

OPUNTIA 497



Vernal Equinox 2021

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

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

photos by Dale Speirs

March so far was mild. I strolled out one morning along the Bow River Promenade where the river flows past the downtown core. The cover photo was taken in East Village as an LRT train headed into the core. Below is looking downstream. The far shore on the left is Saint Patrick Island. In the far distance is the 12 Street SE bridge.





Below: This was the other side of the island, where the channel was still frozen.
At left: Paddlers on the main flow of the river.



Further downstream at the 12 Street SE bridge. The Canada geese are nesting.

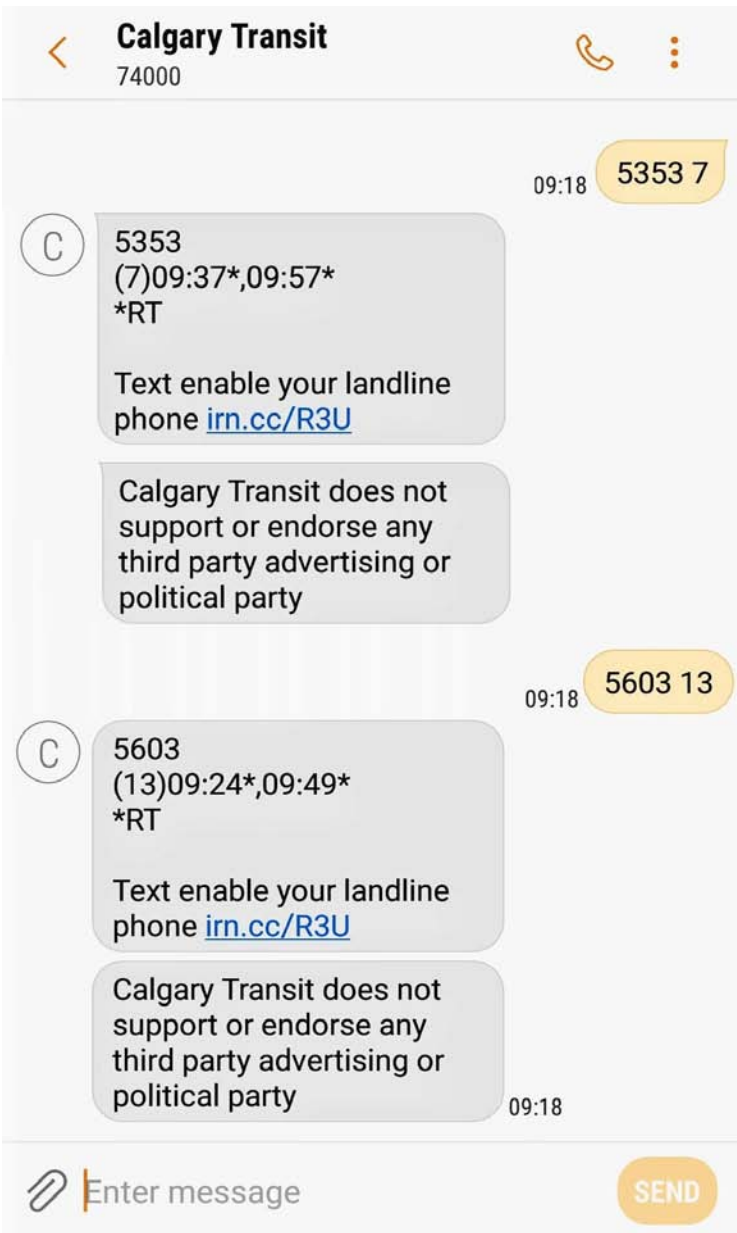


A block south of the bridge is the Inglewood Burger Drive-In, a family operation for decades. They make the best French fries in the city.

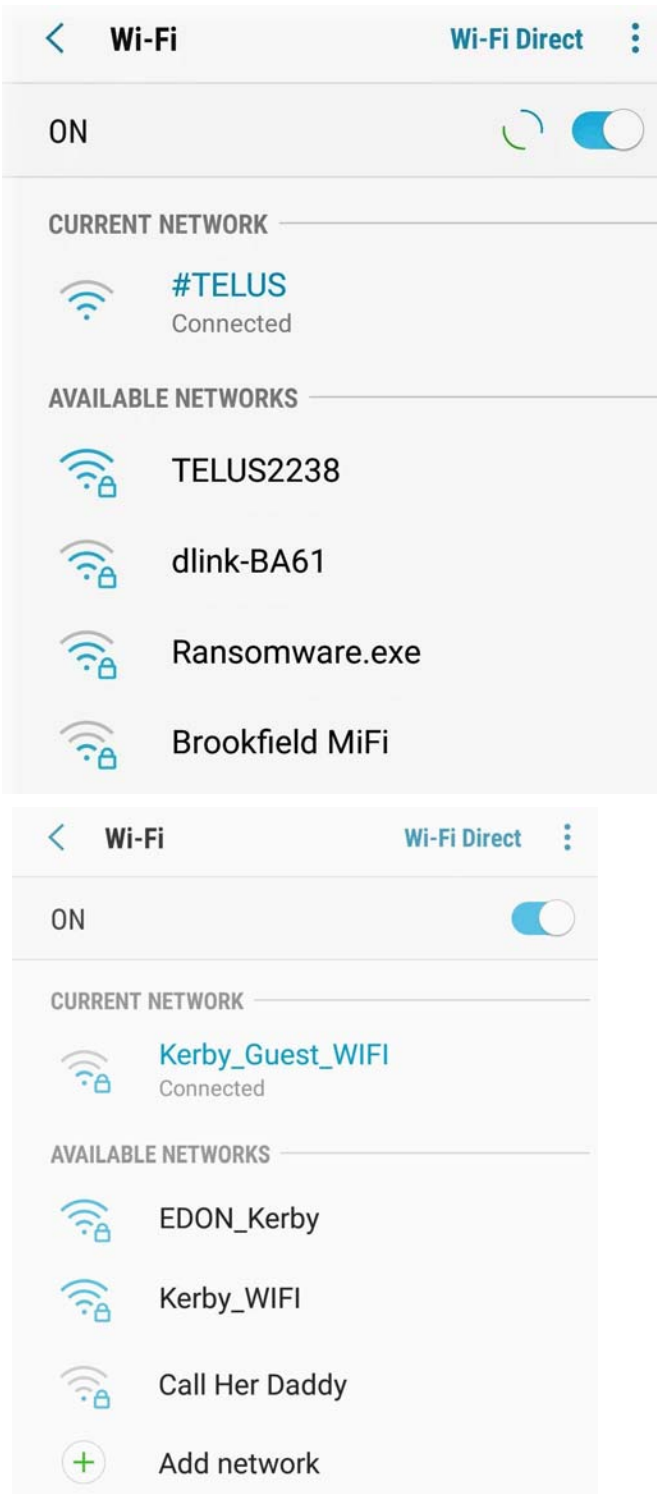
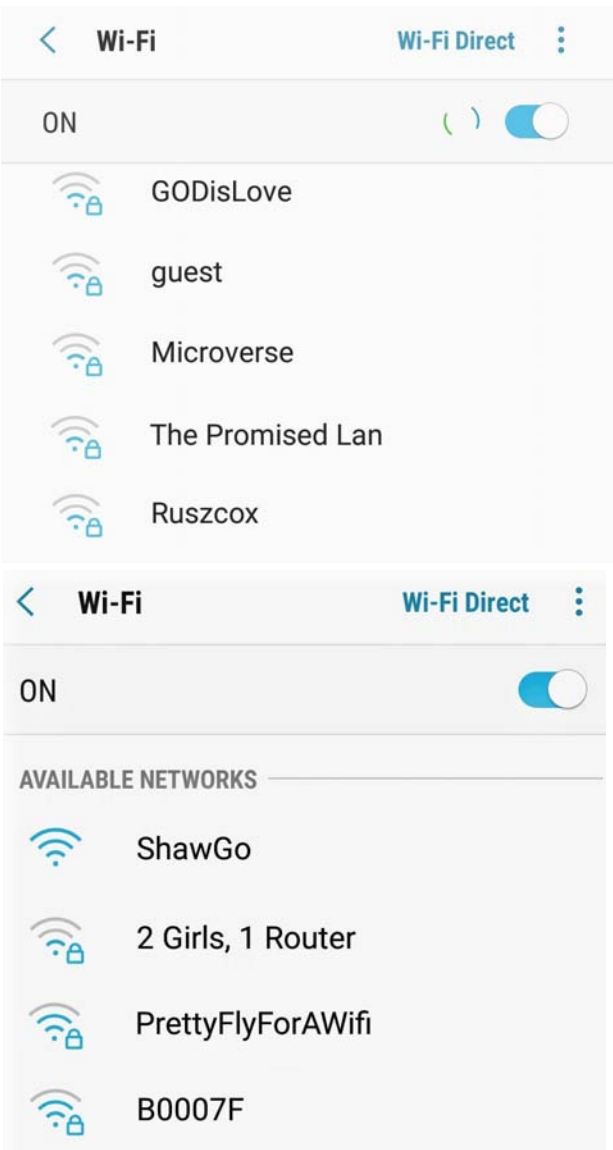
THE NUMBER YOU HAVE DIALED: PART 3
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #413 and 462.]

Seen on my smartphone. Municipal elections will be held across Alberta on October 18 and the maneuvering has already begun. Calgary Transit has a Teletext feature that I use to find out when the next bus arrives at my stop. They have begun adding a disclaimer to the bounceback messages.



Screenshots of some of the weird connections when I check for public wifi.



LICENCED TO DRIVE: PART 4
photos by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 3 appeared in OPUNTIA #476, 482, and 489. Previous licence plate photos were in OPUNTIA #63.5A, 410, 421, 445, 452, 459, and 471.]

I don't bother to photograph with my smartphone any vanity plates that are just personal names. I look for more clever uses of plates.

As far as the plate below is concerned, the Alberta government has announced that as of 2021 they will no longer issue year tabs for licence plates, which will save a few million dollars in handling at the DMV offices. The thinking is that every police cruiser has a computer in it with which the constable can check the licence plate and find out if the vehicle's registration is paid up. Drivers will be able to renew online and thus bypass the universal tradition that everyone is familiar with, from Alberta to California, from Ontario to Florida, the lineup at the DMV office.





BRAVE REVIVED WORLD

by Dale Speirs

THEATER FIVE was a short-lived attempt at reviving drama shows on radio. It aired for the 1964-65 season but the war against television was lost a decade prior, so it failed. The episodes were generally well written and produced, and are worth downloading from www.otrrlibrary.org. The episodes were a mixture of science fiction, fantasy, mystery, and weird fiction.

“The Last Land Rush” was written by George Bamber and aired on 1964-10-06. It was a dystopian story about over-population.

Pause for digression. I have been reading science fiction long enough to remember the flood of stories in the 1960s and 1970s about how human civilization would be destroyed either by overpopulation or nuclear war. Now they moan about climate change, notwithstanding that *Homo sapiens* owes its existence to a climate change far more severe than what might happen now.

Over-population stories neglected how much empty room there is in countries like Canada, the USA, and Russia. Be that as it may, this episode uses an interesting concept. The American government announced that the grassy medians of divided highways would be opened up to settlers looking for land.

The same rules as used for the 1889 Oklahoma land rush would apply but with some dystopian modifications. The rush began at noon and the settlers had to hold the land against all comers for 24 hours. They couldn’t use any modern weapons but could use firearms more than a century old. Once successful, the majority intended to sell their claims to real estate developers who would build housing on the land. Presumably those would be pencil skyscrapers.

The protagonists were a young couple. She wanted to stay in the city, and he wanted a place where they didn’t have to share a room with parents and grandparents. He bought an antique submachine gun to help hold the land.

It wasn’t going to be pretty. First the boomers had to run across the busy highway lanes, stake their land, and then hold it by any means possible. They were dismayed to hear the announcement: “*Traffic will not be stopped in the supersonic lanes*”. As the husband remarked, that would have the benefit of thinning out the population somewhat.

Once across, the median wasn’t any safer. The carnage would terrify an inner-city gangsta. Most of the episode was taken up by the trouble and strife in the median. Shots were fired and all that. The couple held out, and the surveyors came along to confirm their claim. Life in the brave new world.

“The Man Who Loved Jellyroll” was written by Albert G. Miller and aired on 1964-10-20. The plot began with the protagonist Fred Lambert waking up in hospital in confusion. The nurse Alice Collins told him he had been struck on the head with a golf club.

Memory came back to Lambert. He and his wife Edith had invited his partner Joe Tucker to dinner. While she was in the kitchen, the men went into the den, where Tucker took a few practice swings with Lambert’s new golf clubs.

The damage to Lambert’s head seemed minimal, but he discovered he could now read minds. He answered Collins’ questions before she asked them and could read her thoughts. He swore her to secrecy, which she agreed to because she knew no one would believe her.

Edith arrived and Fred got into her mind. She brought a jellyroll for him, which he perceived had been poisoned. He also read her thoughts about her relationship with Tucker and the threat Fred had made to terminate him from the company for just cause. The hit from the golf club wasn’t accidental.

After she flounced out, taking the jellyroll with her to dispose of as incriminating evidence, the attending physician Dr Blaine Packard arrived. Fred asked him about the possibility of telepathy arising from a head injury. He read Packard’s thoughts about a dinner date that night with Collins.

Tucker arrived at the hospital next. Fred did another mind reading, which resulted in an unsuccessful attempt by Tucker to defenestrate Fred. (The hospital room was on the tenth floor.) Edith came back with another jellyroll. This one Fred knew was safe after reading Edith’s mind, and he enjoyed eating it. And so ended the first day in hospital.

The next morning he woke up dazed, with amnesia. He had no memory of the previous day and no telepathic ability. Packard said he could go home that afternoon. When Edith arrived, she talked to Packard. They danced about the subject of telepathy. She relaxed after Packard told her Fred didn’t remember the previous day.

The couple went home where Edith served up a steak dinner. Dessert was jellyroll but for some reason Fred had lost his taste for it. He refused the jellyroll. Edith was so disappointed. She had prepared it especially for him.

“The Wish Fulfillment Machine” was written by George Bamber and aired on 1964-12-24. Set in a future where no one had to die, Patient #1659738 was in a mental institution where the guards seemed more likely candidates for treatment.

The psychiatrist, never named, discussed life with the patient, who was distressingly rational. After 325 years in a utopia, he wanted to die for real, not just a simulation of death in the wish fulfillment machine.

The computers could simulate any kind of life the user wanted, whether a dictator of the world or the world's greatest lover. #1659738 was not happy with that. He argued with the doctor, who kept losing control of the interview.

As with all utopias, there was a tour guide to lecture about the wonders of the modern age. In this case he was the psychiatrist, although the episode being radio, it was impossible to tell if he was wearing a toga. Probably he was.

#1659738 asked why he was being kept alive. He was told he was an engineer with the gift of creativity. Computers could only do what they were programmed to do, but for society to advance, people with imagination were needed.

The doctor put #1659738 under the wish fulfillment machine against his wishes. That padded out the episode with vignettes such as frontline combat and a romantic scene that parodied Clark Gable and any of his leading ladies.

The final scene had #1659738 tearing off the headset of the wish fulfillment machine to return himself to reality. He pulled out an antique handgun. Before aiming it at the doctor, he provided an hilarious infodump explaining how the gun worked. It discharged lead projectiles called bullets, propelled from the gun by expanding gases created by exploding powders.

The patient threatened to kill the room’s computer. One shot into the circuits would seal the room, cut off the air supply, and suffocate them both. He fired repeated shots and the two men began to die.

That final scene was, as any astute listener would have guessed, a vignette inside the wish fulfillment machine. #1659738 woke up back in his cell. He was never going to die but live forever in the matrix.

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. 2021 will be the 28th year of the WWP.

At 21h00 local time, everyone is invited to raise a glass and toast fellow members of the Papernet 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. Rescheduling it to a club meeting or more convenient time negates the idea of a wave of celebration by SF fans and zinesters circling the globe.

At 21h00, face to the east and salute those who have already celebrated. Then face north, then south, and toast those in your time zone who are celebrating as you do. Finally, face west and raise a glass to those who will celebrate WWP in the next hour.

Raise a glass, publish a one-shot, have a Zoom party, or do a mail art project for the WWP. Let me know how you celebrated the day.

SERIES DETECTIVES: PART 11

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 10 appeared in OPUNTIA's #402, 406, 425, 448, 459, 467, 472, 477, 485, and 491.]

