her death. It was murder. During the drumrolls as she swung out into space, a sniper squeezed off two shots and killed her in midair. The sound of the gunshots was covered by the drumrolls.

There were a plentitude of suspects. A clown named Mario was found chloroformed in his trailer. The gun that killed Carlotta was his. The police and Callahan thought he did the crime. Rogue doubted that and went back to the big tent. He found some new evidence and Davis found them. Davis tried to kill him but with a single bound Rogue brought him down before he could fire the gun.

In the epilogue it was explained that Davis had embezzled most of Carlotta’s money. She had wanted an accounting. Davis impersonated Mario and shot Carlotta from ringside. The final clue was a clever one, and it would be a sharp listener who could catch it.

“The Hermit Of The Hills” was a 1946 episode, sometimes listed as “Snowbound”. Richard Rogue was a reluctant guest at a ski resort where he met Juanita Mansfield. He made a play for her, only to learn she was married. Rogue thought he had met David Mansfield before but the latter denied it.

Returning to his room, he was slugged unconscious. He woke up under care of a trapper, the hermit. Rogue had been found at the bottom of a canyon, with a gunshot wound. If the hermit hadn’t found him, he would have died and no one would have ever known the circumstances.

The hermit’s cabin was snowed in. It was two weeks before they could make it back out to the resort. Someone had paid Rogue’s bill and arranged for his luggage to be forwarded to his office. Returning to Los Angeles, he found an acquaintance Dorothy Granby had been murdered. Her roommate Eve Fulton hired him to investigate.

He found a wedding photo of Dorothy and David. They’d never been divorced. Dorothy blackmailed him. Tracking down the Mansfields, he confronted them. Juanita had killed Dorothy. It all ended messily.

The good news was that the hermit struck gold out in the mountains, so he loaded up the truck and moved to Beverly. Hills, that is. As usual, Rogue sustained enough injuries to put him in a nursing home, but he bounced back in good health for next week’s episode.

## 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 Plantagent Matter”, written by John Dawson, was a 5-episode story aired in 1956. The title of this episode was confusing because most listeners, myself included, assumed it was a mis-spelling.

It turned out to have nothing to do with the Plantagenet royal family, but was the name of the hotel, minus an ‘e’, in the story. Everyone pronounced the hotel name ‘plant-agent’. One actor pronounced it as ‘plantation’, which made more sense. Possibly the script writer messed up, but we’ll never know now.

Be that as it may, Dollar was called to the Plantagent Hotel in Vicksburg, Virginia, to investigate a burglary of their safe. On arrival, the police had caught the thief, so Dollar had to turn around on a wasted trip.

He was caught in the middle of a fight in the hotel parking lot between a couple and broke it up. Sending the man on his way, Dollar romanced the woman at the bar but didn’t get her name. He was seeing her off in a taxi, when she collapsed in pain. They rushed her to hospital. She died later and everyone was asking Dollar who the Jane Doe was. She had no purse or other identification.

Lt Jim Aikins was the local Deppity Dawg. He was understandably aggravated about Dollar. The toxicology test showed she had been poisoned about an hour before her death. Dollar began investigating on his own account at the hotel.

He found her purse out in the parking lot. It had no identification but did contain a handgun that had been recently fired. He found out that Raymond O’Connell

was identified as the previous registered owner. Tracking down the address, he found Raymond’s widow Terese. The unidentified man in the parking lot fight was her new boyfriend Paul Dameron. The dead woman was Amy Duran, Terese’s sister.

None of this was divulged to the police, including the gun. Dollar was now worried that he might be run in for obstruction. As a professional insurance investigator, he would be held to a higher standard than a Miss Marple. Dollar hired a local lawyer for defense although the police still didn’t know.

A fresh homicide was a man named Clarence Belden, who had been auditing a company where Duran was the chief accountant. Belden had found a \$10,000 shortage. It looked like Duran might have committed suicide with poison after killing him.

Dollar interviewed Terese, who confessed to having embezzled the money. By now the plot was on its umpteenth right-angle turn. Dollar finally turned in the evidence to the police, who were surprisingly lenient since they thought the case was solved.

Another right-angle turn occurred when a \$10,000 certified cheque was found in Duran’s apartment. Dollar accused Dameron of an elaborate plan to shift the blame to Duran. Much bluster ensued, with a rushed finish to haul Dameron away to the hoosegow.

Dollar’s biggest problem was that other than travel to and from Vicksburg for the original safe robbery, he couldn’t put anything on his expense account. He documented his expenses during his enforced stay on the other matter, but was frustrated that he couldn’t bill anyone. He wasn’t used to traveling on his own money like the lumpenproletariat.

“The Clinton Matter” was a 1956 episode written by John Dawson. This was one of the five-part episodes, so the plot was frequently summarized.

Johnny Dollar was sent to Clinton, Colorado, by an insurance adjustment company. The first expense was \$105.63 for airfare from New York City to Denver, then another \$100 for car rental to Clinton.

When he arrived, there was indeed a hot time in the old town tonight, as the newly-built school building was fully aflame. The janitor Julian Osborne had

tipped off the company that something was amiss, and had subsequently died in the fire. The company had written a \$200,000 policy on the building.

Dollar's first stop was to talk to the school principal Miss Floree Hawkins. Before he could ask any questions, she got a telephone call from Sheriff Dougherty shutting her down. David Baines, the architect of the school, was beaten up by vigilantes.

Roy Vickery was the contractor who built the school. He cut every corner possible in the construction. Fire Chief Hanley did as he was told by Vickery. So did Dougherty. So did the building inspector Richard Hobb. The hostility was so thick it could be cut with a knife.

Hawkins met Dollar on the sly, telling him the building was substandard. She and Baines were afraid of the Vickery gang. She gave Dollar a notarized statement. Hobb had already jumped town when Dollar came calling.

Hobb returned with three bullet holes in him. He died before he could name the killer. Dollar called in help. A swarm of private investigators arrived and a meeting was held. This gave Dollar an opportunity to recapitulate the story so far and pad out the episode.

Earl Kennedy called and took Dollar for a ride with several others. Kennedy said he was the construction foreman, and all of them were willing to swear out statements. There was a confrontation. The Sheriff gave the insurance investigators until sundown to get out of town. Dollar gave him until sundown to resign. A rather neat turnabout that flummoxed the Deppity Dawg.

Hobb's bank account showed large deposits that could only be bribes. His widow needed money because her husband had spent it all on wine, women, and song. Baines came up with the purchase orders that proved substandard materials were used. Events moved quickly. A gun fight disposed of Vickery and Hanley. Dougherty didn't outlive them much longer. Usually the final total of Dollar's was a few hundred dollars, but this case ran it up to \$2,300.85.

The episode was reminiscent of the 1952 movie HIGH NOON, with Johnny Dollar riding into town to do what a man's gotta do. The emotions of all those angry people on both sides were well communicated, as was the fear of those who dared not stand up to the gang. Recommended.

## **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.

There was a set of four episodes with related titles over a year which I'll review as a batch. They were all written by Eugene Wang. The first was "The King Of Hearts", aired on 1952-05-11.

The story began with gigolo Johnny King checking into a hotel. He asked a bellhop Billy Matthew for information about a woman he noticed in the hotel, Grace Burton. For sufficient consideration, Matthew was quite willing to snoop through her room and get details.

Armed with information about her, King romanced Grace. Her husband Vic, a wealthy man, was frequently away. When he returned, she had spent \$18,000 on King from the Burton joint chequing account. The cheques were made to cash, and she refused to account for them. Vic went to Michael Waring for help.

King dropped Grace after meeting up with Waring but she wouldn't drop him. The matter was soon resolved when someone dropped King with gunshots. NYPD Homicide immediately nominated Vic as the culprit but Waring had his doubts.

