



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



photos by Dale Speirs

After two years of pandemic, Calgarians were ready to party hearty on Canada Day. There were celebrations throughout the city but the biggest were downtown. The cover photo shows the aboriginal tribes exhibit in Fort Calgary Park at the east end of the downtown core.

At left, myself in full array at the Olympic Plaza next to a food truck. Below were Canada Day doughnuts. My patriotic duty was to eat them.



Fort Calgary Park. Nothing much seemed to be happening except for some technicians wandering about fiddling with things on the stage.



Food trucks as far as the human eye could see. This was in East Village but could just as easily have been anywhere downtown.



Olympic Plaza, the heart of the city.



LICENCED TO DRIVE: PART 7

photos by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 6 appeared in OPUNTIA #476, 482, 489, 497, 503, and 513. Previous licence plate photos were in OPUNTIA #63.5A, 410, 421, 445, 452, 459, and 471.]

Some licence plates seen around Calgary in 2022.

True Patriot Love.



You Are What You Drive.





At left: There are no fire ants in Alberta.

At right: I'm guessing the owner of this pickup truck was married to a registered nurse.





At upper left:
Infills are narrow
2-story houses
built on lots which
once contained a
single bungalow.
Therefore this
plate belongs to a
realtor or
contractor.

At upper right:
The lowest plate
I've seen so far.



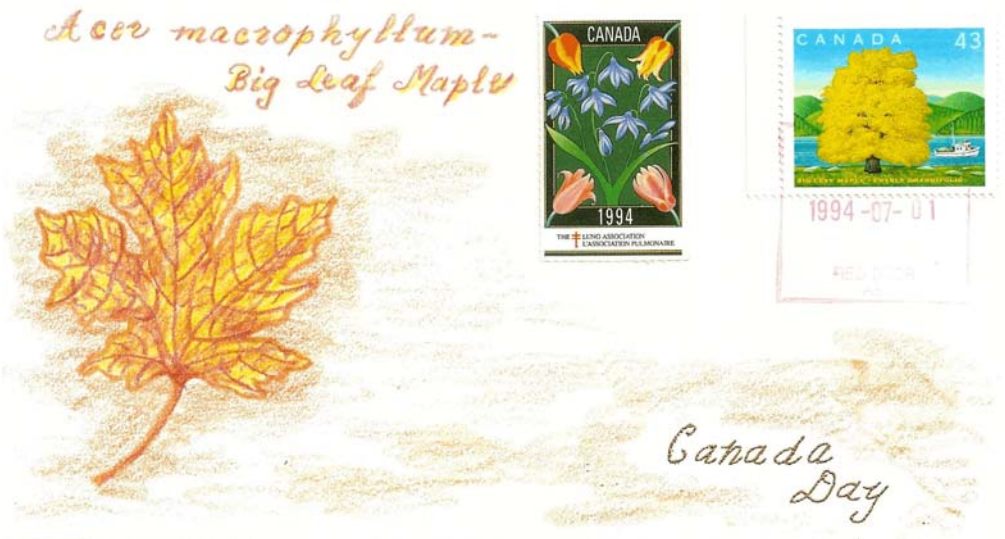
MAIL ART OF BETTY SPEIRS: PART 11
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 10 appeared in OPUNTIA's #511, 514, 517, 519, 521, 523 to 527.]

Each year Canada Post issues a set of stamps on the theme of Canada Day. In 1994, the stamps showed the maple species of Canada.



The post offices run directly by Canada Post are closed on July 1, but the retail postal outlets can stay open if they wish. My mother had her covers canceled at the Red Deer Co-op RePO. The cachets on each cover are her own artwork.





*Manitoba Maple -
Acer negundo*



*Canada
Day*

*Norway Maple -
Acer platanoides*



*Canada
Day*

*Acer pensylvanicum -
Striped Maple*



*Canada
Day*

*Red Maple -
Acer rubrum*



*Canada
Day*

Acer saccharum -
Sugar
Maple



Canada
Day

Acer spicatum -
Mountain
Maple



Canada
Day

Acer sacchinum L. -
Silver
Maple



Canada
Day

DIAMONDS ARE FOREVER: PART 2

by Dale Speirs

[Part 1 appeared in OPUNTIA #499.]

Smuggling Ice.

Diamonds have been favoured by smugglers for centuries because they contain high value in a compact state. Countless methods have been used to get diamonds across borders. An example was “Baldwin’s Fellow Passengers” by Don Mark Lemon (1908 July, THE BLACK CAT, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org), set on board a passenger steamer traveling from England to New York City.

Baldwin was a jeweler returning to the city when he met a pigeon fancier, never given a name. who demonstrated to the passengers his coop of homing pigeons. The man said that upon arrival, he would release the pigeons to fly back home to England. In the harbour, Baldwin watched as the pigeons flew up into the sky from the deck of the ship.

What made him suspicious was that the birds headed west, going inland. Baldwin learned a few days later that the man was offering diamonds to buyers in Manhattan. He had a clerk track him to his house in the boroughs, then notified the customs officers. The pigeons in his coop were not English, they were New Yorkers, and had airlifted the diamonds past the ship dock Customs.

Hot Ice.

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.

The radio series THE SHADOW 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 The series lasted until 1954. Like the print stories, no real-name credit was given to writers. Sometimes a house name was credited, but usually nothing was said in the closing credits about who the writer was.

“Death Shows The Way” aired on 1939-12-03. The episode opened with Lamont Cranston squabbling with his butler Allen over how his clothes were packed for a weekend in the country. That tempest passed and Cranston took Margo Lane out to the Barton estate.

Eddy and Helen Barton had adopted a bratty boy named Skippy. They also adopted a dog that Skippy hated and kicked whenever they met. Needless to say the dog didn’t like him.

The Bartons had just purchased the Harvey diamond, which was delivered to the manor house that same weekend. Ominous forebodings included a reference to the diamond being cursed and Barton having trouble paying for it.

The jeweler who delivered the diamond was poisoned and the stone stolen. Skippy was kidnapped but released a few hours later. As Lane said to Cranston, “*Someday we’ll actually go some place for two days where absolutely nothing happens*”.

Count Santos was a guest at the mansion. Cranston saw him fleeing and The Shadow pursued. Santos turned out to be an American imposter who admitted trying to steal the diamond but denied the murder.

Santos told The Shadow he knew who might have committed the murder. Just as he was about to name the culprit, he was shot dead by an unknown sniper. Of course he was. The obvious suspect is always the second victim.

Barton reported that the real diamond had been found. The stolen gem was a paste copy. Then and now, common practice of jewelry owners was to make a copy to be worn in public where theft might be a concern, while the real jewel was in a safe.

Cranston said he would look after the real stone, then faked his death. He correctly surmised that the thief would return after discovering the deception.

The plan worked. Skippy was the thief. His kidnapping was a ruse to get him out of the house with the diamond and transfer it to his confederates.

When Cranston accused him, Skippy pulled a gun. It was said the boy was actually a midget. Not believable. Real midgets don't look like children. A moot point because when Skippy ran for escape, the dog brought him down.

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

"A Diamond Pendant Stolen" aired on 1946-11-10. Miss Hazel Humphrey's engagement party was attended by Daniel Danfield and Rusty Fairfax. Lots of celebrities, and Danfield recognized quite a few criminal minds. Of course he specialized in criminal psychology, illustrating the old adage that to someone with a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

Hazel's mother Edna was wearing a \$100,000 diamond pendant. Fairfax noted that Hazel looked unhappy for a beautiful bride-to-be. Her fiancé was Count André Devrais, a head shorter than her and fat. Hazel was evidently being pushed into an arranged marriage.

Fairfax wanted Danfield to intervene. He refused because the marriage was none of his business. Fairfax was indignant and the two quarreled. An organ segue changed the scene to Hazel and the Count, who were also quarreling. He spoke with Hollywood's idea of a French accent and tried to placate her.

She told him her parents set up the deal, a trade of their money for his title. Very cynical she was. She said she had a lover, which for some reason upset the Count.

Hazel was called away to a private room where she met her handsome lover Raymond Errol, the gardener. He shocked her with the news that he was leaving her. He reminded her that rich girl-poor boy stories don't work in real life.

She wouldn't accept the situation. Neither did Edna, who barged in and dismissed Errol on the spot. Hazel said she wasn't going to marry the Count, which triggered a lengthy hissy fit in Edna.

The next day the diamond pendant was stolen. Mr Humphrey, first name never given, told Danfield that he was going to sell the pendant due to financial problems. He was broke. The pendant wasn't insured because Humphrey couldn't keep up the premiums on the policy.

Danfield investigated. "*I'm never wrong*", he actually said. Suspicion pointed to Errol but the experienced listener will know it wasn't him. Danfield was a showboater and spun out the suspense at a J'accuse! meeting.

Edna and the Count had conspired to do the alleged theft. The pendant never left her bedroom. Their idea was not monetary gain but to get rid of Errol so the marriage could proceed. Danfield sucker-punched the Count and the organist hit a crescendo.

In the denouement, the next day Errol beat up the Count before eloping with Hazel. There was a clever explanation by Danfield about how he knew Edna was lying, based on two clues earlier in the episode.

I felt sorry for the Count. He was always polite, and the wedding wasn't at his instigation. He took it on good faith and only got humiliation and bruises.

"The Case Of The Whirling Mirrors" aired on 1946-11-25. The Baronian Crown Jewels were \$30 million of uncut diamonds, placed out for sale out by the principality. Two thieves used whirling mirrors to hypnotize the curator and take the jewels.

Sidney Thomas, the jeweler who had been entrusted with the gems, visited Dr Danfield for help because of the circumstances of the theft. Thomas had no memory of the heist. He could, however, describe the thieves, a short swarthy man and a tall blonde woman.

