

# OPUNTIA 517



**Lunar New Year 2022**

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

**LIFE AT CHEZ OPUNTIA**

I took the cover photo on January 17 from Signal Hill, just west of my house. The view is looking west at the Kananaskis mountains, one of the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains. A chinook was blowing, which explained the bare patches in the turf in the foreground.

Below is a cropped portion of the photo showing a close-up of the mountain skyline. The mountains are about a half-hour drive from the city.

The forested area across the middle of the photo is the Tsuu T’ina Reserve. When it was first established in the late 1800s, the reserve was 10 km from the village of Fort Calgary. Now the city has grown out and is contiguous with the reserve. The boundary line is the Elbow River, which is hidden from view in this photo but runs along the line between the forest and the suburban houses.

The mountain skyline is best viewed in winter. This is why I live in Calgary.

Meanwhile, no further than the big spruce by the front steps of Chez Opuntia, was this snowshoe hare, nesting under the tangle of branches.



**MAIL ART OF BETTY SPEIRS: PART 3**

by Dale Speirs

OPUNTIA #511 and 514 had examples of Halloween and Christmas mail art done by my mother Betty. I'm going to formalize those two installments as Parts 1 and 2 of a new series about her works.

What prompted this was that I am getting emails from philatelists who see her covers appearing in the marketplace and want to know more about her. Because I am fairly prominent in the philatelic world, and Speirs is not a common name outside Scotland (whence my father's great-grandparents came), researchers contact me.

Betty began doing mail art in a serious way from the late 1980s until her death in 2002. She belonged to the Art Cover Exchange, a small group of mail artists still in business at [www.artcoverexchange.org](http://www.artcoverexchange.org) Like an amateur press association, membership requires active participation, not just passive subscribers.

Members exchange mail art on announced themes. Those who traded with Betty are now dying off, and their mail art collections sold in estate sales. Thus her covers are reaching a wider market than during her lifetime. Enquiries from others prompted me to begin scanning all her covers in my collection, none of which were produced in editions of more than 20, and most in 5 to 10 copies.

My ultimate aim is a free pdf catalogue of her works. In the meantime, I'll use relevant batches of covers in this zine. As this issue of OPUNTIA goes to press at the beginning of the Lunar New Year celebrations in Calgary, herewith are mail art covers she did in past years.



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 THE  
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RED DEER CO  
 T4N 3P0



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Year of the Golden Dragon

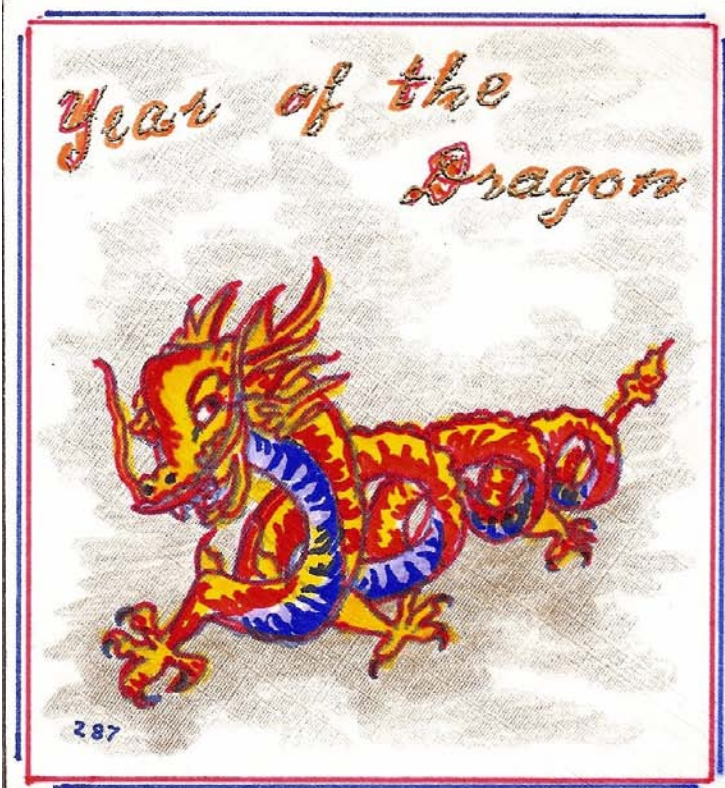


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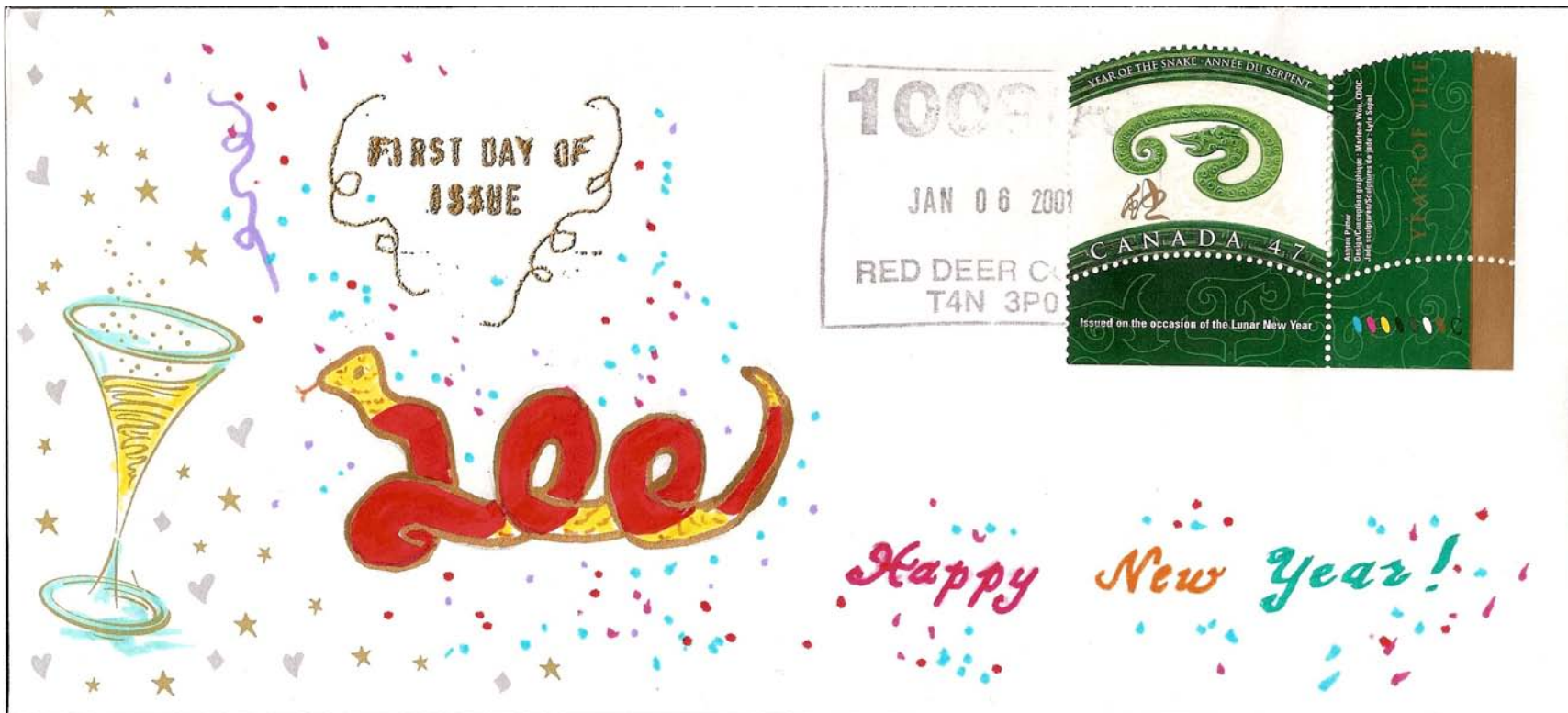
RED DEER CO-OP  
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Most of these covers are postmarked at Red Deer where she lived in her final years. She grew up in the village of Eckville where her family homesteaded.

The place is only a half-hour drive from Red Deer and she frequently visited relatives out there.





Her final Lunar New Year cover. Betty died in August that year at age 71.

Once again, Calgary’s Chinatown was forced to mute its Lunar New Year celebrations because of the pandemic. They did set up a small display of lanterns on the west side of the Chinese Cultural Centre. The building itself was closed.

At right is a wide view and below is a closeup of the lanterns in the back row. There were three docents standing by but I was the only visitor at the time. Not much time was needed to view the lanterns and take photographs.

I was there five minutes. The bus ride from and back home was a half-hour each way. Being retired, I have time to waste, but had I known then I wouldn’t have bothered. Not the Cultural Centre’s fault though. They had massive crowds before the pandemic and I’m sure will have again in future years.





**CURRENT EVENTS: PART 33**  
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 32 appeared in OPUNTIA's #474, 475, 479, 480, 483, 484, 488 to 503, and 507 to 516.]

**Philately.**

Still lots of postage stamps illustrating the COVID-19 stamp. Austria Post, innovative in so many ways, such as the toilet paper stamp to commemorate the Great Toilet Paper Panic of 2020, has issued a stamp made of mask cloth.

The face value is 2.75 euros and the stamp is valid for regular postage. Just peel off the wax paper backing and stick it on the envelope. The stamp has yarn strings. Too small to wear; it is about thumb size. My copy is enlarged below.



Above right is a set of four Zimbabwe stamps, enlarged.

Bottom right is a personalized stamp (enlarged) issued for CalVirt 2022, an online stamp show at [www.calgaryphilatelicsociety.com](http://www.calgaryphilatelicsociety.com) held January 21 to February 2. This was in lieu of our regular live stamp show.



**Statistics And Other Damned Lies.**

As of January 27, there were 2,993,211 cases of COVID-19 in Canada. This figure is low because most provincial governments stopped counting non-hospitalization cases. 33,361 people have died. 78% of the population has been vaccinated. Canada’s population is about 38,000,000.

**Seen In The COVID-19 Literature.**

Cooper, M.J., et al (2022) **Global fine-scale changes in ambient NO<sub>2</sub> during COVID-19 lockdowns.** NATURE 601:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-04229-0 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) is an important contributor to air pollution and can adversely affect human health. A decrease in NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations has been reported as a result of lockdown measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19.*

*Questions remain, however, regarding the relationship of satellite-derived atmospheric column NO<sub>2</sub> data with health-relevant ambient ground-level concentrations, and the representativeness of limited ground-based monitoring data for global assessment.*

*Here we derive spatially resolved, global ground-level NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations from NO<sub>2</sub> column densities observed by the TROPOMI satellite instrument at sufficiently fine resolution (approximately one kilometre) to allow assessment of individual cities during COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 compared to 2019.*

*We apply these estimates to quantify NO<sub>2</sub> changes in more than 200 cities, including 65 cities without available ground monitoring, largely in lower-income regions. Mean country-level population-weighted NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations are 29% ± 3% lower in countries with strict lockdown conditions than in those without.*

*Relative to long-term trends, NO<sub>2</sub> decreases during COVID-19 lockdowns exceed recent Ozone Monitoring Instrument (OMI)-derived year-to-year decreases from emission controls, comparable to 15 ± 4 years of reductions globally.*

*Our case studies indicate that the sensitivity of NO<sub>2</sub> to lockdowns varies by country and emissions sector, demonstrating the critical need for spatially resolved observational information provided by these satellite-derived surface concentration estimates.*

*Initial investigations found substantial decreases in the atmospheric NO<sub>2</sub> column from satellite observations and in ambient NO<sub>2</sub> concentrations from ground-based monitoring during lockdowns enacted to reduce the spread of COVID-19.*

*However, questions remain about the relationship of atmospheric columns with health- and policy-relevant ambient ground-level concentrations, and about the representativeness of sparse ground-based monitoring for broad assessment.*

*Thus, there is need to relate satellite observations of NO<sub>2</sub> columns to ground-level concentrations. It is also important to consider the effect of meteorology on recent NO<sub>2</sub> changes and to quantify NO<sub>2</sub> changes due to COVID-19 interventions in the context of longer-term trends.*

*Furthermore, air quality monitoring sites tend to be preferentially located in higher-income regions, raising questions about how NO<sub>2</sub> changed in lower-income regions where larger numbers of potentially susceptible people reside.*

Gandona, S., and S. Liona (2022) **Targeted vaccination and the speed of SARS-CoV-2 adaptation.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2110666119 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *The limited supply of vaccines against severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) raises the question of targeted vaccination. Many countries have opted to vaccinate older and more sensitive hosts first to minimize the disease burden.*

*However, what are the evolutionary consequences of targeted vaccination? We clarify the consequences of different vaccination strategies through the analysis of the speed of viral adaptation measured as the rate of change of the frequency of a vaccine adapted variant.*

*We show that such a variant is expected to spread faster if vaccination targets individuals who are likely to be involved in a higher number of contacts. We also discuss the pros and cons of dose-sparing strategies.*

*Because delaying the second dose increases the proportion of the population vaccinated with a single dose, this strategy can both speed up the spread of the vaccine-adapted variant and reduce the cumulative number of deaths.*

*Hence, strategies that are most effective at slowing viral adaptation may not always be epidemiologically optimal. A careful assessment of both the epidemiological and evolutionary consequences of alternative vaccination strategies is required to determine which individuals should be vaccinated first.*

*Speirs: In Canada, the policy was that elderly and others likely to die would be vaccinated first. Numerous special groups whined they should be at the top of the list, such as indigenous, immigrants, and even one guy claiming to represent obese people.*

**Asadi, S., et al (2022) Efficacy of masks and face coverings in controlling outward aerosol particle emission from expiratory activities. SCIENTIFIC REPORTS (2020) 10:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-72798-7 (available as a free pdf)**

*Authors' abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic triggered a surge in demand for face masks to protect against disease transmission. In response to shortages, many public health authorities have recommended homemade masks as acceptable alternatives to surgical masks and N95 respirators.*

*Although mask wearing is intended, in part, to protect others from exhaled, virus-containing particles, few studies have examined particle emission by mask-wearers into the surrounding air.*

*Here, we measured outward emissions of micron-scale aerosol particles by healthy humans performing various expiratory activities while wearing different types of medical-grade or homemade masks.*

*Both surgical masks and unvented KN95 respirators, even without fit-testing, reduce the outward particle emission rates by 90% and 74% on average during speaking and coughing, respectively, compared to wearing no mask,*

*corroborating their effectiveness at reducing outward emission. These masks similarly decreased the outward particle emission of a coughing superemitter, who for unclear reasons emitted up to two orders of magnitude more expiratory particles via coughing than average.*

*In contrast, shedding of non-expiratory micron-scale particulates from friable cellulosic fibers in homemade cotton-fabric masks confounded explicit determination of their efficacy at reducing expiratory particle emission.*

*Audio analysis of the speech and coughing intensity confirmed that people speak more loudly, but do not cough more loudly, when wearing a mask.*

*Further work is needed to establish the efficacy of cloth masks at blocking expiratory particles for speech and coughing at varied intensity and to assess whether virus-contaminated fabrics can generate aerosolized fomites, but the results strongly corroborate the efficacy of medical-grade masks and highlight the importance of regular washing of homemade masks.*

**Masciandaro, D., et al (2021) Pandemic recession and helicopter money: Venice, 1629-1631. FINANCIAL HISTORY REVIEW 28:doi.org/10.1017/S0968565021000214**

*Authors' abstract: We analyse the money-financed fiscal stimulus implemented in Venice during the famine and plague of 1629-31, which was equivalent to a 'net-worth helicopter money' strategy, a monetary expansion generating losses to the issuer.*

*We argue that the strategy aimed at reconciling the need to subsidize inhabitants suffering from containment policies with the desire to prevent an increase in long-term government debt, but it generated much monetary instability and had to be quickly reversed.*

*This episode highlights the redistributive implications of the design of macroeconomic policies and the role of political economy factors in determining such designs.*

Flores, A., et al (2022) **Politicians polarize and experts depolarize public support for COVID-19 management policies across countries.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2117543119 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Political polarization impeded public support for policies to reduce the spread of COVID-19, much as polarization hinders responses to other contemporary challenges.*

*Unlike previous theory and research that focused on the United States, the present research examined the effects of political elite cues and affective polarization on support for policies to manage the COVID-19 pandemic in seven countries (n = 12,955): Brazil, Israel, Italy, South Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States.*

*Across countries, cues from political elites polarized public attitudes toward COVID-19 policies. Liberal and conservative respondents supported policies proposed by ingroup politicians and parties more than the same policies from outgroup politicians and parties.*

*Respondents disliked, distrusted, and felt cold toward outgroup political elites, whereas they liked, trusted, and felt warm toward both ingroup political elites and nonpartisan experts. This affective polarization was correlated with policy support.*

*These findings imply that policies from bipartisan coalitions and nonpartisan experts would be less polarizing, enjoying broader public support. Indeed, across countries, policies from bipartisan coalitions and experts were more widely supported.*

*A follow-up experiment replicated these findings among US respondents considering international vaccine distribution policies. The polarizing effects of partisan elites and affective polarization emerged across nations that vary in cultures, ideologies, and political systems.*

*Contrary to some propositions, the United States was not exceptionally polarized. Rather, these results suggest that polarizing processes emerged simply from categorizing people into political ingroups and outgroups. Political elites drive polarization globally, but nonpartisan experts can help resolve the conflicts that arise from it.*