Meanwhile, Matthew had gone to Grace to shake her down for \$5,000, telling her that otherwise he would tell police he saw her at King's room just before the shooting. In a word, blackmail.

Shortly thereafter, Waring was talking on a hotel telephone to police when someone shot him from behind. Not fatally of course, since he was booked for the series. That brought him down on Matthew, who was discovered to have robbed King of the \$18,000.



The episode moved briskly, but by about the 20-minute mark it became obvious that Matthew was the killer. The rest was the details of bringing him down.

“The King Of Clubs” followed on 1952-07-20. The episode began with Michael Waring, apparently a reservist, being called up by U.S. Army Intelligence for a job in Berlin. A preliminary investigation into an Army unit stationed in West Berlin revealed it was \$10,000 short in its accounts.

The head of the unit, Major Jim Dodge, was being blackmailed by German criminals over an affair he was having with a fraulein named Lily. He was a married man and understandably wanted to keep the trysts hidden from his wife Grace. He finally told them to be off. In retaliation, they gave Grace a set of photos.

Shortly thereafter, someone shot the Major dead, leaving Grace as the suspect after police found the photos in her purse. The Falcon was on the case but Grace wouldn’t cooperate, thinking there wasn’t evidence to convict her. The Major’s assistant back at the office was Bruce, who was mildly helpful. He told Waring that Lily worked in a nightclub whose name translated into English as The King Of Clubs.

Waring posed as a wealthy married man to lure Lily and the blackmailers. It worked and they tried to draw him in. Instead he drew them in, but didn’t have the evidence to hold them for the murder of Dodge.

As the listener will already have, Waring re-thought the case and realized that Bruce was connected to the \$10,000 shortage. The missing money had nothing to do with the blackmail. It was a separate embezzlement. Bruce was collared for the theft and Waring looked forward to returning home.

The bad news was that his success in solving the case led the Inspector General to assign him another file. In North Africa. In July.

“The Jack Of Diamonds” aired on 1952-09-07. Waring was once again working for Army Intelligence, this time in London, England. It began with Bruce Graham blackmailing Jack Diamond, his most recent demand being £25,000. While speaking on the telephone with Waring a bit later, Graham was shot dead.

The police thought of the murder as a crime but Waring thought of it as a national security investigation. Diamond was identified as the blackmail victim

but Waring didn’t think he was the killer. The Falcon tracked down Graham’s girlfriend Diane, who was the beneficiary of his life insurance policy.

Diane decided to take over the blackmail business but it was too late and didn’t prove successful. An attempt on her life exposed the killer and sent him to the noose for murder, while Diane was sent in for blackmail.

“The Ace Of Spades” aired on 1953-06-22. It began with New York City mobster Jimmy Volenti hiring Ace Kelly to collect some gambling debts. Volenti later collected some bullets.

One of the debtors hired Michael Waring to help him but was reluctant to assist police with their enquiries. Waring got little information out of him or Kelly. Volenti’s ex-girlfriend Martha was the next suspect. She objected to Waring’s questions and pointed a gun to emphasize her feelings.

The finale came when Waring and the police went to Kelly’s apartment. Martha answered the door and all were equally surprised. Kelly confirmed that he had collected on another debt after Volenti was dead, and kept all the money for himself. I didn’t understand the logic but apparently that proved Kelly was the murderer.

### **Philip Marlowe.**

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

“Red Wind” was a 1947 episode written by Milton Geiger, based on Chandler’s story of the same title. It was set in Los Angeles during a Santa Ana wind. Marlowe was drinking in a bar when a stranger walked in and asked if anyone had seen a woman, describing her to the tavern occupants.

No one had, so the man turned to walk out. He noticed a drunk sitting at the other end, pulled out a handgun, shot him dead, shouted “*Take that, Waldo*”, and then departed. Marlowe and the bartender could hardly believe what happened.

After dealing with the police, Marlowe returned home, only to discover the aforementioned woman waiting for him. She said the man had stolen something from her and she didn't want her husband to know. Someone knocked on the door, so she hid in another room while Marlowe answered it.

The man with the gun barged in, still waving it about. He told Marlowe the dead man was his ex-partner in crime Waldo, who had betrayed him over a bank robbery and sent him to prison. The woman crept out of hiding, got the jump, and slugged the man unconscious with a blunt instrument. Marlowe sent her away while he dealt with the police a second time that night.

They met later that night out in the wind, apparently so the sound man could show off his wind machine. She filled in more details, including her name Laura. Waldo had stolen her pearls during a brief tryst and she was to buy them back from him. She didn't want her husband to know.

More characters, complications, and murders followed. Basically every time the plot sagged the additions were thrown in. Marlowe met the husband, who seemed to have a different wife with him. The pearls finally made an appearance but they were fakes.

At that point, with two minutes remaining, the story fizzled out. Marlowe threw the fake pearls into the ocean and the police continued their investigation. Everyone just basically shrugged their shoulders and went home. No bang-bang-bang finish.

"The King In Yellow" was a 1947 episode written by Milton Geiger, again adapted from a Chandler story. A trumpet player named King, dressed in yellow silk pyjamas, was disturbing the other tenants in a hotel after midnight. The night clerk asked Marlowe for help.

Marlowe quieted King with a punch, then began snooping about his room. He found a threatening note addressed to King. Two doors down a woman who had been egging on King attracted Marlowe's attention in the wrong way. He had the night clerk evict both her and King.

Marlowe tracked her down the next day and found her dead. From there to King's nightclub, for another confrontation. At the club, another woman, named Delores, told him King was not a popular man. Nothing much happened and Marlowe left.

Late that night he got a phone call from Delores. King was at it again, bothering her at her apartment. Marlowe told her it would cost her \$20 for removal. Upon arrival he found that King would never again bother anyone. He had been shot with her handgun.

She had a maid Agatha, so Marlowe went off looking for her, with no mention about calling the police. When he found her body, #3 in case you lost count, he did call Homicide. Back to the hotel, but the night clerk had suddenly gone on vacation. The manager mentioned in passing that two years ago a young woman had shot herself in the hotel.

Marlowe located the clerk, staying with a brother, and verified the woman had been his sister. The brother had been the assassin. He pulled a gun on Marlowe. The clerk pulled his own gun and re-enacted the Cain and Abel story. That made four victims. It all ended well with Marlowe taking Delores out on a date. He had no competition left.

### **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. There was a running gag through the Price series where gangsters wanted to kill him not so much because he was disrupting their operations but because they couldn't stand the constant flow of one-liners.

"The Carnival Murder" was a 1951 episode, written by Dick Powell (not the actor of the same name). There are no prizes for guessing where the opening scene was located. A shill was trying to entice Simon Templar into an attraction where a woman was buried alive, attempting to break the world record for duration underground. He had a tough time but finally succeeded in selling a ticket.

The Saint spoke down a tube to Mona. She thought he was someone named Franky and frantically told him that she was going crazy and wanted to be retrieved. Templar identified himself and asked if he could help. She babbled

a bit and mentioned her sister Angie. Gundel the strong man made a brief appearance but he would be back later in the episode.

The shill came inside since he wasn't getting any customers and talked to Templar. On being asked, he said that Angie had been the previous live-burial performer but had died underground from a weak heart.

Templar was born to be nosy, so he tracked down the carnival owner Bea Sinclair. Franky turned out to be the tattooed man, who was Mona's husband. Angie had been his previous wife, and he carried her ashes about in an urn.

Franky didn't want to bring Mona up, and called in Gundel to forcibly remove The Saint. When Templar regained consciousness, a dwarf helped out. And 'dwarf' was the word used, not whatever the politically correct term is today.