An insurance adjuster named Brown had Thomas as the suspect. Brown agreed to pay Danfield a \$300,000 reward for the return of the diamonds. Danfield, Rusty Fairfax, and Thomas then visited the Baronia consulate.

The consul Sir Sergei was a tall handsome man who put Fairfax into heat. Thomas showed Sergei the letter of introduction from the consulate the thieves had used to gain access to the jewels. It was on genuine letterhead of the consulate with Sergei's signature. He said it was a form letter given out to prospective buyers of the diamonds.

Captain Igor handled the actual disbursement of the letters. Sergei called for him. Igor came in with his wife Olga. They were dressed swankily, having been about to go to a soirée.

Thomas immediately identified Igor as one of the thieves. After a crescendo from the organist, segueing to the plot a few moments later, Danfield regretted having to turn Igor over to the police. How could that be? Diplomatic immunity would prevail. Olga burst out with accusations that Sergei had done it. She said she had refused his advances and he was now trying to get Igor out of the way.

Back at Danfield’s office, he hypnotized Thomas and got the truth. He used whirling mirrors, the same as the thieves who had implanted the fake identifications in his mind. Keeping him in a hypnotic state, they drove back to the consulate.

En route, Danfield gave Fairfax an extended lecture on hypnotism, which certainly padded out the episode. As they entered the consulate, they met Sergei and Olgo exiting arm in arm.

This time Thomas identified them as the thieves. There was a struggle, a shot was fired, and Fairfax was wounded. The police arrived. Diplomatic immunity? What of it?

The denouement tried to ramp up the melodrama with a visit to Fairfax in hospital. She would survive since she was booked for the series. Danfield explained the loose ends to her. He then gave her six Baronian diamonds.

Murdering For Ice.

LIGHTS OUT aired from 1934 to 1947, and was an anthology radio series specializing in fantasy, weird fiction, and horror.

“Munghara”was written by Arch Oboler and aired on 1942-10-27. The protagonist was Alec, who spent too much time in the Australian jungle. One of his employees, named Munghara, found a huge diamond.

Alec killed him for the stone. With his dying breath, Munghara laid a curse on him, that he would die three days after getting off the boat when he went back home.

Alec sold the diamond for a huge sum and returned home, but was plagued by troubles and guilt. Everywhere he went he heard Munghara’s voice from other people’s mouths.

Alec began a romance but heard Munghara’s voice from her mouth and tried to kill her. The voice came from a taxi driver, a waiter, everyone. Alec went insane. The third day dawned. Alec’s fright was so great he died of heart failure.

STRANGE ADVENTURE probably aired in 1945 but little is known about this radio series. The episodes were about 3.5 minutes long, written by Charles Crowder and narrated by Pat McGeehan. Some episodes were based on factual history, but most were fiction.

The series was syndicated as a space filler or for insertion inside a variety show. Available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers at www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary

“The Beach Of Diamonds” was about a geologist searching for alluvial diamonds where the Orange River flowed into the South Atlantic. He surmised that because the river originated in diamond country in the interior of South Africa, it would have washed countless diamonds down to the sea, which would have then thrown them back onto the beaches.

An attempt by a big-game hunter to claim jump the beach ended when he got a spear in the back from a native bearer working for the geologist. The location today is the Namibia coast, the richest alluvial diamond field in the world.

“Diamond Of Destiny” began with a ship anchored in a Brazilian port during a time of plague. One of the crew George Osmond went ashore and set out for the country. He found a dying man by the roadside and gave what help he could.

In gratitude, the plague victim gave him a ring set with a huge diamond. He told Osmond that as long as he wore the ring he would have good luck. As to why the dying man didn’t have good luck, he said that was because he had stolen the ring, whereas Osmond was receiving it as a gift.

Osmond eventually became a railroad baron in Brazil. One day he was washing up in a work camp and took the ring off for a moment while he washed his

hands. As he did so, a disgruntled employee stepped into the washroom and shot him dead.

“Diamonds And Death” was a police case about a diamond buyer murdered for his gems on a rural road. A nearby hermit said he had found the stones lying on a riverbed. The police inspector arrested him because it would have been impossible to see the diamonds underwater in the turbulent flow.

Other Troubles With Ice.

“The Great Diamond” by Thomas L. Masson (1910 December, THE BLACK CAT, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org) was about the problems of owning a big rock. A really, really big diamond. The stone was purchased by a nouveau riche millionaire for his wife as a method of getting dinner party invitations among high society.

Came the time when they realized that things you own are called possessions not because you possess them but because they possess you. Possessions have to be cared for and stored. (George Carlin did a stand-up routine “Stuff”, about the problems of owning things.)

The final solution was to cut the diamond into small stones and make a necklace of them. I’m not sure that was a solution, but since many high society women have diamond necklaces, that took off some of the pressure.

Diamonds In Space.

Asteroid mining has long been touted as a road to wealth, mostly by flim-flam promoters and starry-eyed utopians who don’t realize what will happen to the price of any mineral if an asteroid made of the stuff was hauled into Earth orbit.

Nevermind an asteroid made of solid gold, which would costs billions to bring in and would instantly collapse the price of gold to pennies. The same would apply to rare earth elements or other useful metals currently in short supply. The cost of bringing in such a hunk would never be recovered.

Which brings us to “Diamond Planetoid” by Gordon A. Giles (1937 May, ASTOUNDING, available as a free pdf from www.archive.org). This story was about prospectors in the rings of Saturn, hoping to score a bonanza.

Their first prospect appeared to be some big chunks of cesium ore, but alas, the ore was low grade and could not be gathered in at a profit. Then they found the big asteroid which was entirely a diamond.

Dreams of avarice, etcetera. Claim jumpers appeared and the prospectors defended themselves by slinging the diamond asteroid at the enemy spaceship and destroying it.

Diamond being harder than any metal, the asteroid survived but went flying off into space beyond the reach of the prospectors. The good news was they spotted two more diamond asteroids. The story ended there with mutual congratulations all around.

Except, of course, if two skyscraper-sized chunks of diamond were brought back to Earth, the value of diamonds would plummet. You’d see them on sale in dollar stores.

SERIES DETECTIVES: PART 15

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 14 appeared in OPUNTIA’s #402, 406, 425, 448, 459, 467, 472, 477, 485, 491, 497, 500, 509, and 517.]

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

But Before Them, This.

UPSTAGED BY MURDER (2018) by C.S. Challinor was the ninth novel in a series about Scottish barrister and private detective Rex Graves. He and his wife Helen attended a village amateur dramatics titled “Peril At Pinegrove Hall”.

The play was a manor house mystery with the gimmick that five of the characters were Hercule Poirot, Lord Peter Wimsey, Sherlock Holmes (sans Watson), Father Brown, and of course Miss Marple.

A young actress was shot dead on the stage for real and the conclusion of the first act. The audience thought it was just acting. Graves and the constabulary began investigating. Suspicion was strewn about. There was much ado about timetables, that is, who was where when. Past histories were dredged up.

The denouement was a J'accuse! meeting in which the play was restaged to catch the conscience of the killer. Without live ammo of course. The murderer made a run for the airport and tried to book a one-way flight to Europe.

Once caught, he confessed all instead of keeping his mouth shut. If he couldn't have her, then nobody could. After that, there was only the tying off of loose threads.

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.

"The Case Of The Little Meteorite Who Wanted To Be A Star" aired on 1947-02-02. Daniel Danfield and Rusty Fairfax were in a college town where he had given a lecture on criminal psychology. The students were young ladies more starry eyed about handsome detectives than diligent about the subject.

A heavy snowfall blanketed the town. For want of anything better to do, Danfield and Fairfax attended a vaudeville revue that night in the local music hall. One act was a comedy duo Tiny Corbett and Slim Miles.

They were the world's worst imitation of Abbott and Costello. After the show, Danfield said: "*No wonder vaudeville is dead. Those were the kind of guys who killed it.*" Well said, that man.

Returning to their rooms at a local boarding house, Danfield and Fairfax heard screams from the landlady Mrs Main. Tiny had apparently been gassed to death by a faulty gas light. (Some rural areas still had them even in 1947.) Just then the Deppity Dawg arrived, towing an inebriated Slim.

Slim sobered up in a hurry upon seeing Tiny's body. Keeping the plot moving briskly along was the arrival of a telegram. The message was from Tiny and Slim's agent advising they had been offered parts in a Hollywood movie.

Another boarder Peaches Darling arrived and burst into tears. She didn't think the death was suicide, and Danfield didn't think it was an accident. She said she was secretly engaged to Tiny but Slim doubted her.

The next day Danfield and Fairfax went out for a sleigh ride. He used the opportunity to sleuth, and learned that Tiny had made a down payment on a nearby farm. Danfield wondered why a pretty woman would want to marry a short fat man like Tiny with, as far as she knew, no prospects beyond touring hick towns.

Later that day Danfield held a J'accuse! meeting in the boarding house parlour. He accused Slim of staging the accident. The organist went berserk and the episode cut away for a commercial break.

In the epilogue, as Danfield and Fairfax returned home on the train, he tied up the loose threads in the plot. Tiny was going to break up the act, thwarting the ambitions of Slim. The rest followed.

The only unresolved part was that a beautiful young woman like Peaches was really in love with a fat dumpy man and was going to marry him. If he was rich, that would be understandable, but as a washed-up actor about to take up farming that was unbelievable.

"The Ghost Of Murdock Swamp" aired on 1947-02-09. Millionaire (read 'billionaire' in today's currency) Alec Fraser had vanished but locals in the community thought his ghost haunted a nearby swamp. His widow was a recluse in their mansion.

Daniel Danfield read the newspaper article to Rusty Fairfax. The report said Mrs Fraser was selling a pearl necklace and other jewels. For some unknown reason she was selling the pearls one at a time, instead of getting a better price by selling the necklace as a whole.