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

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, written by house authors.

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 Haunted Rocking Chair” was written by Edith Meiser and aired on 1945-05-20. The aforesaid chair supposedly began rocking by itself whenever someone in the Trumble family was about to die.

The episode began with a flower peddler named Tony telling Patsy Bowen about the chair, which he heard about from his sister Maria, who cleaned for the Trumbles. The mansion was on an island in the Long Sound.

Obadiah Trumble founded the current branch of the family. His fourth wife was hated by his grown children and spouses as a usurper. She claimed to be a voodoo priestess. After Obadiah died, the children kept her a prisoner in her room, where she spent her time rocking back and forth. On her deathbed she vowed revenge from beyond the grave by making the chair rock just before a death.

Nick Carter didn't particularly believe the story. So say us all. Eric and his cousin Ralph and wife Claire were the remaining occupants of the mansion, plus Maria to housekeep. Eric was a painter who didn't sell many paintings. Ralph was a sea captain frequently sailing, which left his wife at loose ends, a dangerous situation.

Carter and Bowen visited the island and met with Maria. He had his lock pick with him and entered the room to find the chair rocking by itself. It was next to a window which had a lower pane missing. Just then Ralph unexpectedly returned home and began shouting for Claire.

There was an ugly scene with Eric and Claire in the studio. Ralph decided to take her off the island. A short time later Eric departed this world, supposedly suicide by hanging. Carter knew better. Eric had been slugged unconscious from behind before being strung up.

Maria tried to convince Carter that Ralph murdered his cousin. She tripped up on some details and Carter accused her of the murder. At this point all believability went out the window when Carter surmised that Maria's married name was Trumble.

Tony might have mentioned that but he hadn't known either. Maria and Eric had married secretly. Eric cleaned her out of her dowry to support his painting, then began courting Claire with divorce in mind. Maria babbled out a confession.

Not satisfied with that, the scriptwriter poured the guff on thicker. Maria said she was dying of tuberculosis and would be dead in six months. The episode paused for a commercial from the Linex Cream Polish people. Just what every home needed to keep furniture in good condition. At least they had the grace not to mention how well the polish worked on rocking chairs.

In the epilogue, Carter explained that the rocking had been caused by the hitherto unmentioned family cat. It climbed up a tree, entered through the broken window, and enjoyed a good rock. The scriptwriter should have been bounced out the Writers Guild for that one.

“The Case Of The Absent Clue” was written by Jim Parsons and aired on 1948-03-07. Paul and Ruth Elliott operated a candy store when they were approached by a gangster named Jeff Greeley. He wanted them to join the numbers racket and start selling slips to nearby school kids. Or else.

Jump cut to Nick Carter's crime laboratory, where Patsy Bowen was gushing over her new tear gas fountain pen. Police Sgt Matheson gave it to her as a gift. Romantic, wasn't it? And you just know it would be used in the next half hour.

The Elliotts appealed to Carter for help. By the time he arrived, Paul was beaten to death. Greeley was the killer according to Ruth, so the police hunt was on. They couldn't find him but he and his henchmen found Ruth and kidnapped her.

Carter did some deducing to locate the hideout. With Bowen, they found the place and confronted Greeley. Carter put in a twist, telling Greeley that he knew he hadn't killed Paul. The murder was a setup by Ruth.

Greeley had kidnapped her to get her written confession because he knew her testimony would put him in the electric chair. Obviously no one would believe his story that he hadn't killed Paul.

She plea-bargained a deal with the trio and wrote out a confession with a fountain pen. Carter and Bowen agreed to sign as witnesses, and guess what happened next. After the tear gas dissipated, on to the epilogue.

Carter mentioned the confession was signed under duress so therefore it wouldn't hold up in court. However she signed a second one down at the police station in the presence of her lawyer. Greeley faced multiple charges of racketeering, extortion, kidnapping, and the like, which sent him up the river for a long stretch.

Bowen wanted to know how Carter figured that Ruth murdered her husband. He said it was a clue that wasn't there, no fingerprints on a crowbar that Paul had been handling.

The motive was dropped in from out of the clear blue sky. At the beginning of the episode, Paul and Ruth were a loving couple, but Carter deduced they weren't. She decided it was a perfect opportunity to kill him for the life insurance money and pin the blame on Greeley. The lengthy infodump finally ended when Bowen accidentally triggered her fountain pen again.

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, and the series grows on the listener.

A regular character was Jake the elevator operator. He was off a Vermont farm and in each episode he gave Craig a different reason why he left the farm and moved to New York City. My favourite was "*Too close to New Hampshire*".

"A Time To Kill", written by John Roeburt, aired on 1952-02-13. "*A gun in the hand is worth two in the bush*" was Barrie Craig's opening remark.

The episode began with a beautiful woman, a complete stranger, getting into Craig's car while he was parked at Grand Central Station. After a couple minutes worth of snappy repartee, she got down to business and told Craig she had been followed by a man on the train from Connecticut. He was now in a car behind them, ready to carry on tailing her.

Craig couldn't shake the man in a high-speed chase but the stranger eventually lost control of his car and crashed. They took him in serious condition to a hospital. A name tag inside his coat said Rueben Crock. The woman, whose name was given as Louise, said she had been held prisoner by an evil guardian Jeffrey Foley who wanted her estate.

Craig put her in a safe house and then returned to his office, where he was greeted by some nasties and rendered unconscious. Awakening, he was interrogated by the leader, who wanted to know where the woman was. The man said she was a liar about whatever she had told Craig. On those friendly terms, the man departed.

Back at the safe house, Craig caught out Louise on her lies. She gave him a fresh story. Visiting the hospital, Craig got another story from Crock. She had been carrying stolen jewels. Shuttling back, she gave Craig yet another story. He gave up and went to the police.

It transpired the woman had escaped from an insane asylum. None of the stories were true. The goons were private detectives hired to track her down for a \$25,000 fee, which explained their enthusiasm. There was a twist ending which didn't help much with the plot, nor did the title match the story as nobody died.

“Behold A Corpse” was written by John Roeburt and aired on 1953-03-01. Barrie Craig opened with a remark about the old saying “Give him enough rope and he’ll hang himself” having one exception. What if the rope was being doled out by the hangman?

Brenda Connor was the client, of whom Craig was suspicious. She over-acted and he thought she might be using him to bring in a false conclusion. Her husband Ralph had disappeared for five years, then returned a week previous. She wasn’t sure it was him. She was rich and thought she was being set up.

Ralph told Brenda he had left his realty business Connor and Saxon to go off and discover himself. She noticed he now had new tastes in food, and spoke words and phrases differently. Most importantly, he was now left-handed. The man she had married was right-handed.

Craig was hijacked by a goon who took him to a crowded nightclub where they saw Brenda canoodling with a handsome young man. The goon identified himself as private detective Mike Hazard, then cheerfully departed, leaving Craig standing in the nightclub.

From there, Craig followed Brenda to the Connor mansion, where he watched unseen from the balcony as she argued with Ralph. He accused her of setting him up for some sort of scheme. Craig wasn’t wrong when he said she over-acted. Melodramatic didn’t half describe her.

The usual slugging the detective unconscious routine then occurred, just in time for a commercial. After the break, Craig woke up with Hazard standing over him. They talked. Hazard admitted slugging him and said he was working for Ralph. The discussion ended with Craig tossing Hazard out a back window, neglecting to open it beforehand. Turnabout was fair play.

Craig left without bothering to talk to the Connors. He went to talk to Saxon, who said the current Ralph was legit and knew the business. Craig snuck around and talked to the bookkeeper Pippet, who said Ralph hadn’t remembered his name or details of the business. The business was profitable, but the money seemed to be flowing elsewhere.

Back to the Connor house, where a scream rent the air as they so often do in mysteries. No murder, just Brenda acting up while Ralph stayed calm. He said she had just suffered a nervous breakdown and was about to be involuntarily

hospitalized. Her erratic behaviour was the reason he had left her five years ago.

Upon departure, he had another run-in with Hazard, who said he knew Ralph was a phony and the real one was probably dead. He proposed the two detectives set up a blackmail scheme. After the two went their separate ways, Craig went back to the Connor residence. He sweet-talked Ralph into writing a cheque for his expenses, and noticed Ralph wrote it right-handed.

Craig’s reasoning was convoluted. He accused Ralph of using his left hand in Brenda’s presence to confuse her, even though he was right-handed as was the real Ralph. That wouldn’t last ten seconds as courtroom testimony.

In fact, the man actually was the real Ralph. He had created an elaborate scheme to institutionalize Brenda and thereafter take over her estate. Craig said he was departing for the District Attorney’s office to lay charges of conspiracy. If I were the D.A., I’d toss Craig out of my office for wasting my time on an unprovable case.

The great unsolved mystery of this case was that there was no corpse to behold. Roeburt made a habit of not fitting titles to the story.

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. The tag line in the opening credits was “*Boston Blackie: Enemy to those who make him an enemy, friend to those who have no friend.*”

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.

“Evelyn Jones Murdered” aired on 1945-08-13. Boston Blackie was hired by Evelyn Jones to act as a bodyguard. She said she had Mary Wesley kidnapped to make him accept the commission. Blackie didn’t ask for any proof but accepted Jones at her word. That seemed gullible of him but then again there wouldn’t have been an episode otherwise.

He wasn’t good at his job. Someone slugged him from behind. When he recovered, Jones was gone. Blackie went to Inspector Farraday for help. Wesley telephoned him, unaware of the contretemps. Nothing had happened to her.

Jones’ body was soon found. Farraday wanted to arrest Blackie from force of habit. The latter went investigating with Wesley while pursued by the police. He didn’t sound worried but then again he had read through the script so he knew how it turned out.

They discovered Jones had been in the blackmail business with a partner named Corrigan. The assumption was that Corrigan didn’t want to split the profits. The victim Lawson didn’t want to cooperate with the police for fear of scandal, but reluctantly went along with Blackie.

The evidence suddenly pointed to Lawson, who had wanted to deal with his tormentor himself and did. Lawson blabbed all to Blackie and Farraday and so to the organ music. A rather facile ending.

“Five Bullets For Don Anderson” aired on 1948-02-15. Boston Blackie was seen running away from the scene just after Don Anderson had five bullets pumped into him. That set the police on Blackie, although surprisingly not Farraday, who by now realized that he would never be able to send Blackie up the river.

Blackie soon exonerated himself. The scene jumped to the gang that did the job. They were led by a dapper dandy named Wilson, who wore a homburg and fine suits. Their loot was \$200,000 in cash which Anderson happened to have lying about the house.

Anderson’s partner George Sims was the next victim, with six bullets pumped into him by a henchman named Archie. They wanted to keep him from assisting police with their enquiries. While Blackie was investigating, Wilson was arguing with his tailor over a new suit.

The henchmen had a falling-out over the loot. Archie got himself picked up by police with his \$15,000 share in his pocket. Then and now, the police are always interested in people with no declared income who nonetheless have lots of cash for walking-around money.

Because Archie’s cohorts were known, that blew the case open. Blackie and Inspector Farraday raced each other to round up the culprits. They converged on Wilson’s apartment, as anxious to show up each other as in bringing justice. After the gang was cornered, Blackie then pontificated in his usual matter as he tied off all the loose ends.

Casey.

CASEY, CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER aired on radio from 1943 to 1955. The title varied several times but is generally remembered by this variation. The series was based on novels by George Harmon Coxe. The hero was Casey, first name never given, who was a newspaper photographer for the MORNING EXPRESS. He was accompanied by reporter and girlfriend Ann Williams.

“King Of The Apes” was written by Alonzo Deen Cole and aired on 1947-05-01. Casey and Ann Williams were assigned to cover the feature acts of a circus. Specifically they were to report on Charles King and his six orangutans. Casey drooled at the thought of the lady acrobats in their skin-tight costumes, much to Williams’ annoyance.

Upon arrival at the circus, they interrupted a loud argument between King and his wife Bernice. She flounced away but stopped to flirt with wirewalker Louie Canelli. That uncomfortable moment done with, King took Casey and Williams to see his charges. King introduced his staff, assistants Joe Logan and Johanus Flee, and Cayane the ape wrangler.

Jump cut to the main show where the orangutans were to perform. One of the apes went berserk and killed King. Casey excitedly took photographs as screams, both orangutan and human, rent the air.

As the blood flowed, it was time for the important part, a commercial from Anchor-Hocking Glass extolling the benefits of their oven glassware in preparing a meal for Mom on Mother's Day. Using Fire King ovenware ensured perfect food from recipes. An ideal Mother's Day gift.

The circus gave King a spectacular funeral in the centre ring. Denise cried crocodile tears as she gave the eulogy. Back at the Blue Note Café, the trio of Casey, Williams, and Ethelbert the bartender speculated whether the death was set up by Cayane, Canelli, or Bernice.

A twist was thrown into the plot when Cayane was arrested for the decapitation of Canelli. Casey decided Fleeer was the murderer. Bernice and Logan agreed to set a trap for Fleet. He tried to kill her. Much shouting and screaming, until Fleet departed this world the hard way at the hands of an angry orangutan.

The epilogue was in the Blue Note Café. Cayane had been released and was now the new King of the Apes. Casey was anxious to go back and see the whole show, particularly the lady acrobats. They have such beautiful eyes, he said.

"Bad Little Babe" was a 1950 episode written by Alonzo Deen Cole. Events began with Casey receiving a warning telephone call from a woman who said two gunmen were waiting for him outside. Casey called the police, who set up surveillance. When the gunsels made their move, so did the police, shooting to kill.

Suspicion centred on gangster Joe Kirby, who had been under pressure from the newspapers over the murder of Sam Alberts. There seemed little doubt that the gunmen had been hired by Kirby, and his ex-girlfriend Emma Humphries had tipped off Casey.

Humphries was executed the next day after the newspaper blabbed about the tipoff. It didn't name her, since no one knew who she was, but Kirby did and took action. Another snitch told Casey the murder had been done by Kirby's current girlfriend Sondra Lansing.

Casey and the snitch did a break-and-enter looking for the gun. It was a trap set up by Kirby and Lansing. There was a double-cross, since Lansing had found out that Kirby had killed her father. She had been the telephone caller, and the snitch had killed Humphries. Lots of twists in this episode that kept the listener off balance.

Richard Rogue.

ROGUE'S GALLERY aired on radio from 1945 to 1947, with a brief revival for the 1950-51 season. The episodes were written by Ray Buffum. Several actors portrayed private detective Richard Rogue to different effect. Dick Powell, of Richard Diamond fame, was the best..

The gimmick of the series was that once each episode Rogue would be rendered unconscious, during which time he would have a conversation with his alter-ego Eugor (spell it backward). Sometimes Eugor would offer valuable advice, most times he would just restate the plot for listeners who had tuned in late, and occasionally he was just padding to make up the time for the episode.

Slugging a detective unconscious was an old cliché even back then. By all rights, those detectives should have been drooling idiots by the end of the first season because of their weekly concussions.

"Blue Eyes" aired on 1946-06-06. Patricia Flynn was the one with the blue eyes, who asked Richard Rogue to protect her after two attempts on her life. They took place at her family's 18-room cottage at Lake Tecumseh. Rich families can say they have 18-room cottages without blushing.

An intense infodump immediately followed, with a flurry of name checks. Her father Michael had died. Her mother, who was never named, then married Herbert Lewis. He was a widower who had a daughter Diane about Patricia's age. He never had a speaking part. Diane married a few months prior to John Anderson, Patricia's ex-boyfriend, for whom she still carried a flame.

Someone had fired rifle shots at Patricia while she was swimming in the lake. In the second go-round, her milk was poisoned which she discovered when her cat died after she poured some out into a saucer for it. She said she never told anyone because she had no proof and no one would believe her.

Rogue went out to the manor qua cottage. He met the family, then went out for a moonlight walk with John and Patricia. She invited Rogue to go riding the next morning at 06h00. *“Will the horses be awake?”*, replied Rogue, a city slicker through and through.

He went back to the cottage, where he overheard a conversation between Diane and Mother. Diane was jealous of Patricia and felt she was making a play for John. Mother said John should have married Patricia in the first instance. Thus was the inevitable forthcoming murder set up. The only question was who would have the honour.

Rogue retired to his room and drank a glass of water before getting into bed. He noted the water tasted funny but being the idiot in the idiot plot, he drank it anyway. Not surprisingly he visited Eugor. *“What are you doing here?”*, Eugor asked, *“There’s no bump on your head”*.