Lopez, S., et al (2022) **More than 50 long-term effects of COVID-19: a systematic review and meta-analysis.** SCIENTIFIC REPORTS 11:doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-95565-8 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *COVID-19 can involve persistence, sequelae, and other medical complications that last weeks to months after initial recovery. This systematic review and meta-analysis aims to identify studies assessing the long-term effects of COVID-19.*

*It was estimated that 80% of the infected patients with SARS-CoV-2 developed one or more long-term symptoms. The five most common symptoms were fatigue (58%), headache (44%), attention disorder (27%), hair loss (25%), and dyspnea [difficulty in breathing] (24%).*

Chang, K.C., et al (2022) **COVID-19 increased censorship circumvention and access to sensitive topics in China.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2102818119 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Crisis motivates people to track news closely, and this increased engagement can expose individuals to politically sensitive information unrelated to the initial crisis. We use the case of the COVID-19 outbreak in China to examine how crisis affects information seeking in countries that normally exert significant control over access to media.*

*The crisis spurred censorship circumvention and access to international news and political content on websites blocked in China. Once individuals circumvented censorship, they not only received more information about the crisis itself but also accessed unrelated information that the regime has long censored.*

*Using comparisons to democratic and other authoritarian countries also affected by early outbreaks, the findings suggest that people blocked from accessing information most of the time might disproportionately and collectively access that long-hidden information during a crisis.*

*Evaluations resulting from this access, negative or positive for a government, might draw on both current events and censored history.*

## CONVENTIONAL PANDEMIC NEWS

### When Words Collide.

Calgary's annual readercon is When Words Collide, held every August. The convention committee had hoped for a live event this year. Alas, the pandemic showed no signs of abating when the go/no go decision was required in January. The following announcement was posted at [www.whenwordscollide.org](http://www.whenwordscollide.org)

*Last August, festival organizers decided to wait six months before deciding on the form and scope of our 2022 festival. It was our hope that health policy, including vaccinations, would reduce the severity of the pandemic and that we would be able to resume our in-person festival.*

*Unfortunately, with the rise of COVID variants such as Delta and Omicron, hospitalization rates remain high and government restrictions remain in place. There is still no clear picture of what August 2022 will look like.*

*Therefore, we cannot commit to a resumption of our in-person festival. We do, however, recognize that people are suffering Zoom fatigue and online events are not as popular as they were near the beginning of the pandemic.*

*With that in mind, we have decided to host a smaller scale online festival on August 12 to 14, 2022. The 2022 festival will offer one scheduled weekend track of programming that includes appearances by our festival guests: Terry Brooks, Edward Willett, Susanna Kearsley, and Hank Phillippi Ryan.*

*It will also include the Thursday night readings, Friday night Keynotes, and Saturday night 2022 Aurora Awards. In addition to our scheduled track of programming, we are inviting our affiliates to host additional concurrent programming.*

*The 2022 online festival, like the previous two, will be free to attend. Like 2021, we will require registration via Eventbrite, which should begin in the April time frame.*

*For those who have prepaid for either the 2020 or 2021 cancelled in-person festivals, passes and banquet tickets will again be rolled forward to 2023.*

For reports on previous WWCs, see OPUNTIA's #71, 253, 266, 282, 318, 350, 387, 421, 452, 481, and 507. The last two were online events, and it is my fervent hope that 2022 will be the final such remote convention.

### Corflu Pangloss.

A group of Americans (and one Brit) were planning a relaxicon in Vancouver this spring, but the realities of the pandemic caught up with them. They issued a press release (extracts below) on January 20 at the website [www.corflu.org](http://www.corflu.org)

*The Corflu Pangloss committee have concluded that current circumstances make our original March dates unfeasible. The Omicron variant of Covid-19 has made travel much more uncertain (the US Centers for Disease Control currently warns US residents against traveling to Canada). We hope that moving the convention later in the year will reduce or eliminate the uncertainties and perhaps more fans can attend.*

*Also, several critical committee members have new medical issues that make it difficult for them to work on the convention in the coming crucial weeks, and could prevent them from working onsite or even attending. We hope that with a delay we will be able to see them attend and participate as planned. We therefore announce new dates for Pangloss: October 21 to 23, 2022*

*The Sands Hotel has moved our function space and hospitality suite reservations to October. .... With the move to October we were able to retain our original hotel rates.*

*The deadline for Fanzine Activity Achievement Awards voting remains the same (February 25) and the awards will be announced via Zoom on Sunday, March 20, as they would have been on our original schedule. The Zoom will also include a presentation for the 2023 Corflu bid. Membership rates also will remain the same for the foreseeable future.*

*We live in parlous times. There is great confusion under heaven, and the conditions are excellent. Which is to say, thanks to border closures, travel restrictions, economic wobbles, and ongoing pandemic uncertainty, much of what we can tell you about Corflu 39 is aspirational, provisional, or pending better data with the unfolding of future events. But we step out in hope, and choose to be optimistic that all our Corflu wishes will come true.*

## **SERIES DETECTIVES: PART 14**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 13 appeared in OPUNTIA's #402, 406, 425, 448, 459, 467, 472, 477, 485, 491, 497, 500, and 509.]

The old-time radio series mentioned here are available as free mp3 downloads from the Old Time Radio Researchers at [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)

### **Danfield.**

DANGER DR DANFIELD aired on radio during the 1946-47 season. He was an unlicensed private investigator and psychologist. Quite arrogant, abusive, and a terrible know-it-all. The series was written by Ralph Wilkinson.

“Death Paints A Picture” aired on 1946-10-20. The episode opened with an artist telling someone his paintings were not for sale. *“And another thing, that gun of yours doesn’t frighten me one bit.”* BANG! BANG! And to think that creationists don’t believe in natural selection.

Flashback to Dr Daniel Danfield and his secretary Rusty Fairfax motoring in Death Valley. She wondered why anyone would live there. Danfield replied that the denizens had done wrong, been wronged, or were anti-social. A good way to insult any radio listeners there, granted that only about 300 people live in the valley.

Fairfax said the place gave her the shivers. They stopped at a motel run by Boris Bedlow. He said he was very fond of doctors because they came in handy when people died. Somewhere nearby in the desert, a coyote howled.

A dust storm arrived shortly after they did. Bedlow said he was very fond of dust storms because they left behind dead things. Suddenly Danfield was normal by comparison.

Dinner was served. The other guests were introduced: Harvey Pierce and his wife Tru, Kenneth Wakefield, Jerry and Ethelstine Meade.

Danfield remarked pleasantly to Pierce that he liked Remington, to which Pierce said *“Bah! A mud dauber! I am the greatest landscape artist who ever lived!”* Pierce’s latest masterpiece was a portrait of a dead cow at a dry waterhole.

Wakefield was an art buyer, but Pierce refused to sell any of his paintings and said so to the table. Meade was a wolf who immediately hit on Fairfax notwithstanding that his wife was sitting beside him. He was a prospector, for gold as well as women.

Having introduced the table, Bedlow began carving the lamb, saying that he had killed it that morning. Fresh food is always best, is it not? After the meal, Danfield was watching the sandstorm when Tru came up to him and unburdened herself. She told him she had married her husband for money and hated him. Fairfax arrived as Danfield was comforting her in his arms. There was a nasty scene.

Fairfax got into a second contretemps when she said out loud that Harvey’s paintings were horrible. He overheard and did not take kindly to her remark. On her way out, she also got in a cutting remark to Bedlow about his obsession with death. Quite the diplomat, that woman.

Later that night, a scream rent the air after Tru discovered her husband’s body in his gallery. *“He’s been murdered!”*, said Danfield, stating the obvious. Outside the window a coyote howled. Well it would, wouldn’t it?

The dead cow portrait had been stolen. The next morning, Danfield began investigating. Meade was in a nearby cabin and was the obvious suspect. Fairfax found the murder gun.

Danfield held a J’accuse! meeting in the motel. Meade was accused and tripped up by his own words. A telephone call to the sheriff, and away Danfield and Fairfax motored. As they drove off, he explained all the loose ends to her. A coyote howled in the distance. No, seriously, it did.

“\$100,000 Life Insurance Claim” aired on 1946-12-08. The episode opened on a farm near Benton, upstate New York. Two labourers digging an irrigation ditch to an apple orchard found a body, identified as Howard Holbrook. He had been missing for weeks but not anymore. The remains were too decayed to determine cause of death.

A year later, an insurance adjuster named Fullet consulted Dr Daniel Danfield. Howard’s wife Elsie had been visiting her sister when Howard disappeared, although she was only an hour’s drive away and could have driven to the farm undetected.

Howard was a former bank president who had just been released on parole after serving hard time for embezzlement. He had \$100,000 life insurance. While in prison, Howard had made an enemy of fellow convict Guy Emerson, who was released on parole two days after Howard. Fuller believed Elsie murdered him and wanted Danfield to investigate.

Pause to recapitulate the premise of the series, not just the episode. Danfield was a psychologist, not a licenced investigator or adjuster. No reputable insurance company would hire an unlicenced freelancer.

In any event, this company did. Danfield and Rusty Fairfax took the train to Chicago to talk to Howard's cousin Charles, who had seen him just after his release. During the train trip, Danfield told Fairfax he was working pro bono. That might explain why the insurance company hired him. Not only was he working for free but because he was doing so, the question of licencing was moot.

Charles said he had seen Howard just after his release. Danfield and Fairfax returned home. A wasted trip. One wonders why Danfield didn't just make a long-distance telephone call. And so to Benton, where Danfield could antagonize Elsie.

Surprisingly he ultimately managed to get on her good side after promising to prove her innocent. Elsie was selling off possessions on the farm to survive. Danfield examined the irrigation ditch and found it took an unusual route if it were to irrigate the orchard.

Danfield and Fairfax walked back to the house. En route there was a noisy owl somewhere nearby. Fairfax suddenly screamed when someone attacked her in the dark. The assailant disappeared unseen. Moments later a shot was fired in the distance.

All in a day's work. They stayed overnight at the farm. Danfield slept peacefully but Fairfax was a nervous wreck. Up the next morning at sunrise.

Even before breakfast they were prowling the barn. Nothing there but a very large net, like a butterfly net but stronger netting. Danfield and Fairfax discussed it for a couple of minutes. Listeners familiar with the principle of Chekhov's gun would immediately be on the alert.

Out in the fields they met a neighbour farmer Jason Dunstan. He said he didn't know Howard and had bought his farm recently. He had a noticeable scar on his head. They conversed pleasantly, then Dunstan walked back across the field.

Fuller arrived and Danfield shocked him by saying Howard hadn't been murdered. They went into the house and Danfield consulted an encyclopedia under the letter O. Fairfax had been attacked by an owl. So had Dunstan, and the scar looked a year old.

After an infodump on aggressive defense of a nest by owls, Dunstan and Elsie walked in, bearing guns. Unfazed, Danfield launched an explanation of how the murder was done. The body was Emerson. Dunstan was Howard. The police arrived in the nick of time.

Pay close attention now. The Holbrooks had caught the owl with the net in the barn. (Bang! went Chekhov's gun.) During the process, Howard was clawed in the face, hence his scar. After subduing the bird, they smeared curare on the owl's claws, lured Emerson to the orchard, and let the owl attack him. The curare killed him.

That mysterious gunshot the night before was Howard disposing of the owl because it might be a clue. One wonders about the fledglings in her nest, who would starve to death once their mother was gone.

Needless to say, the insurance claim was denied. Danfield suddenly changed his mind about working pro bono and took a \$10,000 commission for solving the case.

### **Gregory Hood.**

THE CASEBOOK OF GREGORY HOOD was a radio series that aired from 1946 to 1949. It began as a summer replacement for the Sherlock Holmes series but carried on longer than expected after the Holmes series changed networks that autumn. The episodes were written by Denis Green and Anthony Boucher.

The series was set in San Francisco, where Gregory Hood operated an import business and did amateur sleuthing on the side. His sidekick Sanderson Taylor was a lawyer and a respectable family man.

The part of Hood was played by Gale Gordon. He later became a character actor specializing in pompous blowhards, particularly with Lucille Ball in her many radio and television series.

The first episode of the series was “The Three Silver Pesos”, aired on 1946-06-03. The sponsor was Petri Wines, who plugged their two varieties of sherry in the opening commercial. The plot began at a cocktail party where Hood, knowing which side his bread was buttered on, was serving sherry to his guests. (Pardon the mixed metaphor.)

Hood and Taylor began reminiscing about their latest caper. That case began as they motored across the Bay Bridge. Another car swerved in front of them and blocked them. The driver got out and staggered to the railing but fell dead before he could get there.

They checked the dead man. He was subsequently identified as Harrison Travers of Los Angeles. Besides a wallet with his identification, his pockets contained three silver pesos, a hotel key, and a vial of cyanide. He had been fatally stabbed.

A traffic cop on a motorcycle stopped. He said he would take Travers’ car to the police station, then disappeared from the episode. Note that well, for no genuine police officer would leave the scene of a murder or let two passersby claim the body.

After showing the dead man to a doctor on the far side of the bridge, Hood and Taylor loaded the corpse into their car and headed back in to San Francisco. Their rationale was that the murder happened on the San Francisco side of the bridge, so they might as well dump the body at an SFPD station.

On the return trip they stopped for a female hitchhiker named Penny. She didn’t seemed fazed by the body in the back seat. More than that, she hijacked the car and left the two men on the bridge. Police Inspector Magruder had difficulty believing their story.

The hotel key was a dead end, so they went to a numismatic dealer to check the coins. The pesos were hollow and contained white powder. Hood telephoned Magruder but was one-upped when told that his car had been found with Penny’s body in it but no sign of the original corpse.

After a commercial for Petri burgundy wine, a pleasant way to relax, the episode resumed with Hood very unrelaxed. The police booked him on suspicion. After making bail, and hiring a cab because the car was held as evidence, Hood and Taylor went down to Fisherman’s Wharf.

Hood knew a movie company was working there. The only place a traffic cop costume could be obtained on short notice would be on site, which meant the faker was an actor. The assistant director said Fred Dunn, playing the part of a motorcycle cop in the movie, hadn’t been seen all day.

Once more to the hotel. Remember that key on Travers’ body? Well, this time Hood had better results. They found two corpses, Travers and Dunn. The latter had killed Penny and stolen the corpse for disposal elsewhere.

While plotting his next action, he took thirsty and drank cyanide-laced whiskey that Travers had left behind. In other words, the dead man killed his murderer. Once all the details were explained, Hood relaxed over a glass of Petri wine.

### **Nick Carter.**

This 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. Some of the pulp magazines are available on [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org). I pick a couple at random.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY was a short novel in magazine form, with some house ads from the publisher Street and Smith. The 1897-09-11 issue contained a story with a rather underplayed title, “Nick Carter Does His Best”. Sort of like a Hollywood movie being titled “Rambo Gets His Hair Mussed”.

In any event, the case began with a banker James Jackman worried about the sudden disappearance of his cashier Frank Wilson. The police and Carter suggested the obvious reason and asked Jackman to audit the cash. The banker was miffed and refused to believe the fair-haired Wilson would abscond with other people’s money. Nonetheless he agreed to have the books inspected.

To no one’s surprise but Jackman, the audit revealed that \$70,000 in cash and bearer bonds were missing from the vault. Call it \$7 million in today’s currency. Wilson could not have done it by himself but had a gang inside and outside the bank. The chase was on.

Carter was slugged unconscious during his investigations, demonstrating that this tradition and cliché of detective stories goes way back. Mostly he worked alone, since he was the star and not about to share the glory.

One of the villains liked to tie up victims in a sealed room and then turn on the gas. Carter got to know that smell quite well. The gang was rounded up in due course and the money recovered. Carter got a substantial reward.



NICK CARTER STORIES was a later variation of the magazine. It contained a few non-Carter stories in addition to the main Carter novella. There were factoid space fillers and a few strange-but-true items.

The issue dated 1914-12-26 contained the story “An Uncanny Revenge”. There was a mad scientist Dr Hiram Grantley on the loose. He escaped from Sing Sing, where he had been sent for medical malpractice. He liked to experiment on his patients during surgery without their permission.

Grantley had a long list of enemies, real or imagined, and was seeking revenge. He was a world-class mesmerist who used that skill to victimize his targets. Mad scientist stories were a dime a dozen even then, so the ante was upped by bringing in three more to assist Grantley in his nefariousness. With four mad scientists on the loose, the bwah-ha!-ha!-ing was deafening. Nick Carter had his work cut out for him.

Carter had the usual alarms and chasing people from pillar to post. The case ended well when he and Grantley struggled over a revolver and the latter got a bullet between the eyes. The other three culprits were sent up the river.

NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE aired on old-time radio from 1943 to 1955. Episodes are available as free mp3s from [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary). In this incarnation, he 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.

I suspect the radio series was why Nick Carter faded away. The stories are not entirely extinct, but his know-it-all attitude on radio would have grated on not a few nerves and made him a harsher version of Sherlock Holmes.

“The Funeral Wreath” was written by Jock MacGregor and aired on 1944-10-29. Police Lieutenant Riley, with a stage Irish accent thick enough to slice, had been made the fool once again, begorrah. While on the lookout for a jewel thief and house burglar of unknown description, he was duped by the culprit, who posed as a mortician.

This time, the thief had killed the robbery victim. The thief left behind a funeral wreath. Riley asked Nick Carter and Patsy Bowen to help him find the murderer. They took the wreath to various florists and undertakers, and eventually tracked down its source, and thereby the thief.

Many dramatic music segues, which distracted attention from the plodding storyline. Granted that real-life criminal investigations are exactly that type, little happened until Carter tracked the thief to his apartment.