Danfield was compelled to investigate. Off they went to the Fraser mansion. They were met by a hostile giant Sid Edmunds who said the widow wasn't meeting guests. Danfield said he was interested in buying the pearls.

Notwithstanding Sid's remarks, Mrs Fraser did meet Danfield. Not a dried-up old hag as Fairfax thought, but a young attractive woman. Danfield went into his psychiatrist mode. He asked Mrs Fraser why she feared to leave the house.

She replied indirectly by telling a ghost story about a voice in a fog that had summoned Alec into infinity.

Danfield and Fairfax went ghost hunting in the swamp that night. A dog howled in the distance. A shot was fired. There were alarms. A pearl was found in mud. Sid showed up, hostile as usual. All in all, a night to remember.

Visiting the local Deppity Dawg, Danfield offered to produce Alec Fraser's body the next night. They settled the deal over a glass of cider. With a blast of organ music they segued to the swamp. The constable made Danfield a deputy: *"If you want to shoot anybody, now you can"*.

They found a body. A gun battle broke out in the distance. Edmunds and the constable were shooting at each other. The epilogue wrapped up the plot. Edmunds and the widow had killed Alec that foggy night. The loose threads were tied up, including why she was selling the pearls one at a time.

From there, a public service announcement for elections being held the following week. I couldn't find anything on Google that might fit February 1947.

There was, however, a sermon by the constable about how there wouldn't be any change if people didn't get out and vote. If you were Negro or a woman, this blurb would not be the stirring call to democracy the producer intended.

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 Black Museum" aired on 1946-06-10. The opening commercial for Petri Wine segued into the opening segment of the episode, where Gregory Hood was discussing the best drink for a dinner party.

Once the episode got underway in earnest, Hood was having trouble importing artifacts from Mexico. There were government crackdowns against tomb raiders and smugglers. Nonetheless, his agent Tim Brady managed to obtain an genuine Aztec sacrificial knife.

A curse came with it. The knife's previous owners kept dying violently by its blade. Pish posh and all that, and Hood and Sanderson Taylor went their way. Out on the sidewalk they met Howard Markham, a collector specializing in murder weapons. He took them down the block to his house. Markham showed off the collection. Howard's wife Ethel had her own stock of gruesome items.

Yet another character interposed herself, a Latina named Polara who wanted the knife. She was rebuffed by Hood with ill will on both sides. Later he was in his rooms with the windows open when someone from outside just missed him with a thrown knife resembling the Aztec blade.

Another knife was thrown while Hood was riding on an open cable car. Gave the other passengers quite a start. Then another in a bar where Hood was having a drink, possibly wine. After the thunk of that knife, the episode broke for a commercial about Petri sauterne, the golden wine that goes great with chicken and fish.

A side trip to a theatrical agent. Hood wanted names and addresses of female Spanish dancers. Not Mexican but real Spanish, he emphasized. And don't forget the knife throwers, he added.

They found Polara and interrogated her. She identified Brady as the man who hired her. Likewise the knife thrower. All part of an elaborate plot to eventually kill Markham and take his wife.

"The Beeswax Candle" aired on 1946-06-24. Sanderson and Mary Taylor were driving home one foggy night in San Francisco. They got lost, somebody was playing a clarinet in the distance, and somebody else screamed.

The Taylors jumped out to investigate but were quickly separated. Sanderson lost Mary and went about knocking on doors to ask if anyone had seen her. The

police couldn't help much, so the next morning Sanderson called on Gregory Hood.

Hood telephoned a theatrical agent, who gave the name of Bill Cooper as the likely clarinetist in that neighbourhood who might be playing in the fog. They visited Cooper, who remembered hearing a scream from across the street at Professor Meyer's house.

Meyer in turn mentioned the vacant house next door to him. They entered the place and found Mary unconscious within and a dead man beside her. That called for a calming moment with Petri burgundy wine. The announcer bumbled how delightful was the taste, just the drink to go with meat.

Returning to the episode, Mary was in the hospital and the corpse was in the morgue. The police charged her with murder because her fingerprints were on the knife. Under her was found a grimoire.

The book came in handy, as it contained a spell for making a murderer confess. The cure required a beeswax candle with cuttings of the dead man's nails embedded. Hood decided on Cooper as the suspect, and burned the candle in front of him. Cooper broke down and sobbed a confession. Black magic believers will do that. But will it stand up in court?

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.

NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE aired on old-time radio from 1943 to 1955. Episodes are available as free mp3s from 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 Case Of The Clumsy Forgeries" was written by Jock MacGregor and aired on 1946-06-11. Dr Bradford asked Nick Carter to investigate the death of an elderly patient named Gerald Gould. Was it suicide, murder, or natural death?

The deceased's two sons were Raymond and Peter. There was a newly revised will that cut Peter out and left the estate to Raymond, the ne'er-do-well son. The old will had been the opposite.

The clues were objects such as a water glass and a strongbox, each of which had only one set of fingerprints despite several people handling them. Carter was kind enough to let the local police in on the investigation.

The glass was analyzed and had traces of benzedrine, which would have simulated a heart attack. The strongbox had only Raymond's fingerprints and the glass only Gerald's. Carter headed back to his laboratory. En route, his car was deliberately rammed and Carter attacked by a thug.

The reading of the will was a barnburner. Peter said the signature on the will was a forgery. The lawyer said Gerald had indeed changed the will because he had learned something about Peter but the copy at hand was a fake.

Alice Fenwick had sent threatening letters to Gerald. Peter had gotten her pregnant, then abandoned her. Carter and Patsy Bowen drove out to see her. They found the car that had rammed him. The driver was attacking Fenwick. He said he had been sent by Jack Gould.

At the J'accuse! meeting, Carter declared Fenwick was a woman scorned by Peter. The thug identified Peter as Jack. Peter had tried to set up his brother as the producer of the fake will, in hopes of getting Raymond sent off for murder and thus inheriting the entire estate. The rest was details.

"The Case Of The Martyred Rat" was written by Jim Parsons and aired on 1948-04-04. Nick Carter and Patsy Bowen were investigating a truck hijacking. The regular driver Les Garner had booked off sick and the replacement driver was hijacked.

A second hijack resulted in Garner's murder at the wheel. The cargo was low value, so Carter suspected Garner had been silenced for knowing about the first hijack. The owner Barton seemed a suspect for insurance fraud.

Carter and Bowen snoop around the Barton warehouse and found the stolen cargo. Barton's dispatcher Red Kennedy locked them inside. Bowen went hysterical while Carter figured out an escape plan. He tied a note onto a dead rat and tossed it outside. Someone found it and freed them.

Carter then announced the winners of four new Ford cars in a contest run by the sponsor of the show. The winners' names and street addresses were given. One wonders if any of their cars were hijacked.

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 from 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 Case Of Johnny Phoenix" was written by John Roeburt and aired on 1954-04-16. Barrie Craig was hired by an export-import business owner to retrieve \$200,000 stolen by Johnny Phoenix. The thief had faked insanity and got five years in an asylum instead of prison. He never said where the money was hidden.

Craig was sandbagged by a false claim of arrest that caused him to lose track of Phoenix. The woman who sidetracked him with the complaint was Phoenix's wife Rita, trying to throw him off the track.

The two went traveling on a train, where assorted people threatened Craig with guns and vexatious demands. Craig was taken by a goon who had asthma but had little difficulty overpowering him.

Minus everyone else, Craig arrived in New York City. Talking to the police, Craig learned that Phoenix had been tried for only a \$50,000 theft.

Upon questioning, the client said he had his reasons for not declaring the extra cash. He became hostile and fired Craig, who nonetheless kept investigating because there were still ten minutes left in the episode.

Craig zigzagged about town, reuniting with the gunman and Rita. He finally located Phoenix, who admitted he had buried the cash in a vacant lot. They went out and discovered a house had been built on the lot.

The homeowner had found the cash while digging the basement. That's one way to pay off a mortgage. Nothing could be proven, and all concerned were very miffed.

"Sucker Bait" aired on 1955-06-09 and was written by John Roeburt. Blankhurst University had summoned Barrie Craig, or rather Dean Percival Palmer had, in regards to corruption in the basketball team.

They had lost their most recent game to Stratton College, a definitely inferior team with a record of 2-14-0, and bettors were crying that the fix was in. Blankhurst U, as everyone called the team, had a record of 16-3-0. The team's coach Sandy Bigelow was basically libeled by sports columnist Soapy Slater.

Chris Ranson was the team captain. Craig noted that when a fix was in, one or more players were usually at the heart of the matter, not the coach. Van Bursen College was playing the next game and had yet to win in the season.

At that game, Craig looked over his shoulder and saw "*half the graduating class of Sing Sing*". They were faces known to police and Craig for bookmaking and fixing.

Blankhurst lost, and no one in the audience believed the game was fair. Craig interviewed Ranson, who was not forthcoming with the truth. Bigelow was even worse.

Craig was complimented by the fixers offering him a \$1,000 bribe and a one-way train ticket back to the big city. He declined. Slater took Craig to breakfast to discuss the thrown games and accuse Bigelow of consorting with gamblers in a roadhouse run by a madam named Gussie Daniels.

Slater said his newspaper wouldn't print the story in the sports pages, so he was hoping that Craig could break it for the police beat. He tipped off Craig that Bigelow had made large cash deposits in the Cragmore Savings Bank across the county line.

Bigelow claimed he had just been warning the gamblers to leave his players alone. He said the cash deposits were a setup done by someone else. Ranson came back, saying he had just been offered \$5,000 by one of the fixers to throw a game against Barnaby Tech.

Craig told Ranson to take the bribe and then defeat Barnaby Tech. The gamblers were crushed, or were they? No one knew what the point spread was in the underworld, or which way they were betting. Craig accused Slater of running a vendetta against Bigelow because years ago the coach had dumped Slater's son from the team.