The next morning Diane had the honour, her body floating in the water. She had borrowed Patricia's swimsuit, so the question was for whom the murderer had been aiming. John blamed Patricia, who burst into tears.

Back at the house, Mother blabbed all. She killed Diane, she said, but was only covering for Patricia. Then it was the daughter's turn to blab, or blubber rather, and she was put away for insanity. After the end credits, a jolly chorus sang: *“Laugh a while, let a song be your style, use Fitch shampoo.”*

“The Corpse I Didn’t Kill” aired the following week on 1946-06-13. Richard Rogue was out cruising in the San Fernando valley suburbs. He decided to drop in on a friend Joe Dale. The poor man never got a speaking part, for when Rogue entered the house he saw Dale lying dead on the floor.

As he looked at the corpse, Rogue was slugged from behind, unusually very early in the episode at the 2m18s mark. Normally he wasn’t sent to visit Eugor until just before the halfway commercial. In this installment, Eugor was contemplating marriage but his potential father-in-law gave him a hard time. It wasn’t a particularly funny sequence.

Rogue awakened and got to his feet. He picked up Dale’s billfold from the floor and put it in his pocket. Yeah right, just what any experienced investigator would do, move the evidence and contaminate it with his fingerprints. Witnesses showed up and everything that could be misconstrued was.

A woman, only ever identified as Mrs Stevens, saw Rogue standing over the body. Her husband arrived. She greeted him as Darrin but a sentence later called him Perry, which suggests a revised script that wasn’t completely proofread.

Perry said that just before entering the house he saw a red-headed man running away from the house, calling him Rogue’s partner in murder. The police didn’t think Rogue murdered Dale but had no other suspect. Rogue finally got back home and was jumped from behind as he entered. No trip to Eugor this time, but the culprit ran away with Dale’s wallet.

More excitement followed immediately when Perry telephoned police and told them he had shot an armed intruder in his house, the red-headed man. *“All’s well that ends well”* said Rogue to the police but since the time stamp was only 16m28s on a 29-minute episode, that meant more to come.

The Stevens lived in a palatial house, she having inherited a fortune from her uncle a year prior. Perry got the intruder with his shotgun. The thinking was that the dead man wanted to eliminate Perry as an eyewitness.

The Dale wallet was found in the dead man’s pocket, with only Rogue’s fingerprints on it, not those of the dead man. Other identification on the body named the deceased as Tom Church, late of the U.S. Navy and now living, or had been, in a fleatrap hotel. Rogue checked there and found a vital clue which he withheld from the listener.

Back to the Stevens residence, where Rogue made himself unfriendly to Mrs Stevens and barged in. She instantly changed her voice from traumatized housewife to hardened Brooklyn gunmoll. Rogue accused her of having an affair with Dale and her husband of killing him. Perry was also the man who jumped Rogue both times.

From there it was a matter of cleaning up the details. Church had been set up as a fall guy by Perry. He hadn’t been at the crime scene but Perry said he was to establish a story, then lured him to the house to finish the entrapment.

Perry went to the gas chamber for murder and Marge (as she was suddenly named in the last three minutes) went to prison as an accessory. Rogue deeply regretted that he hadn’t earned a dime from the escapade.

Richard Diamond.

RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE aired on radio from 1949 to 1952 as a star vehicle for singer Dick Powell, who was making 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.

Diamond was played as a happy-go-lucky detective who got on well with the police. Noir, it wasn't, but the episodes were enjoyable listening.

"The Bogus Bills Case" was written by Blake Edwards (best remembered for producing the Pink Panther movies) and aired on 1949-10-15. The case began when Richard Diamond, as he did regularly, bought the day's newspaper from Jeff, a newsboy near his office on 53 Street.

Jeff had been stuck with a counterfeit \$5 banknote. Having no clients at the moment, Diamond took the bill down to the 5th Precinct and showed it to Lieutenant Walter Levinson. He was with Homicide but the two were good friends. Levinson said the banknotes were flooding the city and the U.S. Treasury agents were on the case.

Jeff telephoned Diamond a short while later to say that he had spotted the man who passed him the bill. While it was possible that he might have been an innocent dupe, Diamond knew that paying for a 5-cent newspaper with a \$5 bill strongly suggested he was trying to pass the counterfeits knowingly.

Diamond hurried over and located the passer in a nearby tavern on 53 Street. He was Walker, known to both Diamond and the police. Walker escaped but Diamond tracked him to a back room gambling joint and used psychological warfare on him.

Someone shot through a window and killed Walker before he could tell Diamond who the counterfeiter was. However Diamond got another lead, a supposedly retired counterfeiter named Bab Foster, now paroled and operating

a saloon on 53 Street. Jeff patronized Mary Lou's Ice Cream Parlour across the street. While indulging himself, he excitedly told Mary Lou about the case. She excused herself for a moment and went into her back office. The alert listener will immediately sit up and begin anticipating events.

The listener will not be disappointed. Jeff got himself entangled deep with Mary Lou and her henchmen. Diamond went to the tavern and was likewise entangled with Foster. Everyone convened in back of the ice cream parlour where the printing presses were hidden.

Assorted alarms ensued, replete with fisticuffs and gunshots. Once the excitement was over, Diamond took Jeff along to visit Helen Asher in her penthouse apartment. She made Diamond sing for his supper, and so to the end credits.

"The Hank Burton Case" aired on 1952-03-21, written by Richard Carr. The namesake of the title was a dying jewel thief who wanted revenge against his partner Leigh Thorpe, who stiffed him on a \$50,000 heist.

There was a \$1,000 reward for Burton's arrest. Burton sent a messenger named Shrimp Martin to Richard Diamond to arrange his surrender so that Diamond got the reward. The condition was that Diamond find Thorpe.

The only clue Burton could offer was that her ex-husband Davey operated a poolroom. Diamond went to interview him. While there, the news arrived that Leigh would never get a speaking part. Her body had been found in an alley, stabbed to death.

Assorted to-ing and fro-ing followed. Martin inserted himself into the plot by killing Burton and then threatening Diamond. Davey appeared, ready to finish the job. He had killed his ex-wife and got the jewels.

With a single bound, Diamond was free. Sure he was, thanks to a lazy scriptwriter who wrote himself into a corner and needed a way out. Davey and Martin went up to the river. From there to Helen Asher's penthouse, where Diamond tried to serenade her. She wanted to go out for a long walk instead.

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 Callicles Matter” was written by John Dawson and aired in 1956 May over five nights. An insurance company hired Johnny Dollar to find David Parsons Jr, a broker who had been missing for ten days. They had a \$100,000 policy on him. Call it \$1 million in today’s depreciated currency.

David Sr was an obnoxious blowhard who abused his staff and son at the top of his lungs. He didn’t want any investigation, by Dollar or the police. He offered to buy out the policy, which he could easily afford but which was certainly suspicious.

David Jr’s wife Dorothy gave Dollar a long story and tried to romance him. She said David had a habit of disappearing at intervals. She didn’t want the police called either. She stepped away to make a telephone call to her father-in-law, and returned to tell Dollar that David Jr had reappeared. They got in her car and a moment later were in a bad accident. She was killed and Dollar wound up in hospital.

Robert Ecker, the old man’s secretary, inserted himself into the plot and arranged a meeting with father and son. Junior said he took a ship to Oregon because he wanted to be alone. Dollar got his signature on a pretext and some details about the ship which he didn’t believe.

Dollar went to the funeral home where Ecker was mourning. The dead woman was Ecker’s fiancée, hired to impersonate Dorothy. Junior was also a faker, as

evidenced by the signature, which did not match the one on the original life insurance policy.

It transpired that David Sr had private detectives searching for his son. The real Dorothy was in hiding in Palm Springs. She didn't seem too bereaved. If anything, even less so than her impersonator.

Dollar and David Sr had another confrontation at top lung power. The reason why the father wanted everything kept quiet was because the brokerage was discussing a merger. David Jr was supposed to take over as head of the merged company, whether he wanted to or not.

From there back to meet the real Dorothy. Dollar forced her to call police, which triggered the District Attorney into action and started an audit of the brokerage. The story made the newspapers and jeopardized the merger. An even angrier argument with David Sr revealed the father didn’t much care about his son.

Next up was to talk to Junior’s physician Dr Stanley Warner. He said that Junior liked to quote the Greek philosopher Callicles. Junior had withdrawn \$5,000 from his personal account the day he disappeared, which to him was pocket money.

Dollar found a bartender who remembered Junior from ten days ago and provided information in profuse details, including Callicles quotes. It is amazing how many bartenders had eidetic memories.

I’ve heard this in other radio series. DRAGNET was notorious for how the police investigations were sped up by asking a bartender if he had seen a male Caucasian with brown hair, average weight and height, who had visited the tavern a month ago. Yes, the bartender would say, I remember the guy. He came in at 18h33, ordered a draft beer, and left at exactly 19h05. His tie was on crooked and he paid me with a \$5 bill, serial number ... etcetera.

Junior had made a long distance call to San Francisco. The police traced the call and found Junior there. He said to hell with Dad and Dorothy. Dollar verified his identity over the phone by having him quote Callicles. That ended the story. Since there was no claim, the insurance company dropped the matter. The episode fizzled out, with the expense account total of \$1,100.59.

“The Tears Of Night Matter” was a 1956 May five-parter written by John Dawson. Johnny Dollar was sent to Florida to deal with a claim by an accountant on a \$50,000 life insurance policy for the late Noah Wendover. He had been at sea on his yacht when he was afflicted by appendicitis. By the time the ship returned he was dead. The claim was also late, about two years, so naturally the company was suspicious. The widow was eccentric and forgetful.

The widow was upset at Dollar’s investigation. On the face of it she had so much money that the claim was petty cash. Her strange behaviour led to further enquiries. Mostly they established that she was scatterbrained and felt she was under a curse. The death didn’t seem suspicious so Dollar approved the claim.

There was more to the plot when Dollar was requested to visit Sam Costigan, a Chicago mobster enjoying sunny Florida. The widow Wendover had left a \$10,000 necklace called The Tears Of Night as surety for a gambling debt in his casino. The necklace became the MacGuffin of the story.

The alarums and excursions which followed involved Costigan’s goons pursuing the necklace, Dollar being beaten up by same, and excursions along the waterfront. The bad guys got their comeuppance, strangely from Mrs Wendover, who shot them dead in her apartment. Costigan had preceded them in death elsewhere.

The jeweler who had made The Tears Of Night appeared, played by an actor imitating Sydney Greenstreet. He had made a paste copy, then attempted a switcheroo, eliminating the gangsters in the process. Unfortunately he missed one, who later came by and returned the compliment, machine-gunning him to death.

That used up 90% of the characters, so Dollar called it a day. Mrs Wendover got the necklace back and there was nothing left to say. Total expense account was \$405.16.

The Falcon.

THE ADVENTURES OF 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. In the later part of the series he suddenly turned into a counterspy for the U.S. Army Intelligence overseas.

Each episode opened with Michael Waring answering the telephone as The Falcon. It was a different woman each time, to whom he would explain that he couldn’t keep their date because he just received a case. He would give a one or two sentence blurb about the episode, and so to the opening credits.

“Murder Is A Knock-Out” was written by Eugene Wang and aired on 1949-02-20. Kay Davis and Vic Jones were at the fights in Madison Square Gardens. He was looking rather sick as his fighter lost, and took Jones’ \$500 bet with him. (Call it \$5,000 in today’s depreciated currency.)

Jones had made the bet on credit. When he asked his sugar mama Davis for a loan, she said no. (The actress played the part in the voice of Mae West.) She was fed up with his constant mooching but had no moral right to criticize him. She had stiffed a mobster named Electro \$75,000 back on the opposite coast, and spotted him at the fights just as he spotted her.

Davis managed to evade him but the next day Electro found Jones, who offered to sell her out for \$500. In the meantime she went underground, so Electro hired Waring to find her. In yet another meantime, an Electro henchman named Joey Hagen found her and tried to shake her down for \$25,000.

Davis slugged him with a flashlight, inadvertently killing him, or so she thought. She went after Jones because he was the snitch but he dived out a window and escaped. Jump cut to Electro visiting Waring and asking him to find Hagen’s killer. Electro knew the police would go after him as the prime suspect.

Waring tracked down Davis, who denied everything. She fluttered her eyelids and shook her booty, thereby convincing Waring to work for her. Since Electro was also paying him, he couldn’t refuse being paid twice for the same work. The Falcon visited Jones, who told him about the \$75,000.

Davis went to see Electro because she was tired of running. He forgave her and they conspired to pin the murder on Jones. Waring arrived unexpectedly and

the denouement proceeded. The ending was convoluted. After a long infodump, Waring named Jones as the murderer. Electro and Davis had been pushing on an open door. Jones had come across Hagen after Davis had left him lying there stunned and finished off the job, hoping to pin the blame on Davis.

“Snappy Snapshots” was written by Eugene Wang and aired on 1954-05-31. This time it was Helen on the telephone to whom Michael Waring was apologizing.

Walter and George Kemp were unethical private detectives trying to hustle a drunk on the Bowery for an unspecified job. After about five minutes of padding, they settled on a homeless man named Paul Ziegler. They told him they specialized in divorce cases.

The case at hand was Phyllis Howard, whose husband would rather not be her husband anymore. She wouldn't agree to a divorce. The Kemps wanted to fake a photo of Ziegler with her to make it look like they were lovers. He broke in and accosted her. Someone shot Ziegler dead when he tried to hug her for the photo.

Howard went to The Falcon for help. The police? What of them? They went back to her apartment and yes, the man was dead. Just then a package arrived containing photos of her staring down at the body, taken from the fire escape.

The photographer Faros Dario called to set up an appointment. He said he was also being blackmailed in the same way. Waring pointed out the face on both bodies was indistinguishable, so the body could have been a wax dummy. Therefore the blackmail couldn't succeed as long as the real bodies had been disposed of.

Waring and Howard went back to her apartment with the police, only to discover that someone had in fact replaced Ziegler's body with a wax dummy. Since Waring was speechless, the only thing that could be done was to go to a cigarette commercial.

After the police left, the blackmailer called, demanding \$20,000 from Howard and the same from Dario. Waring said no deal and sat back to await the fireworks. Dario arrived and inadvertently exposed himself as the blackmailer, who had hired the Kemp brothers. That was a wrap with nothing much left to say. No long infodump here.

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.

“The Persian Slipper” aired on 1948-10-03. Everyone was credited except the writer. The client was Cal Delaney, whose wife Norma went missing 36 hours prior. He expected she was dead. The only clue Philip Marlowe had to go on was that Norma had received a telephone call from a fortune teller named Madame Janette.

Marlowe located her celebrating her imminent departure from town in a nearby tavern. She was three sheets to the wind, so Marlowe shamelessly flattered her in the hopes of getting information. The conversation abruptly ended when he asked her about Norma. Just after leaving the tavern, he was approached by a snitch who gave him another lead.

That took him to the apartment of Kier Gillan who was an ex-lover of Norma. That conversation also ended, this time abruptly in fisticuffs. Diplomacy was not Marlowe's strong suit.

Back to Madame Janette's house where yet another conversation terminated. This time Marlowe was slugged unconscious from behind, the traditional point where an episode broke for the middle commercial. Since the series was sustained at the time, the plot kept rolling.

Recovering consciousness, he found himself in an empty house. Leaving the premises he found the snitch and a Persian slipper, in that order. From there he drove back to Gillan's apartment. Still no help but at least no fisticuffs.

Marlowe kept bouncing between the same few places as if he were inside a pinball machine. He returned to the Delaney residence where he found Cal's body. He called the police, then confronted Norma, who said she did it and was going to commit suicide.

She drove off and Marlowe went in pursuit by taxicab. They were too late. She deliberately drove over a cliff. Marlowe found an unspecified clue that took him and the police to Gillan's apartment.

Shots were fired, Gillan was arrested, and so was Norma, who had substituted Madame Janette in the death car. Gillan and Norma had killed the two victims so they could be free. Madame Janette had been blackmailing them over their affair. Marlowe told the police he had found the second Persian slipper at the crash scene.

The episode wrapped up without explaining a major plot hole. Norma had staged the car crash by killing Madame Janette and propping her body in the driver seat before sending the car over the cliff. After witnessing the crash, Marlowe drove straight to Gillan's apartment. She was already there. How did she beat him to the apartment?