Carter then harangued the guilty man with a monologue explaining the details. Shots were fired, Riley arrived in the nick of time, and so to the final commercial.

“Four Rings Of Death” was written by Jock MacGregor and aired on 1945-02-25. This was a treasure hunt on a small island off Long Island. Four Tories had hidden their wealth on the island (or as we call them in Canada, Loyalists, since ‘Tory’ here means a member of the Conservative party).

They feared that the revolutionaries would loot them if George Washington managed to take Manhattan. On the trip back to Manhattan they ran into a storm and were drowned. They did leave coded messages as to where the treasure was.

The descendants asked Nick Carter to help find the treasure. He brought along Patsy Bowen so he could explain the plot to her and the listeners at intervals. Setting foot on the island, they immediately got into a gunfight and found a dead man, one of the heirs. Each of the four heirs had a napkin ring that served as part of the clues. Carter picked up the dead man’s ring.

Carter went to the caretaker’s cabin to make enquiries. He was slugged unconscious but the assailant missed the ring. Back at the house, he met with the other heirs. The island was now owned by a fishing company who gave them permission to search. One wonders who legally owned the treasure.

As one heir mentioned, the island was basically a big rock, which explained why it hadn’t been dug over by treasure hunters in the past 150 years. The treasure was therefore hidden, not buried. It was a dark and stormy night, if I may coin a phrase. Many alarms and excursions hither and yon.

The death toll climbed. The murderer kept missing the rings. While he was out and about, everyone else, the survivors that is, gathered in the house to examine the four rings. Each ring had an inscription and notches on the edges to line them up. From there, Carter decoded the message, a cipher based on a book.

Another burst of deaths, and Bowen had her turn at being slugged unconscious. This was unusual in old-time radio shows. The rings were stolen but Carter had made notes. The book, it was finally revealed, was HAMLET. The cipher referred to the line: “*Upon the platform, twixt eleven and twelve.*”

The last five minutes were an exposition by Carter about who did what to whom. They found the treasure on the house’s widow walk, counting the floor tiles to #12. All very simple. About five dead, but I may have lost count.

### **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. He 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*”.

“The Long Way Home” was written by Louis Vittes and aired on 1952-07-08. The client was a woman Mona Walsh fearing her estranged husband Ted, a murderer on the run. He had killed a guard during a \$60,000 bank robbery.

She asked Barrie Craig to escort her home and act as a bodyguard. Craig was suspicious of her and dropped the case. She hired a replacement but Craig kept snooping around. He found Ted’s partner in the heist, a man named Harold, but had no further reason to proceed.

The sticking point was how Ted would know where Mona was unless she told him. Craig figured it was a set-up so she could have Ted shot dead by a bodyguard. The replacement was a henchman working for Harold. He was the first to die.

Mona did not long survive him. Craig drove back to see Harold. As he arrived, he saw a car leaving, rammed it, and rendered the driver unconscious. Ted's body was in the back seat. Entering Harold's house, Craig accused him of all the murders, then took him at gunpoint to the police. A rather abrupt ending, but since everyone else was dead there wasn't much point carrying on.

What wasn't mentioned and which I would like to know, was how Craig explained the damage to his car to his insurance company. That must have affected his renewal premiums.

"Nobody Lives There Anymore" aired on 1955-02-09, and was written by Louis Vittes. Ben Moran had intercepted an armoured car and disappeared with the loot, as well he might. His girlfriend Penny Lane (nevermind the Beatle's reference; this was a decade prior) was questioned by police.

Barrie Craig was in a diner when a woman named Myra Wilson came in and promptly collapsed. She and her husband Jim were visiting from out of town and stayed at the Hotel Meeker. She stepped out to do some errands. When she returned, their suite was empty and the clerk denied anyone had stayed there.

Craig took her back to the hotel. The clerk Farley was adamant to the point of pulling a gun on Craig. The hotel manager Mr Roberts intervened and took them up to Room 312 so they could see it themselves. Her description of the room before entering did not match the actuality. Craig apologized and they left.

Outside the hotel, he remembered the famous story about the woman in Paris in the 1890s who had a similar experience. Her husband had died of the plague while she was away and the hotel covered it up for fear of losing customers by denying the couple had ever lodged there.

(This story has been dated back to the 1910s and appeared many times in different variations as literary fiction, movies, and supposed "true fact" television shows.)

As Craig noted, New York City didn't have plagues anymore. Craig went back to the hotel, where Farley grudgingly let him have Room 312. Craig began tearing off the wallpaper and discovered the room had been freshly redecorated. Wilson's description was correct.

Craig then lurked outside and followed Farley to a brownstone. As Farley opened the door, someone within shot him dead. There being nothing more to do for the poor soul, Craig went to Roberts' house and found him entertaining none other than Penny Lane.

*"What do you hear from Ben Moran?"*, Craig asked her. *"You mustn't believe everything you read in the newspapers"*, she coolly replied. Craig and Roberts exchanged nasty remarks. Roberts began unloading all the blame on Farley and was obviously maneuvering to protect himself.

Lane hitched a ride home with Craig. She was evasive and manipulative as they conversed in the car. More to-ing and fro-ing across town. Many of the principals, including Craig, wound up at a remote house in the wilds of New Jersey. Shots were fired and Ben Moran departed this life without a speaking part.

Myra Wilson said the deceased was her husband Jim. He had been leading a double life. More running about town. Craig met up with Roberts and accused him of acting in cahoots with Moran/Wilson.

A semi-J'accuse! meeting pointed at several suspects before settling on Myra as the murderer of the two men. Craig spent the last four minutes of the epilogue tying off the loose threads. He lamented that he hadn't been paid a fee for the case. Just then Penny Lane arrived and offered payment in kind.

"Visitor At Midnight" was written by Louis Vittes and aired on 1955-05-12. A man entered Barrie Craig's bedroom and woke him. Pointing a gun at him, he said he was a novelist writing a book about an unsolvable crime. He wanted Craig's professional advice to help commit a murder.

At this point, I recognized the plot. Vittes had re-used a script he had written for THE SAINT. "Author Of Murder" had aired in 1950. I reviewed it in OPUNTIA #425, page 12. Vittes hadn't necessarily done anything wrong.

Remember that in those days there were no cheap home recording devices, and listeners only heard an episode once. Even the networks didn't like to record transcriptions because of the cost. A radio play was considered the same as a stage play. Five or ten years after the first airing, many writers re-used their scripts.

## **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.

"Blackie Kidnapped" aired on 1945-11-22. The title pretty much summed up the plot. Boston Blackie was kidnapped and immediately gagged. Undoubtedly the crooks knew of his penchant for constantly making quips. The criminals were seeking bank loot from a robbery a year ago and apparently figured Blackie could help.

At the behest of the kidnappers, Blackie left a note for his friends. The note was grammatically incorrect and a tip-off to Mary Wesley. Wesley and Blackie's sidekick Shortie the taxi driver figured out the clue.

A moll who knew where the money was murdered in her jail cell. Inspector Farraday couldn't blame Blackie for that but tried to do so anyway. The listener will wonder how he ever got promoted from foot patrol.

Blackie told the kidnappers where the money was, at the bottom of a well in a farm. They retrieved the cash and then tossed him into the well. Since Blackie was booked for the series, he survived and the gangsters were rounded up.

Blackie spent the episode making incoherent mumbles. The listener may suspect that the actor playing Blackie was off sick. In the climax, he spoke in a hoarse whisper, blaming exposure for his voice.

"Photographer Clyde Winston Murdered" aired on 1948-04-07. The deceased was blown away by a shotgun but no one saw the murderer. The episode was a locked room mystery.

Winston's only visitor was fashion model Evelyn Anderson, who worked for the Harry Conover Agency. A sawed-off shotgun, recently discharged and later confirmed as the murder weapon, was found in the car of her boyfriend Bill Jackson. That was enough for Inspector Farraday and the police.

The scene jumped to the real murderers, Gus and Mabel. They gloated about the deed. Mabel was the cleaning lady who smuggled the gun inside the studio for Gus to use later. Gus resented Winston for stealing a photographic invention he had neglected to patent.

Gus had seen Anderson entering the studio. He waited until just after she left before blowing away Winston, who, by the way, never had a speaking part. He then stowed the murder weapon in Jackson's car.

Boston Blackie kept barging into Gus and Mabel's business. He figured out how they staged the murder and confronted them in their apartment. Mabel got out her shotgun but Blackie had taken the precaution of unloading it before they arrived.

The listener will have surmised as much since Blackie continued to chat conversationally and, of course, was booked for the series. Not a suspenseful ending so the rest was just details.

**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.

“The Box Of Death” was written by Alonzo Deen Cole and aired on 1947-04-17. A crate left on the sidewalk proved to contain the body of Fred Lister. Casey and Ann Williams were on the case. Oh yes, the police as well, but as per usual they followed in the footsteps of the dynamic duo.

Lister was a small-time crook who worked as an errand boy for gangster Lucky Carson. He had wooed and married Carson’s girlfriend Ella. The police dragnet picked up Carson, his lawyer Webster, and three of his henchmen. Since there was no evidence to hold them, they had to be released.

Casey noticed Carson had an old penny on a watch chain for a good luck piece. Casey tracked down Ella and made plans with her to exact revenge upon Carson. While they plotted, the announcer spoke on behalf of the sponsor, the Anchor Hocking glassworks. He explained the joys and benefits of Fire King ovenware, all at incredibly low prices.

From the oven to Carson’s lair, equally hot, where he admitted Ella to his imperial presence. She buttered him up and made a date for after the funeral. After she left, he suddenly noticed his good luck penny was gone.

He went berserk. Ella had obviously clipped the penny. Dashing out the room after her, he tripped, fell, and knocked himself unconscious. His underlings noted the coincidence and noted it well.

At the Blue Note café, Casey showed the penny to Ethelbert the bartender, who made an offer for it which was accepted. Leaving the tavern, Casey and Williams were kidnapped by the Carson gang. Both were slugged unconscious (rare for a heroine) and taken for a ride into the country.

Carson wanted the penny. Casey used psychology against the gang by emphasizing Carson’s bad luck. Webster shot Carson, but the duo still weren’t safe. He was going to kill them since they were witnesses, but one of the other gangsters had leadership ambitions as well, and fired first at Webster.

More shots were fired and the gang was rapidly thinned out. The announcer broke in to warn the audience that to be safe, they should only buy food packed in glass containers made by Anchor Hocking.

A return to the Blue Note café, where Casey smugly tied up the loose threads. The smile was wiped off his face when Ethelbert said a lottery ticket had won him a \$25 silk top hat, thanks to the lucky penny.

“The Chivalrous Gunman” was written by Alonzo Deen Cole and aired on 1947-08-14. Safecrackers Gus and Ed were preparing to blow a safe at a financial company, assisted by a renegade employee Riker. They were relying on nearby subway construction to cover the noise of their blast.

Leaving the crime scene, they were seen by an office worker Frances Birch staying late on the job. Ed grabbed her. She recognized Riker and called out to him, so they couldn’t just let her be. Ed hauled her into a park but left her there unharmed. He was too chivalrous to kill a woman.

What he didn’t know was that Gus and Riker had followed him just to be sure. Gus pulled his gun but Ed was faster. Since a murderer can only be hanged once, Ed also killed Riker. As the last shot reverberated, the announcer leaped in with a pitch for Anchor Hocking glass, reminding listeners to buy beer and ale only in glass containers to ensure they were getting the true taste.

But wait! There’s more! Anchor Hocking had just introduced a revolutionary new type of bottle, the one-way, no-deposit bottle. Yes, it was no longer necessary to return the bottles to get the deposit back. Demand your beverages in convenient and cheaper disposable bottles. Enjoy your drink and then toss the bottle in the garbage can.

Riker lived long enough to tell his story to police. Unfortunately his description of Ed fit half the men in the city and he didn’t know Ed’s surname, assuming the name Ed wasn’t an alias. The hunt was on for Birch, but she wouldn’t cooperate, so she was taken in as a material witness.

Jump cut to the Blue Note tavern, where a jazz piano tinkled in the background. Casey and Ann Williams ordered a bottle of beer each from Ethelbert, and yes, they specifically said ‘bottle’. The conversation was about the chivalrous gunman, played up big by the newspapers.

Casey was suspicious as to why a gunman would have let her go. Birch’s background was investigated by both police and reporters, but no one could find anything in her background that would connect her to Ed. At the police station, Birch was paraded before various suspects.

For one of them, the reaction between them was suppressed too much, enough to make police and news reporters suspicious. They knew they had Ed, by any name he used. Casey suggested making Birch jealous enough to betray Ed.

Williams asked him how he knew so much about how women behave. Casey said he read about them in books, leaving Williams sputtering. The listener will have already guessed that a honey pot would be used to romance Ed. From there, Birch would blab in a jealous rage. And so she did.

The denouement at the Blue Note tied up some significant loose ends. The pianist was still tinkling the same tune in the background. Everyone had a bottle of beer.

### **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.

“Fortune In Furs” aired on 1945-12-20. Richard Rogue was approached by George Grant, who said he could prove a warehouse fire that destroyed \$160,000 in furs was arson. Grant demanded \$1,000 cash in advance for the squeal.

Rogue told him to come back in an hour. After he left, Rogue telephoned the insurance company and made a deal for a \$10,000 reward, with \$1,000 in cash to be forwarded by special messenger. Even as Rogue was talking with the insurance adjuster, gunshots were heard outside.

Grant’s speaking part was terminated and he would henceforth be spoken of in the past tense. Leaving the police to clean up the mess, Rogue went to the Grant residence. He found Grant’s daughter, who told him her father had been warehouse manager for the Matthews Fur Company.

She said her father had fallen under the spell of Bernice Maxwell, a woman of easy virtue. That made Rogue’s next stop obvious. There were alarms and contretemps along the way. At Maxwell’s house Rogue was slugged unconscious but surprisingly did not visit Eugor. The body count increased as the arsonist tried to cover up his tracks.

Maxwell blubbered a lot but eventually agreed to turn state’s evidence to escape the electric chair. That led everyone to the mansion of Paul Matthews, who had perpetuated the insurance fraud. Before the fire had been ignited, Matthews had removed the minks and sables and replaced them with cheap furs.

Justice had been done. Eugor suddenly made a surprise appearance, and promised Rogue they’ll meet again some sunny episode. He then wished Rogue a merry Christmas. (Note the air date of this episode.)

### **Richard Diamond.**

RICHARD DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE aired on radio from 1949 to 1953 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 Brown Envelope Case" was written by Dick Quentin and aired on 1951-12-07. It was raining and thundering, which didn't make Richard Diamond happy because he had smashed up his car and had to walk until it was repaired at Larson's Garage.

Diamond telephoned the garage to find out how much the bad news was going to cost him. The mechanic said he had given the estimate to the man who came over to get Diamond's personal stuff from the car.

Diamond had not sent anyone to do that, but the problem was resolved when the man walked into his office and fired a single shot to get his attention. The man demanded to where 'it' was, a brown envelope that had accidentally been tossed into his car as passersby helped clean up after the collision with a car from Connecticut.

A second shot was fired, this time from Diamond killing the intruder. Police Lt. Walter Levinson from Homicide identified the deceased as Paul Scammel, "*hoodlum first class, car stripper, nightclub bouncer, Central Park mugger, and manic depressive about town*".

The Connecticut vehicle had been the getaway car in a \$600,000 bank robbery that morning. After Levinson left, Diamond tidied his office. Forensics technicians can be so messy. He found the brown envelope mixed into his papers. It contained a baggage check, with the words Blue Duck written on it.

A femme fatale named Dora Martin walked in, much prettier than Scammel but just as well armed. She made Diamond take off his pants, took them and the envelope, and left. He was left in an awkward position. Let us pass over his embarrassment and move on with the case.

The Blue Duck was a failed nightclub operated by Dis Madison and her husband. Diamond, now with pants, and Levinson went out to the place. No doubt it was Dis passing as Dora. They found an old man in occupancy who tried to stall them, saying he was the caretaker. Going upstairs they met with gunshots. They wounded Madison's husband.

Dis walked in with a suitcase she had claimed from the baggage check. She was quite surprised to find her husband bleeding on the staircase and Diamond wearing pants. No surprise what was inside the suitcase.

And so to Helen Asher's penthouse, where Diamond entertained her with a romantic song "The Loveliest Night Of The Year". Presumably it had stopped raining.

"The Merry-Go-Round Case" aired on 1952-01-04 and was written by Richard Carr. Before becoming a private investigator, Richard Diamond had been a police officer. He still kept in touch with friends on the force. Thus it was that Lt. Walter Levinson brought the bad news that Diamond's old partner Ben Johnson had been shot by a hoodlum Smiley Brill. Naturally Diamond agreed to help run Brill to ground.

The starting point was The Bowery, where Brill was known to hang out and his girlfriend Jewel worked as a chorus girl. She said they broke up months ago. She didn't know where he lived but he had said something about working on a merry-go-round.

Diamond trudged around the city collecting plot coupons. Birdy Morgan had been a cellmate but was now going straight raising canaries. He mentioned Joe Brill, uncle to Smiley, who owned a kiddies carnival.

That was Diamond's next stop. Uncle Joe said he had fired his nephew and wasn't surprised to hear that Smiley was in big trouble. The boy had always been a disappointment to the Brill family. Nonetheless Joe slugged Diamond unconscious for the traditional rendering that all private detectives got once per episode.