At that point, the episode cut off with only an implication that the police would be called in on the case. Just details, one supposes, except for the fact the scriptwriter had forgotten to explain who threw the previous games.

Boston Blackie.

BOSTON BLACKIE, real name Horatio Black, had at one time been a jewel thief in Boston, but later became a freelance paladin. He was created by Jack Boyle who only published one book about him, a collection of stories in 1919.

The character proved popular, producing 10 silent films, 14 talkies, two radio series, and a television series in the early 1950s. In the book his wife was Mary and they lived in San Francisco, while in the second radio series Mary Wesley was his girlfriend and they were in New York City.

"Boston Blackie's Code" (1919) was republished in the anthology THE BIG BOOK OF ROGUES AND VILLAINS (2017), edited by Otto Penzler. In the story he disrupted a love triangle.

A jewel thief had romanced the wife of a wealthy but inattentive husband. He got away with her jewels as far as the front sidewalk, where Blackie held him up at gunpoint. Turnabout is fair play, and a thief never complains to the police.

The radio shows are leavened with humour and quips. Everyone, including Mary, called him Blackie. Writers were not credited, although the actors were. Blackie 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.

In the early episodes of the radio 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.

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.*"

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.

"Boxers Murder Case" aired on 1945-10-18. Bob Johnson was a boxer who was ordered by a syndicate to take a dive against Hollister in the sixth round or else. He didn't, and won the fight.

Boston Blackie got a tipoff about the fix. Both he and the mobsters were surprised by the result. Not surprisingly, Johnson became the murder victim. Equally not surprisingly, Farraday made Blackie the prime suspect., as was his standard practice in the early days of the radio series.

Johnson's girlfriend Carolyn Smith came by the police station and named a gambler called Edwards as the suspect. That sent Farraday haring off. One has to wonder how he ever got promoted past foot patrol.

Blackie's suspect was Hollister's manager Joe Beckley. Alas, he became the second victim. Smith went after Hollister for blackmail money because he had bet with Johnson on a double-cross. Smith almost became the third victim but

Blackie arrived in the nick of time to save her from Hollister. Farraday completed the formalities, claiming that he knew all along. Sure he did.

“Killer Lightning” aired on 1948-12-08. The episode opened during a thunderstorm, with Martin Carson and his lover Esther Archer discussing how to get her husband Donald out of the way. The murder had to look like an accident. Martin knocked him unconscious, then hauled him out into the middle of a field during a thunderstorm.

Donald’s physician Dr Wilson was suspicious and called in Blackie. The deceased had been struck by lightning but the death didn’t seem right. Blackie promised that the killer would also have a shocking ending.

Archer had owned an industrial laboratory, where Carson also worked. One of the lab techs named Harold Crane noticed a lightning rod was missing from the stock room.

He put two and two together, and decided to blackmail the illicit couple. Unfortunately he learned the hard way that blackmailers have a shortened life span. As soon as he made his demand, Martin shot him dead.

Crane’s body was found in a roadside ditch that evening. Time of death was established at 18h00. Farraday was called in, and where he went, Blackie was not far behind. Martin and Esther alibied each other, saying they had been at the movies. Martin showed the ticket stubs, mentioning the admission was \$1 each. Such a specific and needless detail will alert the listener.

Blackie challenged them to describe the movie. They hemmed and hawed but came up with a scene. Martin said they had walked into the theatre about 17h50. Blackie and Farraday said they’d check with the theatre. They left. On his way out, Farraday cautioned the couple not to leave town. He then told Blackie he could leave town any time. Farraday always had the wittiest lines.

Blackie discovered that the theatre charged only 85 cents for admissions prior to 18h00. That meant Martin and Esther had entered after 18h00. That gave them time to dump the body and go to the movies.

Dr Wilson then threw in a shark and jumped it, by telling Blackie that Donald was allergic to grass. So much so, that he had to give up golf. Ergo, he would not voluntarily walk into a cow pasture.

Farraday hauled in Esther for a chat. While they were talking, a man telephoned Farraday and without identifying himself, offered proof to provide testimony that Esther killed the two men.

Farraday chuckled heartily and remained non-committal. He sent Esther home without telling her the substance of the phone call. Esther had the hearing of a cat and apparently heard the conversation. Really?

She was on the opposite side of the desk, Farraday said nothing out loud that would make her guess, and since he had the earphone against his ear, she could not possibly have heard the other end of the conversation. Nobody has hearing that good.

Nonetheless she went home and accused Martin of betrayal. The listener will have guessed the caller had been Blackie, trying to break the solidarity of the couple. He succeeded. As the police arrived, they heard enough to convict the couple.

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 Camera Bug” was written by Alonzo Deen Cole and aired on 1947-10-16. Casey was accosted by a young man Alan Forster looking for a job. The lad had a steady job in a camera store and was married. Casey pointed out that newspaper photographers worked all hours, had no home life, and were poorly paid.

From there to the Blue Note where he met Ann Williams, who was trying to cure a cold with booze. From the way the actress sounded, I suspect she really did have a cold and the scriptwriter added a few lines to explain why she sounded congested.

A call came in for a murder, so off they went. Max Blake was the victim, a lawyer who was widely regarded as a shyster and lowlife. The first thing we do, as Shakespeare said. Blake had been shot by someone firing at ground level as he walked on the sidewalk. He wasn't mourned.

Butch Silver and Tony Rosco were the suspected gunmen, of ill repute. They were caught immediately because their getaway car crashed into a truck as it pulled out of the parking space. A policeman was at the next corner.

Richard Craigle was an eyewitness, a big-time contractor who did business with City Hall. Neither he nor anyone else saw the actual gun pointed and fired. He said he saw the shooting from his office on the third-floor of the building across the street.

As Casey, Williams, and Craigle were talking on the sidewalk, Forster ran up and said he got photos of the actual shooting, the moment of death.

The police were stymied. The bullet that killed Blake was a 38 caliber. Silver and Rosco were carrying 45 caliber guns. They said they were there on unrelated business. When the shot sounded, they panicked and ran because they had criminal records and would be made the suspects.

The episode paused for an Anchor Hocking commercial extolling the virtues of one-way no-deposit beer bottles. No bother about recycling them, just toss them in the garbage bin. Ah yes, those were the days.

Back at the newspaper, Forster showed Casey his photos. The editor would only go \$100, so Casey told Forster to take them to a rival newspaper where he would get \$200.

Later that day, Mrs Forster telephoned and said her husband had gone missing and their apartment was ransacked. The photos were the MacGuffin. Closer examination revealed that no one was standing at the third-floor window but someone had been at a first-floor window.

The rest of the plot was obvious, with the expected alarums and excursions. Blake had been blackmailing Craigle. And so to the Blue Note for the denouement and tying off the loose ends. Williams still had a foggy voice from her cold but no doubt was back in form the following week.

"Ex-Convict" was written by Alonzo Deen Cole and aired on 1948-01-22. Casey picked up a hitchhiker, a recently released convict named Ben Holden. He said he was on his way to a halfway house run by a Mr Maddox.

A month later a \$30,000 payroll heist was blamed on Hogan and an unknown accomplice. The search was brief as Hogan was soon found dead from a hit-and-run. A \$100 banknote from the robbery was found in his pocket.

The police decided to infiltrate the Maddox house but the convicts would recognize any of their undercover agents. Casey volunteered to infiltrate the place. He posed as an out-of-state convict. Maddox's secretary Shirley Reed became the love interest.

The investigation suggested that one of the convicts was master-minding the crimes. Everyone drove a car with a dented fender, so that didn't help solve the hit-and-run. Maddox sent Casey and Reed to pick up a package of jewelry, a test of honesty. Casey and Reed were intercepted by one of the criminals.

Casey revealed his true identity, which was unusual because he normally didn't play the part of the idiot in an idiot plot. A police lieutenant was hiding in the back seat of the car. Difficult to believe. After hearing the criminal blab all, he popped up and arrested him.

Reed was upset that Casey had deluded her. She would only drive the lieutenant and his prisoner to the police station, and insisted that Casey get out and walk. So he did. In the epilogue at the Blue Note Café, Ann Williams didn't believe his story.

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 Garibaldi Case” was written by Richard Carr and aired on 1952-02-01. The damsel in distress was Janet Collins, whose brother Burt was on Death Row. She told Richard Diamond that Burt didn't do the murder. He had been visiting a bookie when a stranger walked in, shot the man dead, and left, dropping the gun.

Burt said he picked up the gun just as police arrived. The only witness was a small-time hoodlum Tony Garibaldi, who promptly dropped out of sight for the duration of the trial.

Diamond went looking for him, but Garibaldi found him first and rendered him unconscious. After waking up, Diamond began a variety of excursions across the city. The list included a pickpocket turned informer, Garibaldi's mother, and finally Tony himself.

The twist was that Burt really did do the deed. Tony feared Janet and didn't want to be killed by her as a witness proving Burt killed the bookie. There was a gunpoint confrontation. With a bit of trickery involving a coin toss, Diamond was free and Tony became a witness.

“The Enigma Of Big Ed” was written by Ty Cobb and aired on 1952-04-04. Ed Barton barged into Diamond's office. His metalworks factory had been plagued by sabotage and loss of skilled staff fearing bad luck. Two men had died in separate accidents in the last month.

It was arranged that Diamond would infiltrate the plant as a worker. The foreman Steve Miller was in on the investigation. Needless to say there were alarums aplenty.

Since Diamond was booked for the series, there was no suspense about him surviving to the end of the episode. However some of the supporting characters were thinned out.

About two-thirds of the way through, the conclusion became obvious that Miller was acting out, resentful that Barton was hogging all the profits. Having wrapped up the case, Diamond went over to Helen Asher's penthouse to serenade her.