The following week another sartorial episode appeared, "The Panama Hat", which aired on 1948-10-10. Everyone was credited except the writer. Isobel Gordon was the client, on behalf of her husband Bruce who was receiving threatening letters. The couple were married about a year and living with her uncle Avery Fairchild on his Malibu estate.

Bruce was, as she explained, still unsettled by his war service, and dabbled in photography without an actual job. Uncle doted on his niece but didn't think much of her husband. The letters began arriving two weeks, and a strange man, wearing a white Panama hat, was lurking outside the house.

Uncle didn't want the police involved because of the bad publicity, so Isobel suggested a private detective. She suggested that Marlowe pose as an old college acquaintance. He asked what college she had attended. She said Southern California. That was good, he replied: "*I was afraid you might say Vassar*".

The first alarm was the man in the Panama hat attempting to run over Marlowe with a car. Setting that aside, Marlowe went to the Fairchild estate as a weekend guest. Additional alarms followed, including the traditional slugging unconscious of the detective. Skipper Martin was introduced, a ne'er-do-well cousin of Isobel. Marlowe was mistaken for him by a gun-wielding stranger named Brock Green, who was anxious that Martin repay a \$10,000 gambling debt.

Bruce was kidnapped and a \$50,000 ransom demanded. Uncle Avery didn't want the police or the publicity, so he reluctantly agreed to pay the ransom. Marlowe made the drop and saw the pickup man was wearing a Panama hat. It

wasn't Martin but Marlowe telephoned him and bluffed that he was Brock. Martin said he'd have the money momentarily.

Bruce was returned home. Carla Winters entered the plot, a dragon lady who was an unfriendly acquaintance of Martin. When Marlowe searched Bruce's photography studio, he found an artistic photo of her. You know, *that* kind of artistic. As Marlowe snooped, Martin stopped four bullets elsewhere, which brought in the police.

Marlowe found a vital clue in the studio but since that would dispel any suspense, he kept it from the listener. Back to Uncle's mansion for the J'accuse! meeting. He named Bruce and Carla for setting up the kidnapping as a fundraiser.

They wanted a stake to start a new life together after Bruce divorced Isobel. Martin found out about their plan and tried to blackmail them to pay off his gambling debt. Bruce resented the imposition and silenced him with a revolver. The vital clue was a store receipt made out to Bruce for a Panama hat.

The Saint.

Simon Templar, aka The Saint, began as a series of novels by Leslie Charteris and became successful as a multimedia amateur detective in movies, radio, and television. Templar had no visible means of support, yet lived elegantly. He was not a professional private detective but either stumbled into situations or had people coming to him for help. The latter never had any difficulty in finding his apartment address or telephone number. Presumably he was listed in the directory, and was not averse to newspaper publicity.

Various radio series of THE SAINT aired between 1945 and 1951. The general consensus was that the seasons featuring Vincent Price were the best. He fit the mould of The Saint perfectly, being cultured and urbane in private life.

The dialogue was witty, with so many quips that in several episodes the bad guys were motivated to try and kill him just to shut up all those jests. Well worth listening to. There is a problem with episodes circulating under multiple titles.

"Baseball Murder" was written by Dick Powell (not the actor-singer) and aired on 1950-09-03. The minor league team Blue Sox were playing and had

distinguished themselves with the league's first father-son pair of players. The old man Lefty Miller had been relegated from the majors, and his son Phil was an up-and-comer.

Simon Templar, driven to the game by Louis the cab driver, learned that neither was playing that day. Louis speculated about a rumour that the Blue Sox were throwing games. Replied Templar: "*Nonsense Louis. Baseball is honest, you know that*".

Upon arrival at the ball park, Templar met with Lefty. They seemed to be on familiar terms, as Lefty called him Saint. Father and son were not a loving pair due to family troubles of the past. Nonetheless Lefty was worried that Phil might be contaminated by the dirty-money crowd.

In particular he was concerned about a woman Diane Courtney who had her claws into Phil. The Saint went after Courtney, which aroused Phil's jealousy. That also aroused a gangster named Frank who beat up Templar. Frank mentioned he was seeing a psychoanalyst for rage control problems. The sessions didn't seem to be successful.

Lefty didn't survive past the half-way mark, shot to death. Templar set up meetings and so did others. Courtney ordered Phil to throw the game. That would allow the gang to get their claws into him. A minor league game was trivial but they would have blackmail material to use after he made it to the majors.

Templar named Courtney as the ringleader, which upset Phil. Many gunshots were fired. No prizes for guessing who walked away and who didn't. There was a twist ending because the gang hadn't actually watched the game. Phil had pitched a no-hitter in memory of his father. In the denouement, The Saint and Louie took their cue from Frank and began psychoanalyzing Courtney and Phil.

"The Horrible Hamburger" was written by Louis Vittes and aired 1950-09-10. It began with Simon Templar hailing a cab, inevitably driven by Louie. The Saint had a dinner date in Westchester County. Louie was hesitant about driving out of Manhattan into the frontier wilderness, but since there wouldn't be an episode without the trip, off they went.

Louie got lost and Templar missed his dinner date. As both were feeling peckish, they stopped off at The Happy Hamburger diner. The service was

without a smile but the waiter grudgingly rustled up some grub. The meal was mediocre at best.

Departing the diner, the taxicab had a flat tire. Upon opening the trunk to get the spare tire, Louie discovered a man's body inside. The deceased had not died naturally. The corpse had no identification. The only place the body could have been acquired was at the diner, so they went back after changing the tire, only to find it closed.

There was a house behind the diner, so they knocked on the door. The hospitality wasn't any better. The Lawtons, who operated the diner, also had the farm behind the house. Their hired hand Dan Webster had quit that afternoon and the listener quickly guessed who was in the trunk. Mrs Lawton dropped a clue about her husband that listeners will quickly pick up.

Except there was a twist. When Louie opened the trunk with a flourish to show the corpse to the Lawtons, it was empty. However Mr Lawton confirmed the identity from Templar's description of the vanished body.

There wasn't much more to say, so Templar and Louie drove off. They passed through a village and stopped at an all-night drugstore. The soda jerk filled them in on the gossip about Webster and the Lawtons. She was quite a flirt, with snappier lines than Templar.

Back to The Happy Hamburger, where Templar capitalized on the clue previously dropped by Mrs Lawton. They went on a search of the farm and in due time found the body. Somebody found them, shots were fired, and assorted predictable alarums ensued.

Another twist was the body was Mr Lawton, which meant that Webster had been impersonating him. It was the usual love triangle. The rest was details, explained at great length. The soda jerk was in on the final scene but she was underage, so Templar had to brush her off politely.

The Shadow.

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

microphone. He always announced himself as The Shadow with maniacal laughter.

The lovely Margo Lane was the only one who knew his real identity. Her main functions were to scream every time she saw a corpse, be frequently kidnapped or trapped with a killer, and to have the loose threads explained to her in the denouement.



HERE IS YOUR "Shadow" RING
PRESENTED WITH THE
COMPLIMENTS OF **'blue coal'**

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR "CHARGING" YOUR RING
SO THAT IT WILL GLOW IN THE DARK**

To charge your "Shadow" Ring so that it will glow in the darkness, hold it close to a lighted electric bulb for a half minute or more. The longer you hold the ring to the light, the longer and brighter it will glow. And you may recharge it as often as you wish. The ring can also be charged by holding it in the sunlight. **BUT DO NOT EXPOSE THE RING TO THE DIRECT RAYS OF THE SUN FOR TOO LONG!**

TO MAKE YOUR RING LARGER

(1) Put the ring in hot water (not boiling hot) for about five minutes. (2) Take it out of the water and gently bend it until it fits your finger. (3) After bending it to the correct size, put it in cold water for one minute.

**YOU ARE NOW A MEMBER OF THE SHADOW
"STOP CRIME" CLUB**
(See other side for special order blank)

**YOU ARE NOW
A MEMBER OF
"The Shadow"
"STOP-CRIME" CLUB**



**USE THIS BLANK TO ORDER ADDITIONAL
"Shadow" RINGS**

If you want to order additional "Shadow" Rings for your own use or for gifts, send the order blank below to: "The Shadow", P.O. Box No. 5, Madison Square Station, New York City. Simply enclose 10c for each ring you order.

Please send me rings. Enclosed is cents

NAME
Print Name and Address

ADDRESS

CITY STATE

THIS OFFER EXPIRES DECEMBER 31st, 1941

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

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

The radio series had a complicated genealogy that began in 1930 and didn't evolve the familiar version of The Shadow until 1933. Several dozen episodes are available as free mp3s from www.otrrlibrary.org The series lasted until 1954. Like the print stories, no real-name credit was given to writers. Sometimes a house name was credited, but usually nothing was said in the closing credits about who the writer was. Never expect logical plots.

"The Hypnotized Audience" aired on 1938-03-27. The opening scene was in a theatre for a gala event. Gurkha Khan was a master hypnotist whose brother Yosef Hakim was to be executed for murder. The show must go on though. The night of the execution, Khan performed before a stellar audience which included Lamont Cranston, Margo Lane, Commissioner Weston, and State Governor Barnes. Khan's assistant was Princess Lada, wife of Hakim.

There was method in Khan's madness. He hypnotized the entire audience into a trance, excluding Cranston, who knew something about hypnotism. Cranston managed to bring Lane and Weston out of their trances but while he was doing so, Khan grabbed the governor and took off.

The trio pursued and tracked Khan to a rural hideout. Cranston told Lane to wait in the car while he and Weston went to the house. Like a good little girl she waited, something that scriptwriters wouldn't try today. To be fair, she screamed at the slightest provocation.

Khan wanted Barnes to telephone a commutation of Hakim's death sentence. The following morning a jail break was planned to spring Hakim free. Cranston qua The Shadow infiltrated Barnes' room and managed to forestall the commutation.

Assorted alarums took place but no excursions. Khan and Lada turned on the radio news and heard with horror that Hakim had been executed on schedule. In anger, Lada shot Khan dead. With her husband gone, she then killed herself with the next bullet.

Lane either got tired of sitting in the car or else she was listening to the car radio and heard the news. She came inside so that Cranston could explain away the loose ends in the epilogue.

“The Werewolf Of Hamilton Mansion” aired on 1947-01-05. Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane were invited by an old friend Scotty to the mansion of the Hamilton family. Scotty was the gardener. The place was, as you already guessed from the title, plagued by a werewolf. The howling got on everyone’s nerves.

Upon entering the Hamilton grounds, Cranston and Lane found Scotty dead from a slashed throat. Wolf tracks were seen in the snow that suddenly changed into a man’s footprints. This was never explained later in the episode as to how it was done. At the big house, they were admitted by Hamilton himself, who didn’t seem too perturbed by the news they brought.

Jonas the butler told Cranston that the Hamilton son George was sickly, stayed in his room, and tended to scream from time to time. More than that, Jonas didn’t care to say. Inside the library Cranston found some books on lycanthropes. Suspicion was scattered about like road salt.

The alarums really were alarums, full throated screams. Jonas had a pet wolf and was about to feed Lane to the beast when The Shadow came to the rescue. The method and means seemed doubtful, an elaborate plan by Jonas to gain control of the Hamilton wealth. He was sent up the river to sit in the electric chair. Nothing more was said about the wolf, so one hopes it went to a rescue society.

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.

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

From 1944 to 1948, Shayne was located in San Francisco and had a pretty secretary named Phyllis Knight. Wally Maher voiced Shayne as a relatively sedate and average detective. From 1948 to 1950, Shayne lived in New Orleans without a secretary. He was voiced by Jeff Chandler, who narrated the show in tones of rising hysteria, even if he was just crossing the street. That period could best be described as frenetic. Thereafter a variety of forgettable actors portrayed him.

“The Case Of The Poisoned Fan” was written by Jerome Epstein and aired on 1946-11-12. This episode was set in San Francisco when Michael Shayne could afford a secretary, Phyllis Knight.

The episode began with Knight lecturing Shayne on how he should behave himself at a party that evening. A guest was Amy Vickers, one of those “I’m your biggest fan” hero worshipers. She gushed at meeting a real live detective. Her husband George wasn’t so enthusiastic. Amy was an obnoxious chatterbox who wouldn’t stop yapping.

Hardly had they stepped through the door when a gunshot was heard in the kitchen. Shayne went in and found the hosts, Professor Watkins and his wife Helen, and his student Percival Tolliver, standing about trying to look innocent.

The gun had gone off accidentally, they said. I wanted to use it against Amy, Helen said. I’m not interested in your stories, Shayne said. Everyone having had their say, they all went out to the living room and the party began.

The after-dinner conversation got around to the idea of the perfect crime. The talk was interrupted when Amy took a hearty swallow of poisoned coffee. At that point, the episode broke for a warning to anxious listeners worried about their cars. If their car was burning oil, install Hastings piston rings. Enjoy a carefree life with Hastings piston rings.

The listeners having been reassured that life was worth living if you had Hastings piston rings, the episode resumed. If Amy had ever worried about her car burning oil, she was now beyond such cares. The police and Shayne had to identify who slipped the poison into the coffee.

Tolliver took Shayne aside to bribe him to forget about that earlier contretemps with the gun. Shayne said no, so Tolliver slugged him unconscious, trussed him like a hog, and took him for a ride. He wanted to clear Helen's name, and decided he would solve the case. Those amateur detectives are so annoying, aren't they?

Shayne told Tolliver his plan wouldn't work, especially when the others noticed he was missing. "*Are you suggesting that I kill you so it doesn't matter if they find you?*" said Tolliver. "*Maybe I talk too much*", admitted Shayne.

The alarums and excursions multiplied. Shayne got away. The next morning he and Knight learned that Amy's coffee was definitely poisoned. Since everyone had coffee the question was how the poison was introduced.

Another question was how to start a car easily in cold weather. The episode halted as an announcer assured listeners that Casite oil treatment in the crankcase would do the job. (Canadians use electrical engine block heaters but apparently Hollywood vehicles don't have such things.)

Shayne decided the obvious suspect was George and the poison was in the sugar. He and Knight went over to the Vickers house. George had a gun. He was very calm about the situation and said the matter was awkward. Nobody knew where to look.

The police arrive in the nick of time, as they so often do. Surprisingly George had done it for life insurance money, not because she was an obnoxious chatterbox who wouldn't stop yapping. The rest was details.

"The Case Of The Left Handed Fan" aired on 1948-10-16. Everyone was credited except the writer. This episode was set in New Orleans, where Michael Shayne operated without a secretary. He also operated on the edge of hysteria, shouting out his dialogue as if he was watching the Hindenburg burn and describing it to others.

Shayne's client was actress Christina Bancroft. He met her backstage in her dressing room. She talked at high speed. She wanted to hire him as a bodyguard for three days, until the play closed and the tour moved on to the next city. Someone was trying to kill her, she said.

The director Hamilton Dunn admitted he was in love with her. He chatted with Shayne as they stood in the wings watching her perform and said he was her biggest fan.

An admirer Edward Leverett said he was her biggest fan, sending her flowers after every performance. He followed her from city to city, what today we would call a stalker. She claimed she didn't know who had targeted her but Shayne forced the truth out of her. She said Dunn and Leverett thought she was in love with her manager Frank Harper and were jealous. She denied that but they didn't believe her.

The next morning Shayne visited Leverett in his hotel room. The conversation, had it been recorded and played back during a trial, would have convicted him in any court in the land. Even today, six decades later, Leverett's rationalization of why he was following Bancroft will chill the listener. Shayne next had lunch with Bancroft, whose conversation was almost as unsettling.

From there, he tailed Harper, who seemed to be up to something. Blonde, flashily dressed, in short, a hussy. And so to the final performance. Backstage all was quiet. Too quiet. That was soon remedied by a gunshot, a scream, and Shayne's over-the-top narration. Harper had been murdered. The killer escaped, leaving behind a handgun.

Bancroft thought the bullet had been intended for her. She didn't see the shooter, only his left hand holding the gun as it poked through the door. She recognized a ring on one finger. Shayne talked to Dunn as an excuse to observe his hand. He saw the same ring as what Dunn wore on his right hand. Further, Dunn was right-handed.

That narrowed the list of suspects down to Leverett, who had a ring on his left hand and wrote left-handed. Shayne rushed to the NOPD only to learn that the gun had no fingerprints on it. Bancroft couldn't have seen the bare hand of the killer because otherwise there would be prints on the gun. She had, however, earlier seen Harper with the blond hussy. Jealousy overtook her. Then the police took her.