They discussed the Mona situation, then went over to her tent. She didn't respond when they talked down the tube. The alarm was sounded and she was dug up, barely alive but suffering from poisoned food. Mona was most uncooperative. She was either protecting someone or afraid.

Templar set a trap for Franky. All the characters assembled for a J'accuse! meeting. Franky was in the marrying business. Shots were fired, Gundel went berserk, and justice was served. The closing scene returned to the shill, this time touting the fat lady. Templar went inside.

"The What-Not What Got Hot" was a 1951 episode written by Louis Vittes. It began when Simon Templar arrived home to find his furniture gone. He and his cabby Louis had seen a moving van driving away as they pulled up. The cabbie remembered the company name on the side of the truck, so Templar called the company. Someone using his name had ordered his furniture moved to an antiques store called the Sprague Gallery.

The chase was on. As Templar said to the cabby, "*We gotta get a move on*". The furniture was ordinary, but among the items taken was a whatnot he had purchased a few days previous from the Sprague Gallery.

The rest of the furniture was taken as a diversion. (A whatnot is a tier of small shelves designed to show off knickknacks. It is commonly designed to fit into corners where two walls meet.)

Upon arrival at the gallery, they found the building unlocked, Templar's furniture inside, the place ransacked, and they found Sprague's corpse. The two men located a clue to the original consignor and hared off after her.

Entering her mansion they found assorted characters of varying degrees of sanity. The consignor was dead. The Saint and the cabby were invited to spend the night, but were awoken by a fire. They carried the corpse out, much to the dismay of the others.

Templar had realized the fire was set to burn the corpse and prevent an autopsy that would reveal murder by poisoning. The defunct was believed to have hidden wealth which the others wanted. Eventually it was found hidden in the whatnot. The niece did it for the usual reason, to speed up her inheritance.

A routine manor house mystery, but spiced up by the furniture theft and Templar's method of stymieing the guilty.

### **Michael Shayne.**

Michael Shayne began as a series of novels by Davis Dresser, writing under the pseudonym of Brett Halliday. As a fictional detective, Shayne appeared not only in print but as an old-time radio series, movies, television, and a mystery fiction digest. Dresser quit writing Shayne stories after 1958 but farmed out the Halliday pseudonym as a house name to other writers, so the stories continued to appear for decades afterwards.

In the movies, Shayne was portrayed by several actors, the best of whom was Lloyd Nolan, who did him with dry humour, unlike Shayne's origin as a hard-boiled detective. I have five of the Shayne movies, all with Nolan, and they are enjoyable watching even 80 years later. The movies were not all based on Shayne novels by Dresser/Halliday but often were written from other novels with the character names changed.

The movie series began with MICHAEL SHAYNE, PRIVATE DETECTIVE in 1941. The screenplay was written by Stanley Rauh and Manning O'Connor, with a "based on" credit to Brett Halliday. This was part of a 4-movie boxed DVD set from 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, with pristine reproduction and subtitles.

This movie began at a race track where ingenue Phyllis Brighton was having a bad day at the tote board. Her introduction to Shayne was when he messed her



up while she was trying to put down a bet with bad collateral. The horse she wanted but wasn't able to bet was Banjo Boy, a long shot that paid 15 to 1. She was most vexed.

Later at Shayne's office, a gentleman of undeclared income had paid track tout Harry Grange to spread \$10,000 of bets on Banjo Boy. After the horse won, Grange was nowhere to be found. Shayne was asked to locate him but refused.

Moments later, Brighton's father Hiram hired Shayne to keep an eye on Phyllis. She was located at a casino with Grange, who was flashing a roll of banknotes that would choke a horse, pardon the expression. Shayne brought her home, and was invited to stay overnight in the Brighton mansion, the better to watch Phyllis.

The other occupants were Ponsby the butler and dotty old Aunt Olivia. Ponsby was ever so polite but always managed to get in some digs. As an example, whenever the police arrived, he announced them: *It's the cops, madam*. Lots of snappy dialogue between Shayne and Phyllis, who proved quite a wildcat.

Grange was a ladies man. His previous dalliance was with Marsha Gordon, the daughter of the casino owner, who was angry at being dumped in favour of Phyllis. When he was shot dead in Phyllis's car, the plot kicked into high gear.

Shayne was implicated in several different ways. To clear his name, he investigated in the usual manner, such as break-and-enter while searching for evidence and impersonating various people who would have objected had they known. Clues littered the scenery and not just figuratively. They were found lying on the ground and in Phyllis's car.

In the denouement, almost all of the characters converged on the beach house of Banjo Boy's owner, where assorted alarums took place and a J'accuse! meeting was held. As a police detective asked, *"What is this, a convention?"* The final explanation was that all the crimes were a concatenation of events arising from the initial fraud, substituting a ringer for Banjo Boy, to several blackmails and bad debts.

SLEEPERS WEST (1941) was the second installment in the movie series, from the DVD box set. The screenplay was written by Low Breslow and Stanley Rauh, based on a novel by Frederick Nebel, which they adapted into the Michael Shayne milieu.

The movie opened at a railroad station where Shayne met an old girlfriend Kay Bentley on the Comanche train out of Denver bound for San Francisco. She was a newspaper reporter in Denver. Shayne was escorting Helen Carlson, a star witness who was scheduled to testify at a San Francisco trial. Several people would rather that she not complete the trip.

A subplot was the imminent retirement of the train's engine driver, on his last run before taking his pension. The Comanche was behind schedule and he didn't want to end his career by coming home late, so he was highballing the train at full speed. Assorted other characters populated the train. A railroad detective on board was the Deppity Dawg. A dry goods salesman running from his wife made friends with Carlson as a kindred and lonely soul.

The train smashed into a semi-trailer at a level crossing, not the engine driver's fault. This gave everyone the opportunity to get off the train, stretch their legs, and fire a few gunshots. The principal characters scattered over the countryside with many alarums, excursions, and gun pointing.

The comedy took a temporary back seat to hard-boiled drama. It all ended well. Carlson testified, and everyone settled back into the normal routine of life in the epilogue. A clichéd plot but an enjoyable movie for all that.

DRESSED TO KILL (1941) was written by Stanley Rauh and Manning O'Connor, based on a novel by Richard Burke. I have this as a single DVD, not part of the box set. Another comedy, with Michael Shayne once again on the verge of marriage with a showgirl.

The nuptials never got going because there was a double murder in an apartment building adjacent to a Broadway theatre. A middle-aged couple were shot dead as they sat at their dining table, a retired producer and a former stage actress. Shayne was in the building and thus became involved, also using the opportunity to pick up a few extra dollars.

The deceased were involved in sharp practice and failed romance 25 years prior. The victim of their shenanigans was back looking for revenge, definitely a dish served cold. It took Shayne a while to piece the history together, as well as the elaborate method used to kill the victims.

Matters were not helped by the apartment being an unusual one with multiple back door passages to the theatre and connecting apartments. Both Shayne and

the police were frustrated by all the pedestrian traffic in and out of the apartment, about the same as the sidewalks of Broadway.

The murderer's appearance had changed dramatically over the decades, such that no one else recognized him. That was fine by him, as it enabled him to move freely about while setting up the murders. Shayne got him but lost the showgirl.

THE MAN WHO WOULDN'T DIE (1942) was written by Arnaud d'Usseau, based on a novel by Clayton Rawson which was converted into a Michael Shayne story. From the DVD box set. This was a manor house mystery which began with three shiftily-looking men carrying a corpse out of the big house at midnight and burying it out in the woods.

Upon returning to the house, the three men were surprised by the arrival of Kay Wolff, the daughter of the house. She had been out of town and informed one of them, her father Dudley, that she had just married a man named Roger Blake. Her husband had been detained on business but was expected in three days.