He sang a slow and mournful blues tune. As he played the piano, a trombone joined in, which destroyed any illusion that he and she were by themselves. After the song concluded, she asked the question that all the listeners were thinking, namely where did the trombone come from. Diamond replied that he had been playing it with his feet. Indeed.

They kissed but Diamond fell asleep immediately after. Asher sighed and said she'd have to get herself a younger detective. The only comeback to that was the final commercial, for Camel cigarettes. After extolling the benefits of their fine tobacco, the advertiser then complained that half the price of a pack of cigarettes was sales taxes.

Johnny Dollar: The End Times.

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.

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

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

But first, an episode from the middle part of the series, and I'll explain why further on. “The Burning Car Matter” was written by Jack Johnstone and aired on 1956-12-09.

The brothers Arnold and Edward Karr operated lumber yards in Florida, one of which was a \$125,000 claim for arson. Several times other yards had been attempted by the torcher.

Johnny Dollar had hardly arrived when a second yard went up in flames. Arnold was the prime suspect but became the first murder victim. He had telephoned the insurance agent and said he knew who the torcher was but someone killed him before he could talk.

Dollar's investigation was hampered because he was a doppelganger for Edward. Everyone gave him a hard time because they thought he was the black sheep of the family. Edward partied hearty and associated with the jet set.

One nosy neighbour gave a description of a fast woman who matched the insurance agent's wife. Snooping about Edward's house, Dollar got beat up by a gangster named Tony who came to collect a \$5,000 debt owed by Edward.

The wife found Dollar. Thinking he was Edward, she revealed the arson plot, but also revealed she was the wife's twin sister. Edward arrived, ready to murder everyone to escape the murder rap. He didn't get the chance because the wife arrived and shot him. Total expense was \$385.26.

The end of YTJD was not a sudden surprise, and not unnaturally the production staff began coasting. Jack Johnstone produced the final season and wrote the episodes. He obviously felt there was no use in trying to be original anymore, so he rewrote "The Burning Car Matter" as "The Case Of Trouble Matter", which aired on 1962-08-05.

Johnny Dollar was called to Des Moines, Iowa, to investigate arson in pulp and paper factories of Case Paper Products. Albert and Ed Case were the owners, the former running the company and the latter the black sheep of the family.

Once again Dollar looked so much like Ed that people called him Mr Case. Business hadn't been well for the brothers, and the insurers suspected Albert was trying to juice the income.

Albert was shot dead in his home. The Deppity Dawgs were in a snit about Dollar investigating, as well they might be. Albert had told people he knew who the arsonist was but never named him.

Everyone blamed Dollar qua Ed, and some tried to use frontier justice on him. The chase for Ed was thereby complicated, especially when gangsters came to collect on Ed's gambling debts.

Dollar went after Ed's girlfriend Millie, who also couldn't tell the difference. She said Ed had killed Albert. The real Ed arrived, miffed to discover Millie had blabbed all to Dollar. Guns were brandished, shots were fired, all the usual alarums. The real Ed lost. Total expense account was \$256.10, roughly \$130 less than the original story.

Philip Marlowe.

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

"The August Lion" was written by Mel Dinelli, Robert Mitchell, and Eugene Levitt, and aired on 1949-08-06. Eileen Voss was a stockbroker who caught a bullet. Her ex-boyfriend Judson Angel found the body in her apartment. Her gun was under the pillow where she laid.

Anyone else would have telephoned the police but Angel had served time a decade before on forgery charges. During their breakup, he had publicly uttered threats against Voss in front of witnesses. The police would take him into custody. As soon as they got the fingerprint report on him, the jig would be up.

He probably wouldn't be convicted but he had built up an accountancy firm which would collapse once news of his prior conviction leaked out. Only one other person knew of his past, his secretary Phoebe Hammon.

Angel called a taxi and convinced the cabbie that Voss was just a passed-out drunk. He took her body to friend Philip Marlowe's apartment. Sure, why not? Drag him in as well.

Marlowe called the police but only said someone had dumped a body on him and he had no idea who did the deed. He then took off for Voss' apartment to look for clues. The only clue he found there was a gold tie pin with the image of a lion on it.

As he searched, he made the acquaintance of a gunman who had arrived to collect on her very large debt, \$50,000. He hadn't known about her death and was most annoyed. The creditor concluded the conversation by rendering Marlowe unconscious.

Once awake again, Marlowe followed clues to a nightclub called The Garden Room. More characters were added to the plot. Phoebe Hammon appeared and mentioned that Angel's real name was Francis Lyon. Everybody had old connections with mobsters from pre-war.

Speaking of old connections, LAPD Lieutenant Matthews tracked Marlowe to the nightclub. He too was most annoyed. The alarums shifted into high gear and the characters took numerous excursions around town.

Voss had been mixed up with insider trading with Hammon, who was playing the stock market with embezzled money. Voss wouldn't pay up and Hammon got very, very annoyed.

The final confrontation took place on a cliff-top mansion with a spectacular view from the balcony. After Hammon and Marlowe explained all the details to each other and tied up the loose threads, a gun battle broke out. Hammon made a run for freedom, tripped over the railing on the balcony, and saved the state the cost of a trial by splattering herself over the rocks far below.

“The Baton Sinister” was written by Mel Dinelli, Robert Mitchell, and Eugene Levitt, and aired on 1949-09-17. The MacGuffin of the plot was a 15th-century tapestry, which had a baton sinister on the design.

In Latin, sinister simply means the lefthand side, and a baton is a stick. In heraldry, the baton sinister means the bearer was an illegitimate child of a king or prince.

The episode began with Philip Marlowe hired by Hollis Schindler, a Hollywood art dealer. As he drove up to Schindler's house, someone fired a gunshot at him. Schindler came running out of the house, dived into the car, and told Marlowe to vamoose.

The gunman, said Schindler, was an Englishman named Myron Loft. The dispute was over the tapestry, on the market for \$80,000 to Arthur Merritt, a buyer claiming descent from King Edward II. Loft begged to differ and wanted the tapestry for himself.

Marlowe was hired to courier the tapestry from Hollywood to Merritt in Seattle. As expected, there were numerous alarums and fatalities along the way. Those who talked to Marlowe seriously reduced their chances of surviving to the end credits.

The tapestry changed hands, always involuntarily. Marlowe zigzagged hither and yon. Merritt's niece Anne Solare was one of those who intercepted the tapestry, except she tried to toss it into a fireplace.

There was method in her madness. She said her uncle had been spending all his wealth on antiques and was down to his last \$100,000 (call it a million in today's depreciated currency). She resented the loss of her inheritance.

When Marlowe finally got the tapestry back, he discovered it wasn't the same one he had before. The baton sinister was missing. The tapestry was a fake. More running about. Schindler shot Loft.

The episode suddenly took a giant leap to a conclusion. Schindler confessed to all the murders, mainly, one supposes, because there were only four minutes left in the episode. The writers had painted themselves into a corner.

Marlowe did some high speed explaining to explain away the remaining details. Then he put Solare over his knee and spanked her. No, seriously.

The Saint.

Simon Templar, aka The Saint, began as a series of novels and short stories 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.

“The Damsel In Distress” (1933) by Leslie Charteris was a short story which should not be confused with the radio episode “Dossier Of A Damsel In Distress” (reviewed in OPUNTIA #491).

The story was originally published as “The Kidnapping Of The Fickle Financier” and had a completely different plot. It was reprinted in THE BIG BOOK OF ROGUES AND VILLAINS (2017), a 911-page anthology edited by Otto Penzler.

The story was about Guiseppe Rolfieri, a con man who skipped England with his loot for his native Italy. Bond forgery had been his specialty. Some of the victims used Simon Templar to locate Rolfieri but they were intent on blackmail.

Having taken Rolfieri for £25,000, their scheme was disrupted when The Saint took them for that same amount. He didn't like being used as a bloodhound.

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

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

“Simon Takes A Curtain Call” aired on 1951-01-14 and was written by Dick Powell (not the actor-singer who played detective Richard Diamond). An actor Mercer Benedict called on Simon Templar because he was worried that the plays he was performing were coming to life for him.

Benedict had done a play about an actor marrying his leading lady and did so in real life. Now he was worried because he was in a play where his character committed murder.

The original version of the play had the murder done with a handgun. The prop man discovered just before a performance that the gun had been loaded with real bullets. The script was changed to murder by knife at Benedict's insistence so that a rubber blade could be used.

Benedict had four ex-wives, which gave a good start to the list of suspects. “*Alimony to four wives? Nobody's got that much dough*”, remarked Benedict's agent Jackson. It didn't help that the play got poor reviews.

Ex-wife Lola was the first interview. She told The Saint that the list of suspects should be amended to include anyone who knew Benedict. From there to the play's financial angel Arnold Prince. Templar told him he was trying to prevent a crime, to which Prince replied: “*You're too late. The play already opened.*”

Next up were Cherise Babcock, the leading lady, and Charles Glenway the playwright. They were at loggerheads, not helped when Benedict arrived to make it a three-way fight. Hell hath no fury like a writer whose lines were changed by the leading man and whose leading lady mumbled her lines.

“*The play is closing tonight. A two-day run*” said Jackson to Simon Templar. “*Just ahead of the lynch mob*” came the reply. The Saint was talked into attending the final performance. It was a barnburner because this time the knife was real. Fortunately Babcock only was scratched but she couldn't resist the opportunity to do an extended death scene.

Templar convinced everyone to run the show a third time, using it as a theatrical J'accuse! meeting. He first summed up all the characters, then named the murderer as Jackson, who was fiddling the books.

Jackson blabbed all, the usual “*Yes! I did it! And I'd gladly do it again!*”, but fortunately no bwah-ha!-ha!-ing. The good news was the play would run indefinitely thanks to all the publicity.