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.

Spade's secretary was Effie Perrine, a scatterbrained young woman who took down his narration in the form of a report. Unlike the movie, where Spade was a serious man, the radio series played him as a happy-go-lucky fellow, sometimes swerving into slapstick.

"The Dead Duck Caper" aired on 1947-02-02, no writers credited but probably John Michael Hayes, Gil Doud, and Robert Tallman. The episode began on an ugly note. Sam Spade argued angrily with Effie Perrine over some sort of disaster that had occurred during her mother's birthday party.

The flashback then began. He had been dragooned into the event, strictly teetotal, surrounded by goofy relatives playing charades. Another guest had drawn the phrase "dead duck". He lay on the floor, quacked a few times, and went stiff and silent. After a couple of tries, Effie correctly guessed the phrase. He didn't get up from the floor, someone having spiked his drink with poison.

Spade stayed overnight after the police had come and gone. As the household slept, intruders burst in and slugged Spade unconscious. They then kidnapped Effie's mother after unsuccessfully demanding "the duck", whatever that might be and never explained.

In the absence of any leads, Spade put the word out to the underground that he had the duck, although he had no idea what it was. A mouthpiece arrived to offer a trade, the duck for Effie's mother. Spade bluffed him, saying he didn't care about an old woman but wanted \$50,000 cash now and another \$50,000 on delivery. That confused the emissary.

The two men got into a chauffeured limousine and went for a drive in the country. They met a man who had a tattoo of a mallard duck on his arm. Spade

disgusted the goon, who couldn't understand why such a man had no concern for a dear old lady. Nonetheless, Duckie Morton, as he was known, agreed to the deal.

Back to San Francisco, where the alarums continued. Spade found a moll who turned out to be the duck. Specifically she was testifying in court against Morton and his mob. She had been at the party and the poisoned drink had been meant for her.

Shots were fired, and Mother proved feistier than her age suggested. The police arrived, more shots were fired, and Morton and the boys also became dead ducks.

"The Adam Figg Caper" was written by Robert Tallman and Gil Doud, and aired 1947-10-05. The episode began with Effie Perrine introducing Sam Spade to a new gadget she bought for the office, Memorobot, an automated Rolodex-type machine.

Just dial the time of day and it would spit out a card showing what appointment was scheduled for that time. It didn't work but did make a variety of bizarre noises that any modern hip-hop musician would be glad to sample.

But on with the report, as Spade dictated the Adam Figg caper to Perrine. Figg was the butler at Exon Manor. There had been an attempt on the master's life. Hilary Exon was the son and heir. His elderly father was a handful to manage, and the staff were constantly quitting. Someone else had also thought that and fired a shot into the old man's bedroom.

Father Exon cheerfully admitted a mis-spent life committing fraud, cheating friends and family, and not a few murders. He wasn't surprised by a shot fired at him. Small potatoes in his life. The nurse Barbara Caylin was a suspicious character, but then again so was everybody in the mansion.

Before Spade could investigate further, multiple shots were fired, screams resounded, and assorted other alarums filled the big house. Spade chased the shooter out the house. He found a suspect, Captain Shelley, who said he had been using Caylin to gather blackmail material to use against Exon the elder.

Back to the manor, where there was never a dull moment. More shots and screaming. One wonders why the neighbours didn't complain to the police.

Old Exon admitted to Spade that he had fired the shots just for the fun of it to distract everyone else. He then promptly died, surprisingly from old age. That finished the case. Dead men can't be blackmailed.

George Valentine.

LET GEORGE DO IT aired on radio from 1946 to 1954, sponsored by Standard Oil for its Chevron stations. 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.

"The Crime That Was No More" was written by David Victor and Herbert Little Jr, and aired on 1948-07-26. Arnold Loomis was a gambler who blew \$1,000 in household money. He tried to cover up by filing a false police report that he had been robbed at gunpoint. He didn't want his wife Michelle to know the truth.

After police arrested Neil Denquist, who confessed to the crime, Loomis wrote to George Valentine. The implication was that Denquist was using the robbery as an alibi for the murder of his ex-wife Gloria Hastings. His second wife Francine did her part to muddy the waters.

Gloria's husband John also hired Valentine for the case. That made Valentine happy because he was being paid twice for the same job. Valentine and Claire Brooks did some snooping. There were alarums and gunshots to pep up the plot. Francine tried to shoot Valentine but he was booked for the series. She was arrested and blabbed all but insisted Neil was innocent.

The evidence involved a complicated chronology of who was where on the night of the murder. A flow chart would be needed to track everyone. After a few more twists, John was arrested for the murder of Gloria. Valentine could do flow charts in his head.

The episode ended with a warning from the sponsor Chevron to be careful with your car's wheel bearings and have them regularly greased. Otherwise you might be in real trouble.

"Go Jump In The Lake" was aired 1950-02-13, the night before Valentine's Day. That was worked into the plot by the writers David Victor and Jackson Gillis. Throughout the episode whenever George Valentine introduced himself someone would remark he was a day early.

The opening letter was from Mona Chandler, the secretary of Clarence Doyle, Vice-President of Consolidated Machine Tool. She wrote that her boss was in a jam and needed help. Valentine and Claire Brooks visited Chandler at her job to find out what she wanted.

Contrary to Valentine's ad, she didn't write full details. She told them that Doyle was acting nervous and had just bought a gun. She didn't tell them but they observed that she was carrying a torch for another Vice-President, Gil Frank, who came by her desk for a moment.

Doyle arrived at the office just as Chandler opened a package in the morning mail and found a broken handgun. It was some sort of warning. Doyle refused to say who was bothering him and told Valentine to go jump in the lake, in those exact words.

Chandler mentioned that she had been auditing some company accounts and found a \$3,000 discrepancy. Valentine suspected Doyle had some gambling debts and figured out nightclub owner Sparky Bennett held his markers. Next up was Gil Frank, found badly beaten but uncooperative to the point of telling Valentine to go jump in the lake, again in those exact words.

Frank had been mistaken for Doyle by Bennett's goons. Doyle disappeared, triggering a search by police. The waterfront was the obvious choice, where they found Doyle being fitted for concrete overshoes. Shots were fired and the sound effects man spent a busy few minutes splashing water. Doyle was rescued from a watery grave.

Valentine accused Doyle of embezzlement. At that point the episode abruptly terminated. Valentine explained away a few loose threads, then he and Brooksie went out for a romantic date.

Philo Vance.

The PHILO VANCE series aired on old-time radio from 1945 to 1950, based on the novels by S.S. Van Dine. Script writers were not credited. 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. Markham frequently came out and did field investigations, something a real D.A. would not do. The police occasionally appeared but usually just the two men brought in the culprit. Markham narrated the second half of each episode, after the commercial break.

Henry Sylvern was the berserk organist who supplied incidental and segue music. He continually outdid himself with staccato outbursts and crescendos for each scene change. Some of the episodes are worth listening to just for him.

“The Coachman Murder Case” aired on 1948-08-31, no writer credited. Jonathan Morton Zachery, known as J. Morton to his wife Grace and friends, was a millionaire sportsman whose particular obsession was fly fishing. The listener will immediately anticipate that J. Morton would not get a speaking part, and will not be wrong.

The episode opened with Grace arriving back at the mansion, supposedly from a long trip. She was just in time to meet a magazine writer named David Douglas, who said he was doing a story on J. Morton. The two were former lovers, once engaged, but Grace preferred to marry for money.

They found J. Morton floating dead in the swimming pool, with a fisherman’s cleaning knife in his heart and a coachman fly attached to him. Philo Vance and District Attorney John Markham arrived at the scene. Vance interrogated Grace, whose responses suggested she wasn’t telling the whole truth. Her story about coming home via train and taxicab soon fell apart.

Douglas was a nervous wreck and almost suicidal. He was blithering and acting like a wet wimp. One suspects that it wasn’t just financial opportunity that made Grace dump him. Douglas was later found dead in his apartment, apparently from gunshot suicide.

Vance suddenly brought in George Hastings, assistant to J. Morton, as another suspect, a man never mentioned until just then. Hastings said a big company merger had been planned with a company owned by William Bartlet but the deal fell apart with J. Morton’s death.

Elsewhere, Bartlet called on the widow to pay his respects. He said he had never met J. Morton during preliminary negotiations but was to have done so quite soon. Vance dwelt on this point, so the alert listener will add Bartlet to the list of suspects.

Vance summoned one and all to a J’accuse! meeting in the trophy room of the mansion, which opened onto the swimming pool. He re-enacted the murder, including falling into the pool. There was method in his madness.

Bartlet was accused through a complicated set of clues too lengthy to mention here. He blabbed all instead of remaining silent and letting his lawyer have the case dismissed for lack of evidence. He and J. Morton were feuding about who would have control of the merged company, and he stabbed him in the heat of the moment.

Vance and Markham only had supposition and hypothesis to support their case. The knife had been washed clean of fingerprints when the victim fell into the pool. Grace and Douglas had not yet arrived, so Bartlet left the mansion before anyone saw him. Had he kept quiet, Markham would have lost the case in court.

“The Vanilla Murder Case” aired on 1948-12-21, no writer credited. A young woman named June Mills came to Philo Vance and John Markham for help. She was worried her boyfriend Johnny Blake was in danger of his life.

Not wrong, for he was in debt for \$50 to small-time loan shark Tony Emrotty, who was anxious for repayment. The interest rate was \$5 per week. Her father didn’t approve of Blake either, and warned him away from June.

Blake worked as a soda jerk. Vance came round to talk to him the next morning, but only conversed with his coworker Dick Jackman, who said he had just come on duty. They went looking for Blake and found him.

Blake would never talk to anyone again. Someone bashed in his head with a syrup pump in a back room where the pumps were washed and sanitized.

Vanilla flavour. Everyone kept emphasizing the flavour, so it must have been important.

Vance made the rounds. First to Emrotty for a bit of huffing and puffing, but the loan shark wasn't impressed. The next stop was the Mills residence, where father and daughter didn't tell him anything new. Notwithstanding that, Vance confidently announced he had identified the killer.

Pausing only for some berserk organ music, Vance returned to the soda fountain. In conversation, Jackman mentioned that Emrotty wouldn't loan him money despite the potential for interest.

The shark was sitting at a nearby table enjoying a dish of vanilla ice cream, so Vance went over to talk to him. Emrotty told him Jackman was a bad debtor, having stiffed a bookie for \$50 before finally paying him. The payment was made the same time Blake borrowed money. The obvious deduction was made.

Vance loved J'accuse! meetings, so naturally hosted one to end the episode, this time in Markham's office. All the guests were fingerprinted upon entry, except for Emrotty, whose prints were already on file. Vance announced he was going to review all the details if those assembled didn't mind. *"Any way we can stop you?"* asked Emrotty. That was a rhetorical question of course.

Vance announced that the fingerprints on the vanilla syrup pump were Jackman's, who defended himself by pointing out that he handled syrup pumps continuously. Vance reminded him that he had just come on duty, or so he had said. How could his fingerprints be on the freshly washed pump unless he had used it as a blunt instrument?

Jackman broke and tried to run for it, but Emrotty slugged him. Vance then said there were no fingerprints on the pump and he had been bluffing. The vital clue was that when he and Jackman first spotted the body, the latter had identified the syrup pump as the vanilla one while still on the far side of the room. Syrup pumps all look alike from a distance, and no one could have read the label from that far away.

Emrotty had all the good lines. His sarcastic responses to Vance's questions were hilarious, and he always got the best of each confrontation.

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 and Anne Hummert but actually done by a stable of house writers. The series was so over the top that for years afterwards Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding on their comedy show did a parody titled "Mr Trace, Keener Than Most Persons".

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

"Murder And The Jewel Thief" was a 1950 episode. Carl Rawlins, aka Kansas Carl, the jewel thief of minor notoriety, telephoned Mr Keen to set up an appointment. Just as he gave his address, gunshots rang out at his end. Keen and Mike Clancy rushed over and found him dead.

As they discussed what to do, Andrea Mitchell arrived. Telling them she was a good friend of Rawlins, she wanted to know what they were doing in her fiance's apartment. They broke the news to her and then to the police.

She was naive about Rawlins. He had told her that he was a jewelry importer. She was astonished to hear that the importing he did was from rich society folk without their permission.

Mitchell had a 17-year-old daughter Jean by her first husband, currently at a finishing school in Vermont. Andrea was worried about what the publicity would do to Jean's prospects, so she hired Keen to help solve the crime quietly.

Keen asked if she knew any of Rawlins' friends. She mentioned Grace Bentley, an older woman who was a maternal figure to him. Keen and Clancy went to visit her and found her held hostage. The assailant dived out a window but she identified him as George Darcy. She said he was a friend of Rawlins and helped him repent of his sins and begin a new life.

Darcy was Rawlins’ sidekick during their criminal careers. The chase was on. Darcy showed up at Andrea’s house demanding Rawlins’ loot but Clancy was guarding her. That ended quickly. Darcy denied killing Rawlins and was hauled away for attempted robbery.

Keen and Clancy headed back to Bentley’s apartment and found her packing her bags. The jewels were in her suitcase. She suddenly changed from a dear old lady and began talking like a Brooklyn gun moll. She had killed Rawlins. It was all over bar the shouting and the final commercial.

“The King Cobra Murder Case” was a 1950 episode which began in an ocean liner just docked in New York harbour. A young woman Doris Walker was packing up her luggage in her stateroom when she was murdered by an unknown assailant using a king cobra.

Her sister Alice came to Mr Keen and Mike Clancy for help. She said Doris had refused the attentions of a young man named Frank Percy. He became abusive and possessive. Doris met another man Bill Darryl and became engaged.

The three came back on the same ship, and so did Percy, still stalking Doris. After her body was discovered, a king cobra was found in her room. So was a small bucket of ice cubes, but Alice said she and her sister were teetotalers. The implication was that the snake had been kept sluggish on the ice until the killer needed it.

There had been a shipment of snakes on board and it was assumed the king cobra had escaped therefrom. Alice said she and Percy had worked together in a laboratory on snake anti-venoms. He had written a threatening note to Doris, which Alice presented to Keen. It was probable the snake had been stolen, not escaped. After she left, Clancy wondered if this was a case of a jealous sister.

Keen and Clancy went to Darryl’s hotel room and found him ill in bed, tended by Edna Hunter, an honorary aunt not much older than him. As they were talking to him, Percy barged in with gun in hand. He blamed Darryl for the murder. A shot was fired, and Clancy disarmed him.

Just to muddy the investigation, the newspaper reported a maniac from England was loose in the city. He was wanted for the murder of two young women. That came to nothing. The kindly old investigator had suspicions. He asked Darryl to tell Hunter he was going to marry Alice.

She went into a jealous rage, which telegraphed the ending. Keen then stepped in with additional information that had been withheld from the listener. Hunter was the agent for the consignment of poisonous snakes on board the ship.

She blabbed all, as murderers in fiction always do. Her eventual final voyage would be up the river to sit in the electric chair.

FOOD FOR ALL

by Dale Speirs

This oxymoronic food was seen in my local supermarket





I buy a bag of peanuts at intervals to do my part in keeping the squirrel and magpie population healthy. I keep the bag by the front door. Every time I leave the house I sling a handful of peanuts across the lawn (for the magpies) and into the shrubbery (where the birds can't reach but the squirrels can go).

Normally the supermarket sells peanuts from Georgia but they had a sale on bags from a Manitoba producer.

That struck me as odd, there being no peanuts grown in that province. I had to look up the packager's home town of Winkler on Google.

I loved the reverse side of the bag.





There are some foods I will not eat whatsoever. Why anyone would buy these types of potato chips is beyond me.

They remind of the Two Ronnies comedy sketch about the store that sold ice cream in flavours such as bacon and ketchup, and potato chips in flavours such as raspberry ripple.

Cupcakes, of course, are a different matter.



CURRENT EVENTS: PART 16
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 15 appeared in OPUNTIA's #474, 475, 479, 480, 483, 484, and 488 to 496.]



Spring has brought hope of the end of the pandemic within about six months. My neighbour has now been yarnbombing this tree for a year.



Seen In The COVID-19 Literature.

As of March 19, Canada had 927,059 cases of COVID-19, with 22,617 deaths and 3,721,269 vaccinations. The population is about 38,000,000.