By now, the episode was two-thirds over, so the slugging was overdue. He woke up in the carnival shack with Smiley standing over him. Diamond talked Joe into changing sides. Shots were fired and the gun battle raged across the carnival. "*Come and get me, shamus!*" shouted Smiley. His actual words. So the man was not only wanted for murder but for wilful use of clichés with intent. Smiley died on the merry-go-round. A grim story.

In the epilogue, Helen Asher fretted about how Diamond always seemed to be meeting beautiful women in his cases. He had been foolish enough to mention Jewel. He recovered by serenading her with "I Get A Warm Feeling".

## Johnny Dollar.

YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR was the second-last of the old-time radio series, airing from 1949 to 1962. (The final episode of SUSPENSE aired immediately after the final episode of YTJD.) 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 the series 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 adjuster 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 Chesapeake Fraud Matter” was a five-part episode in October 1955, written by John Dawson. Elizabeth Reardon had claimed \$20,000 on a life insurance policy for her husband John. He was killed in a boating accident on Chesapeake Bay and his body was never found.

Five years later, Paul Coombes saw him alive in Denver and talked to him. He said his name was Frank Bowers but Coombes didn’t believe him and notified the insurance company. The widow lived in Baltimore, so the company sent Johnny Dollar. He romanced her, which was good for a considerable amount of padding.

Hugh Brien walked in, not too happy to see him. He was her attorney, a large powerful man. Dollar finished his drink and left. From there, he went to the Coast Guard for a report on the boat accident, which didn’t tell him much.

Brien changed his attitude when he learned that John might still be alive. He gave Dollar a file on John, including fingerprints from his army service. Elizabeth, on the other hand, wanted Dollar to drop the case. He told her that wasn’t possible.

The investigation moved from Baltimore to Denver. Bowers checked out okay although his source of income was mysterious. He had arrived in Denver five years ago. Dollar talked to Bowers, who was evasive and contradictory.

Bowers did agree to be fingerprinted, too willingly. John’s fingerprints, as supplied by Brien, didn’t match. The insurance company called Dollar off the case but he refused to stop investigating. Bowers’ account of his past history was full of holes.

A connection was made when Bowers was caught making a long distance phone call to Baltimore. Dollar sent off the fingerprints to Washington, DC, to verify them. They came back as Reardon. Brien had supplied fake prints.

Dollar and another private detective staked out Bowers’ house. A large powerful man visited Bowers, killed him, shot dead the other detective, then fled. Back to Baltimore, where Dollar learned that Elizabeth had just married Brien. Dollar told him the police would soon be there. Brien wilted and the story came out.

John used the boat accident to fake his death and start a new life as Frank Bowers. He had his reasons. Dollar’s excursion to Denver made John/Frank call Brien and tell him the jig was up. John was going to come back to Elizabeth.

Brien flew out to silence him and not so incidentally keep Elizabeth. The rest was details. Total expense report was \$1,124.98.

“The McCormick Matter” was a five-parter written by John Dawson and aired in October 1955. A convict named Mike Cairn was dying in prison hospital, whom Johnny Dollar had put away.

All was forgiven on the deathbed. Cairn wanted Dollar to recover \$100,000 in jewelry a cellmate Joe Panning had stolen from Julian McCormick. Cairn figured the insurance company would pay a reward. He wanted Dollar to find the loot and split the reward with Cairn’s wife.

Panning was on parole and not overly helpful. Dollar visited McCormick, who said he only got \$20,000, and mourned the loss of family heirlooms, such were the jewels. Frank Porter was the original insurance investigator. He said the job was professional, no cutting of the safe.

Someone was after Panning, searching his rooms. The man himself disappeared. Dollar was pistol-whipped by a woman leaving Panning's room. The ex-wife was Iris Panning née Carter, so Dollar set off on her trail.

From hither to yon, the list of suspects and contacts grew. Dollar did manage to confirm that the woman who slugged him was Carter. Panning reappeared, but this time in the morgue, fished out of the water by the harbour patrol.

His feet had been burned but the medical examiner said the burns were made after death. It seemed likely that the culprit was trying to confuse the story. Dollar visited a strip club and talked to an ecdysiast. She told him Iris was now married to McCormick. Leaving the club, someone opened fire on Dollar and wounded him.

Ignoring his wound, he went to the McCormick house and accused Iris of being an accomplice in the original theft. She spun a complicated story but was interrupted by Julian. He had a gun but was no match for Dollar.

The evidence didn't fit McCormick, which left Frank Porter as the remaining suspect. Dollar went to Porter's apartment for a J'accuse! meeting. Porter had been blackmailing the McCormick-Panning clan about the false insurance claim. He conveniently committed suicide.

Total expense account was \$265.91.

## **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 or Bulldog Drummond 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.

"The Case Of The Running Waters" was written by Eugene Wang and aired on 1952-07-13. This time Kathy got the brush-off in the opening telephone call. Michael Waring told her: "*When it comes to murder, there's no place like Rome.*"

Jump cut to Steve Waters, recently arrived in Rome and knocking on the door of Marie Antonescu. He implied that he was a Comintern agent who could get her father out of a Bucharest prison. Her boyfriend Kirby Paterson was an American espionage agent.

Waters told her he knew Paterson was to meet with Waring in Rome. If she expected her father to stay healthy, she was to delay Paterson so that Waters could impersonate him and make the meeting. Waring was on board a train when he caught a man named Roberto Stefani going through his luggage. Another Comintern agent who knew that Waring was to meet Paterson.

At the meeting, Waring met with the fake Paterson and gave him a coded notebook. Waters might have gotten away with his impersonation but unfortunately the hotel detective knew otherwise. Waring set off in pursuit.

Waters hadn't been expecting a coded document. The listener will wonder why, since such items would be standard procedure for every spy. Waters and Stefani tracked down the real Paterson to coerce him into retrieving the code key. Too much coercion, which culminated in Paterson's murder.

Waring had to sort out who was who. Running about, he discovered Antonescu and managed to get most of the story from her. The chase was after Waters, Stefani, and the codebook.

Surprisingly it was Waters who was next to be deleted from the Party membership list. The killer might have been Stefani or Antonescu, but it was the hotel detective. Those Commies were everywhere.

"The Case Of The Rolling Stones" aired on 1952-08-10, written by Eugene Wang. Lisa was the disappointed woman in the opening telephone call. She was told by Michael Waring that Army Intelligence was sending him to Sicily. Unfortunately this meant an episode filled with bad Italian accents.

Waring was to locate Mario Toscelli alias various other surnames, who kept moving around and didn't want to be found. He was though, by Edna Marcolini, his girlfriend. The police followed her there and ran him into prison. Since he was a known Communist agent, they notified Waring.

Toscelli wasn't wanted for that though, but for war crimes in the recent unpleasantness. Edna smuggled in a stiletto into his prison cell, and he soon escaped. He stabbed the prison guard through the heart.

As the guard fell dead to the floor, the episode broke for a public service commercial. The announcer said that people could expect a longer life if they were careful how they drove in traffic.

An old friend of Toscelli visited Waring. He had known Toscelli in the 1930s when he was a fascist partisan and now feared his revenge. One of the characters murdered his wife and pinned the blame on Toscelli. Much running about ensued, plus kidnapping, vendettas, and bodies piling up.

Once the supporting actors were sufficiently thinned out, the final gunfight brought resolution. Toscelli almost disappeared from the plot, just a blind for the murder that would be pinned on him.

### **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. There is a problem with episodes circulating under multiple titles.

"Simon Minds The Baby" was written by Dick Powell (not the actor/singer) and aired on 1950-12-17. Joe Collins was a boxer who called on Simon Templar for help. The Saint was glad to help as an old friend and mentioned he had a bet down on Collins for the big fight tomorrow. The boxer told him to cancel the bet, then hung up.

The Saint called for Louie the cab driver to take him to the gym. When Louie arrived, he found a baby on Templar's doorstep. A note pinned on the clothes asked Templar to care for the baby and not tell the police. The baby had a one-word vocabulary: Donny. Since Templar had an appointment, he deputized Louie as a babysitter and borrowed his cab.

At the gym, Sam Chadwick was Collins' manager who always talked of him and his fighter in the possessive plural: "*We're in the greatest shape of our lives.*" When he said the contender didn't have a chance against us, Templar remarked that two against one didn't seem fair. Collins was suddenly hesitant and didn't want to explain why he called Templar.

A jump cut to the next morning. Templar was haggard after being up all night with the baby. He called an agency, who sent over a nurse Miss Barton. Leaving Donny in her care he went off to visit the boxer Kid Purchase who would be fighting Collins. Templar didn't meet the Kid but spoke with his handlers. It became obvious they had fixed the fight.

Collins dropped out of sight, sowing alarm and despair everywhere, or at least among those who had money bet on him. Templar and Louie combed the taverns and found Collins drowning his sorrow in one of them. His explanation was that his son had been kidnapped to ensure he would throw the fight. The boy was named Donny, and was in custody of his ex-wife Marie.

A mad dash to Templar's apartment found Miss Barton badly beaten and the baby missing. She was in fact Marie and died moments later after gasping out a few details. Templar and Louie were on the trail. They soon found the kidnappers and the baby.

Rushing to the arena, they let Collins know the baby was safe. He won the fight. There was one final confrontation with the Kid's handler who had set up the kidnapping but the resolution was obvious. Louie was a good man with a tire iron.

There was a strange interlude during which Templar and Louie philosophized about why people go to fights. The mob wanted blood and they didn't care whose. Fights were an allegory, people wanted something exciting in their dull lives, that sort of thing. Sounds like science fiction fandom.

"Ladies Never Lie Much" was written by Louis Vittes and aired on 1951-01-07. Simon Templar received a visitor at his apartment, Claire Gordon. She breathlessly confessed to him that she had just murdered her husband James.

The Saint was perplexed about why she should come to him. She said she had to confess to someone. Templar made the obvious suggestion that she should go to the police. "*Oh, they're so vulgar*", she replied.

Claire inadvertently revealed she was an upper-class snob by telling Templar that she refused to visit some dirty police station and be interrogated by a grubby little man about her personal affairs. Templar said that in his experience the police stations were cleaned from time to time. She stormed out.

A moment later, James arrived, suspecting she was having an affair with Templar. That misunderstanding was straightened out. Both men were puzzled about Claire's behaviour. As James stepped out the door he was shot dead by a person unknown. Louie the cab driver arrived as James left.

After dealing with the police, Templar and Louie went out to the Gordon manor. The butler had a Brooklyn accent and let slip the fact that the manor staff hadn't been paid for some time. The Gordons were in financial difficulty. Claire denied having met Templar or having been to his apartment. When he explained the situation, she said James was alive and healthy. Replied Templar, "*Your husband's health is no longer what it used to be. He's dead.*" She fainted.

The two men left the mansion but waited outside in Louie's cab. Their suspicions were confirmed when they saw her coming out and getting into her sports car. They followed at a distance. "*For a woman who just fainted, she's driving awfully fast*", said Louie. The Saint replied that no one dawdles in the shadow of the gallows.

They tracked her to a rendezvous with an unknown man. After the illicit couple separated, the two men tied handkerchiefs over their faces and held up the man to get his wallet, then sent him on his way. They didn't want the money, just his identification. He was a lawyer named Kerrigan.

Back at Templar's apartment, they met the butler, who was carrying a gun. During the ensuing conversation, he said James had a \$100,000 life insurance policy. The butler refused to come out and say he was in love with Claire but his fondness for her was evident.

Apparently Claire was in love with Kerrigan. She was the next visitor as the butler hurriedly ducked into a back room. She tried to bribe Templar but didn't succeed. During that conversation, Kerrigan arrived but was disposed of by the butler.

The rest was details. Kerrigan survived to sit in the electric chair, and Claire was an accessory. The butler went back to the simple life in Brooklyn. Templar explained away the loose threads to Louie.

### **The Shadow.**

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

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

What was interesting for those days was that she and Cranston were supposedly single and living in different apartments, but they commonly had scenes where they ate breakfast or stayed in hotels together. The network executives and sponsors of those times weren't as prudish as often thought, or else never noticed.

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.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary) The series lasted until 1954. Like the print stories, credit was seldom 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 opening musical theme for the episodes was “Le Rouet d’Omphale” (“Omphale’s Spinning Wheel”), composed in 1871 by Camille Saint-Saens. It was beautifully played on the organ and provided an ominous note, in both senses of that word, to introduce the show.

I originally had quite a number of cassette tapes of this series, all but one from the Great American Audio Corporation. The tapes were produced in sets in the 1990s but I only bought them remaindered in bookstores, being on a tight budget in those days. (I paid off my mortgage in 1997 and have since never looked back.) It wasn't until the Old-Time Radio Researchers club began offered OTR shows as free mp3s in the last decade that I got into radio shows in a big way.





Cranston and Margo Lane arrived on a dark and foggy night. The inhabitants were in terror of The Prophet, who bwah-ha!-ha!-ed at all and sundry to establish his credentials as an evil man. Pausing only for a commercial from Blue Coal anthracite, the battle between The Prophet and The Shadow began.

The former was into human sacrifice. The latter was going to stop the ceremony. There are no prizes for guessing who won. And so to maniacal laughter from The Shadow and a final pitch for Blue Coal, the clean fuel. Order a trial ton today.

“The Silent Avenger” aired the following week on 1938-03-13. The opening scene was a courtroom where Joe Brekker was sentenced to death after being convicted of first-degree murder. He screamed to the judge that in revenge for his execution, everyone would die, from the judge to the prosecutor to the jury members to the state governor, and especially The Shadow, who had brought evidence against him.

In a following scene, Joe met with his brother Danny while awaiting execution and had him promise to kill all concerned. Danny was of addled mind, suffering from shell shock after the last war.

Today we call it post-trauma stress disorder. He had been a sniper in World War One and came home a changed man unable to adjust to civilian life. Joe and their mother had been looking after Danny ever since.

The jurors, prosecutor, and judge began dying one by one. Each was killed by a single shot from a silenced rifle at a distance. Danny was tetchd but hadn’t forgotten his training. Lamont Cranston was unable to find a pattern, nor could the police provide complete security against a sniper who could fire through windows from blocks away. They set out a dragnet but couldn’t run Danny to earth.

Cranston was surprising sympathetic once he learned that Danny was the killer. Cranston noted that training soldiers to kill and then sending them into battle was against normal behaviour. Therefore, one should not be surprised when some of those men couldn’t break their conditioning after returning home.

In those days, and even now, much fiction makes characters evil because they were just plain evil. For pulp fiction such as The Shadow, it was unusual to give criminals a motive beyond greed or territorial imperative.

“The Bride Of Death” aired on 1938-03-06, no writer credited. A village preacher Rev. Colby condemned a local Satanist who had corrupted his daughter and other children. While preaching at the pulpit, a bomb detonated, killing Colby and ten of his parishioners. This was a job for Lamont Cranston qua The Shadow.

Rich widow Mrs Ashley had been traveling in the Far East. She returned to the fishing village with a mystic in tow, who called himself The Prophet of the Ancient Ones. He made her the High Priestess, who would live forever, but only by human sacrifice.

The denouement came when an announcement was made that the governor was attending an outdoor ceremony. That narrowed down the possible sites for a sniper's nest, and Cranston correctly surmised Danny would be using an unfinished skyscraper for his shot. The rest was details.

### **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 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.

"Inventor Hess Goes Missing" was written by David Taylor and aired on 1945-06-18. The title is speculative. Like many other radio series, the episodes were never named, and were given titles by OTR fans.

This episode was set in San Francisco, where William Belsey and Miss Hess (no first name given) were the clients. Michael Shayne and Phyllis Knight took down the details. Miss Hess had returned home from New York City three days early to find her father's house empty.

Not that it mattered, because the police fished Hess out of the bay even as his daughter was talking to Shayne. Hess was an investor, not an inventor as the available mp3 titles state. Belsey was the inventor, who had sold his idea to Hess and two other men, Carter and Hackett.

The police found Hess's eye glasses, umbrella, and overcoat on the beach at Sausalito, northwest of San Francisco. They were on the far side of the bay from the body.

There was no possibility that the items were flotsam. The glasses would have sunk straight down in the water, the umbrella might have floated, but an overcoat would not have come off the body. They had to have been removed by the murderer and dumped together.

The police interrogated those who knew the victim. Hackett said Carter and others hated Hess. Carter said Hess was brusque but not hated. Belsey said Hess hadn't been wearing an overcoat. Somebody was lying.

Shayne set up a meeting with Miss Hess, hoping to flush out the killer. Nothing happened. Detectives private and public perambulated around town looking for clues. Police said that fingerprints were lifted off the eye glasses and umbrella. I had trouble believing that because the seawater would have washed or blurred them.

Shayne called a J'accuse! meeting. The explanation was convoluted and improbable. On no evidence, Shayne accused Belsey of the murder. He also said there was no invention and Belsey was a confidence man bilking the investors out of money. Belsey did not blab a confession. One doubts he would have been convicted.

### **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 worked in San Francisco. His 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.

“Sam And The Psyche” aired on 1946-08-02. No writer was credited, although everyone else was. The subject was the death of Dr Gregory Denoff, a client who was being shaken down for \$10,000 by Pericles Nikalitis. The blackmailer had stolen a confidential file about one of Denoff’s clients, a celebrity actor who would be humiliated if the file was made public.

Sam Spade was to act as the middleman for the drop at Denoff’s apartment. Spade arrived on the street just after Denoff had come screaming off the balcony from his 12th floor penthouse for a hard landing. The police in the apartment let him in to talk to the grieving widow.