That didn't make Papa happy. He was under investigation by a Senate committee, not to mention he had just committed murder and improper disposal of a corpse. The other two men, his partners in crime, were his long-time secretary Dunning and Dr Haggard. The latter had a basement laboratory where he was working on elixirs to extend life, paid for by Dudley, who feared death. Dudley's wife, his second, was Anna, a trophy wife about the same age as Kay.

An intruder awoke Kay as she was sleeping and fired a shot at her. After calming her down, the three men went back to the woods and found the grave they had dug was empty. The next day, Kay hired Shayne, asking him to pose as Roger and not telling anyone else who he was.

Unlike the novels, which were written as hard-boiled or noir, this movie played as comedy, interspersed with serious bits. Haggard was shot dead the next day by the intruder. When police arrived, the butler Phillips calmly answered the door and said he'd show them the body. As the detective Jonathon Meek remarked: "*First case I ever covered where they had a butler show you the body.*"

Meek was a Deppity Dawg who had a past history with the manor. He had once courted the cook, a battleaxe who wasn't happy about the police tramping about

the house. Shayne took the opportunity to guide Meek through the case. The intruder returned once again that night. Shots were fired, a car chase ensued, and a rip-snorting time was had by all.

Except the intruder, who crashed, apparently a fatality. He was identified as Zorah Bey, an illusionist who specialized in faking death in underground burials and then reviving himself. Meek and the coroner were much perturbed when Bey's corpse got up in the middle of the night and walked out of the morgue.

Shayne was even more perturbed when the real Roger Blake arrived, having finished up his business early. The next few scenes were straight out of any British farce.

Bey, still referred to by other characters as "the body" from force of habit, became the MacGuffin of the plot. Everyone was searching for him, but he simplified matters by going back to the mansion. It was a dark and stormy night. Parenthetically, one wonders why stately piles always have such bad weather.

The next gunfight, and there was one, had Anna shooting Bey dead. She revealed she had once been married to him. Shayne deduced, at great length, that she, Bey, and Haggard were part of a blackmail ring.

With a few last explanations to substitute for action, the guilty were hauled away and the innocent were left to get on with their lives. An amusing movie, well worth watching.

BLUE, WHITE AND PERFECT (1942) was written by Samuel G. Engel, based on a story by Borden Chase, and found in the DVD box set. By now the Americans were in the war and the movie reflected that, although there didn't seem to be signs of rationing.

Michael Shayne had tangled himself in a romance, while working as a spy in an aircraft factory, looking for saboteurs. Shayne was posing as a riveter. A cashier at the factory, Vanderhoefen, was mugged and \$100,000 in industrial diamonds were stolen from the vault. No American thief would have taken them, but the Nazis could certainly use them for their factories.

They were a priority item because of their use in grinding and abrading tools. The factory couldn't just order more because of a shortage. The robbery was

an inside job, and Vanderhoefen skipped town. Shayne began tracking him and focused on the Daisy Bell Dress Co. as a conduit for the stolen diamonds.

The smugglers had been sending the diamonds out inside buttons of dresses but switched their tactics after learning that Shayne was on to them. They successfully misled him onto a false trail aboard an ocean liner bound for Honolulu. The ship was carrying the dresses sans the diamonds.

The Nazi smugglers were on board as well. The voyage was filled with alarms and excursions that left one of the smugglers dead and one of the good guys in the sickbay. Upon arrival in Honolulu, Shayne discovered by accident that the diamonds were being smuggled inside hard candies.

A few more alarms in tropical paradise. Interestingly, the movie used several genuine Hawaiians as local police instead of Hollywood's typical procedure of making up white men to look like natives. A surprise twist revealed the ringleader of the Nazi smugglers, then a quick wrap and so to the end credits.

Not quite as funny as the previous movie but enjoyable nonetheless. This was the final movie in the aforementioned DVD box set.

## **Sam Spade.**

THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE, based on the character created by Dashiell Hammett, aired from 1946 to 1951. It went off the air shortly after both Hammett and Howard Duff, the actor who played Sam Spade, were named as Communist sympathizers during the Red Scare.

The series struggled on for a few more episodes as a sustained show with no advertisers. No corporation dared to be associated with it. The replacement actor couldn't live up to Duff's characterization.

"The Rowdy Dowser Caper", written by Harold Swanton, was a 1951 episode. Wendell Wisby of North Tacaloma, California, was a banker in distress who hired Sam Spade after a cashier disappeared with \$53,000.

The vanished man was Percy 'Purse' Snatcher, Wisby's uncle. Auntie wasn't very helpful when she said Purse had told her out of the blue one day that embezzlement was only punishable by five to ten years.

Spade spent a day hunting about the countryside for Snatcher with no luck. A big spender blew into North Tacaloma who worked as a dowser. That led Spade out to an abandoned farm where he found Snatcher's car and, following private eye tradition, was slugged unconscious from behind.

Spade awoke inside a burning barn, but with a single bound he was free and dived into a creek to extinguish his burning pants. Spade and Wisby bluffed the bank president, who had embezzled the money, then killed Snatcher who had discovered the fraud. The bluff was to use a dowsing rod to find Snatcher's body, although Spade had a good idea where it was by observing the disturbed ground.

The episode had a frantic pace to it, rushing the listener along. The dialogue tried to be witty in a music hall sort of way. The actors tended to shout their lines.

"The Civic Pride Caper", written by John Michael Hayes, was a 1951 episode. Steven Dunne was substituting as Sam Spade after Howard Duff had been named during the Red Scare.

The caper began with Spade departing San Francisco for the town of Westover, hired by Garrett Welsh. Upon arrival he visited his client's office and found two men fist-fighting. One was Welsh, the other was a man named Kesley.

Five people had been killed when the municipal auditorium collapsed. Welsh had been the architect, and wanted Spade to find out who was at fault. The prime contractor was Howard Kesley, who naturally denied any fault. He gave Spade a copy of the building plans.

From there to the residence of building inspector Albert Mitchell, whose wife Kitty was in heat. She tried to, ahem, romance him while he tried to find out where Albert was. Kitty said she hadn't seen Albert for a while.

Spade went to the auditorium rubble and looked around. He heard shots in the back and found Albert dying on the sidewalk. The next day Spade interviewed the mayor. The town council held an inquiry the week before and decided that no blame could be fixed for the collapse.

Purchase orders for building materials and other paperwork for the auditorium had been destroyed after the building was completed. Spade found that Albert



had been depositing \$5,000 cheques into his bank account, at a time when one of them represented a year's wages for the average person.

Spade went back to Kitty, who told him Albert had been a womanizer, which was where the money went. She said the Central Cement Company, owned by Kesley's brother Ralph, had paid him off.

Spade continued circulating back and forth between all the characters aforementioned. He bluffed the mayor and the newspapers by saying that copies of the purchase orders had been found and he was about to talk to the district attorney. That stirred up trouble.

Spade's hotel room was ransacked and he received threatening telephone calls. Spade holed up in Welsh's office and they waited. Kitty called, saying three men were after her. She wanted him to bring the papers to her but he refused.

It was a busy and bloody night in Welsh's office. Howard Kesley showed up to negotiate a deal with Spade, admitting he had shorted the quality of the concrete. The mayor arrived shortly after and shot Howard dead, then admitted he had taken kickbacks. Kitty arrived and shot the mayor dead. She didn't admit anything, not even remorse.

At that point, the episode cut off with Spade remarking he didn't like to think what would happen next. All the loose threads were left dangling with no attempt to tie them off. Since the show was on its last legs, one can understand why the writers weren't trying but even so, professional pride should have made them write better.

**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 board for Valentine and have the plot explained to her at intervals.