Karim, S.S.A., et al (2021) **Appropriate names for COVID-19 variants.** SCIENCE 371:doi.org/10.1126/science.abh0836 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ extracts: *Multiple severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) variants are now circulating globally. ... Unfortunately, variants are widely being referred to by their country of first description.*

The connotation that the variants were created and spread by their respective first locations has already generated political backlash through travel bans and negative perceptions of these countries and their people.

The descriptions are also inaccurate. It is not known whether patient zero of each variant was a resident of or visitor to that country, and all variants have been identified well beyond the first countries in which they were identified.

Admittedly, mutation-based or lineage names are difficult to say and write. The World Health Organization is expected to announce a standard nomenclature soon. Until then, scientific and media reports should not refer to variants by country names.

Goldstein, J.R., et al (2021) **Vaccinating the oldest against COVID-19 saves both the most lives and most years of life.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 118:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2026322118 (available as a free pdf)

Authors abstract: *Vaccinating the very old against COVID-19 saves the most lives, but, since older age is accompanied by falling life expectancy, it is widely supposed that these two goals are in conflict. We show this to be mistaken.*

The age patterns of COVID-19 mortality are such that vaccinating the oldest first saves the most lives and, surprisingly, also maximizes years of remaining life expectancy. We demonstrate this relationship empirically in the United States, Germany, and South Korea and with mathematical analysis of life tables.

Elezkurtaj, S., et al (2021) **Causes of death and comorbidities in hospitalized patients with COVID-19.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 11:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-82862-5 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Infection by the new corona virus strain SARS-CoV-2 and its related syndrome COVID-19 has been associated with more than two million deaths worldwide.*

Patients of higher age and with preexisting chronic health conditions are at an increased risk of fatal disease outcome. However, detailed information on causes of death and the contribution of pre-existing health conditions to death yet is missing, which can be reliably established by autopsy only.

We performed full body autopsies on 26 patients that had died after SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19 at the Charité University Hospital Berlin, Germany, or at associated teaching hospitals. We systematically evaluated causes of death and pre-existing health conditions. Additionally, clinical records and death certificates were evaluated.

We report findings on causes of death and comorbidities of 26 decedents that had clinically presented with severe COVID-19. We found that septic shock and multi organ failure was the most common immediate cause of death, often due to suppurative pulmonary infection.

Respiratory failure due to diffuse alveolar damage presented as immediate cause of death in fewer cases. Several comorbidities, such as hypertension, ischemic heart disease, and obesity were present in the vast majority of patients.

Our findings reveal that causes of death were directly related to COVID-19 in the majority of decedents, while they appear not to be an immediate result of preexisting health conditions and comorbidities.

We therefore suggest that the majority of patients had died of COVID-19 with only contributory implications of preexisting health conditions to the mechanism of death.

More than 100 million confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and more than two million associated deaths have been counted around the globe by end-January, 2021.

Chow, J.H., et al (2021) Aspirin use is associated with decreased mechanical ventilation, intensive care unit admission, and in-hospital mortality in hospitalized patients with coronavirus disease 2019. ANESTHESIA AND ANALGESIA 132:930-941 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) is associated with hypercoagulability and increased thrombotic risk in critically ill patients. To our knowledge, no studies have evaluated whether aspirin use is associated with reduced risk of mechanical ventilation, intensive care unit (ICU) admission, and in-hospital mortality.*

A retrospective, observational cohort study of adult patients admitted with COVID-19 to multiple hospitals in the United States between March 2020 and July 2020 was performed.

The primary outcome was the need for mechanical ventilation. Secondary outcomes were ICU admission and in-hospital mortality. Adjusted hazard ratios (HRs) for study outcomes were calculated using Cox-proportional hazards models after adjustment for the effects of demographics and comorbid conditions.

412 patients were included in the study. 314 patients (76.3%) did not receive aspirin, while 98 patients (23.7%) received aspirin within 24 hours of admission or 7 days before admission. Aspirin use had a crude association with less mechanical ventilation (35.7% aspirin versus 48.4% nonaspirin, $P = .03$) and ICU admission (38.8% aspirin versus 51.0% nonaspirin, $P = .04$), but no crude association with in-hospital mortality (26.5% aspirin versus 23.2% nonaspirin, $P = .51$).

After adjusting for 8 confounding variables, aspirin use was independently associated with decreased risk of mechanical ventilation, ICU admission, and in-hospital mortality. There were no differences in major bleeding ($P = .69$) or overt thrombosis ($P = .82$) between aspirin users and nonaspirin users.

Aspirin use may be associated with improved outcomes in hospitalized COVID-19 patients. However, a sufficiently powered randomized controlled trial is needed to assess whether a causal relationship exists between aspirin use and reduced lung injury and mortality in COVID-19 patients.

Ji, W., et al (2021) Transmission of SARS-CoV-2 via fomite, especially cold chain, should not be ignored. PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 118:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2026093118 (available as a free pdf)

[Fomites are cold surfaces that may carry pathogens, such as furniture, kitchen utensils, light switches, elevator buttons, or door handles.]

Authors’ abstract: *As reported, respiratory droplet, airborne, direct contact, animal-to-human, and human-to-animal transmissions represent major spread routes of SARS-CoV-2. Patients (symptomatic or asymptomatic) can emit SARS-CoV-2 into the environment by sneezing, sweating, skin contact, etc., resulting in contamination of the surrounding environment or items.*

The half-life of SARS-CoV-2 on plastic and stainless steel is about 6 hours. SARS-CoV-2 was stable on the skin for at least 96 hours at 22°C, 8 hours at 37°C, and 14 days at 4°C. Moreover, the virus can be isolated from aerosols 3 hours after infection and from various surfaces (such as glass, stainless steel, paper, and bank notes) 72 hours later or even up to 28 days at 20 °C.

Notably, the virus is highly stable at low temperatures. Therefore, it can stay on the surface of cold-chain products or their packaging for a longer time, and be transferred from one place to another by transportation.

These reports further confirm that SARS-CoV-2 can be spread to all parts of the world through trade, especially through cold-chain transportation. Therefore, livestock plants and cold-chain industries should not be neglected for controlling COVID-19. Supervision of meat packaging and scattered small-scale meat production may be beneficial to disease prevention and control.

Furthermore, the environment of the livestock plants and the cold-chain industry should be tested and disinfected regularly, and the imported cold-chain products and their packaging should be sampled and tested to find the contaminated product in time.

Finally, due to the rapid increase in confirmed cases and deaths caused by COVID-19, we strongly recommend wearing masks, keeping social distance, and reducing gatherings.

Vicens, P., et al (2021) **Does living close to a petrochemical complex increase the adverse psychological effects of the COVID-19 lockdown?** PLOS ONE 16:doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0249058 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The petrochemical industry has made the economic development of many local communities possible, increasing employment opportunities and generating a complex network of closely-related secondary industries.*

However, it is known that petrochemical industries emit air pollutants, which have been related to different negative effects on mental health. In addition, many people around the world are being exposed to highly stressful situations deriving from the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns adopted by national and regional governments.

The present study aims to analyse the possible differential effects on various psychological outcomes (stress, anxiety, depression and emotional regulation strategies) stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdown experienced by individuals living near an important petrochemical complex and subjects living in other areas, nonexposed to the characteristic environmental pollutants emitted by these kinds of complex.

The sample consisted of 1607 subjects who answered an ad hoc questionnaire on lockdown conditions, the Perceived Stress Scale, the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, the Barratt Impulsivity Scale, and the Emotional Regulation Questionnaire.

The results indicate that people living closer to petrochemical complexes reported greater risk perception [$K = 73.42$, $p < 0.001$, with a medium size effect ($\eta^2 = 0.061$)].

However, no significant relationship between psychological variables and proximity to the focus was detected when comparing people living near to or far away from a chemical/petrochemical complex.

Regarding the adverse psychological effects of the first lockdown due to COVID-19 on the general population in Catalonia, we can conclude that the conditions included in this survey were mainly related to changes in the participants' impulsivity levels, with different total impulsivity scores being obtained if they had minors in their care ($p < 0.001$), if they had lost their jobs,

if they were working ($p < 0.001$), if they were not telecommuting ($p < 0.001$), if they went out to work ($p < 0.001$) or if they established routines ($p = 0.009$). However, we can also be fairly certain that the economic effects are going to be worse than those initially detected in this study.

Shumsky, R.A., et al (2021) **Retail store customer flow and COVID-19 transmission.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 118:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2019225118 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *To reduce the transmission of COVID-19, many retail stores use one-way aisles, while local governments enforce occupancy limits or require "safe shopping" times for vulnerable groups.*

To assess the value of these interventions, we formulate and analyze a mathematical model of customer flow and COVID-19 transmission. We find that the value of specific operational changes depends on how the virus is transmitted, through close contact or suspended aerosols.

If transmission is primarily due to close contact, then restricting customers to one-way movement can dramatically reduce transmission. Other interventions, such as reductions in customer density, are effective at a distance but confront store operators with trade-offs between infection rates and customer flow.

We examine how operational changes in customer flows in retail stores affect the rate of COVID-19 transmission. We combine a model of customer movement with two models of disease transmission: direct exposure when two customers are in close proximity and wake exposure when one customer is in the airflow behind another customer.

We find that the effectiveness of some operational interventions is sensitive to the primary mode of transmission. Restricting customer flow to one-way movement is highly effective if direct exposure is the dominant mode of transmission. In particular, the rate of direct transmission under full compliance with one-way movement is less than one-third the rate under two-way movement.

Directing customers to follow one-way flow, however, is not effective if wake exposure dominates. We find that two other interventions, reducing the speed

variance of customers and throughput control, can be effective whether direct or wake transmission is dominant.

We also examine the trade-off between customer throughput and the risk of infection to customers, and we show how the optimal throughput rate drops rapidly as the population prevalence rises.

Wahl, A., et al (2021) **SARS-CoV-2 infection is effectively treated and prevented by EIDD-2801.** NATURE
591:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03312-w (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *All coronaviruses known to have recently emerged as human pathogens probably originated in bats. Here we use a single experimental platform based on immunodeficient mice implanted with human lung tissue (hereafter, human lung-only mice (LoM)) to demonstrate the efficient in vivo replication of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), as well as two endogenous SARS-like bat coronaviruses that show potential for emergence as human pathogens.*

Virus replication in this model occurs in bona fide human lung tissue and does not require any type of adaptation of the virus or the host. Our results indicate that bats contain endogenous coronaviruses that are capable of direct transmission to humans.

Our detailed analysis of in vivo infection with SARS-CoV-2 in human lung tissue from LoM showed a predominant infection of human lung epithelial cells, including type-2 pneumocytes that are present in alveoli and ciliated airway cells. Acute infection with SARS-CoV-2 was highly cytopathic and induced a robust and sustained type-I interferon and inflammatory cytokine and chemokine response.

Finally, we evaluated a therapeutic and pre-exposure prophylaxis strategy for SARS-CoV-2 infection. Our results show that therapeutic and prophylactic administration of EIDD-2801, an oral broad-spectrum antiviral agent that is currently in phase II/III clinical trials, markedly inhibited SARS-CoV-2 replication in vivo, and thus has considerable potential for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

The non-COVID-19 research continues as it should.

Ulloa, O., et al (2021) **The cyanobacterium *Prochlorococcus* has divergent light-harvesting antennae and may have evolved in a low-oxygen ocean.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA
118:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2025638118 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The marine unicellular cyanobacterium *Prochlorococcus* is the most abundant photosynthetic organism on Earth. Members of this genus are classically thought to be adapted to high-oxygen and nutrient-poor ocean conditions, with a principle divergence between high-light and low-light ecotypes.*

*We show that the most basal *Prochlorococcus* lineages are adapted to the low-oxygen, low-light, and high-nutrient conditions found in the dimly illuminated waters of anoxic marine zones. The most basal lineages have retained phycobilisomes as light-harvesting antennae, a characteristic of most other cyanobacteria, whose loss was thought to define all *Prochlorococcus*.*

*As oxygenic photosynthesis drove ocean oxidation in the ancient Earth, oxygen appears to have played as much a role as light and nutrients in driving *Prochlorococcus* evolution.*

*Marine picocyanobacteria of the genus *Prochlorococcus* are the most abundant photosynthetic organisms in the modern ocean, where they exert a profound influence on elemental cycling and energy flow. The use of trans-membrane chlorophyll complexes instead of phycobilisomes as light-harvesting antennae is considered a defining attribute of *Prochlorococcus*. Its ecology and evolution are understood in terms of light, temperature, and nutrients.*

Here, we report single-cell genomic information on previously uncharacterized phylogenetic lineages of this genus from nutrient-rich anoxic waters of the eastern tropical North and South Pacific Ocean.

The most basal lineages exhibit optical and genotypic properties of phycobilisome-containing cyanobacteria, indicating that the characteristic light-harvesting antenna of the group is not an ancestral attribute.

Additionally, we found that all the indigenous lineages analyzed encode genes for pigment biosynthesis under oxygen-limited conditions, a trait shared with other freshwater and coastal marine cyanobacteria.

Our findings thus suggest that *Prochlorococcus* diverged from other cyanobacteria under low-oxygen conditions before transitioning from phycobilisomes to transmembrane chlorophyll complexes and may have contributed to the oxidation of the ancient ocean.

Wang, J., et al (2021) **Ancient noeggerathialean reveals the seed plant sister group diversified alongside the primary seed plant radiation.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 118:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2013442118 (available as a free pdf)

[Lignophytes are any plants that have woody tissue. Gymnosperms are cone-bearing trees and shrubs such as conifers and cycads.]

Authors’ abstract: There were two heterosporous lignophyte lineages of which only one, the seed plants, survived the Permian-Triassic mass extinction. Based on exceptionally complete fossil trees from a 300-My-old volcanic ash, the enigmatic Noeggerathiales are now recognized as belonging to the other lineage.

They diversified alongside the primary seed plant radiation and constitute seed plants’ closest relatives. Noeggerathiales are reconstructed as members of a plexus of free-sporing woody plants called progymnosperms, extending their age range by 60 My.

Following the origin of seed plants, progymnosperms were previously thought to have become gradually less abundant before dying out in Carboniferous. We show they diversified and evolved complex morphologies including conelike structures from modified leaves before going extinct at the Permian-Triassic extinction.

Noeggerathiales are enigmatic plants that existed during Carboniferous and Permian times, ~323 to 252 Mya. Although their morphology, diversity, and distribution are well known, their systematic affinity remained enigmatic because their anatomy was unknown.

Here, we report from a 298-My-old volcanic ash deposit, an in situ, complete, anatomically preserved noeggerathialean. The plant resolves the group’s affinity and places it in a key evolutionary position within the seed plant sister group.

Paratingia wuhaia sp. nov. is a small tree producing gymnospermous wood with a crown of pinnate, compound megaphyllous leaves and fertile shoots each with O-shaped vascular bundles. The heterosporous (containing both microspores and megaspores), bisporangiate fertile shoots appear cylindrical and cone-like, but their bilateral vasculature demonstrates that they are complex, three-dimensional sporophylls, representing leaf homologs that are unique to Noeggerathiales.

The combination of heterospory and gymnospermous wood confirms that *Paratingia*, and thus the Noeggerathiales, are progymnosperms. Progymnosperms constitute the seed plant stem group, and *Paratingia* extends their range 60 My, to the end of the Permian.



Permian Noeggerathiales show that the heterosporous progymnosperm sister group to seed plants diversified alongside the primary radiation of seed plants for ~110 My, independently evolving sophisticated cone-like fertile organs from modified leaves.

[Image is from this paper, showing a reconstruction of *Paratingia wuhaia*.]

Snyder-Beattie, A.E., et al (2021) **The timing of evolutionary transitions suggests intelligent life is rare.** ASTROBIOLOGY 21:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2019.2149 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *On Earth, the emergence of complex intelligent life required a preceding series of evolutionary transitions such as abiogenesis, eukaryogenesis, and the evolution of sexual reproduction, multicellularity, and intelligence itself. Some of these transitions could have been extraordinarily improbable, even in conducive environments.*

The emergence of intelligent life late in Earth’s lifetime is thought to be evidence for a handful of rare evolutionary transitions, but the timing of other evolutionary transitions in the fossil record is yet to be analyzed in a similar framework. Using a simplified Bayesian model that combines uninformative priors and the timing of evolutionary transitions, we demonstrate that expected evolutionary transition times likely exceed the lifetime of Earth, perhaps by many orders of magnitude.