She was being badgered by another psychiatrist Dr Zoya for her husband’s files. The police said it was suicide. She said it murder by actress Constance Brent, a patient. Spade went to talk to her and her husband Jonathan Wallace.

They weren’t upset by the news of the death, but Brent was by the news of her personal file missing from Denoff’s cabinet. Spade got nothing else and left. Back at his office, Spade was visited by Nikalitis, a soft-spoken Peter Lorre impersonator.

Nikalitis wanted the \$10,000. Spade set up a rendezvous at his apartment. Nikalitis got there first but in body only, someone having rendered him into a corpse. The orchestra worked itself into a frenzy before an announcer broke in to extol the qualities of Wildroot Cream Oil.

Back at the murder, Spade turned that investigation over to the police. They knew more about the defunct, who operated a photography business that specialized in photostats and microfilming.

Spade then went off to see Zoya. The psychiatrist didn’t believe it was suicide. He told Spade that Denoff was in love with Brent, who might have murdered him. Zoya said that just before the murder Denoff had given him a gold watch with a request it be buried with him.

Spade asked to see the watch but Zoya said Denoff had already been buried. Since the murder had taken place only four hours previously, Spade protested the body couldn’t have been interred already. Zoya said the body had been buried before sundown in accordance with Mosaic Law.

This explicit reference to Orthodox Judaism was unusual in old-time radio. Jews were generally portrayed on radio and stage as Yiddish-speaking Brooklynites with thick accents, mostly comical, and sometimes sinister. A neutral reference such as this was unusual.

Once again to the Denoff apartment where Spade delivered an exposition to the widow. Her husband knew she had been snooping in the client files. He removed the Brent file, had it microfilmed, and destroyed the original. Nikalitis had made a second copy of the microfilm for blackmail.

Spade talked Mrs Denoff into a midnight expedition to dig up her husband's corpse. Exhumation permit? What of it? The watch contained the microfilm. As soon as it was identified, Wallace appeared waving a gun. Mrs Denoff pulled one out as well. Quite the tangle of illicit romances.

Spade had tipped off the police, who arrived in the usual nick of time. Shots were fired and Wallace departed this life, while the widow went to reside in a penitentiary.

“The Insomnia Caper” aired on 1948-10-24. Sam Spade had trouble sleeping. People kept disturbing him.

A young neighbour woman Doreen Duval roped Spade into a fight with her boyfriend, a sailor named Dan McCrae. Surprisingly the men made up after a few fisticuffs. They parted as acquaintances but not friends. Spade went back to sleep, or tried to.

Not long after, McCrae found a dead man named Frank Shepard in his cabin on board his ship. The deceased had been canoodling with Duval while McCrae was at sea. Spade was called for help out of his sleep. Understandably McCrae was perturbed because he had the motive.

The police found an elderly couple in Duval’s apartment who denied knowing a young woman. Later Spade went back to the couple’s apartment. The old man was sitting dead at the table. Natural causes, believe it or not.

The couple were involved in drug smuggling. Duval had accidentally discovered they were hiding the drugs in ship models. They locked her inside a closet. Shepard had been a federal drug agent who got too close to Granny. Spade sorted out the details. He called the police and then went back to bed.

**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 Old Style" was written by David Victor and Jackson Gillis, and aired on 1950-02-06.

Jerimiah Stark was an antiquarian who liked to deal in murder curios such as nooses and knives used in crimes. He called in George Valentine and Claire Brooks after receiving a strange gift in the mail. The item was a music box with tomorrow's date on it.

Stark was able to give a description of a possible suspect. They back-tracked the box to a barber shop where Emily Caster worked as a manicurist. Joe the barber provided the info. He liked to think he had quite a sense of humour, a good thing to have as a barber. Note that well.

John Helmington, a regular customer at the barber shop, was found dead in Caster's boarding house room. There was a music box in his pocket with that day's date on it. Meanwhile Stark was slugged unconscious in his shop. The next revelation was that he had dated Caster, who had disappeared.

Music boxes kept popping up everywhere, as did bodies. The deceased had all been suitors of Caster. She was found as a kidnap victim but survived. Joe was a jealous barber.

The plot was elaborate but then again so was Joe's insanity. He idolized her even though she wouldn't date him. What sent him over the edge was when she laughed in his face over his advances. It turned out that he had no sense of humour after all.

"Tune On A Triangle" was written by David Victor and Jackson Gillis, and aired on 1951-01-05. The client was Jerry Briscoomb, who was late getting to the office of George Valentine and Claire Brooks. He said there was a large crowd in front of the building, so he had to find the back entrance.

The three looked out the window and saw a woman standing on the ledge nearby. Valentine rescued her, after which he learned she was Estella, a circus acrobat whose publicity agent was Briscoomb. She was doing a stunt she did in every city, going for a walk around a building on a window ledge.

To complicate matters, her husband Theodor the strongman arrived. He was insanely jealous and resented Valentine grabbing Estella. Fortunately Valentine was able to divert Theodor's attention to Briscoomb, to the latter's severe physical disadvantage.

After the beating was over, Theodor was overcome by remorse. He sobbed out the story of his marital problems. The others didn't know where to look as he blubbered about Estella. He then stole Valentine's gun and left in a rage.

Valentine and Brooksie apparently didn't tell the police. Instead they went to the circus, where they searched for Estella's current boyfriend, another acrobat with the stage name Flying Ferelli. While they were looking for him, Theodor found them. Theodor rendered Valentine unconscious.

When he woke up the police were there, Estella having been murdered by a blunt instrument. Theodor and Ferelli had struggled with each other, during which time the gun was discharged. The question was who murdered Estella, since the two men had been fighting each other at the time she died.

Suspicion shifted to Briscoomb, since he was the only one without an alibi. Valentine did some thinking about Theodor and Ferelli, whose stories seemed a bit off. His resolution was that both did the murder, then staged the fight as a mutual alibi. Estella had thrown over both men. She ought not to have done that.

**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 Butler Murder Case” aired on 1949-02-15. A dentist Michael Butler was threatened by an extortionist known as Professor Powell that he would suffer if he didn’t cough up \$10,000.

Butler had received notice from a dental supply company that they would not ship him any more items until he paid his account, past due for six months. At the same time, Butler’s wife Grace was having trouble at home with the maid Thelma, who hadn’t been paid in five weeks. A fellow dentist Dr Stanley James, in desperate financial straits, came asking for a loan and was roughly refused. That rounded out the list of suspects for the inevitable murder.

Powell and his henchman Franky discussed the threat. Powell was quite confident. A jump cut followed to Philo Vance in the office of D.A. John Markham, where they discussed Powell and the sudden unexplained death of Butler.

Off they went to the dental office. The body had been removed. The police, operating without forensics technicians, had left everything else unchanged. Vance took one of his giant leaps and concluded that Butler had been poisoned by injection from a syringe.

Another dentist named Millstad was next to be threatened by Powell. Vance went to the rescue and had a chat with Powell. They sparred verbally but nothing happened. Powell went off to discuss with Franky the best method of disposing of Vance.

The plan decided upon was to manufacture an exact duplicate of Vance’s car, wire explosives to the starter, and switch them. The listener may wonder why Powell didn’t just wire the explosives directly to the real car. The listener will wonder in vain.

The Professor was evidently a graduate of the Bwah-Ha!-Ha! Institute For Mad Scientists. As such, he would prepare an elaborate death for Vance, instead of just shooting him. Franky was a dropout from the Igor School For Laboratory Assistants, presumably because he was unable to imitate Peter Lorre’s voice.

Franky and Powell were blown apart when they tried to drive away with what they thought was Vance’s real car. The switch was explained with an unbelievable amount of handwaving. Vance then went on to identify the real murderer of Butler as Grace. In the epilogue, he identified a clue given earlier that gave her away. The explanation about his car didn’t jive though.

“The Million Dollar Murder Case” aired on 1949-03-15. Herr Ezra Simmons lived in a mansion with a 10-foot-high wall out front, a vertical cliff out back, and barred windows. His paranoia was bigger than his mansion. He was assisted by a secretary Betty Jarnus and a deaf handyman named Harold Eckner.

Simmons sprachen mit der German accent dot no Deutschlander ever spoke outside Hollywood. At first I thought it was my imagination but it became obvious the actor was voicing the part of Simmons with the same cadence and rhythm as Hitler making a speech.

Simmons was a tyrant and a boor. The real mystery wasn’t why he was murdered but how he managed to live as long as he did. Someone shot him while Jarnus was away from the house and only deaf Eckner was there.

Philo Vance and John Markham went out to investigate. The will was read by lawyer Joseph Hargrave. Jarnus was left \$1 million and Eckner got \$10,000. The rest of his fortune went to a home for cats. That made Jarnus an obvious suspect.

A bit later, Jarnus telephoned her brother Jim and asked him to help her, since she feared she was the prime suspect. The plot jumped forward and brought in a hitherto unmentioned Buck Digby, henchman of Frank Rodney, who had suffered from Simmons' machinations.

The police arrested Digby for the murder, but Vance confidently accused Jim Jarnus. A kangaroo couldn't make such leaps. Vance said Jim had landed on the roof of the mansion with a helicopter and thus bypassed the defenses. Talk about a *deus ex machina*. Eckner couldn't hear the helicopter, and it didn't matter if Simmons did, because the old man wasn't long for this world.

### **Jack Webb.**

Before he vaulted to national fame as Sgt Joe Friday in DRAGNET, Jack Webb served an apprenticeship in several private detective radio series, most of them originating from San Francisco. He generally played a harsh man among harsh people, crime noir relieved only by a constant flow of exaggerated similes and sarcastic remarks.

The first of these was PAT NOVAK, FOR HIRE, which aired from 1946 to 1947 and a brief revival in 1949. This series was mostly written by Richard Breen. Pat Novak worked in San Francisco along the waterfront.

Webb's second series was JOHNNY MODERO, PIER 23, which aired for four months in the spring and summer of 1947. The man rented boats in San Francisco and did anything else along the waterfront that would make him money. *"The sign outside looks honest but down here the only sign people pay any attention to is rigor mortis."*

Because PAT NOVAK was still running on another network with a different leading man, there was a flurry of legal briefs back and forth. Webb had to make some cosmetic changes, but since both series were not long for this world, the dispute was a tempest in a teapot. The name was also frequently spelled Madero.

JEFF REGAN, INVESTIGATOR aired in the last half of 1948. The name was always pronounced 'ree-gun'. The episodes were very harsh, too noir. The grimness was unrelieved. Webb later toned down his performance for DRAGNET and played Joe Friday as a polite man. After Webb left, the series continued on in a milder tone with other actors.

PETE KELLY'S BLUES aired in the summer of 1951 and was a brief sideline for Webb. In private life, he and his first wife, jazz singer Julie London (better remembered as the ER nurse in the Webb-produced television series EMERGENCY!), were both jazz aficionados.

Pete Kelly was a jazz musician in Kansas City during the Roaring Twenties. Each episode was not only a noir mystery, but Webb and his band played one or two jazz instrumentals. One can safely say that Webb wasn't just doing the series for money. He really loved the music and was an accomplished player.

DRAGNET began in June 1949 and on radio went until early 1957. Webb never looked back, and from radio his franchise extended into television and movies. He never said *"Just the facts, ma'am."* but it became a catch phrase because of his use of similar remarks.

The PAT NOVAK episode "Father Leahy" aired on 1949-04-02, written by Richard Breen. The priest of the title's name hired Pat Novak to intercept an escaped Alcatraz prisoner Joe Feldman. That was quickly done but 25 minutes remained in the episode so the alarums, excursions, and sarcastic remarks continued.

An acquaintance named Ann appeared, Novak was rendered unconscious, and Feldman had his throat cut. Leahy said Ann was Feldman's sister, but the dead man turned out to be Mike Greeley. The real Feldman had killed a cop a half hour earlier in a nightclub run by Charlie Giffin. Inspector Hellman arrived to arrest Novak as usual.

Ann reappeared at Giffin's place. She added her sister Norma into the mix. Much emoting followed. Joe, the real Joe, was murdered offstage without ever getting a speaking part. Another meeting took place, where Ann betrayed Giffin to Hellman.

The two sisters had a nasty spat that ended in tears. Novak walked out in silence, exchanged homilies with Leahy, and so to the conclusion. It took Novak several minutes of high-speed talking to tie off the loose threads.

"Geranium Plant" aired on 1949-05-14. No writer was credited although everyone else was. Pat Novak's current hire was a courier job for a mysterious woman, to pick up a geranium plant from Point A and deliver it to Point B.

En route he noticed a man with a cane tailing him. The real excitement was when a car tried to run him down. Somebody got the licence plate number and gave it to Novak, who then went on his way. Finally arriving at Point B, which was a cheap rooming house, Novak found a sick woman coughing her guts out. He delivered the geranium and departed.

Back home he found SFPD Inspector Hellman searching his apartment. As per tradition, Hellman wanted Novak for murder. The deceased had been found in the rooming house where Novak had delivered the geranium. The defunct was a man who had been poisoned by a spring-loaded needle hidden in the geranium container.

The room had been rented by George Langley. The landlady said there had never been a woman staying there. Hellman and Novak exchanged insults, then separated with heartfelt expressions of mutual contempt.

Novak had one of his informers trace the licence plate. Meanwhile he tracked down the woman who hired him. She pulled a gun and blamed him, saying he had switched the geranium container from her payload to the poison booby trap.

He was rendered unconscious as per usual. When he woke up, the woman was gone but he had been joined by the body of the man with the cane. Plus Hellman, who informed Novak that the geranium gang were spies.

Separating from Hellman, once again with fresh loathing, Novak talked to his informer, who told him the car was registered to Langley. Hellman tied off another loose end when the police identified the dead man with the cane as Langley.

Everyone converged on Langley's apartment. Spies, police, the mysterious woman, and basically anyone who had a speaking part. The supporting characters were thinned out by gunfire. As the mysterious woman lay dying, she told Novak that the MacGuffin hidden in the flower pot was a secret formula for something or other that the spy ring was going to smuggle out.

Novak tied off the loose ends in the epilogue. Given that the Red Scare was underway at the time, it was a wonder Novak didn't get a summons for a Senate committee.

The JEFF REGAN episode "Gentlemen Prefer Horses", written by William Froug, aired on 1950-09-03 and was the final episode of the series. The boss Anthony J. Lyon was in a good mood. Regan found him in his office smoking a better cigar than usual. "*A 50-center, they were out of my usual brand*", to which Regan replied that the price of rope must have gone up.

The client was Boots Crenshaw, an ex-jockey who had been seriously injured in a spill five years prior. He now worked as a race track tout, with a sidekick named Longshot Koi. Their gimmick was they charged \$100 per tip, money cheerfully refunded if the horse didn't win.

Their problem was their best customer had suddenly disappeared. Regan suspected something else was involved, possibly related to the accident that ended Crenshaw's career. Crenshaw told him the bets were always placed by a chauffeur named Mike Johnson, supposedly on behalf of his employer McMillan.

Leaving the cheap hotel where the duo were staying, Regan was intercepted by a woman claiming to be Crenshaw's wife Susan. He invited her across the street to a tavern to hear her story. As they were about to cross, Johnson drove past them. Regan ditched her and pursued.

He caught up but had cause for regret because Johnson got the drop on him. They wound up out in an oil field where Johnson told him to lay off Crenshaw, then took off and left Regan standing there.

Regan tracked down Johnson's address, where a femme fatale named Gloria answered the door. She said this was the Stevens residence, for whom she was secretary and Johnson was chauffeur. The boss wasn't due back for weeks.

Back to Boot's hotel room but he had been sent off into the next life. Hopefully Lyon had been paid in advance. The police gave Regan a hard time but reluctantly let him go.

Longshot Koi reappeared, claiming that Boots had deliberately taken a fall in his last race. Susan had placed the right bets and the two skipped town. Koi was terrified of taking the rap for Boots' murder.

Johnson also reappeared, rendering Regan unconscious in the traditional manner before departing. In the meantime, Lyons had been making telephone calls. He

learned that the race the Crenshaws fixed was with Stevens' horse. The horse had to be destroyed and Stevens lost a \$100,000 purse. Sufficient cause indeed. The problem was Stevens was long since dead.

Susan was arrested for her husband's murder. Regan decided to find out who was running the Stevens stable. He bumped into Johnson at the Stevens mansion and returned the previous favour by rendering him unconscious. Entering the house, he was welcomed with gunshots by Gloria but prevailed against her.

She was the former Mrs Stevens, a past mistress of Boots, and an ex-business partner of Koi. She and her current man Johnson were cleaning house. The greatest tragedy was revealed in the epilogue. Lyon hadn't been paid. But the good news was that Lyon had bet on a horse which paid off at 21 to 1. Regan got his pay after all.

### **Bulldog Drummond.**

Bulldog Drummond was based on the novels by H.C. McNeile. There was little continuity between the books, a plethora of movies, and the radio series. The novels and movies were set in Britain where Drummond was some sort of police detective.

In the books, he was a married man, in the movies he was forever affianced, and in the radio series he was a loner. The movies were played as comedy and the radio series as grim action-adventure.

The radio series soon moved Drummond to the USA. He roamed the country as a paladin with no visible source of income and unspecified police powers, assisted by his valet Denny, a blithering idiot. The radio series aired from 1941 to 1954. The episodes were mediocre, worth listening to once and then forgotten.

"Death Loops The Loop" aired on 1948-03-10 and was set at Wynn's Wonderland amusement park. In the opening sequence the roller-coaster operator Miller found a body in one of the cars after the train completed its run.