"Death In Fancy Dress" was a 1948 episode written by David Victor and Herbert Little Jr. The client Lloyd Bascum had received death threats because of his hobby, collecting artifacts related to scandals and crimes. He wrote George Valentine for help.

Items in the Bascum collection included the licence plate of a hit-and-run car, and a broken wine bottle used to slash someone at a dinner party gone wild. Those associated with the items were not happy with Bascum.

A man named Reynolds physically attacked Bascum in front of Valentine for blackmailing his wife Donna. She had committed suicide. Valentine changed clients and was hired by Reynolds. Bascum retaliated by threatening to swear out a warrant.

Valentine kept pushing. He investigated Celeste Dupre, now Cele Dawson, who had been a victim of Bascum. Nonetheless she kept contact with him. So did Reynolds, who shot at Bascum but missed. The plot took a wild jump when out of the blue Valentine decided Dupre's old boss Jake Swansey was involved.

Reynolds had murdered his wife and staged it to look like suicide. Bascum and Swansey were part of the plot. Donna had been a wealthy woman, and the three men were ghouls after her estate.

The episode leaped about with assumptions and unlikely connections which made it difficult to suspend disbelief. The links between characters and events were made without any reasonable deductions or logic. They were simply stated to exist by Valentine, who also withheld information from the listener. There are rules for mysteries (see OPUNTIA #414, pages 16 to 18), which were largely ignored here by sloppy writers.

"Tonight The Mayhem's Going To Be Different" was a 1951 episode, no writer credited. Claire Brooks received a letter from a Cecille Lewis inviting her and George Valentine to the Avery family's lake cottage. Brooksie never heard of her but accepted the invitation anyway.

Cecille was evasive when they arrived and seemed to be in fear of her brother Avery. He had an acquaintance, a wealthy social climber named Joe Ames who bought the neighbour Paul Merrill's estate adjacent to the Ames property. This upset Avery to no end, who stormed back into the house.

A moment later, five gun shots were heard but it was just Avery working off his frustrations at their private rifle range. Valentine and Avery had a man-to-man talk. The latter was paranoid about Cecille eloping with Ames. Those fears were put to rest when the body of Ames was found in the adjacent woods.

Avery found evidence that someone had been experimenting on his range with firing a rifle slug using a shotgun shell. The police said his rifle had fired the bullet that killed Ames. That raised the possibility that the murderer had collected spent slugs on the range, loaded one into a shotgun shell to kill Ames, and thus have the ballistics indicate Avery had fired it.

Merrill arrived, and in the ensuing conversation mentioned that he had been forced to sell his property to Ames, who held the mortgage which was in default. Cecille was equally suspicious, having lied about everything. Valentine told her he doubted that Avery killed Ames since he would not frame himself. In any event if Avery didn't want to leave ballistic marks he would have just used an ordinary shotgun shell.

Valentine accused Cecille, which drove Avery crazy, brandishing a shotgun. In the denouement, he accused Avery of an elaborate double-switch to confuse the murder investigation. The final explanation was equally confusing. I'm didn't really believe it.

### **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 John Markham to investigate, as apparently the local police could not be trusted to find the killer.

"The Tree Trunk Murder Case" was a 1948 episode that began with District Attorney Markham and Philo Vance heading out of town for a relaxing weekend camping in the woods. Jump cut to a group of lumberjacks who weren't relaxing in the woods. They all talked with a Hollywood producer's idea of a north woods drawl.

Bill Avery, one of the sawmill workers, argued with his boss. Then home for the day, where Avery told a woman he had been seeing for five years that not

only was their relationship done with but he had never really liked her in the first place. Her brother Johnny wasn't pleased to hear that. Avery's mother lived with him. He was very abrupt with her, not at all a dutiful son.

The next morning the lumberjacks found Avery under a tree, crushed to death. It wasn't an accident. That same day Markham and Vance arrived at the nearby railroad siding for the rest. The lumberjacks didn't like them city fellas snooping about. The Deppity Dawg, pardon me, the Sheriff wasn't investigating too much, given Avery's unpopularity. Vance set up a J'accuse! meeting. And the name of the murderer ...

Was Mrs Avery, the dead man's mother. She had chopped a tree down on him for being such a bad-tempered boy. Vance noticed she had blisters on her hands, as if she had been using an axe. Since Vance had no proof that would hold up in court, it was fortunate she confessed her guilt. Well, I do declare. This was one of the silliest murder story solutions I've ever heard.

"The Cheesecake Murder Case" was a 1949 episode, no writer credited. It opened with a scene of domesticity that took a sudden bizarre turn. Jane Ashley and her fiance Billy Avery had finished their dinner, with cheesecake for dessert, which he loved.

Wait a minute, wait a minute! Did Bill Avery rise from the dead, or were the writer and producer just sloppy at continuity. The latter, of course. They could get away with it because there were no home recording devices in those days, nor did the networks commonly record shows for repeat performances. Radio shows were considered the same as a stage show, soon to be forgotten.

Avery had to rush off to work with his colleague Mike but before he left, she presented him with a gift, a new mask. His profession was armed robbery and burglary. The latest victim was a commercial photographer named George Merton. He was setting up a photo shoot with a leggy model Sally Burns (they discussed her legs for several minutes) when the robbers set up their job.

It went wrong and both victims were shot, Merton fatally and Burns wounded. Mike and Billy fled the scene at high speed. A few moments later their car went out of control on a curve and crashed, killing Mike. Billy left the mask and gun behind, and the police assumed Mike had been working alone. Billy telephoned Jane to say he was okay. He had bought a fresh cheesecake for dinner that night but left it in the back seat of the wreck when he fled.

Philo Vance barged into the case as was his wont. The police were annoyed but since the District Attorney Markham had no objection, they had to put up with him. Vance examined the wreckage and immediately deduced there had been a second man.

Billy and Jane celebrated his lucky escape from death by having cheesecake, bought from their usual supplier, Raleigh's Restaurant. He was already thinking ahead to his next job, a factory payroll of \$30,000. The heist went according to plan.

Vance and Markham trudged about investigating. This was Homicide work but in this city the D.A. did their job instead of concentrating on prosecuting cases in court. They interviewed Burns in her hospital bed, where she mentioned seeing the masked man squeeze the trigger of his handgun with his middle finger.

Even if you've never fired a gun, that remark raised a red flag. Vance leaped on it immediately. Anyone pulling a trigger will use their index finger. From there to Raleigh's, which made the best cheesecake in the city, where the owner remembered delivering cheesecakes to a man with a paralyzed index finger.

The rest was obvious. Over to the apartment for a punchup. Vance struggled with Billy on the fire escape, who lost his balance and fell to his death. That made less work for Markham.

In the epilogue, Vance explained why he thought there had been two robbers in the crashed car. Both sun visors had been pulled down, indicating two people wanting to keep the sun out of their eyes. The cheesecake had been left in the back seat of the car. If the driver had been alone, he would have put it beside him on the front seat.

### **The Fat Man.**

THE FAT MAN aired on radio from 1946 to 1951. It was originally based on Dashiell Hammett's famous character Gutman, who was transmogrified into a private detective named Brad Runyon. The series was cancelled after Hammett was named as a Communist during the Red Scare. The role was played by Jack Scott Smart, as huge in real life as his character. He had a unique speaking style, a deep baritone who slurred the last syllable of each word at the end of each sentence clause.

"Murder Plays Hide And Seek" was a 1948 episode, written by Lawrence Klee. Brad Runyon was called upon for a pro bono case. A taxi driver Andy Maloney had stepped away from his cab for a moment. When he returned, the passenger sitting in the back seat was dead.