“No Hiding Place” was written by Dick Powell and aired on 1950-11-19. Tommy Pachek was a prisoner who appealed to Simon Templar for help. Pachek said he had been framed for murder. Several prisoners had made attempts on his life.

Just as Templar arrived, Pachek escaped prison. The Saint went sleuthing and tracked down Pachek's sister Nancy. He also inadvertently tracked down Charlie Ferelli, nightclub owner and gangster about town.

Ferelli's goon Frankie rendered The Saint unconscious, not appreciating Templar's quips. That was a common theme through the series, since gangsters have no sense of humour.

Still investigating, Templar revisited Nancy. There was another contretemps when Frankie arrived. It transpired that he was Nancy's boyfriend. This time it was Frankie who was rendered. Once he was disposed of, Tommy showed up, badly beaten.

The Saint went off to find evidence and succeeded. There was a grand finale with Ferelli, Frankie, and Nancy. The cops arrived in the nick of time. No proof against Ferelli for the murder but he was deported to Sicily.

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 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.

“The Temple Bells Of Neban” aired on 1937-10-24. Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane were investigating a drug ring that was addicting millionaires' sons.

A Hindu woman Sadi Belada led the gang. She was the niece of the yogi who taught Cranston the power to cloud minds. She had her own powers, so the battle was engaged. Her power had something to do with bells whose chimes could neutralize The Shadow for good. More prosaically, she used a trained cobra to kill her victims.

Cranston told Lane that he had acquired his powers in India. That contradicted other narratives which said The Shadow was trained in Tibet, but Hollywood writers have always been a bit vague about geography.

Cranston snooped about and found a connection to a freighter in the harbour. Belada was busy enslaving young men but not so busy to deliver a dead cobra to Cranston as a warning.

The finale took place out in the harbour on board the ship. Since The Shadow would be on the air for two more decades, there was no doubt who would prevail. He got Belada by substituting a wild cobra for her trained one.

“The Guest Of Death” aired on 1938-23-18. The victim had been given a pass to tour a prison, including the execution chamber. The guide Keysee sat the man down in the electric chair as a demonstration. Twasn't just a demonstration, nor was the victim the first.

Lamont Cranston read the news about the death and decided to investigate by taking the tour. Keysee said he had once been a member of the execution squad but was dismissed because he enjoyed his work too much. Cranston allowed himself to be strapped into the chair.

Keysee gave a bwah-ha!-ha! explanation about how he missed being an executioner, then threw the switch. A jump cut to some time later, when The Shadow harangued Keysee at his house and conducted some psychological warfare to kill him.

Cranston gave the lovely Margo Lane an explanation in the denouement. Keysee knew how to frighten visitors so badly that they died of a heart attack. Thus it appeared that the visitor died of natural causes.

The electric chair was never hooked up to electricity until just before a legal execution. Using the mystic powers he learned in Tibet, Cranston was able fake his death, then revive himself after Keysee left. Even for this series, the plot holes were gigantic.

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.

"The Apple Of Eve Caper" aired on 1949-06-19, written by Robert Tallman and Gil Doud. As with every episode, the opening was Sam Spade dictating a report about the case to his secretary Effie Perrine.

This time around she was worried about a shortage of office supplies, and was taking his dictation with an eyebrow pencil on scrap paper. Just as he was about to begin, he suddenly noticed the girlie calendar on the office wall was missing. Perrine was using the blank sides for her dictation. After that blowup, he began his report.

Eve Adams was the client, who arrived at his office battered and bruised by a jealous wife named Dreama Love. (Spade had Adams spell out the name.) No sooner was that established when Love arrived, ready to rumble.

Spade was foolish enough to try and separate them. Love had a blackjack in her purse, rendered him unconscious, and chased Adams out of the office. After Perrine revived him, a telephone call came in from Love, who said she was at Adams' apartment. The latter was dead, so Spade suddenly had a new client.

Everywhere Spade went he found Apple of Eve lipstick as clues. At the apartment, Spade found clues leading to Gorsh Hagen, a gangster at the apex of the love triangle.

From there he visited Love's brother Eddie, who said he was engaged to Adams. Eddie reasonably disputed Spade's right to enter and search his apartment. Spade's rebuttal was to render Eddie unconscious.

Hardly had that happened when Hagen arrived. There was another contretemps but this time Hagen won the fight. As Spade lay dazed on the floor, Love was the next visitor. She began arguing with Hagen and admitted she killed Adams.

Hagen grabbed her and hauled her away. Once Spade recovered himself, he began a pursuit that took him to the waterfront. An informant named Psalty ("*The P is silent*", he said.) pointed him in the right direction and told him Hagen's boat was over yonder.

Spade needed to hire a boat but such was not easily found. Psalty said he knew a guy named Novak who rented boats but he was sleeping off a drunk. For those who don't know old-time radio, this was an in-joke by the writers about a rival detective radio series, also set in San Francisco, whose hero was Pat Novak.

Psalty had an old wreck that barely floated. They set off in pursuit of Hagen, with Spade working the bilge pump and wearing a life jacket. Upon arrival at the boat they were greeted by gunfire. Psalty departed this world just as Eddie arrived looking for his sister. He followed Psalty moments later.

The denouement wrapped up the loose ends. Presumably Love went off to sit in the gas chamber, but that line of thought was abruptly dropped with no further explanation. The good news was that Spade promised to buy Perrine a new notebook.

“The Crab Louis Caper” was written by Harold Swanton and aired on 1951-03-02, subtitled by Sam Spade as “The View Of Fisherman’s Wharf From The Water”. Bartolomeo Majori was the client, a crab fisherman. His son Louis had been missing for six days, apparently washed off his fishing vessel during heavy seas.

His friend Dominique Torreo, who had been working with him, said it was an accident. Lotsa fake Italiano accents, except Torreo, who had a Brooklyn accent. Well, Brooklyn is on an island, so they might have fishermen whose younger sons emigrated to San Francisco.

Some thought it was murder as Louis’ fiancée Rosalio was the object of Torreo’s affection. Every cliché about Sicilians was trotted out. Spade visited Rosalio, who confessed to him, a total stranger asking questions, that si, she loved Torreo.

However she went on to say that he spurned her, so on the rebound she pledged herself to Louis. She thought Louis was crazy because he collected wax from the sea.

That night Spade got a telephone call from a man calling himself Louis, offering him a bribe to stay out of the case. He said he faked his death to get out of the marriage. Spade didn’t believe him. A man born and raised among Italian fisherfolk wouldn’t walk away from an expensive trawler and his loving family.

Spade told the caller he didn’t believe he was Louis. The man offered to meet him on a wharf to prove who he was. A music box played briefly in the background which Spade commented on, so the listener will surmise that it was a clue.

The night was dark and foggy on the wharf. It was a trap, there was a fight, and Spade went for an involuntary swim. That was a good time for the halfway commercial.

Since no company wanted to be associated with the series, the commercial was an in-house network ad for a drama special called HAMLET, about a young Danish man who had his problems too. The only difference was that the author of that play was never suspected of being a Communist.

Returning to the plot, Spade swam ashore. Something was rotten in the state of California, but Heaven directed Spade to an Italian elder named Bosci. While talking to the man, Spade was offered a cigarette from a music box. He carefully chose his words thereafter, then made his excuses and left as soon as he could, not wanting to be fitted out with concrete shoes.

The next stop was Torreo’s rooming house, where Spade interrogated the landlady (another bad Italian accent). She said Louis had been there showing off a handful of wax. Torreo had then run out to send a telegram.

Privacy laws were not then as they are now, so Spade went to the telegraph office and saw the office copy of Torreo’s message and the reply. The response was from an assay office which said that if the rest of the wax was the same quality and the total weight was as specified, then the value was \$60,000.

By now even a landlubber such as myself will have guessed the wax was ambergris, once widely used as a fixative for perfume. It is now illegal to possess but back then they didn’t fuss so much about whales.

The rest of the plot was obvious. Bosci was caught trying to steal Louis’ stash of ambergris. Torreo was caught when one of his crab pots was hauled up to reveal Louis’ body with a knife in his back. Upon seeing it, Torreo confessed all, not knowing that the body was a mannequin dressed as a decayed corpse, planted by Spade. Mamma mia!

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

“The Dark Chain” was written by David Victor and Jackson Gillis, and aired on 1949-11-07. Mrs Purcell called George Valentine and Claire Brooks out to her farm. Her valuable cameo brooch had been stolen.

She blamed Luke Schroder, a neighbour farmer who was out of prison on parole. Her 19-year-old son Buddy was retarded, with the intelligence of a 4-year-old. Luke’s wife Maria liked to tease him.

Buddy was a huge man, who carried logging chains on him like they were bracelets. Luke’s dog had been beaten to death by chains. Buddy said the dog killed his chickens.

The hired hand Simon said he had seen Maria wearing the cameo brooch. Valentine and Brooks confronted Buddy’s mother, who had recovered the brooch. She said Buddy had given it to her. Maria’s body was later found. She had been beaten to death by chains. Luke was the next victim. Valentine and Brooks went searching for Buddy.

Simon arrived a little too conveniently. Valentine accused him of the murders and trying to frame Buddy. While Simon would go up the river for murder, it had become obvious that Buddy was becoming uncontrollable. He was a great danger to all because of his size and strength. There was no choice but to have him committed to an institution. On that cheerless note, the episode ended.

“See Me Once, You’ve Seen Me Twice” was written by David Victor and Jackson Gillis, and aired on 1951-02-26. The client was Wally Wallace, who had just met Lucy Lameralle and was madly in love with her. The difficulty was another man who had threatened to kill Wallace if he didn’t stay away from her.