Anthony Wynn, the owner of the park, was slumped over dead. The official verdict was a heart attack from the stress of the ride. His daughter Isabel didn't accept that and appealed to Captain Drummond for help.

Drummond and Denny checked out the adjacent rides. While testing the tunnel-of-love ride, a shot was fired at them. Adjacent to the park was Carlson's Oyster Bar, whose owner had attempted to buy out Wynn.

Drummond and Denny discovered the oysters were being used to smuggle in dope. Drug addicts used a code phrase to buy a fix. Carlson's yacht was moored off-shore and served as the central base. He took Isabel, Drummond, and Denny hostage and put them in the anchor chain room.

The plan, as Carlson bwah-ha!-ha!-ed to them and the listeners, was to hoist anchor claiming not to know that Drummond and Denny stowed away on board. A regrettable accident would ensue. Didn't work, of course. Miller was an accomplice and went up the river with Carlson but neither of them went in a yacht.

"Penny Arcade" aired on 1948-12-01. Carol Stevens was a woman who convinced Bulldog Drummond to pick up a package for her at a penny arcade. Her husband Albert didn't know about it. At the rendezvous, Drummond was handed a threatening note telling him to leave.

He remained, of course. His contact was a medium named Zara. She was shot by a man named Ace Collins before she could hand over the package. Drummond and Denny located her hotel room and searched for information.

They got lucky and learned her ex-husband was a jewel thief, Collins himself, who was the one who slipped Drummond the note. Then they got unlucky and tangled with an insurance investigator named Braden. He said the jewels had been stolen from the Stevens.

Carol denied knowing Drummond but when told Zara was dead, quickly confessed all. Zara was her sister. The back story was that Carol and Zara had been jewel thieves with Collins a decade before. He shot Carol next and almost got Drummond.

Braden killed Collins instead, who had been working for him. Braden was next at the hands of the law. Drummond found the necklace in Zara's room and presented it to Albert. Most of the characters were thinned out by that point, so the story quickly wrapped up. The impression was that the plot had grown so tangled that the script writer had to kill off all the supporting characters before the time ran out. There was little admissible evidence for use in court.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Lloyd Penney 2022-01-16  
Etobicoke, Ontario

I took a lot of December off to edit an e-book, and a very nice payday has arrived.

OPUNTIA 514: On Christmas Eve, we have the tradition of driving around our area to see Christmas lights. We are rarely disappointed by what we see, and we were rewarded this year as well. Nothing was too ostentatious, but some displays were well-designed, and brightly lit, with a lot of colour.

I noticed that with tall condo buildings, there are lights on the balconies and in the windows, and almost without fail, they are all white. No imagination, or perhaps with some of these mortgages, it’s all they can afford.

Our province keeps changing the pandemic rules, too. We never really know what we can or cannot do, so I suspect most people stay home. We have been enjoying the return of our pub nights, but with the Omicron variant, and the most recent confusing messages, finding rooms at restaurants are all closed again.

Tomorrow is the Third Monday of the month, our usual Third Monday pub night, and we will go there for takeout. We have to support our pub night restaurant if we want it to be there later.

[Alberta is the same. One never knows from one day to the next what the rules are. Premier Jason Kenney issued an order to the Tories and mandarins banning Christmas parties. The next day a group of backbenchers were caught in a restaurant whooping it up. Their defense was they had booked the room before Kenney issued his ukase.]

[The official vacancy rate in Calgary for commercial space is 33%, worse than the Great Depression. Retail space is about 50% vacant in the malls. Any restaurant that didn’t convert to Skip The Dishes and takeout orders died last year, but the survivors seem to be hanging on.]

Great stamp covers. I never got into anything like that beyond a few corner blocks of four. I was just pleased to have stamps from a far country.

My previous letter: True, Omicron is not quite as dangerous as Delta was, but I still hear of 20 to 30 deaths a day here. This morning, I saw the world-wide total of COVID deaths as crossing the 5.5 million mark. We have had our third shots, plus flu shot, and have the QR codes to prove it, but few are the times anyone really checks.

OPUNTIA 515: [Re: feral rabbits in Calgary] I have seen reports from communities in Vancouver, plus Nanaimo, BC, and Canmore, AB, of feral rabbits nearly covering the whole district. It all stems from irresponsible pet owners, and the fact that rabbits can multiply like, well, rabbits.

[The coyotes like them. Hopefully they will get them under control.]

We’ve just had our own really cold day, with wind chills around -32°C. It has warmed up substantially, but tonight, we are expecting a huge snowstorm that should whiten the place up considerably. With that, we have to make sure the windows are shut, and the balcony is clean, for we do expect a fair deposit of snow.

We have none on the ground right now, but we are promised 10 to 15 cm, and that’s a good drop for Toronto, which hasn’t had a snowbank in some time. If the snow is heavy enough, we might lose power here, so off this goes before that happens.

[Power outages are rare in Calgary. The usual cause isn’t blizzards but drunk drivers knocking over power poles.]

[Since January 10, Calgary has enjoyed a succession of chinooks, interspersed with an occasional cold front storm. I’ve noticed that in Canada, the prairies and the eastern provinces alternate cold weather. If warm here, Ontario freezes, or vice versa.]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Astronomy.

Green, R.F., et al (2022) **The growing threat of light pollution to ground-based observatories.** ASTRONOMY AND ASTROPHYSICS REVIEW 30:doi.org/10.1007/s00159-021-00138-3 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Human activity is rapidly increasing the negative impact of artificial skyglow at even the most remote professional observatory sites. Assessment of the actual impact requires an understanding of the propagation as a function of source spectral energy distribution.*

*The higher blue content of light-emitting diodes being widely used as replacement for sodium discharge lamps has greater impact closer to the source, and less impact for more distant mountain-top sites.*

*All-sky cameras with moderate angular resolution provide data and metrics sufficient to model and remove celestial contributions and provide measures of artificial light contribution.*

*The natural skyglow is significantly affected by solar activity, which must be accounted for in determining secular trends in the artificial component. With the availability of the New World Atlas of the Artificial Sky Brightness, a direct comparison is made of the modeled artificial contribution to the sites with the largest aperture telescopes, noting the possible systematic errors in individual cases.*

*Population growth of the nearest urban centers allows a prediction of the change in that brightness over a decade. All site protections are effected primarily by national or regional regulation.*

*A collection of worldwide regulations shows that most are leveraged off environmental protection statutes, while in the U.S., they are largely based on land-use zones. Particular examples are presented in more detail for Flagstaff, Arizona, and the Island of Hawaii.*

*The latest rapidly growing threat is that of reflected sunlight from large constellations of satellites in low-earth orbit. A snapshot is provided of that rapidly changing situation. In all cases, astronomers must become very*

*proactive in educating the public about the cultural value of visual or naked eye astronomy as well as the science and the need for access to a dark night sky for astronomical research.*

Schutte, Z., and A.E. Reines (2022) **Black-hole-triggered star formation in the dwarf galaxy Henize 2-10.** NATURE 601:329-333

Authors’ abstract: *Black-hole-driven outflows have been observed in some dwarf galaxies with active galactic nuclei, and probably play a role in heating and expelling gas (thereby suppressing star formation), as they do in larger galaxies.*

*The extent to which black-hole outflows can trigger star formation in dwarf galaxies is unclear, because work in this area has previously focused on massive galaxies and the observational evidence is scarce.*

*Henize 2-10 is a dwarf starburst galaxy previously reported to have a central massive black hole, although that interpretation has been disputed because some aspects of the observational evidence are also consistent with a supernova remnant.*

*At a distance of approximately 9 Mpc, it presents an opportunity to resolve the central region and to determine if there is evidence for a black-hole outflow influencing star formation.*

*Here we report optical observations of Henize 2-10 with a linear resolution of a few parsecs. We find an approximately 150-pc-long ionized filament connecting the region of the black hole with a site of recent star formation.*

*Spectroscopy reveals a sinusoid-like position–velocity structure that is well described by a simple precessing bipolar outflow. We conclude that this black-hole outflow triggered the star formation.*

Hurley-Walker, N., et al (2022) **A radio transient with unusually slow periodic emission.** NATURE 601:526-530

Authors’ abstract: *The high-frequency radio sky is bursting with synchrotron transients from massive stellar explosions and accretion events, but the*

*low-frequency radio sky has, so far, been quiet beyond the Galactic pulsar population and the long-term scintillation of active galactic nuclei.*

*The low-frequency band, however, is sensitive to exotic coherent and polarized radio-emission processes, such as electron cyclotron maser emission from flaring M dwarfs, stellar magnetospheric plasma interactions with exoplanets and a population of steep-spectrum pulsars, making Galactic-plane searches a prospect for blind-transient discovery.*

*Here we report an analysis of archival low-frequency radio data that reveals a periodic, low-frequency radio transient. We find that the source pulses every 18.18 minutes, an unusual periodicity that has, to our knowledge, not been observed previously.*

*The emission is highly linearly polarized, bright, persists for 30 to 60 seconds on each occurrence and is visible across a broad frequency range. At times, the pulses comprise short-duration ( $<0.5$  s) bursts; at others, a smoother profile is observed.*

*These profiles evolve on time scales of hours. By measuring the dispersion of the radio pulses with respect to frequency, we have localized the source to within our own Galaxy and suggest that it could be an ultra-long-period magnetar.*

Zucker, C., et al (2022) **Star formation near the Sun is driven by expansion of the Local Bubble.** NATURE 601:334-337

*Authors' abstract: For decades we have known that the Sun lies within the Local Bubble, a cavity of low-density, high temperature plasma surrounded by a shell of cold, neutral gas and dust.*

*However, the precise shape and extent of this shell, the impetus and timescale for its formation, and its relationship to nearby star formation have remained uncertain, largely due to low-resolution models of the local interstellar medium.*

*Here we report an analysis of the three-dimensional positions, shapes and motions of dense gas and young stars within 200 pc of the Sun, using new spatial and dynamical constraints.*

*We find that nearly all of the star-forming complexes in the solar vicinity lie on the surface of the Local Bubble and that their young stars show outward expansion mainly perpendicular to the bubble's surface.*

*Tracebacks of these young stars' motions support a picture in which the origin of the Local Bubble was a burst of stellar birth and then death (supernovae) taking place near the bubble's centre beginning approximately 14 megayears ago.*

*The expansion of the Local Bubble created by the supernovae swept up the ambient interstellar medium into an extended shell that has now fragmented and collapsed into the most prominent nearby molecular clouds, in turn providing robust observational support for the theory of supernova-driven star formation.*

## **Planets.**

Murakami, M., et al (2022) **Radiative thermal conductivity of single-crystal bridgmanite at the core-mantle boundary with implications for thermal evolution of the Earth.** EARTH AND PLANETARY SCIENCE LETTERS 578:doi.org/10.1016/j.epsl.2021.117329

*Authors' abstract: The Earth has been releasing vast amounts of heat from deep Earth's interior to the surface since its formation, which primarily drives mantle convection and a number of tectonic activities. In this heat transport process the core-mantle boundary where hot molten core is in direct contact with solid-state mantle minerals has played an essential role to transfer thermal energies of the core to the overlying mantle.*

*Although the dominant heat transfer mechanisms at the lowermost mantle is believed to be both conduction and radiation of the primary lowermost mantle mineral, bridgmanite, the radiative thermal conductivity of bridgmanite has so far been poorly constrained.*

*Here we revealed the radiative thermal conductivity of bridgmanite at core-mantle boundary is substantially high approaching to  $\sim 5.3 \pm 1.2$  W/mK based on newly established optical absorption measurement of single-crystal bridgmanite performed in-situ under corresponding deep lower mantle conditions.*

*We found the bulk thermal conductivity at core-mantle boundary becomes ~1.5 times higher than the conventionally assumed value, which supports higher heat flow from core, hence more vigorous mantle convection than expected.*

*Results suggest the mantle is much more efficiently cooled, which would ultimately weaken many tectonic activities driven by the mantle convection more rapidly than expected from conventionally believed thermal conduction behavior.*

Way, M.J., et al (2022) **Circumpolar ocean stability on Mars 3 Gy ago.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2112930118

[In the absence of established stratigraphy and geological dating on Mars, scientists have established a provisional chronology of Noachian era (4.1 to 3.7 gigayears ago), Hesperian (3.7 to 3 gigayears ago), and Amazonian (3 gigayears ago to date).]

Authors' abstract: *The current Martian climate is not habitable and far from Earth's climate. At the same time that life spread on Earth (3 gigayears ago), the Red Planet was possibly more similar to our Blue Planet.*

*Our model includes a coupled model with dynamic ocean and atmosphere including a hydrological cycle and a simplified glacier mass flux scheme. We show that an ocean is stable in agreement with interpretations of the surface geological records.*

*What was the nature of the Late Hesperian climate, warm and wet, or cold and dry? Formulated this way the question leads to an apparent paradox since both options seem implausible.*

*A warm and wet climate would have produced extensive fluvial erosion but few valley networks have been observed at the age of the Late Hesperian. A too cold climate would have kept any northern ocean frozen most of the time.*

*A moderate cold climate would have transferred the water from the ocean to the land in the form of snow and ice. But this would prevent tsunami formation, for which there is some evidence.*

*Here, we provide insights from numerical climate simulations in agreement with surface geological features to demonstrate that the Martian climate could have been both cold and wet. Using an advanced general circulation model, we demonstrate that an ocean can be stable, even if the Martian mean surface temperature is lower than 0°C.*

*Rainfall is moderate near the shorelines and in the ocean. The southern plateau is mostly covered by ice with a mean temperature below 0°C and a glacier return flow back to the ocean.*

*This climate is achieved with a 1-bar CO<sub>2</sub>-dominated atmosphere with 10% H<sub>2</sub>. Under this scenario of 3 gigayears ago, the geologic evidence of a shoreline and tsunami deposits along the ocean/land dichotomy are compatible with ice sheets and glacial valleys in the southern highlands.*

Zhang, N., et al (2022) **Lunar compositional asymmetry explained by mantle overturn following the South Pole-Aitken impact.** NATURE GEOSCIENCE 15:37-41

Authors' abstract: *The spatial distribution of mare basalts, titanium and KREEP (potassium, rare earth elements and phosphorus) on the Moon is asymmetrical between the nearside and farside.*

*These asymmetries cannot be readily explained by solidification of a global magma ocean and subsequent mantle overturn, which should result in a layered and spherically symmetric lunar interior.*

*Alternative scenarios have been proposed to explain the observed compositional asymmetry, but its origin remains enigmatic. Here, we present hydro- and mantle convection numerical simulations of the giant impact event that formed the South Pole-Aitken basin, the largest impact basin on the Moon, and the subsequent impact-induced convection with the assistance of gravitational instability.*

*We find that the impact induces thermochemical instabilities that drive the dense KREEP-rich ilmenite-bearing cumulate to migrate towards the nearside following lunar magma ocean solidification.*

*This results in the formation of a chemical reservoir under the nearside crust that could explain the observed geochemical asymmetries. We suggest that enrichments of ilmenite and KREEP in the nearside hemisphere following the South Pole-Aitken impact event provide a viable explanation for the wide composition range of mare basalts observed on the lunar surface.*

**Space Travel.**

Haveman, N.J., and A.C. Schuerger (2022) **Diagnosing an opportunistic fungal pathogen on spaceflight-grown plants using the MinION Sequencing Platform.** ASTROBIOLOGY 22:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2021.0049

*Authors’ abstract: Sustainable agriculture in microgravity is integral to future long-term human space exploration. To ensure the efficient and sustainable cultivation of plants in space, a contingency plan to monitor plant health and mitigate plant diseases is necessary.*

*Yet, neither methods nor tools currently exist to evaluate the plant microbial interactions or to diagnose potential plant diseases in space-based bioregenerative life support systems.*

*In this study, we show how the MinION sequencing platform can be used to diagnose the opportunistic pathogen Fusarium oxysporum sensu lato, a fungal infection on Zinnia hybrida (zinnia) plants that were grown on the International Space Station (ISS) in 2015 to 2016.*

*Genomic DNA from the infected plant material (root and leaf tissues) retrieved from the ISS were extracted and sequenced. In addition, pure cultures of Burkholderia contaminans, F. oxysporum sensu lato, and Fusarium sporotrichioides were used as controls to test the specificity of the bioinformatics pipeline developed.*

*The results show that the MinION platform can be used to accurately differentiate between Fusaria species and strengthens the case for using the platform as a rapid plant disease diagnostic tool in space.*

Speirs: I am reminded of Michael Swanwick’s novel VACUUM FLOWERS (reviewed in issue #323 of this zine), which took its title from weed control problems on space stations.

**The Origin Of Life.**

[The Precambrian era of Earth, from 4,500 to 542 mega years ago, is of great interest to exobiologists because the challenge of detecting ancient life is much the same as detecting life on Mars.]

Goodwin, A., and D. Papineau (2022) **Biosignatures associated with organic matter in late Paleoproterozoic stromatolitic dolomite and implications for Martian carbonates.** ASTROBIOLOGY 22:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2021.0010

[Stromatolites are mat-forming algae that grow up into mounds in shallow ocean waters. They are the oldest positively known ancient life forms from the Precambrian of 3.8 gigayears ago. They still exist today in a few restricted habitats.]

[The algae produced oxygen as a byproduct of photosynthesis and eventually converted Earth’s atmosphere from a poisonous (to us) methane-ammonia-carbon dioxide mix into oxygen. It took them a billion years to do it because their waste oxygen first reacted with minerals and converted them into oxides before enough free oxygen was left over.]