Runyon scraped together a few clues and investigated with Maloney driving him and the body about. The police? What of them? They tracked down a blonde who owned a nightclub. Runyon hardly had time to begin interrogating her when they noticed a second body outside the club.

At that point it was admitted by all concerned that the police should be notified, and so they were. Both victims were poisoned. Both had clothing items with the initials CH. One was subsequently identified as Casper Hall, the other as Charlie Haney.

The excursions were real excursions, including a hoodlum named Franky Cooley hijacking Maloney's cab, with Runyon as passenger, and going for a trip out to the countryside. That didn't amount to anything, so the Fat Man went back to the nightclub, not because he wanted to see the floor show.

After much exposition but no alarms or excursions, Runyon deduced Casper Hall was a jewel thief who robbed his female victims after following them out of the nightclub. One of the waitresses fingered the rich women and telephoned Hall to come and get them. Cooley was her boyfriend. Haney tried to barge in and get a piece of the action.

The loose threads were all tied up at a lengthy J'accuse! meeting. The Fat Man seemed confident that the case would hold up in court, but there seemed an awful lot of supposition and hypothesizing, and not so much admissible evidence.

"Murder Wins The Draw" was a 1949 episode written by Lawrence Klee. Brad Runyon was traveling in Central America when he was diverted to Guatemala City by a woman named Helen who had mistaken him for someone else. She had pressed a roll of \$50 into his hand, so the unexpected flight wasn't a complete loss.

Upon arrival Helen was hustled away by a goon. Runyon had to go through Customs, which is when he discovered he had the woman's suitcase. At the hotel, he ascertained Helen's room number and went to exchange suitcases.



Instead he found the body of a different woman, unknown to him. After the police came and went, he retired to his room where Helen later telephoned him to arrange a switch of suitcases. A third woman showed up at his suite, displaying a nickel-plated gun with which to take the suitcase.

Next in was the goon, looking for said suitcase. The two of them became unwilling partners in the search for the errant luggage. Much to-ing and fro-ing across the city.

The secret of the suitcase was that it contained the winning ticket on a lottery, worth \$250,000. Helen had stolen it from the wife of the goon, the dead woman. There was a three-way struggle to get the ticket, but The Fat Man was the winner.

The plot seemed complicated as the story developed, then was neatly integrated into one logical explanation in the denouement. Runyon narrated the episode as it went, which provided a look into his interior thoughts as he was buffeted about by the other characters.

### **Mr Keen.**

MR KEEN, TRACER OF LOST PERSONS aired on old-time radio from 1937 to 1955. It was a soap opera style mystery show, produced by Frank and Anne Hummert, who at one time owned 40% of all radio series being aired during the Golden Age of radio.

They were all soap operas except for MR KEEN. The series was credited as written by Frank Hummert but actually done by a stable of house writers. The series was so over the top that for years Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding did a parody on their comedy show titled “Mr Trace, Keener Than Most Persons”.

MR KEEN was written and performed in the exact same style as soap operas. Characters identified by name to whom they were speaking in each sentence, which no one does in real life.

They also explained their actions, notwithstanding that the sound effects did the job just as well, such as knocking on a door or walking down a hallway. In old-time radio, everyone wore tap dancing shoes, and every car needed a brake job because the wheels squealed when they stopped.

Mr Keen had no official capacity as a detective. He commonly entered premises without a warrant, often as a break-and-enter, and barged into people’s lives with no compunctions about legalities. The plots relied on wild coincidences and leaping to conclusions with no supporting evidence. He made Miss Marple and Jessica Fletcher look like paragons of virtue when it came to proper procedure.

As the series progressed, Keen did fewer missing persons cases and more just plain murders. By its demise in 1955, it was a straightforward mystery series. His assistant was Mike Clancy, with a phony stage Irish accent straight out of vaudeville.

“The Case Of the Moonless Night” was a 1944 episode. It began on a dark and stormy night way on Down South. Keen and his assistant Mike Clancy were driven out to a decaying mansion.

The lady of the house, Miss Dorothea, welcomed them but elderly Cousin Roscoe warned Keen away. Uncle Adam Lee had disappeared about ten days ago. There were assorted other cousins and hangers-on, not to mention the servants. Just introducing all the characters was good for five minutes of padding.

Glen Mackley was one of those aforesaid characters. He seemed to have a good supply of old-fashioned currency banknotes. His job at the moment was filling in hollow trees with concrete to stabilize them.

Apropos of nothing, Keen mentioned to everyone that if no body was found, then Lee’s will could not be probated. There would have to be a 5-year wait before he could be legally declared dead. Cousin Herbert mentioned he had seen his uncle’s dog spending a lot of time around an old black walnut out back.

Keen was suspicious as to why the large black walnut had been filled with concrete. He had the stuff cracked open and thereby found Lee, or what was left of him. Cousin Herbert had done it. He hadn’t known about the inheritance law, so when Keen mentioned the waiting period he decided to speed things up. That gave him away.

“The Case Of The Absent Minded Professor” was a 1945 episode about Dr Roland Barton, Professor of English Literature at Harvard University. It opened on a scene of domesticity as he relaxed with his wife Julia and his stepdaughter

Joan at home. Joan gave Julia her regular medicine, but a few moments later her mother was dead.

A week later, Joan called in Mr Keen after the police started giving her a hard time. Julia's heart medication had a hefty batch of her sleeping powder mixed in, which put her to sleep permanently. How that happened was a matter of speculation for the coroner and Homicide. Julia would inherit a sizeable estate.

Joan was dating a chemist named Frank Lawrence, of whom Julia did not approve. He was a ne'er-do-well, fired by the university for cause and known to police for associating with gamblers and drug dealers. Lawrence had made no secret of his intention to get the estate via Joan.

Keen poked around the house, beginning with the medicine cabinet. The housekeeper Mrs Gleeson offered up some ominous forebodings but was short of specifics. The professor and Mrs Gleeson were also named in Julia's will. The latter vanished from the house but was soon found dead from typhoid fever.

More poking about into Barton's past life revealed a string of academic posts and past wives, all of whom died of unusual natural causes such as cholera. Keen was convinced that Joan was in danger. She apparently committed suicide with her mother's sleeping powder.

Keen asked Barton how it was that in this modern age that women could die from cholera and typhoid fever. Barton denied everything. He didn't know that Joan had survived and would testify against him. Justice was served. One thread was left untied, that of Lawrence and his evil doings. Nothing more was said about him after Keen chose Barton as the main suspect.

From the middle of the series was the 1950 episode "The Case Of The Rushville Murder". Rushville was in New Jersey, where Dr Prentiss urgently telephoned his daughter Laura and told her to lock up the house. One of his patients Nettie Craven had escaped from the hospital. She was a homicidal maniac who swore revenge against Prentiss.

Laura locked the windows but before she could get to the back door, an intruder entered. Prentiss and the police found Laura dead in the kitchen, stabbed with a knife. Keen was called into the case. He found it odd that a mental patient was able to go straight to the Prentiss residence so fast.

Further, since it was clearly stated that Craven was fixated on the doctor, it was puzzling that she would attack the daughter, whom she had never met. Keen and Clancy camped out in the Prentiss house, hoping Craven would return and try for the doctor. Prentiss mentioned that a young man named John Digby hadn't yet heard the news. Digby was Laura's new husband of less than a month. They had quarreled and she moved back to Papa's house.

As Keen and Clancy checked out the Prentiss house, they found Digby prowling. He said he had come in through the kitchen window because he thought Laura wouldn't let him in. (You noticed that clue, right?) He had been living in a Pennsylvania town after the marital split and had only just returned. Keen broke the news to him about Laura.

Digby didn't think Craven had killed her. He said a former medical student named Arthur Halliday had been bothering Laura. Prentiss was on the hospital board of directors, who had expelled Halliday because of drinking and gambling. He had been an old boyfriend of Laura.