Our results corroborate the original argument suggested by Brandon Carter that intelligent life in the Universe is exceptionally rare, assuming that intelligent life elsewhere requires analogous evolutionary transitions. Arriving at the opposite conclusion would require exceptionally conservative priors, evidence for much earlier transitions, multiple instances of transitions, or an alternative model that can explain why evolutionary transitions took hundreds of millions of years without appealing to rare chance events.

Although the model is simple, it provides an initial basis for evaluating how varying biological assumptions and fossil record data impact the probability of evolving intelligent life, and also provides a number of testable predictions, such as that some biological paradoxes will remain unresolved and that planets orbiting M dwarf stars are uninhabitable.

Yu, Y., et al (2021) **Deep time diversity and the early radiations of birds.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 118:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2019865118

Authors’ abstract: *Our analyses reveal three distinct large-scale increases in the diversification rate across bird evolutionary history. The first increase, which began between 160 and 170 megayears ago and reached its peak between*

130 and 135 Ma, corresponds to an accelerated morphological evolutionary rate associated with the locomotory systems among early stem birds. This radiation resulted in morphospace occupation that is larger and different from their close dinosaurian relatives, demonstrating the occurrence of a radiation among early stem birds.

The second increase, which started ~90 Ma and reached its peak between 65 and 55 Ma, is associated with rapid evolution of the cranial skeleton among early crown birds, driven differently from the first radiation. The third increase, which occurred after ~40 to 45 Ma, has yet to be supported by quantitative morphological data but gains some support from the fossil record.

Our analyses indicate that the bird biodiversity evolution was influenced mainly by long-term climatic changes and also by major paleobiological events such as the Cretaceous-Paleogene (K-Pg) extinction.

Vullo, R., et al (2021) **Manta-like planktivorous sharks in Late Cretaceous oceans.** SCIENCE 371:doi.org/10.1126/science.abc1490

Authors’ abstract: *Modern sharks occupy marine ecosystems across the world but display little morphological diversity, being mostly streamlined predators. We describe a new species of shark from the late Cretaceous that shows that the lack of current variation is not due to limited morphological exploration in the past.*

Specifically, Aquilolamna milarcaedisplays many features similar to modern manta rays, notably long, slender fins and a mouth seemingly adapted to filter feeding, suggesting that it was planktivorous.

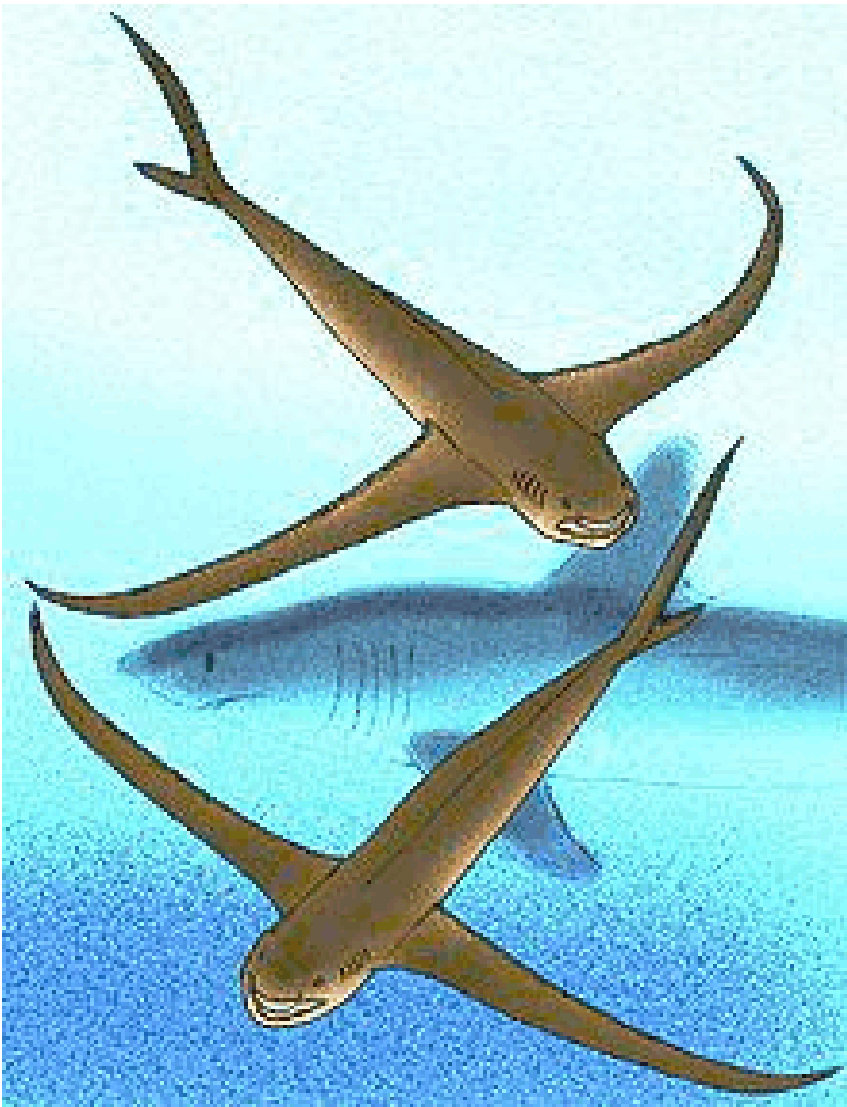
This finding indicates both that elasmobranchs evolutionarily experimented with other forms and that the planktivorous “soarers” emerged in this group at least 30 million years earlier than previously recognized.

The ecomorphological diversity of extinct elasmobranchs is incompletely known. Here, we describe Aquilolamna milarcae, a bizarre probable planktivorous shark from early Late Cretaceous open marine deposits in Mexico. Aquilolamna, tentatively assigned to Lamniformes, is characterized by hypertrophied, slender pectoral fins.

This previously unknown body plan represents an unexpected evolutionary experimentation with underwater flight among sharks, more than 30 million years before the rise of manta and devil rays (Mobulidae), and shows that winglike pectoral fins have evolved independently in two distantly related clades of filter-feeding elasmobranchs.

This newly described group of highly specialized long-winged sharks (Aquilolamnidae) displays an aquilopelagic-like ecomorphotype and may have occupied, in late Mesozoic seas, the ecological niche filled by mobulids and other batoids after the Cretaceous-Paleogene boundary.

[Image is from Wikipedia.]



van der Valk, T., et al (2021) **Million-year-old DNA sheds light on the genomic history of mammoths.** NATURE 591:265-269

Authors' abstract: *Temporal genomic data hold great potential for studying evolutionary processes such as speciation. However, sampling across speciation events would, in many cases, require genomic time series that stretch well back into the Early Pleistocene subepoch. Although theoretical models suggest that DNA should survive on this timescale, the oldest genomic data recovered so far are from a horse specimen dated to 780 to 560 thousand years ago.*

Here we report the recovery of genome-wide data from three mammoth specimens dating to the Early and Middle Pleistocene subepochs, two of which are more than one million years old. We find that two distinct mammoth lineages were present in eastern Siberia during the Early Pleistocene. One of these lineages gave rise to the woolly mammoth and the other represents a previously unrecognized lineage that was ancestral to the first mammoths to colonize North America.

Our analyses reveal that the Columbian mammoth of North America traces its ancestry to a Middle Pleistocene hybridization between these two lineages, with roughly equal admixture proportions. Finally, we show that the majority of protein-coding changes associated with cold adaptation in woolly mammoths were already present one million years ago.

Liu, C., et al (2021) **A towering genome: Experimentally validated adaptations to high blood pressure and extreme stature in the giraffe.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 7:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abe9459 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *The suite of adaptations associated with the extreme stature of the giraffe has long interested biologists and physiologists. By generating a high-quality chromosome-level giraffe genome and a comprehensive comparison with other ruminant genomes, we identified a robust catalog of giraffe-specific mutations.*

These are primarily related to cardiovascular, bone growth, vision, hearing, and circadian functions. Among them, the giraffe FGFR3 gene is an outlier with seven unique amino acid substitutions not found in any other ruminant.

Gene-edited mice with the giraffe-type FGFR1 show exceptional hypertension resistance and higher bone mineral density, both of which are tightly connected with giraffe adaptations to high stature.

Our results facilitate a deeper understanding of the molecular mechanism underpinning distinct giraffe traits, and may provide insights into the study of hypertension in humans.

Cai, L., et al (2021) **Deeply altered genome architecture in the endoparasitic flowering plant *Sapria himalayana* Griff. (Rafflesiaceae).** CURRENT BIOLOGY 31:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2020.12.045

[Angiosperms are the flowering plants. Introns are segments of a gene that do not code for proteins. Endophytes are parasitic plants that do not have their own bodies but grow completely inside their host except for their flowers.]

Authors’ abstract: *Here, we present the highly modified genome of the iconic endophytic parasite *Sapria himalayana* Griff. (Rafflesiaceae), which lacks a typical plant body.*

*First, 44% of the genes conserved in eurosids are lost in *Sapria*, dwarfing previously reported levels of gene loss in vascular plants. These losses demonstrate remarkable functional convergence with other parasitic plants, suggesting a common genetic roadmap underlying the evolution of plant parasitism.*

Second, we identified extreme disparity in intron size among retained genes. This includes a category of genes with introns longer than any so far observed in angiosperms, nearing 100 kilobases in some cases, and a second category of genes with exceptionally short or absent introns.

*Finally, at least 1.2% of the *Sapria* genome, including both genic and intergenic content, is inferred to be derived from host-to-parasite horizontal gene transfers (HGTs) and includes genes potentially adaptive for parasitism. Focused phylogenomic reconstruction of HGTs reveals a hidden history of former host-parasite associations involving close relatives of *Sapria*’s modern hosts in the grapevine family.*

[Image is from this paper and shows the flower of *Sapria himalayana*.]



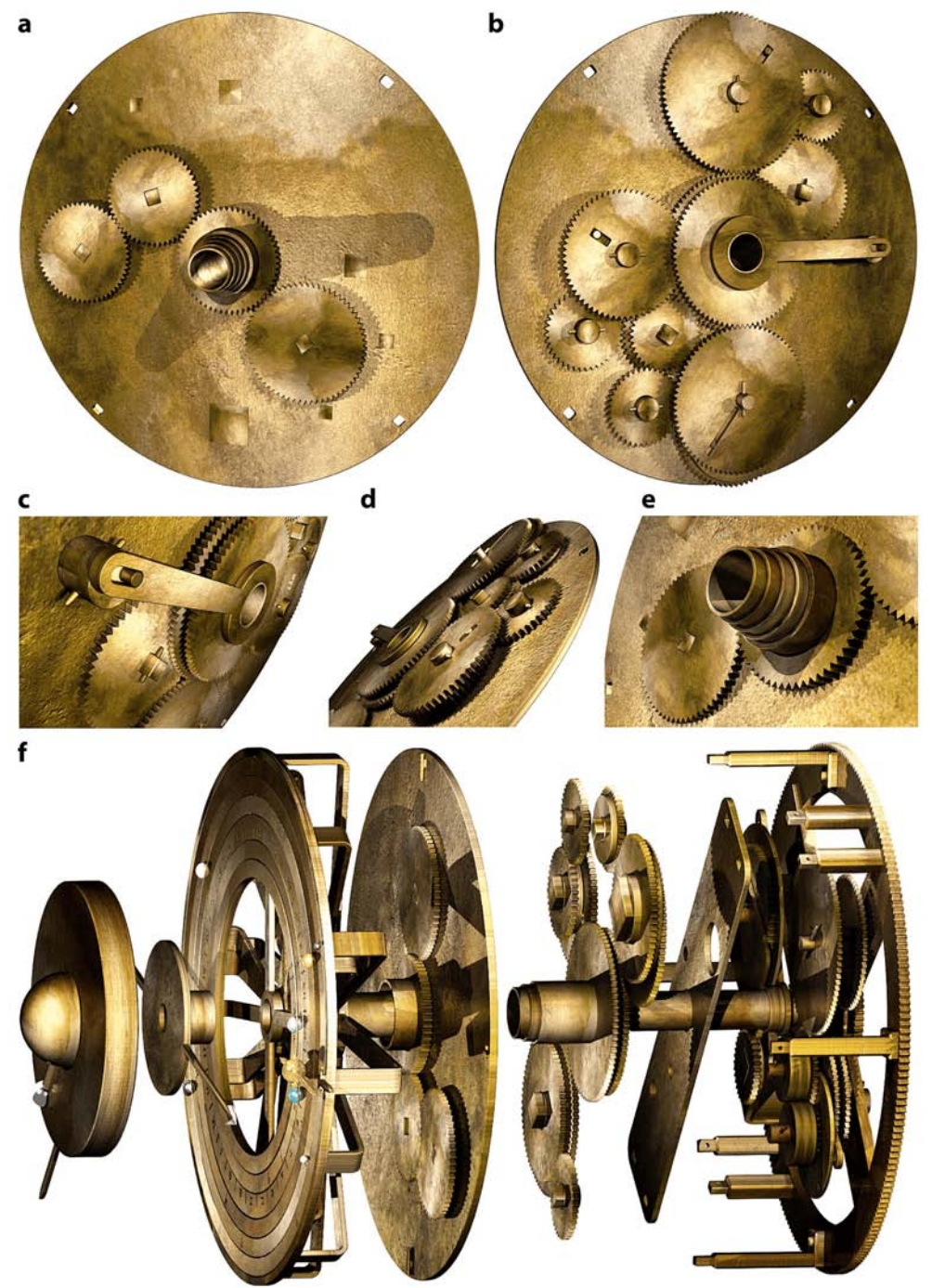
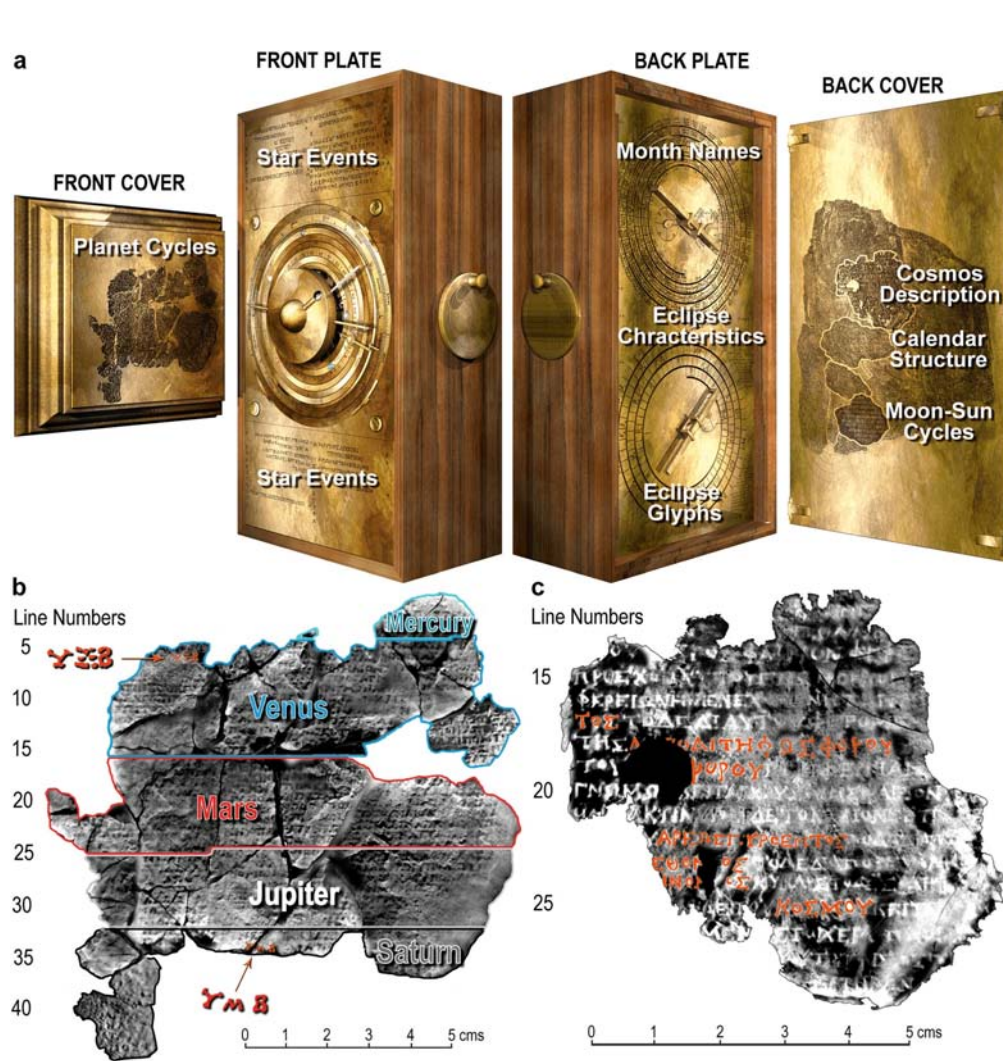
Freeth, T., et al (2021) **A model of the cosmos in the ancient Greek Antikythera mechanism.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 11:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-84310-w (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *The Antikythera Mechanism, an ancient Greek astronomical calculator, has challenged researchers since its discovery in 1901. Now split into 82 fragments, only a third of the original survives, including 30 corroded bronze gearwheels. Microfocus X-ray Computed Tomography (X-ray CT) in 2005 decoded the structure of the rear of the machine but the front remained largely unresolved.*

X-ray CT also revealed inscriptions describing the motions of the Sun, Moon and all five planets known in antiquity and how they were displayed at the front as an ancient Greek Cosmos. Inscriptions specifying complex planetary periods forced new thinking on the mechanization of this Cosmos, but no previous reconstruction has come close to matching the data.