*Authors’ abstract: The documentation of biosignatures in Precambrian rocks is an important requirement in the search for evidence of life on other ancient planetary surfaces. Three major kinds of biosignatures are crucially important: primary microbial sedimentary textures, diagenetic organomineral assemblages, and stable isotope compositions.*

*This study presents new petrographic, mineralogical, and organic geochemical analyses of biosignatures in dolomitic stromatolites from the Pethei Group (Northwest Territories, Canada) and the Kasegalik Formation of the Belcher Group (Nunavut, Canada). Both are approximately contemporary late Paleoproterozoic stromatolite-bearing dolomitic units deposited after the Great Oxidation Event.*

*Micro-Raman and optical microscopy are used to identify and characterize possible diagenetic biosignatures, which include close spatial association of diagenetic materials (such as ferric-ferrous oxide and anatase) with disseminated organic matter (OM), dolomitic groundmass textures, and mineralized balls.*

Many of these petrographic relationships point to the oxidation of OM either biotically or abiotically in association with iron reduction and chemically oscillating reactions.

Oxidation of OM in these stromatolites is consistent with the widespread oxidation of biomass during the late Paleoproterozoic Shunga-Francevillian Event.

Biosignatures identified in this study are also compared with possible carbonate outcrops on Mars, and thereby contribute a basis for comparison with potential biosignatures in ancient Martian terrains.

Similarities are drawn between the paleoenvironments of the studied units to the Isidis and Chryse planitia as locations for potential extraterrestrial dolomitic stromatolites.

**Palaeobiology.**

Pérez-Peris, F., et al (2021) **Systematics, morphology, and appendages of an Early Ordovician pilekiine trilobite *Anacheirurus* from Fezouata Shale and the early diversification of Cheiruridae.** ACTA PALAEONTOLOGICA POLONICA 66:doi.org/10.4202/app.00902.2021 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Pilekiines are the earliest diverging members of the successful trilobite family Cheiruridae. The pilekiine genus Anacheirurus is characterized by sub-quadratic to sub-oval glabella, pitted genae, and a distinct trunk with elongated pleural spines in its posterior part.*

*Anacheirurus adserai* is a common component of the Fezouata Shale (Lower Ordovician, Morocco), where it was initially included into several species of the genus *Lehua*.

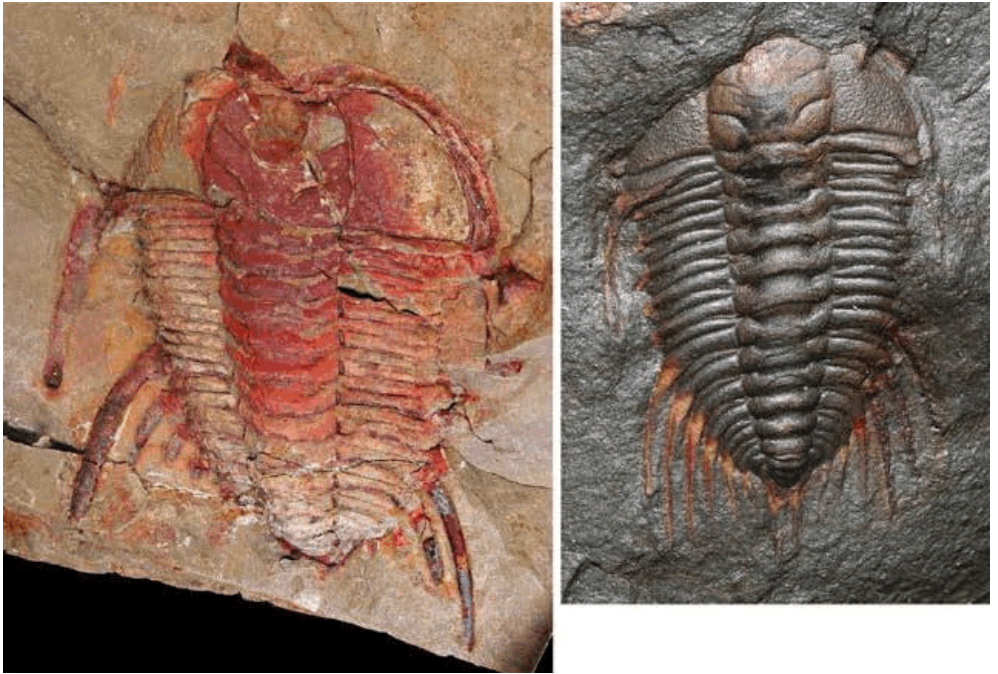
*This assignment and taxonomic over-splitting created confusion, overestimated cheirurid diversity at this locality, and simultaneously underestimated morphological variability within A. adserai. In this contribution we examine new material of A. adserai from the Fezouata Shale, clarifying its morphology and systematics.*

Exceptionally preserved specimens of *A. adserai* from the Fezouata Shale show details of appendages, revealing the endopodite and exopodite morphologies in early members of Cheiruridae.

The endopodite of *A. adserai* is unique among trilobites in possessing comparatively longer distal podomeres 5 and 6, but otherwise, it has the same general morphology as other described trilobite endopodites. The exopodite morphology of *A. adserai* shows characters typical of some Cambrian species but differs in several aspects from those known in post-Cambrian taxa.

It is concluded that trilobite exopodite morphology was probably more variable than the endopodite morphology, which remains rather conservative across different taxa. Morphological diversity of trilobite exopodites in post-Cambrian taxa might be related to ecological escalations during the Ordovician biodiversification and the transition between Cambrian and Ordovician trilobite faunas.

[Images of *Anacheirurus adserai* are from this paper.]



**Botany.**

Bansal, M., et al (2022) **Southeast Asian Dipterocarp origin and diversification driven by Africa-India floristic interchange.** SCIENCE 375:doi.org/10.1126/science.abk2177

Authors’ abstract: *The Dipterocarpaceae are a prominent family of mainly tropical trees, reaching particularly high diversity and dominance in present-day Southeast Asian rainforests, where several species regularly reach heights of 50 meters or more. We used fossil pollen, molecular data, and paleobiogeographic analysis to study the origin and dispersal of the family.*

*We trace the origin of the dipterocarps to the mid-Cretaceous of tropical Africa, and postulate subsequent dispersal eastward across an Indian Ocean island arc to the then-isolated Indian subcontinent. The collision of the subcontinent with the Asian landmass then facilitated further dispersal toward Southeast Asia.*

*The evolution and diversification of ancient megathermal angiosperm lineages with Africa-India origins in Asian tropical forests is poorly understood because of the lack of reliable fossils.*

*Our palaeobiogeographical analysis of pollen fossils from Africa and India combined with molecular data and fossil amber records suggest a tropical-African origin of Dipterocarpaceae during the mid- Cretaceous and its dispersal to India during the Late Maastrichtian and Paleocene, leading to range expansion of aseasonal dipterocarps on the Indian Plate.*

*The India-Asia collision further facilitated the dispersal of dipterocarps from India to similar climatic zones in Southeast Asia, which supports their out-of-India migration.*

*The dispersal pathway suggested for Dipterocarpaceae may provide a framework for an alternative biogeographic hypothesis for several megathermal angiosperm families that are presently widely distributed in Southeast Asia.*

**Ecology.**

Retallack, G.J. (2022) **Soil carbon dioxide planetary thermostat.** ASTROBIOLOGY 22:doi.org/10.1089/ast.2020.2415

Author’s abstract: *Biological regulation of planetary temperature has been explained with the Daisyworld model, in which reflective cooling white daisies balance absorbing warming black daisies.*

*This article advances the proposition that cooling “daisies” of Daisyworld represent carbon sequestration and consumption by productive soils and ecosystems, such as grasslands expanding into deserts and tropical forests migrating toward the poles.*

*On the other hand, warming “daisies” represent continued CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from volcanoes and springs allowed by unproductive frigid and desert ecosystems.*

*Greenhouse spikes of CO<sub>2</sub> in deep time from large perturbations, such as flood basalt eruptions and asteroid impacts, did not continue as lethal runaway greenhouses, such as Venus, nor did low CO<sub>2</sub> of ice ages decline to a sterile global snowball, such as Mars.*

*These hypotheses are quantified and tested by new global soil maps derived from paleosols of the last extremes of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>: middle Miocene (16 megayears ago) and last glacial maximum (20 kiloyears ago), when CO<sub>2</sub> levels were 588 ± 72 and 180 ppm, respectively.*

*Observed expansion of productive soils curbed large atmospheric injections of CO<sub>2</sub> in deep time and observed expansion of unproductive soils during ice ages of low CO<sub>2</sub> was thwarted by continued metamorphic and volcanic degassing.*

*This short-term Soilworld thermostat of biogeographic redistribution of ecosystems supplemented long-term evolution of terrestrial carbon sequestration curbing solar radiation increases over billions of years. Similar agricultural management of ecosystems has potential for short-term carbon sequestration.*

Sharma, S., et al (2022) **North American tree migration paced by climate in the west, lagging in the east.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2116691118

Authors’ abstract: *Suitable habitats for forest trees may be shifting fast with recent climate change. Studies tracking the shift in suitable habitat for forests have been inconclusive, in part because responses in tree fecundity and seedling establishment can diverge.*

*Analysis of both components at a continental scale reveals a poleward migration of northern species that is in progress now. Recruitment and fecundity both contribute to poleward spread in the West, while fecundity limits spread in the East, despite a fecundity hotspot in the Southeast.*

*Fecundity limitation on population spread can confront conservation and management efforts with persistent disequilibrium between forest diversity and rapid climate change.*

*Tree fecundity and recruitment have not yet been quantified at scales needed to anticipate biogeographic shifts in response to climate change. By separating their responses, this study shows coherence across species and communities, offering the strongest support to date that migration is in progress with regional limitations on rates.*

*The southeastern continent emerges as a fecundity hotspot, but it is situated south of population centers where high seed production could contribute to poleward population spread. By contrast, seedling success is highest in the West and North, serving to partially offset limited seed production near poleward frontiers.*

McCarthy, A.H., et al (2022) **Ship traffic connects Antarctica’s fragile coasts to worldwide ecosystems.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2110303118

Authors’ abstract: *Ship movements related to fishing, tourism, research, and supply expose the Antarctic continent to human impacts. Until now, only rough estimates or industry-specific information have been available to inform evidence-based policy to mitigate the introduction of nonnative marine species.*

*Antarctica’s Southern Ocean supports a unique biota and represents the only global marine region without any known biological invasions. However, climate change is removing physiological barriers to potential invasive non-native species and increasing ship activities are raising propagule pressure.*

*The successful conservation of iconic Antarctic species and environments relies on addressing both climate change and direct, localized human impact. We have identified high-risk areas for introduced species and provide essential data that will underpin better evidence-based management in the region.*

*Antarctica, an isolated and long considered pristine wilderness, is becoming increasingly exposed to the negative effects of ship-borne human activity, and especially the introduction of invasive species.*

*Here, we provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis of ship movements into Antarctic waters and a spatially explicit assessment of introduction risk for nonnative marine species in all Antarctic waters.*

*We show that vessels traverse Antarctica’s isolating natural barriers, connecting it directly via an extensive network of ship activity to all global regions, especially South Atlantic and European ports.*

*Ship visits are more than seven times higher to the Antarctic Peninsula (especially east of Anvers Island) and the South Shetland Islands than elsewhere around Antarctica, together accounting for 88% of visits to Southern Ocean ecoregions.*

*Contrary to expectations, we show that while the five recognized “Antarctic Gateway cities” are important last ports of call, especially for research and tourism vessels, an additional 53 ports had vessels directly departing to Antarctica from 2014 to 2018.*

*We identify ports outside Antarctica where biosecurity interventions could be most effectively implemented and the most vulnerable Antarctic locations where monitoring programs for high-risk invaders should be established.*

**Zoology.**

Bellinger, M.R., et al (2022) **Conservation of magnetite biomineralization genes in all domains of life and implications for magnetic sensing.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2108655119 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Animals use geomagnetic fields for navigational cues, yet the sensory mechanism underlying magnetic perception remains poorly understood.*

*One idea is that geomagnetic fields are physically transduced by magnetite crystals contained inside specialized receptor cells, but evidence for intracellular, biogenic magnetite in eukaryotes is scant.*

*Certain bacteria produce magnetite crystals inside intracellular compartments, representing the most ancient form of biomineralization known and having evolved prior to emergence of the crown group of eukaryotes, raising the question of whether magnetite biomineralization in eukaryotes and prokaryotes might share a common evolutionary history.*

*Here, we discover that salmonid olfactory epithelium contains magnetite crystals arranged in compact clusters and determine that genes differentially expressed in magnetic olfactory cells, contrasted to nonmagnetic olfactory cells, share ancestry with an ancient prokaryote magnetite biomineralization system, consistent with exaptation for use in eukaryotic magnetoreception.*

*We also show that 11 prokaryote biomineralization genes are universally present among a diverse set of eukaryote taxa and that nine of those genes are present within the Asgard clade of archaea Lokiarchaeota that affiliates with eukaryotes in phylogenomic analysis.*

*Consistent with deep homology, we present an evolutionary genetics hypothesis for magnetite formation among eukaryotes to motivate convergent approaches for examining magnetite based magnetoreception, molecular origins of matrix-associated biomineralization processes, and eukaryogenesis.*

Wynn, J., et al (2022) **Magnetic stop signs signal a European songbird’s arrival at the breeding site after migration.** SCIENCE 375:doi.org10.1126/science.abj4210

Authors’ abstract: *Many migratory species undertake incredibly long migrations throughout a year. Much research has focused on understanding how these animals know where to go and how to return, and most work has focused on understanding how animals know, or learn, routes and directions. Equally important, however, is how they know when and where to stop migrating.*

*We looked at a century of leg ringing and banding data in Eurasian reed warblers and found that the birds rely on the magnetic inclination as a “stop sign” to return to within meters of their breeding site.*

*Although it is known that birds can return to their breeding grounds with exceptional precision, it has remained a mystery how they know when and where to stop migrating.*

*Using nearly a century’s worth of Eurasian reed warbler (Acrocephalus scirpaceus) ringing recoveries, we investigated whether fluctuations in Earth’s magnetic field predict variation in the sites to which birds return.*

*Ringing recoveries suggest that magnetic inclination is learned before departure and is subsequently used as a uni-coordinate “stop sign” when relocating the natal or breeding site. However, many locations have the same inclination angle.*

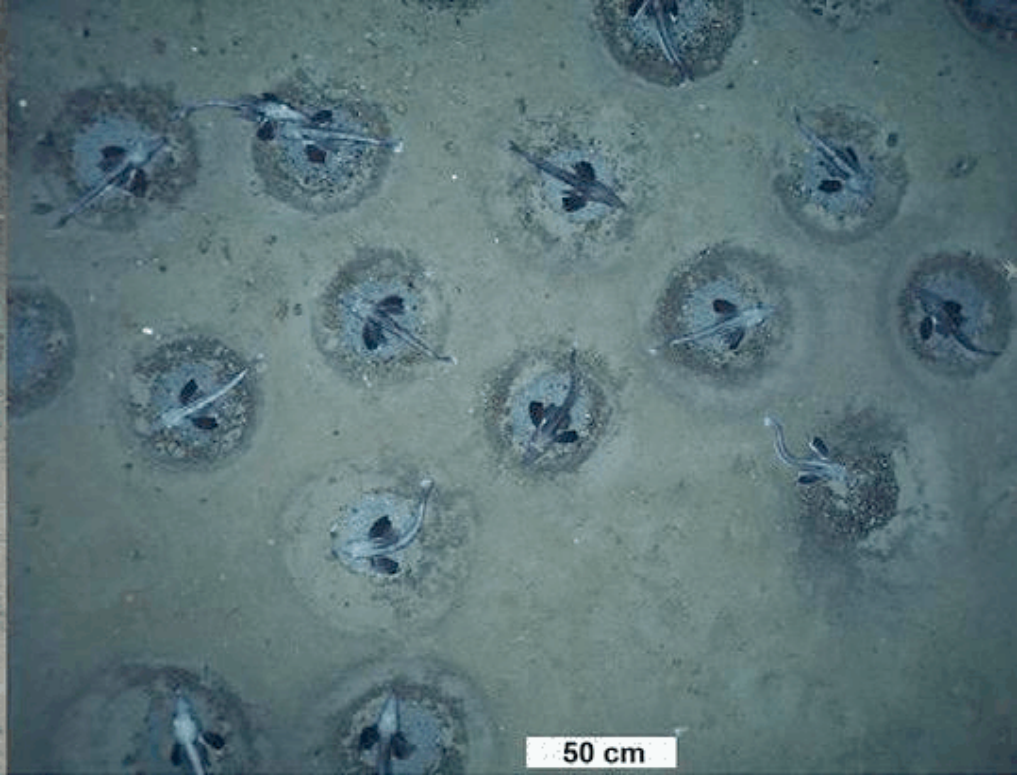
*Data from populations with different migratory directions indicate that birds solve this ambiguity by stopping at the first place where the right inclination is encountered on an inherited return vector.*

Purser, A., et al (2022) **A vast icefish breeding colony discovered in the Antarctic.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 32:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2021.12.022 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *A breeding colony of notothenioid icefish (Neopagetopsis ionah) of globally unprecedented extent has been discovered in the southern Weddell Sea, Antarctica.*

*The colony was estimated to cover at least 240 km<sup>2</sup> of the eastern flank of the Filchner Trough, comprised of fish nests at a density of 0.26 nests per square meter, representing an estimated total of 60 million active nests and associated fish biomass of >60,000 tonnes.*

*The majority of nests were each occupied by 1 adult fish guarding 1,735 eggs. Bottom water temperatures measured across the nesting colony were up to 2°C warmer than the surrounding bottom waters, indicating a spatial correlation between the modified Warm Deep Water (mWDW) upflow onto the Weddell Shelf and the active nesting area.*



*Historical and concurrently collected seal movement data indicate that this concentrated fish biomass may be utilized by predators such as Weddell seals (*Leptonychotes weddellii*). Numerous degraded fish carcasses within and near the nesting colony suggest that, in death as well as life, these fish provide input for local food webs and influence local biogeochemical processing.*

*To our knowledge, the area surveyed harbors the most spatially expansive continuous fish breeding colony discovered to date globally at any depth, as well as an exceptionally high Antarctic seafloor biomass. This discovery provides support for the establishment of a regional marine protected area in the Southern Ocean under the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) umbrella.*

[Images are from this paper.]