The next caller at the house, who rang the front doorbell like most people would, was Marg Craven, sister of the escaped patient. Keen had hardly invited her inside when the telephone rang. It was a threatening call from Halliday, vowing revenge against Prentiss. Even as Keen hung up the phone, Nettie glared in through the kitchen window. There's never a dull moment in Rushville.

Most of the characters piled into the house after many alarums. Suspicion was thrown about like rock salt on an icy road. Keen handcuffed Marg after a trick question exposed her. The explanations, in support of tying up the loose ends, were all based on last-minute knowledge the listener didn't know. It was never explained why, if Laura had locked all the windows, Digby had been able to enter through one.

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: Lloyd Penney 2020-04-05  
Etobicoke, Ontario

OPUNTIA #469: We’ve all seen rules and regulations on control of the COVID-19 coronavirus get tighter as the number of cases worldwide breaches 1 million. No groups over 5, I gather. For us, life is generally the same as it’s always been. No one is asking us out, so life carries on, and we save our money. We have lots to do at home, and we stay busy. We go out for groceries on Friday, and that’s about it.

For Toronto, Ad Astra and Anime North have been cancelled, as expected. Both intend to return in 2021. Smaller events say they have been postponed, and a couple of those events, we had tables at them. This coming summer and fall will be busy, assuming this is all over, which is increasingly a poor assumption to make.

[Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi has ordered all public facilities in the city to remain closed until June 30. The Calgary Stampede is in early July and there is an alarming possibility it may not be held this year.]

Years ago, when we hand-delivered flyers for Ad Astra all over the Greater Toronto Area, we would know where every bookstore, comic shop, gaming shop, collector’s shop and hobby store was. We still do, but their numbers have literally been decimated. The Internet makes it easier to find them, but there are so few left. If we have an event to publicize, social media gets the word out far better than we ever could.

Our buildings are just across the street from a large park with a playground. They are now officially closed, with high fines if you are caught in them. It has become trespassing if you walk into the park. This park has a walkway from one residential neighbourhood to the main street with a bus line, and I gather the police are patrolling to ensure that walking through the park is all you do.

I’m working further with AMAZING STORIES, and got another Allen Steele novel to edit and proof.

OPUNTIA #470: The toilet paper aisle at our supermarket is a vast empty area. We are forced to laugh at the panicked hoarding. In our apartment we have a closet that doubles as a pantry, and we take advantage of sales when we can. We don’t need to hard; we’re already stocked up.

[Likewise I always stock up on essentials. It happened that last autumn my supermarket had a sale on toilet paper at such a ridiculously low price so I bought a huge supply. I’ve always kept a good stock of canned and dry food on hand from general prudence. Nonetheless, each time I go into a supermarket during the current emergency I have been picking up extra cans of soup or beef ravioli.]

Canada’s response to COVID-19 was a little late, but I think that applies to just about everyone, especially the Trump regime. They fiddled, and now, America is burning. Trump thought that if he ignored it, it would go away. The rest is a sad history, and I shudder to think what will happen further. We’ve just lost a good friend in the Detroit area to COVID-19, and I am sadly sure that more will succumb.

We are still lucky to have the TTC running. All buses are rear-entry, and swipe your card there. The front of the bus is for those in wheelchairs only. In Windsor, Ontario, all transit has been cut, which is a real hardship for many who need their groceries or prescriptions.

[Re: Sherlockiana] I have enjoyed the Holmes canon, and a few of the pastiches. I never understood why Dr. John Watson was portrayed in the Holmes movies as a buffoon. No buffoon would be a licensed doctor with a successful practice.

[Blame Nigel Bruce, the actor who played him as an doddering old fool opposite Basil Rathbone’s Holmes. I’m glad to see the movies and television shows from the post-Millennium are showing them as younger men, which is in accordance with the canon.]

I was pleased in the Jeremy Brett Holmes TV series and movies that Watson was an intelligent man, and some of Holmes’ lines from the books were transferred to Watson in the movies. Perhaps they felt that Holmes needed an intelligent sounding board. Both David Burke and Edward Hardwicke were marvelous Watsons.

It's finally dark, and the skies and highway are almost supernaturally quiet for any time of the day. Such is the effect of everyone staying home. Most of us are, but there are still some idiots roaring down the 427 as if the road was their own, and perhaps they are right.

[Calgary has the same problem, which is why the commissionaires are still operating the photo camera vans on our freeways.]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Wampler, J., et al (2020) **Superconductivity found in meteorites.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 117:7645-7649

Authors' abstract: *In this paper, we report the presence of superconducting material in two meteorites. We further characterize these phases as alloys of lead, tin, and indium. These findings could impact our understanding of several astronomical environments. Superconducting particles in cold environments could affect planetary formation, shape and origin of magnetic fields, dynamo effects, motion of charged particles, and other processes.*

*Meteorites can contain a wide range of material phases due to the extreme environments found in space and are ideal candidates to search for natural superconductivity. However, meteorites are chemically inhomogeneous, and superconducting phases in them could potentially be minute, rendering detection of these phases difficult. To alleviate this difficulty, we have studied meteorite samples with the ultrasensitive magnetic field modulated microwave spectroscopy (MFMMS) technique.*

*Here, we report the identification of superconducting phases in two meteorites, Mundrabilla, a group IAB iron meteorite and GRA 95205, a ureilite. MFMMS measurements detected superconducting transitions in samples from each, above 5 K. By subdividing and remeasuring individual samples, grains containing the largest superconducting fraction were isolated.*

*The superconducting grains were then characterized with a series of complementary techniques, including vibrating-sample magnetometry (VSM), energy-dispersive X-ray spectroscopy (EDX), and numerical methods. These measurements and analysis identified the likely phases as alloys of lead, indium, and tin.*

Abrevaya, X.C., et al (2020) **The UV surface habitability of Proxima b: first experiments revealing probable life survival to stellar flares.** MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY 494:doi.org/10.1093/mnrasl/slaa037 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *We use a new interdisciplinary approach to study the UV surface habitability of Proxima b under quiescent and flaring stellar conditions. We assumed planetary atmospheric compositions based on CO2 and N2 and surface pressures from 100 to 5000 mbar.*

*Our results show that the combination of these atmospheric compositions and pressures provide enough shielding from the most damaging UV wavelengths, expanding the 'UV-protective' planetary atmospheric compositions beyond ozone.*

*Additionally, we show that the UV radiation reaching the surface of Proxima b during quiescent conditions would be negligible from the biological point of view, even without an atmosphere.*

*Given that high UV fluxes could challenge the existence of life, then, we experimentally tested the effect that flares would have on microorganisms in a 'worst case scenario' (no UV-shielding).*

*Our results show the impact that a typical flare and a superflare would have on life: when microorganisms receive very high fluences of UVC, such as those expected to reach the surface of Proxima b after a typical flare or a superflare, a fraction of the population is able to survive.*

*Our study suggests that life could cope with highly UV irradiated environments in exoplanets under conditions that cannot be found on Earth.*



Tang, Q., et al (2020) **A one-billion-year-old multicellular chlorophyte.** NATURE ECOLOGY AND EVOLUTION 4:543-549

[Chlorophytes are filamentous green algae.]