George Valentine and Claire Brooks met with Wallace, who proved to be fresh off the range. The horse he rode into town on was probably tied up in the alley. Wallace noted the other man was tailing her and challenged him. The stranger didn’t answer but just lashed out with his fist and knocked Wallace to the floor. He hit him so hard that a ring on his finger cracked and a diamond broke off.

Valentine went over to see Lameralle, a chorus girl living in a fancy apartment well beyond her means. She spoke with a Noo Yawk accent. Upon leaving, he was accosted by the other man and a violent confrontation broke out. After rendering him unconscious, Valentine went back to the apartment where he found a doppelganger with a cultured voice.

This woman had blue eyes and said she was Lucy. She told Valentine that the other girl, with brown eyes, was Audrea Murphy. They had a doubles act at a nightclub. The violent man was identified by police as Lefty Muscat. He and Murphy were in the confidence racket, and were evidently setting up Lameralle for some kind of fraud.

The agent who introduced the two women to each other was Franz Kling, so Valentine took Lameralle to see him. Alas, Kling never got a speaking part, as they found him at his desk, shot dead. Another diamond was found on the floor next to the body.

Wallace showed up and after he provided a few tidbits of information, was sent on his way. He had been dating Lameralle, not Murphy. Muscat and Murphy were on the loose but no one could find them. Eventually they found Muscat, dead in Murphy’s hotel room. That left Lameralle and Wallace as suspects.

Valentine threw suspicion around like road salt. Lameralle broke down and confessed all. She had been playing the part of Murphy, used coloured contact lenses, as a plan to get rid of Muscat, who was blackmailing her. Kling was never an agent but her boyfriend, murdered because he knew too much.

Wallace, having lost his true love, didn’t waste any time. He immediately propositioned Brooksie. What interested me was the part about coloured contact lenses. I hadn’t realized they dated back to 1950.

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 Identical Murder Case” aired on 1949-12-27. Tommy Orchid sent one of his henchmen to kill Philo Vance but the torpedo made a mistake and took out an innocent man who only looked like him.

Orchid sent orchids to girlfriends and foes alike. He kept repeating to all and sundry that he didn’t tolerate mistakes. He paid a visit to Vance but lost a physical altercation. Much huffing and puffing between the men, like two bulls fighting in a pasture.

Penny Daley was Orchid’s girlfriend. She helped him set up an ambush of Vance. Turnabout was fair play, as Vance and D.A. John Markham were planning to do the same to Orchid. Even for Vance, the precautions were elaborate.

Since the outcome of the confrontation was foreordained, there was no suspense. Several shots and thunks later, Orchid was bound for a trip up the river. Vance and Markham explained away the loose ends to each other, and from there to the organ music. Not an exciting episode, just a routine plot.

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 and the actors pronounced it both ways.

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 were both jazz aficionados. She is better remembered by Boomers as the ER nurse in the Webb-produced television series EMERGENCY!.

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.

From the PAT NOVAK series was “Rory Malone”, which aired on 1949-03-20. Pat Novak was offered \$300 by a woman Conn Reagan to stay away from a boxer named Rory Malone. The boxer’s manager Hans Neumeyer then offered \$300 to Novak to protect Malone.

A gangster Joe Slater caught up with Malone and broke his right hand just before the fight. Neumeyer was shot dead not long after. Strangely, Malone won the fight by a knockout. That meant the other boxer had taken a dive. Soon learned was that Slater had been covering bets left, right, and centre, and made a handsome profit.

Police Inspector Hellman didn’t believe anything Novak said, especially since Slater and Reagan were married. Novak barged about annoying people with

sarcastic remarks. Slater departed this life and Reagan was trying to depart San Francisco. So was Malone, suggesting a triangle. His ex-girlfriend Kitty showed up waving a gun, so the romances were a square. Hellman sorted all that out but no charges were brought. Lack of evidence and all that. Nobody blabbed a confession. Refreshing.

“Little Jake Siegel”, aired on 1949-06-26, no writer credited. Pat Novak had gone to a church to talk to Father Leahy. A altar boy Jake Siegel led the way. A man stood up from a pew, shouted out the name Mike Quinlan at Novak, and opened fire, missing him and killing the boy.

Then and now, it was unusual for Hollywood to have innocent children murdered in a story. There are few taboos left in prime time, but involving children in such events is rare. Even for a Jack Webb show, this episode was grim. Not to be listened to on a rainy Sunday afternoon when you are feeling depressed.

Father Leahy was angry at Novak and unforgiving. Novak protested that he didn’t know the killer but to no avail. He began his investigation and picked up a clue. Returning to his apartment, he found three unfriendly goons waiting for him.

They demanded he turn over a gun and some papers. He didn’t know what they were talking about, so they rendered him unconscious. When he woke up, the police were there, as was the body of a woman he never saw before. Inspector Hellman accused Novak of murder, as he usually did.

Mike Quinlan tracked down Novak first. The events were connected to a Chicago mobster named Sandell. Quinlan was next to depart this world. More characters came and went, thinned out by gunfire almost as quickly as they appeared.

The final gunfight was in front of the church. Sandell was the last one standing. Novak counted how many shots Sandell fired, then rushed him, breaking Sandell’s neck on the church steps.

In the epilogue, Novak quickly summarized the plot and tied off the loose ends. Sandell and Quinlan had a falling out back east over a bank robbery. They came to a settlement and the payoff was to be in the church. Strangely, Sandell mistook Novak for Quinlan. All else followed.

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.

“Claim Check Murders” was written by Edward Adamson and aired on 1947-01-17. Captain Drummond and Denny stopped in at a lowlife café for a bite to eat. While there, Drummond was mistaken for a courier by a gangster and handed an envelope with a \$1,000 banknote and a claim check. He was told to wait for a contact.

One wonders how anyone could spend a \$1,000 bill in 1947 without drawing undue attention. Or even today, for that matter. The criminal element might circulate such bills between themselves, but I suspect trying to deposit a \$1,000 banknote, then or now, would result in very detailed attention being paid to the depositor.

In any event, the contact person telephoned Drummond and identified herself as Priscilla Miller. From there developed a chain of excursions. The MacGuffin was \$100,000 of stolen radium.

The atomic business was still new to listeners in January 1947, so Drummond had to explain to Denny what a Geiger counter was. The chase was on for the radium, with good guys and bad guys alike waving Geiger counters in one hand and handguns in the other.

The deaths were, however, due to high-velocity lead poisoning rather than radiation. The trail led back to Miller, who had the radium. Drummond lectured her at length until the police arrived. She probably welcomed them as a relief from Drummond.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Astronomy.

Li, Y., et al (2022) **A unique stone skipping-like trajectory of asteroid Aletai.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 8:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abm8890 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Meteoroids/asteroids could deposit energy to Earth during their entries, which arouses great concerns. Strewn field, as a product of meteoroids/asteroids breakup, comprehensively reflects the trajectory, dynamics, and physical properties of meteoroids/asteroids. It typically has a length of several to a dozen kilometers.*

Nevertheless, the recently found massive Aletai irons in the northwest China comprise the longest known strewn field of ~430 kilometers. This implies that the dynamics of Aletai could be unique.

Petrographic and trace elemental studies suggest that all the Aletai masses exhibit unique compositions, indicating that they were from the same fall event. Numerical modeling suggests that the stone skipping-like trajectory associated with a shallow entry angle (e.g., ~6.5° to 7.3°) is responsible for Aletai’s exceptionally long strewn field if a single-body entry scenario is considered.

The stone skipping-like trajectory would not result in the deposition of large impact energy on the ground but may lead to the dissipation of energy during its extremely long-distance flight.

Planets.

Veysi, H. (2022) **Megatsunamis and microbial life on early Mars.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 21:doi.org/10.1017/S1473550422000209 (available as a free pdf)

Author’s abstract: *It is currently believed that early Mars had a vast and shallow ocean, and microbial life may have formed in it, albeit for a short geological time.*

The geological evidence indicates that during the existence of this ocean, large

collisions occurred on the surface of Mars, which led to the formation of megatsunamis in its palaeocean.

Previous research has reported on the effects of tsunami waves on microbial ecosystems in the Earth’s oceans. This work indicates that tsunami waves can cause changes in the physico-chemical properties of seawater, as well as tsunami-affected land soils.

These factors can certainly affect microbial life. Other researchers have shown that there are large microbial communities of marine prokaryotes (bacteria and archaea) in tsunami-induced sediments.

These results led us to investigate the impact of tsunami waves on the proposed microbial life in the ancient Martian ocean, and its role in the preservation or non-preservation of Martian microbial life as a fossil signature.

Alien Life.

Romanovskaya, I.K. (2022) **Migrating extraterrestrial civilizations and interstellar colonization: implications for SETI and SETA.** INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ASTROBIOLOGY 21:doi.org/10.1017/S1473550422000143 (available as a free pdf)

Author’s abstract: *Advanced extraterrestrial civilizations may produce observable technosignatures when they migrate inside their planetary systems and to other planetary systems.*

Collectively, the search for technosignatures produced by migrating extraterrestrial civilizations can be described as the search for migrating extraterrestrial intelligence (SMETI).

I propose that extraterrestrial civilizations may use free-floating planets as interstellar transportation to reach, explore and colonize planetary systems.

I propose possible technosignatures and artefacts that may be produced by extraterrestrial civilizations using free-floating planets for interstellar migration and interstellar colonization, as well as strategies for the search for their technosignatures and artefacts.