Goldshtein, A., et al (2022) **Mother bats facilitate pup navigation learning.** CURRENT BIOLOGY 32:doi.org/10.1016/j.cub.2021.11.010

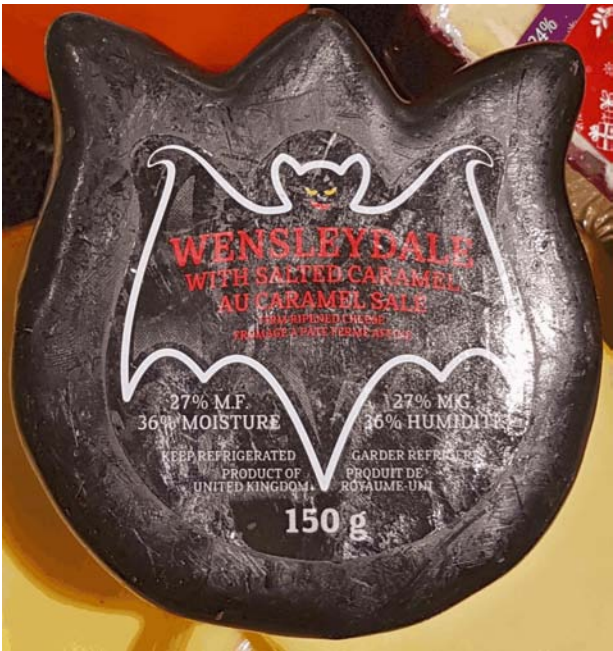
Authors’ abstract: *Pups learn to navigate while passively being transported upside down by their mothers. Learning where to forage and how to navigate to foraging sites are among the most essential skills that infants must acquire. How they do so is poorly understood.*

*Numerous bat species carry their young in flight while foraging. This behavior is costly, and the benefits for the offspring are not fully clear. Using GPS tracking of both mothers and bat pups, we documented the pups’ ontogeny from being non-volant to foraging independently.*

*Our results suggest that mothers facilitate learning of navigation, assisting their pups with future foraging, by repeatedly placing them on specific trees and by behaving in a manner that seemed to encourage learning.*

*Once independent, pups first flew alone to the same sites that they were carried to by their mothers, following similar routes used by their mothers, after which they began exploring new sites.*

*Notably, in our observations, pups never independently followed their mothers in flight but were always carried by them, suggesting that learning occurred while passively being transported upside down.*



Cheese with salted caramel. I didn’t buy it.

**Human Prehistory.**

Vidall, C.M., et al (2022) **Age of the oldest known Homo sapiens from eastern Africa.** NATURE 601:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-04275-8

Authors’ abstract: *Efforts to date the oldest modern human fossils in eastern Africa, from Omo-Kibish and Herto in Ethiopia, have drawn on a variety of chronometric evidence, including 40Ar/39Ar ages of stratigraphically associated tuffs.*

*The ages that are generally reported for these fossils are around 197 thousand years (kyr) for the Kibish Omo I, and around 160 to 155 kyr for the Herto hominins.*

*However, the stratigraphic relationships and tephra correlations that underpin these estimates have been challenged. Here we report geochemical analyses that link the Kamoya’s Hominid Site (KHS) Tuff, which conclusively overlies the member of the Omo-Kibish Formation that contains Omo I, with a major explosive eruption of Shala volcano in the Main Ethiopian Rift.*

*By dating the proximal deposits of this eruption, we obtain a new minimum age for the Omo fossils of  $233 \pm 22$  kyr. Contrary to previous arguments, we also show that the KHS Tuff does not correlate with another widespread tephra layer, the Waidedo Vitric Tuff, and therefore cannot anchor a minimum age for the Herto fossils.*

*Shifting the age of the oldest known Homo sapiens fossils in eastern Africa to before around 200 thousand years ago is consistent with independent evidence for greater antiquity of the modern human lineage.*

*Only eight sites in Africa have yielded possible early anatomically modern Homo sapiens fossils from the late Middle Pleistocene (approximately 350 to 130 thousand years ago (ka). Most of these have considerable age uncertainty or debatable H. sapiens apomorphy.*

*The most widely accepted fossils that are interpreted as possessing unequivocal modern cranial apomorphies (that is, a tall cranial vault and a chin) and classified as H. sapiens are two Ethiopian finds, namely the Omo II and Herto specimens.*

Stiner, M.C., et al (2022) **An endemic pathway to sheep and goat domestication at Asikli Höyük (Central Anatolia, Turkey)** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2110930119

Authors’ abstract: *Sheep and goats (caprines) were domesticated in Southwest Asia, but how and in how many places remain open questions. Our analysis of caprine age and sex structures and related data reveal a local (endemic) domestication process at Asikli Höyük in Central Anatolia.*

*Beginning ca. 10,400 years ago, caprine management segued through a series of viable systems over the next 1,000 years. The earliest stage simply involved capturing wild lambs and kids and growing them on site to supplement a broad spectrum forager diet.*

*Soon, low-level breeding began within the settlement along with catching and raising wild infants. By the end of the archaeological sequence, large numbers of animals were produced from captive herds, which gave rise to early domesticated forms.*

*This study investigates the initial conditions and trajectory of caprine domestication at Asikli Höyük, which preserves an unusually high-resolution record of the first 1,000 years of Neolithic existence in Central Anatolia. Our comparative analysis of caprine age and sex structures and related evidence reveals a local domestication process that began around 8400 cal BC.*

*Caprine management at Asikli segued through three viable systems. The earliest mode was embedded within a broad-spectrum foraging economy and directed to live meat storage on a small scale.*

*This was essentially a “catch-and-grow” strategy that involved seasonal capture of wild lambs and kids from the surrounding highlands and raising them several months prior to slaughter within the settlement.*

*The second mode paired modest levels of caprine reproduction on site with continued recruitment of wild infants. The third mode shows the hallmarks of a large-scale herding economy based on a large, reproductively viable captive population but oddly directed to harvesting adult animals, contra to most later Neolithic practices.*

*Wild infant capture likely continued at a low level. The transitions were gradual but, with time, gave rise to early domesticated forms and monumental differences in human labor organization, settlement layout, and waste accumulation. Asikli was an independent center of caprine domestication and thus supports the multiple origins evolutionary model.*

Patterson, N., et al (2022) **Large-scale migration into Britain during the Middle to Late Bronze Age.** NATURE 601:588-594

Authors’ abstract: *Present-day people from England and Wales have more ancestry derived from early European farmers (EEF) than did people of the Early Bronze Age. To understand this, here we generated genome-wide data from 793 individuals, increasing data from the Middle to the Late Bronze Age and Iron Age in Britain by 12-fold, and western and central Europe by 3.5-fold.*

*Between 1000 and 875 BC, EEF ancestry increased in southern Britain (England and Wales) but not northern Britain (Scotland) due to incorporation of migrants who arrived at this time and over previous centuries, and who were genetically most similar to ancient individuals from France.*

*These migrants contributed about half the ancestry of people of England and Wales from the Iron Age, thereby creating a plausible vector for the spread of early Celtic languages into Britain.*

*These patterns are part of a broader trend of EEF ancestry becoming more similar across central and western Europe in the Middle to the Late Bronze Age, coincident with archaeological evidence of intensified cultural exchange.*

*There was comparatively less gene flow from continental Europe during the Iron Age, and the independent genetic trajectory in Britain is also reflected in the rise of the allele conferring lactase persistence to approximately 50% by this time compared to approximately 7% in central Europe where it rose rapidly in frequency only a millennium later.*

*This suggests that dairy products were used in qualitatively different ways in Britain and in central Europe over this period.*

Kuitens, M., et al (2022) **Evidence for European presence in the Americas in AD 1021.** NATURE 601:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-021-03972-8 (available as a free pdf)

[The significance of the contact between Vikings and Inuit a millennium ago is that it completed the circumnavigation of Earth by *Homo sapiens sapiens*.]

Authors’ abstract: *Transatlantic exploration took place centuries before the crossing of Columbus. Physical evidence for early European presence in the Americas can be found in Newfoundland, Canada. However, it has thus far not been possible to determine when this activity took place.*

*Here we provide evidence that the Vikings were present in Newfoundland in AD 1021. We overcome the imprecision of previous age estimates by making use of the cosmic-ray-induced upsurge in atmospheric radiocarbon concentrations in AD 993.*

*Our new date lays down a marker for European cognisance of the Americas, and represents the first known point at which humans encircled the globe. The Vikings (or Norse) were the first Europeans to cross the Atlantic. However, the only confirmed Norse site in the Americas is L’Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland.*

*Extensive field campaigns have been conducted at this UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) World Heritage Site, and much knowledge has been gained about the settlement and its contemporary environment.*

*Evidence has also revealed that L’Anse aux Meadows was a base camp from which other locations, including regions further south, were explored.*

*The received paradigm is that the Norse settlement dates to the close of the first millennium; however, the precise age of the site has never been scientifically established.*

*Most previous estimates have been based on stylistic analysis of the architectural remains and a handful of artefacts, as well as interpretations of the Icelandic sagas, oral histories that were only written down centuries later.*

*Radiocarbon (<sup>14</sup>C) analysis has been attempted at the site, but has not proved especially informative. More than 150 <sup>14</sup>C dates have been obtained, of which 55 relate to the Norse occupation. However, the calibrated age ranges provided by these samples extend across and beyond the entire Viking Age.*

*This is in contrast with the archaeological evidence and interpretations of the sagas. The latter offer differing scenarios for the frequency and duration of Norse activity in the Americas, but both the archaeological and written records are consistent with a very brief occupation.*

*The unfavourable spread in the <sup>14</sup>C dates is down to the limitations of this chronometric technique in the 1960s and 1970s when most of these dates were obtained. Such impediments included far greater measurement uncertainty and restrictive sample size requirements. Furthermore, many of these samples were subject to an unknown amount of inbuilt age.*

*The term inbuilt age refers to the difference in time between the contextual age of the sample and the time at which the organism died (returned by <sup>14</sup>C analysis), which can potentially reach hundreds of years. This offset was also sometimes inappropriately incorporated into summary estimates.*

*In our study, we use an advanced chronometric approach to anchor Norse activity in the Americas to a precise point in time. Exact-year <sup>14</sup>C results can be achieved by high-precision accelerator mass spectrometry (AMS) in combination with distinct features in the atmospheric <sup>14</sup>C record.*

*Measurements on known-age (dendrochronological) tree rings show that <sup>14</sup>C production usually fluctuates by less than 2‰ per year. However, such time series have also revealed that production of the isotope rapidly increased in the years AD 775 and AD 993 by about 12‰ (which manifests as a decrease of about 100 <sup>14</sup>C year) and about 9‰ (about 70 <sup>14</sup>C year), respectively.*

*These sudden increases were caused by cosmic radiation events, and appear synchronously in dendrochronological records all around the world. By uncovering these features in tree-ring samples of unknown age, it is possible to effect precise pattern matching between such samples and reference series.*

*In so doing, if the bark edge (or more specifically, the waney edge) is also present, it becomes possible to determine the exact felling year of the tree. Moreover, it is not necessary to have <sup>14</sup>C dates for the outermost growth rings,*

*because once the ring that contains the ad 993 anomaly has been detected, it simply becomes a matter of counting the number of rings to the waney edge.*

Philippsen, B., et al (2022) **Single-year radiocarbon dating anchors Viking Age trade cycles in time.** NATURE 601:392-396

*Authors' abstract: Recent discoveries of rapid changes in the atmospheric 14C concentration linked to solar particle events have spurred the construction of new radiocarbon annual calibration data sets. With these data sets, radiocarbon dating becomes relevant for urban sites, which require dates at higher resolution than previous calibration data sets could offer.*

*Here we use a single-year radiocarbon calibration curve to anchor the archaeological stratigraphy of a Viking Age trade centre in time. We present absolutely dated evidence for artefact finds charting the expansion of long-distance trade from as far away as Arctic Norway and the Middle East, which we linked to the beginning of the Viking Age at AD 790 ± 10.*

*The methods developed here enable human interactions and cultural, climatic and environmental changes to be compared in archaeological stratigraphies worldwide.*

**Modern Humans.**

Cassidy, Richard (2021) **Silver coins, wooden tallies and parchment rolls in Henry III's Exchequer.** FINANCIAL HISTORY REVIEW 28:doi.org/10.1017/S0968565021000184

*Authors abstract: In the mid thirteenth century, England used only a single coin, the silver penny. The flow of coins into and out of the government's treasury was recorded in the rolls of the Exchequer of Receipt. These receipt and issue rolls have been largely ignored, compared to the pipe rolls, which were records of audit.*

*Some more obscure records, the memoranda of issue, help to show how the daily operations of government finance worked, when cash was the only medium available.*

*They indicate something surprising: the receipt and issue rolls do not necessarily record transactions which took place during the periods they nominally cover.*

*They also show that the Exchequer was experimenting with other forms of payment, using tally sticks, several decades earlier than was previously known.*

*The rolls and the tallies indicate that the objectives of the Exchequer were not, as we would now expect, concerned with balancing income and expenditure, drawing up a budget, or even recording cash flows within a particular year. These concepts were as yet unknown. [Speirs: And appear to have since been forgotten in Canada and the USA.]*

*Instead, the Exchequer's aim was to ensure the accountability of officials, its own and those in other branches of government, by allocating financial responsibility to individuals rather than institutions.*

Smith, Christopher (2022) **The Great Chester Cat Hoax: Creating an urban legend in the anglosphere press, 1815-1955** HISTORY 107:74-96

*Author's abstract: In 1815 a cat hoax rocked Chester. Someone plastered the city with handbills offering to buy cats. Hundreds of cats were rounded up and delivered, yet there was no buyer to be found. In the resulting chaos, people were injured, and hundreds of cats were drowned.*

*This story was widely reported at the time up and down Britain. Soon enough it was also told in newspapers and compendia of trivia across the anglosphere. Yet, the Great Chester Cat Hoax never happened; it was a journalistic invention which rapidly transformed into a widely believed urban legend.*

*This did not, however, prevent copycat hoaxes from materialising as pranksters imitated the story, first in the British Isles and then later in North America.*

*The press were instrumental in the evolution and spread of cat hoaxes, and pranksters soon utilised newspaper adverts to engineer new hoaxes. Press coverage of cat hoaxes also evolved, reflecting the changing role of the cat in urban society and emergent anti-cruelty concerns.*

Finally, the article shows that the meaning of the hoax was tied to ideas regarding ignorance rooted in anti-Hibernian attitudes, as well as gendered and working-class stereotypes.

Bertazzini, M.C. (2022) **The long-term impact of Italian colonial roads in the Horn of Africa, 1935-2015.** JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY 22:doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbaa017

Author’s abstract: *This article exploits the quasi-natural experiment provided by the extensive road network that was built across the Horn of Africa during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-1941), to examine how a first-mover advantage in transportation can affect the spatial distribution of economic activity in developing countries over the long run.*

*The results show that Italian paved roads rendered areas located within 10 km of them significantly more populated, urbanized and luminous around 2010, relative to comparable, more distant locations.*

*Early road building lifted first-mover locations out of isolation and allowed for net welfare gains, thanks to a reduction in transport costs and specialization. To this day, first-mover locations continue to diverge from the control group, due to a coordination mechanism that led to an oversupply of governmental facilities in the post-colonial period.*

Jervis, Robert (2022) **Why postmortems fail.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 119:doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2116638118

Author’s abstract: *Learning from past experiences, especially failures, is central to progress in human affairs. Knowing this, organizations, and especially governments, often conduct postmortems after important policies fail.*

*Unfortunately, however, the combination of political pressures and psychological biases usually leads to the use of flawed social science methods, which make the results of the studies limited and often misleading.*

*Most high-profile disasters are followed by demands for an investigation into what went wrong. Even before they start, calls for finding the missed warning*

*signs and an explanation for why people did not “connect the dots” will be common.*

*Unfortunately, however, the same combination of political pressures and the failure to adopt good social science methods that contributed to the initial failure usually lead to postmortems that are badly flawed. The high stakes mean that powerful actors will have strong incentives to see that certain conclusions are, and are not, drawn.*

*Most postmortems also are marred by strong psychological biases, especially the assumption that incorrect inferences must have been the product of wrong ways of thinking, premature cognitive closure, the naive use of hindsight, and the neglect of the comparative method.*

*Given this experience, I predict that the forthcoming inquiries into the January 6, 2021, storming of the US Capitol, and the abrupt end to the Afghan government will stumble in many ways.*