Authors’ abstract: *Chlorophytes (representing a clade within the Viridiplantae and a sister group of the Streptophyta) probably dominated marine export bioproductivity and played a key role in facilitating ecosystem complexity before the Mesozoic diversification of phototrophic eukaryotes such as diatoms, coccolithophorans and dinoflagellates.*

*Molecular clock and biomarker data indicate that chlorophytes diverged in the Mesoproterozoic or early Neoproterozoic, followed by their subsequent phylogenetic diversification, multicellular evolution and ecological expansion in the late Neoproterozoic and Palaeozoic. This model, however, has not been rigorously tested with palaeontological data because of the scarcity of Proterozoic chlorophyte fossils.*

*Here we report abundant millimetre-sized, multicellular and morphologically differentiated macrofossils from rocks approximately 1,000 million years ago. These fossils are described as Proterocladus antiquus new species and are interpreted as benthic siphonocladalean chlorophytes, suggesting that chlorophytes acquired macroscopic size, multicellularity and cellular differentiation nearly a billion years ago, much earlier than previously thought.*

Evans, S.D., et al (2020) **Discovery of the oldest bilaterian from the Ediacaran of South Australia.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 117:845-7850

Authors’ abstract: *The transition from simple, microscopic forms to the abundance of complex animal life that exists today is recorded within soft-bodied fossils of the Ediacara Biota (571 to 539 Ma). Perhaps most critically is the first appearance of bilaterians, animals with two openings and a through-gut, during this interval. Current understanding of the fossil record limits definitive evidence for Ediacaran bilaterians to trace fossils and enigmatic body fossils.*

*Here, we describe the fossil Ikaria wariootia, one of the oldest bilaterians identified from South Australia. This organism is consistent with predictions*

*based on modern animal phylogenetics that the last ancestor of all bilaterians was simple and small and represents a rare link between the Ediacaran and the subsequent record of animal life.*

*Analysis of modern animals and Ediacaran trace fossils predicts that the oldest bilaterians were simple and small. Such organisms would be difficult to recognize in the fossil record, but should have been part of the Ediacara Biota, the earliest preserved macroscopic, complex animal communities.*

*Here, we describe Ikaria wariootia gen. et sp. nov. from the Ediacara Member, South Australia, a small, simple organism with anterior/posterior differentiation. We find that the size and morphology of Ikaria match predictions for the progenitor of the trace fossil Helminthoidichnites, indicative of mobility and sediment displacement.*

*In the Ediacara Member, Helminthoidichnites occurs stratigraphically below classic Ediacara body fossils. Together, these suggest that Ikaria represents one of the oldest total group bilaterians identified from South Australia, with little deviation from the characters predicted for their last common ancestor. Further, these trace fossils persist into the Phanerozoic, providing a critical link between Ediacaran and Cambrian animals.*

Herries, A.L.R., et al (2020) **Contemporaneity of Australopithecus, Paranthropus, and early Homo erectus in South Africa.** SCIENCE 388:doi.org/10.1126/science.aaw7293 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Understanding the extinction of Australopithecus and origins of Paranthropus and Homo in South Africa has been hampered by the perceived complex geological context of hominin fossils, poor chronological resolution, and a lack of well-preserved early Homo specimens.*

*We describe, date, and contextualize the discovery of two hominin crania from Drimolen Main Quarry in South Africa. At ~2.04 million to 1.95 million years old, DNH 152 represents the earliest definitive occurrence of Paranthropus robustus, and DNH 134 represents the earliest occurrence of a cranium with clear affinities to Homo erectus.*

*These crania also show that Homo, Paranthropus, and Australopithecus were contemporaneous at ~2 million years ago. This high taxonomic diversity is also*

*reflected in non-hominin species and provides evidence of endemic evolution and dispersal during a period of climatic variability.*

Georgiou, L., et al (2020) **Evidence for habitual climbing in a Pleistocene hominin in South Africa.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 117:8416-8423 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Here we present evidence of hominin locomotor behavior from the trabecular bone of the femur. We show evidence for habitual use of highly flexed hip postures, which could potentially indicate regular climbing in a South African hominin from Sterkfontein, which is either Paranthropus robustus or Homo.*

*Second, we present evidence that Australopithecus africanus likely did not climb at the frequencies seen in extant nonhuman apes, and exhibits a modern, human-like pattern of loading at the hip joint. These results challenge the prevailing view of a single transition to bipedalism within the hominin clade by providing evidence of climbing in a more recent, non- Australopithecus South African hominin, and add to the increasing evidence for locomotor diversity in the hominin clade.*

*Bipedalism is a defining trait of the hominin lineage, associated with a transition from a more arboreal to a more terrestrial environment. While there is debate about when modern human-like bipedalism first appeared in hominins, all known South African hominins show morphological adaptations to bipedalism, suggesting that this was their predominant mode of locomotion.*

*Here we present evidence that hominins preserved in the Sterkfontein Caves practiced two different locomotor repertoires. The trabecular structure of a proximal femur (StW 522) attributed to Australopithecus africanus exhibits a modern human-like bipedal locomotor pattern, while that of a geologically younger specimen (StW 311) attributed to either Homo sp. or Paranthropus robustus exhibits a pattern more similar to nonhuman apes, potentially suggesting regular bouts of both climbing and terrestrial bipedalism.*

*Our results demonstrate distinct morphological differences, linked to behavioral differences between Australopithecus and later hominins in South Africa and contribute to the increasing evidence of locomotor diversity within the hominin clade.*

Scarpata, C., et al (2020) **Pompeian hiatuses: new stratigraphic data highlight pauses in the course of the AD 79 eruption at Pompeii.** GEOLOGICAL MAGAZINE 157:695-700

Authors' abstract: *A new stratigraphic survey of the pyroclastic deposits blanketing Pompeii ruins shows departures from prior reconstruction of the events that occurred inside the town during the two main phases (pumice fallout and pyroclastic density currents) of the AD 79 Vesuvius eruption.*

*We document the depth and distribution of subaerial erosion surfaces in the upper part of the pyroclastic sequence, formed during two short-lived breaks occurring in the course of the second phase of the eruption. These pauses could explain why 50% of the victims were found in the streets during the pyroclastic density currents phase.*

Jiang, M., et al (2020) **The fate of carbon in a mature forest under carbon dioxide enrichment.** NATURE 580:227-231

Authors' abstract: *Atmospheric carbon dioxide enrichment (eCO<sub>2</sub>) can enhance plant carbon uptake and growth, thereby providing an important negative feedback to climate change by slowing the rate of increase of the atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration. Although evidence gathered from young aggrading forests has generally indicated a strong CO<sub>2</sub> fertilization effect on biomass growth, it is unclear whether mature forests respond to eCO<sub>2</sub> in a similar way.*

*In mature trees and forest stands, photosynthetic uptake has been found to increase under eCO<sub>2</sub> without any apparent accompanying growth response, leaving the fate of additional carbon fixed under eCO<sub>2</sub> unclear. Here using data from the first ecosystem-scale Free-Air CO<sub>2</sub> Enrichment (FACE) experiment in a mature forest, we constructed a comprehensive ecosystem carbon budget to track the fate of carbon as the forest responded to four years of eCO<sub>2</sub> exposure.*

*We show that, although the eCO<sub>2</sub> treatment of +150 parts per million (+38 per cent) above ambient levels induced a 12 per cent (+247 grams of carbon per square metre per year) increase in carbon uptake through gross primary production, this additional carbon uptake did not lead to increased carbon sequestration at the ecosystem level.*

*Instead, the majority of the extra carbon was emitted back into the atmosphere via several respiratory fluxes, with increased soil respiration alone accounting for half of the total uptake surplus.*

*Our results call into question the predominant thinking that the capacity of forests to act as carbon sinks will be generally enhanced under eCO<sub>2</sub>, and challenge the efficacy of climate mitigation strategies that rely on ubiquitous CO<sub>2</sub> fertilization as a driver of increased carbon sinks in global forests.*

**BIN THERE, SEEN THAT**  
photo by Dale Speirs

Just a space filler to make the page come out even. A garbage bin in a park on 58 Avenue SW, seen while I was out walking.