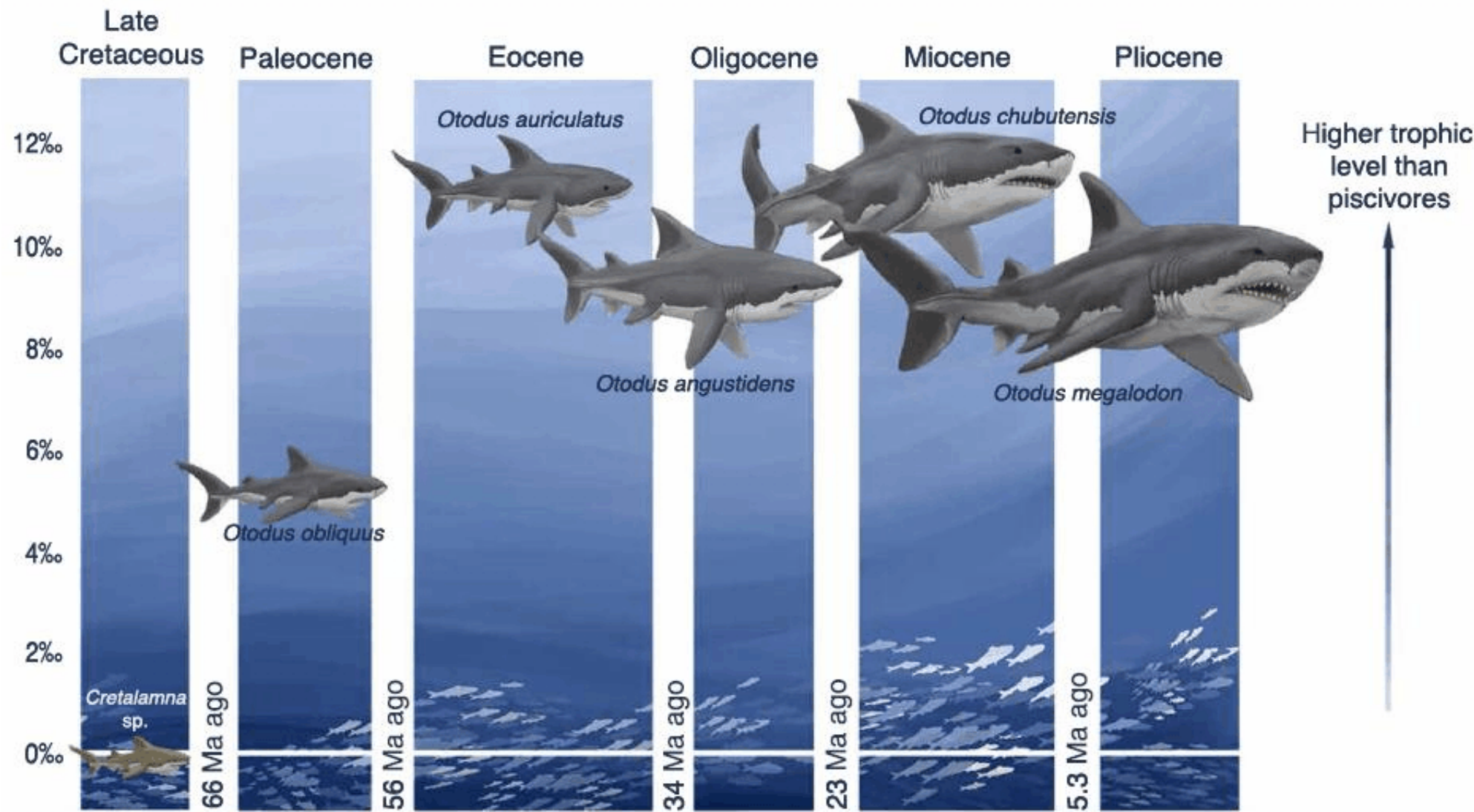
I discuss technosignatures that may be produced by extraterrestrial civilizations using other methods of interstellar migration and colonization. As an example, I discuss the star GJ 433, which experienced a close flyby a few thousand years ago.

I divide possible technosignatures of migrating civilizations into groups to highlight similarities and differences among technosignatures produced by civilizations using different methods of migration and interstellar colonization. It follows from the comparison, for example, that interstellar migration using flybys of stars can blend with interstellar migration using free-floating planets.

Paleobiology.
Kast, E.R., et al (2022) **Cenozoic megatooth sharks occupied extremely high trophic positions.** SCIENCE ADVANCES
8:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abl6529 (available as a free pdf)

[The word trophic refers to the diet of an animal and/or its position in the food chain. Megatooth sharks were about the size of a bus.]

Authors’ abstract: *Trophic position is a fundamental characteristic of animals, yet it is unknown in many extinct species.*



*In this study, we ground-truth the $^{15}\text{N}/^{14}\text{N}$ ratio of enameloid-bound organic matter ($\delta^{15}\text{N}_{\text{EB}}$) as a trophic level proxy by comparison to dentin collagen $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ and apply this method to the fossil record to reconstruct the trophic level of the megatooth sharks (genus *Otodus*).*

*These sharks evolved in the Cenozoic, culminating in *Otodus megalodon*, a shark with a maximum body size of more than 15 metres, which went extinct 3.5 million years ago.*

*Very high $\delta^{15}\text{N}_{\text{EB}}$ values of *O. megalodon* from the Miocene and Pliocene show that it occupied a higher trophic level than is known for any marine species, extinct or extant.*

*$\delta^{15}\text{N}_{\text{EB}}$ also indicates a dietary shift in sharks of the megatooth lineage as they evolved toward the gigantic *O. megalodon*, with the highest trophic level apparently reached earlier than peak size.*

[Image is from this paper.]

Environmental Science.

Dethier, E.N., et al (2022) **Rapid changes to global river suspended sediment flux by humans.** SCIENCE 376:doi.org_10.1126/science.abn7980

Authors' abstract: Humans dramatically change the amount of sediment that makes it to the oceans and seas by damming rivers or through land-use changes. We used satellite imagery from the mid-1980s onward, ground truthed with over 100,000 measurements, to estimate the sediment flux from 414 rivers worldwide.

Dams have substantially reduced sediment flux in the global north, whereas land-use changes have increased sediment flux in the global south. These observations can help to guide policy decisions regarding critical water resources.

Rivers support indispensable ecological functions and human health and infrastructure. Yet limited river sampling hinders our understanding of consequential changes to river systems.

Satellite-based estimates of suspended sediment concentration and flux for 414 major rivers reveal widespread global change that is directly attributable to human activity in the past half-century.

Sediment trapping by dams in the global hydrologic north has contributed to global sediment flux declines to 49% of pre-dam conditions. Recently, intensive land-use change in the global hydrologic south has increased erosion, with river suspended sediment concentration on average $41 \pm 7\%$ greater than in the 1980s.

This north-south divergence has rapidly reconfigured global patterns in sediment flux to the oceans, with the dominant sources of suspended sediment shifting from Asia to South America.

Aksenov, A.A., et al (2022) **The molecular impact of life in an indoor environment.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 8:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abn8016 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: The chemistry of indoor surfaces and the role of microbes in shaping and responding to that chemistry are largely unexplored. We found that, over 1 month, people's presence and activities profoundly reshaped the chemistry of a house.

Molecules associated with eating/cooking, bathroom use, and personal care were found throughout the entire house, while molecules associated with medications, outdoor biocides, and microbially derived compounds were distributed in a location-dependent manner.

The house and its microbial occupants, in turn, also introduced chemical transformations such as oxidation and transformations of food-borne molecules.

The awareness of and the ability to observe the molecular changes introduced by people should influence future building designs. Modern humans spend ~70% of their time in their home environment and reshape the indoor microbiome with inputs from their bodies.

To date, studies of the indoor environment have revealed that human activity inside buildings leads to potentially higher particle, pollutant, and toxin

exposures than typically observed in the outdoor environment, but such studies often limit their measurements to one or a few molecular species.

In this study, we set out to determine how humans influence the entire molecular composition throughout the home due to routine activities.

Human Prehistory.

Wilson, V.A.D., et al (2022) **The evolutionary origins of syntax: Event cognition in nonhuman primates.** SCIENCE ADVANCES 8:doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abn8464 (available as a free pdf)

[As a schoolboy, I learned the basic structure of a sentence is subject-verb-object. In this paper, written by Europeans, they use the terms agent-action-patient.]

Authors’ abstract: *Languages tend to encode events from the perspective of agents, placing them first and in simpler forms than patients. This agent bias is mirrored by cognition: Agents are more quickly recognized than patients and generally attract more attention.*

This leads to the hypothesis that key aspects of language structure are fundamentally rooted in a cognition that decomposes events into agents, actions, and patients, privileging agents. Although this type of event representation is almost certainly universal across languages, it remains unclear whether the underlying cognition is uniquely human or more widespread in animals.

Here, we review a range of evidence from primates and other animals, which suggests that agent-based event decomposition is phylogenetically older than humans.

We propose a research program to test this hypothesis in great apes and human infants, with the goal to resolve one of the major questions in the evolution of language, the origins of syntax.

Modern Humans.

Griffith, B.P., et al (2022) **Genetically modified porcine-to-human cardiac xenotransplantation.** NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL OF MEDICINE 386:doi.org/10.1056/NEJMoa2201422

[A man with the heart of a pig, in plain English.]

Authors’ abstract: *A 57-year-old man with non-ischemic cardiomyopathy who was dependent on veno-arterial extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) and was not a candidate for standard therapeutics, including a traditional allograft, received a heart from a genetically modified pig source animal that had 10 individual gene edits.*

Immunosuppression was based on CD40 blockade. The patient was weaned from ECMO, and the xenograft functioned normally without apparent rejection. Sudden diastolic thickening and failure of the xenograft occurred on day 49 after transplantation, and life support was withdrawn on day 60.

On autopsy, the xenograft was found to be edematous, having nearly doubled in weight. Histologic examination revealed scattered myocyte necrosis, interstitial edema, and red-cell extravasation, without evidence of microvascular thrombosis, findings that were not consistent with typical rejection. Studies are under way to identify the mechanisms responsible for these changes.