Our discoveries lead to a new model, satisfying and explaining the evidence. Solving this complex 3D puzzle reveals a creation of genius, combining cycles from Babylonian astronomy, mathematics from Plato's Academy and ancient Greek astronomical theories.

[Images are from this paper. Many more make it well worth downloading the pdf.]



Karla, A. (2021) **Controversial chronologies: The temporal demarcation of historic events.** HISTORY AND THEORY 60:134-149 (available as a free pdf)

Author’s abstract: *In everyday language and in historiography, influential events are commonly described as “historic” but are rarely defined from a theoretical standpoint.*

Discussing temporal demarcations of events by scholars, in particular William H. Sewell Jr.’s foundational study of the Storming of the Bastille, this article considers the contemporary urge to define the event’s temporal boundaries to better evaluate the alleged importance of certain events in history.

Rather than perpetuating the constructivist idea that any event possesses a fundamentally interpretable character, it crafts a theoretical definition of the historic event that distinguishes between its flexible fringes and its rather stable core. Fixing an event as an anchor point on the timeline of history is thus presented as a process that provokes political, social, and, last but not least, financial controversies.

As this article shows with examples from the history of revolutions reaching from the late eighteenth century to the early twenty-first century, such epoch-making events are essentially shaped by their flexible beginning and ending points. Although the cores of these events remain strikingly stable, their temporal fringes become objects of highly controversial discussions.

For the French Revolution, it is questionable whether it began with the Tennis Court Oath on 17 June 1789, the opening of the Estates General in May 1789, or the Assembly of Notables in February 1787.⁵⁴

It is also debatable whether it ended with Thermidor, Brumaire, or the Bourbon Restoration. But it is hardly imaginable to describe occurrences like the Storming of the Bastille and the erection of guillotines without referring to the revolution.

Exploring another prominent example, one can similarly discuss whether World War I began with the assassination of the Habsburg successor in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, with the first cascade of the official war declarations in August 1914, or with the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911 ...

Similarly, the end of World War I can be dated to the armistice on 11 November 1918 or to different dates related to the Paris Peace Conference (including its opening on 18 January 1919 or the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles on 10 January 1920).

Li, X., et al (2021) **Passion matters but not equally everywhere: Predicting achievement from interest, enjoyment, and efficacy in 59 societies.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 118:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2016964118

Authors’ abstract: *In three large-scale data sets representing adolescents from 59 societies across the globe, we find evidence of a systematic cultural variation in the relationship between passion and achievement.*

In individualistic societies, passion better predicts achievement and explains more variance in achievement outcomes. In collectivistic societies, passion still positively predicts achievement, but it is a much less powerful predictor. There, parents’ support predicts achievement as much as passion.

One implication of these findings is that if admission officers, recruiters, and managers rely on only one model of motivation, a Western independent one, they may risk passing over and mismanaging talented students and employees who increasingly come from sociocultural contexts where a more interdependent model of motivation is common and effective.

How to identify the students and employees most likely to achieve is a challenge in every field. American academic and lay theories alike highlight the importance of passion for strong achievement.

Based on a Western independent model of motivation, passionate individuals, those who have a strong interest, demonstrate deep enjoyment, and express confidence in what they are doing, are considered future achievers. Those with less passion are thought to have less potential and are often passed over for admission or employment.

As academic institutions and corporations in the increasingly multicultural world seek to acquire talent from across the globe, can they assume that passion is an equally strong predictor of achievement across cultural contexts? We address this question with three representative samples totaling 1.2 million

students in 59 societies and provide empirical evidence of a systematic, cross-cultural variation in the importance of passion in predicting achievement.

In individualistic societies where independent models of motivation are prevalent, relative to collectivistic societies where interdependent models of motivation are more common, passion predicts a larger gain (0.32 vs. 0.21 SD) and explains more variance in achievement (37% vs. 16%).

In contrast, in collectivistic societies, parental support predicts achievement over and above passion. These findings suggest that in addition to passion, achievement may be fueled by striving to realize connectedness and meet family expectations. Findings highlight the risk of overweighting passion in admission and employment decisions and the need to understand and develop measures for the multiple sources and forms of motivation that support achievement.

Fasching, L., et al (2021) Early developmental asymmetries in cell lineage trees in living individuals. SCIENCE 371:doi.org/10.1126/science.abe0981

Authors' abstract: After fertilization, the human zygote divides into two cells. We used genomic analysis from cellular samples taken much later in development to back-calculate the cell division trees that went before.

Although the first cell division in human development looks symmetrical from the outside, the fates followed by daughter cells from each of those first two blastomeres are anything but the same.

As much as 90% of blood cells are derived from just one of the first two blastomeres. Mosaic mutations can be used to track cell lineages in humans. We used cell cloning to analyze embryonic cell lineages in two living individuals and a postmortem human specimen. Of 10 reconstructed postzygotic divisions, none resulted in balanced contributions of daughter lineages to tissues.

In both living individuals, one of two lineages from the first cleavage was dominant across tissues, with 90% frequency in blood. We propose that the efficiency of DNA repair contributes to lineage imbalance.

Allocation of lineages in postmortem brain correlated with anterior-posterior axis, associating lineage history with cell fate choices in embryos. We establish a minimally invasive framework for defining cell lineages in any living

individual, which paves the way for studying their relevance in health and disease.

Andersen, T.J., et al (2021) Flocculation of PVC microplastic and fine-grained cohesive sediment at environmentally realistic concentrations. BIOLOGICAL BULLETIN 240:42-51 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: Microplastic particles have become ubiquitous in aquatic environments and can be found in large numbers in riverine, estuarine, and marine settings at the surface of water, in suspension, and as particles deposited at the bed. The transport and settling behavior of small microplastic particles is likely very dependent on interactions with other suspended particles.

Here we show from settling tube experiments conducted in the laboratory that fragments and threads of polyvinylchloride microplastic in the size range of 63 to 125 μ m readily flocculated with fine-grained natural sediment under relative particle number concentrations that can be observed in nature in high-turbidity estuarine and coastal environments.

The implication of this flocculation is that the microplastic particles are suspended and transported incorporated in aggregates that settle faster than the individual microplastic particles. This is causing a continuous sedimentation of microplastic particles in estuarine and marine settings, resulting in increased microplastic loading for benthic life in these environments.

Basset, F.B., et al (2021) Quantum key distribution with entangled photons generated on demand by a quantum dot. SCIENCE ADVANCES 7:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abe6379 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: Quantum key distribution, exchanging a random secret key relying on a quantum mechanical resource, is the core feature of secure quantum networks. Entanglement-based protocols offer additional layers of security and scale favorably with quantum repeaters, but the stringent requirements set on the photon source have made their use situational so far.

Semiconductor-based quantum emitters are a promising solution in this scenario, ensuring on-demand generation of near-unity-fidelity entangled

photons with record-low multiphoton emission, the latter feature countering some of the best eavesdropping attacks.

Here, we use a coherently driven quantum dot to experimentally demonstrate a modified Ekert quantum key distribution protocol with two quantum channel approaches: both a 250-m-long single-mode fiber and in free space, connecting two buildings within the campus of Sapienza University in Rome.

Our field study highlights that quantum-dot entangled photon sources are ready to go beyond laboratory experiments, thus opening the way to real-life quantum communication.

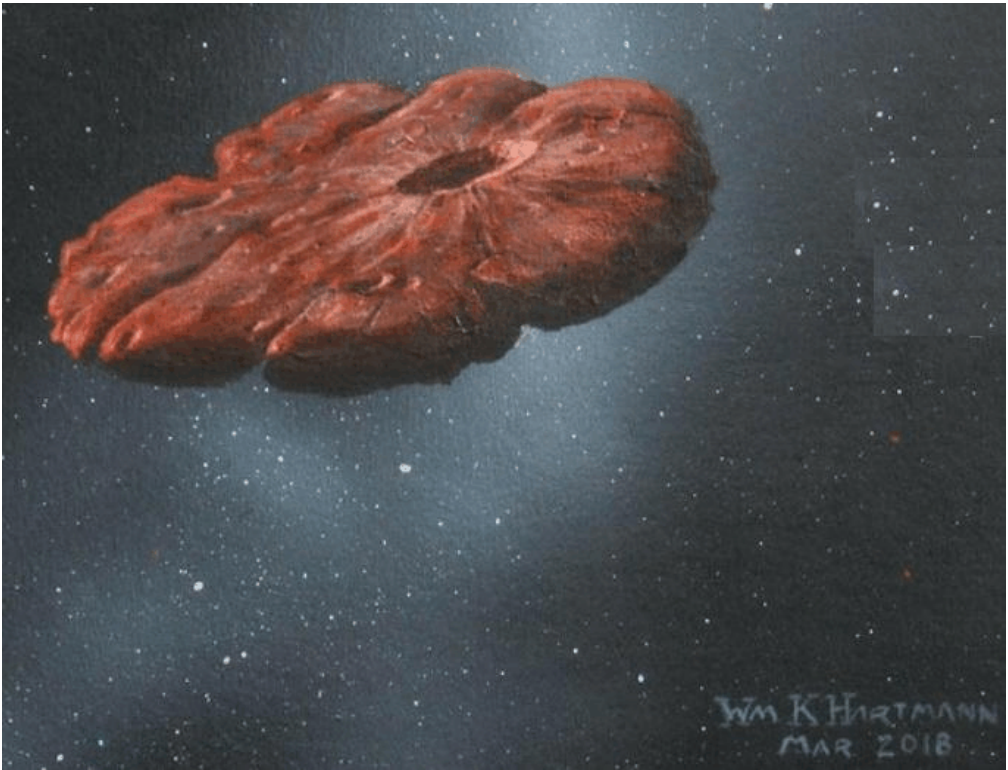
Jackson, A.P., and S.J. Desch (2021) **1I/`Oumuamua as an N₂ ice fragment 1 of an exo-Pluto 2 surface: I. Size and compositional constraints.** AMERICAN GEOPHYSICAL UNION JOURNALS Preprint:doi.org/10.1029/2020JE006706 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *1I/`Oumuamua was discovered by the Pan-STARRS telescope in October 2017, when it was only 0.22 au from Earth and briefly “brightened” to a 20th-magnitude object. Its heliocentric orbit was soon found to be hyperbolic, with eccentricity $e = 1.2$, making `Oumuamua the first definitive interstellar object discovered*

The origin of the interstellar object 1I/`Oumuamua has defied explanation. We perform calculations of the non-gravitational acceleration that would be experienced by bodies composed of a range of different ices and demonstrate that a body composed of N₂ ice would satisfy the available constraints on the non-gravitational acceleration, size and albedo, and lack of detectable emission of CO or CO₂ or dust.

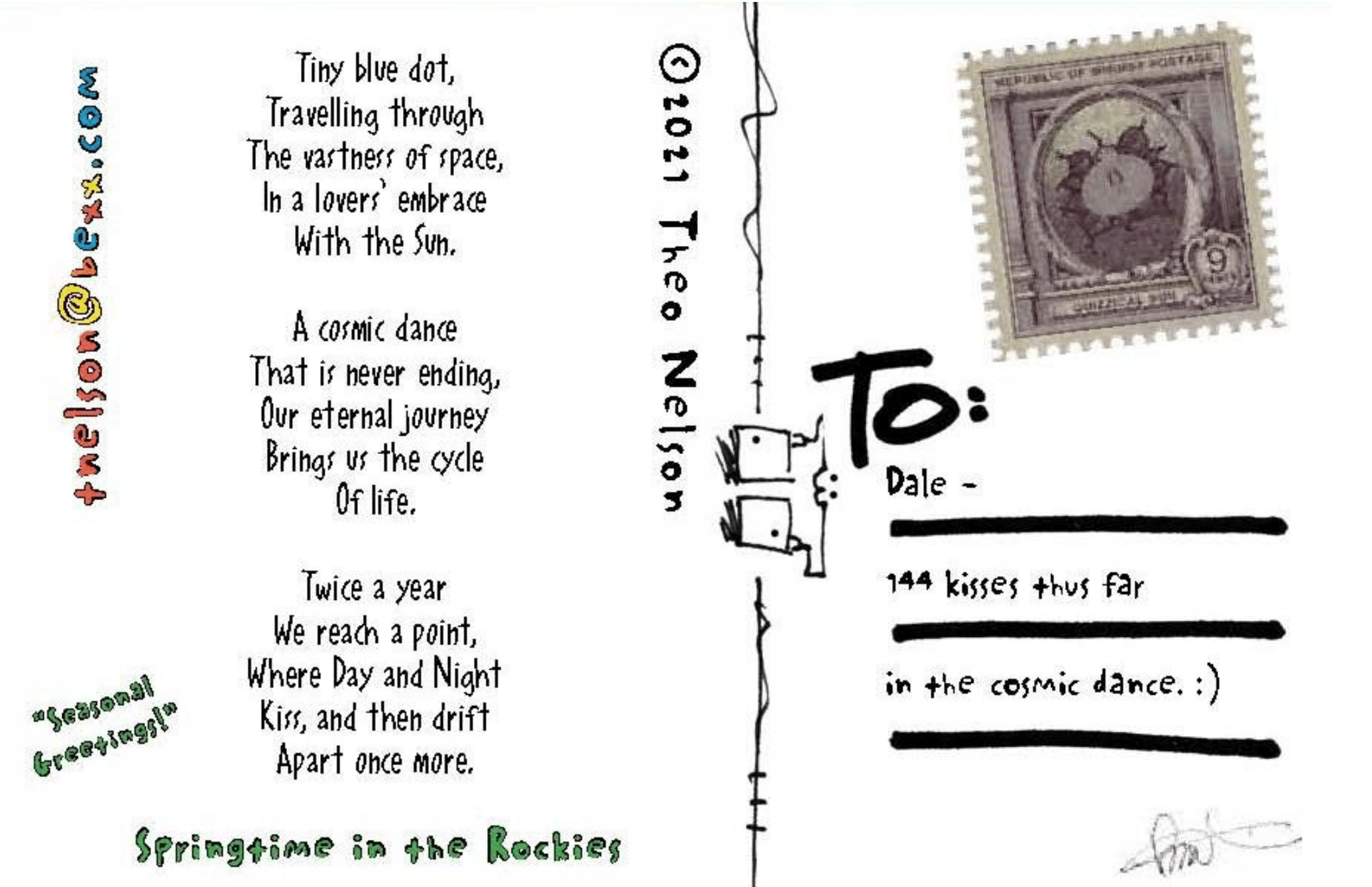
We find that `Oumuamua was small with dimensions 45 metres x 44 metres x 7.5 metres at the time of observation at 1.42 AU from the Sun, with a high albedo of 0.64. This albedo is consistent with the N₂ surfaces of bodies like Pluto and Triton.

We estimate `Oumuamua was ejected about 0.4 to 0.5 gigayears ago from a young stellar system, possibly in the Perseus arm. Objects like `Oumuamua may directly probe the surface compositions of a hitherto-unobserved type of exoplanet: “exo-plutos”.



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

[Theo sends his quarterly postcard. The view side is on the next page.]



Springtime in the Rockies

©2021 Theo Nelson



To:

Date -

144 kisses thus far

in the cosmic dance. :)

Handwritten signature

