

# OPUNTIA 541



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

**BRINGING IN THE NEW YEAR**

2022-12-31

photos by Dale Speirs

Finally Cowtowners could celebrate in full style. Over the past few years, if it wasn't COVID-19 social distancing rules, then it was a couple of weeks of -30°C from Christmas Day to New Year's Day that crimped our celebrations.

This year we had our regular -30°C blast just before December 23. Then we shipped the polar front into eastern Canada while warm weather blew into Calgary. Over the holidays the temperatures were 0°C to -10°C.

I went downtown for the fireworks by bus. The temperature was slightly below freezing. The streets were packed with pedestrians. I noticed motorists circling the blocks trying to find a parking spot. New Year's Eve at 23h00 and there are people who think they can find a parking spot downtown. Sometimes I despair for humanity.

The fireworks were launched from the top of the Calgary Tower. The cover photo was taken just as the tower changed its lighting to red for the 2-minute warning. The stately pile at right is the Palliser Hotel, built 1914 and always the most expensive place in the city. \$15 for a salad, a friend told me. If you have to ask what the rooms rent for, you can't afford it.

I took 98 photos during the 8-minute display and kept 56. If I showed them all, this issue would be 100 megabytes in size. So here are some representative photos.

At right was the first blast. The Calgary Tower has its own light display used on the stem of the tower year round, which were somewhat coordinated with the fireworks..









On New Year's Day I slept in until 11h30, had a late breakfast, then went for a stroll. Chez Opuntia is a 10-minute walk from the Elbow River canyon. The river's name is a translation of the Blackfoot name and refers to the numerous right-angle bends the river makes as it flows out of the Kananaskis mountains.

The weather was beautiful, with bright sunshine and the temperature just at the freezing mark.

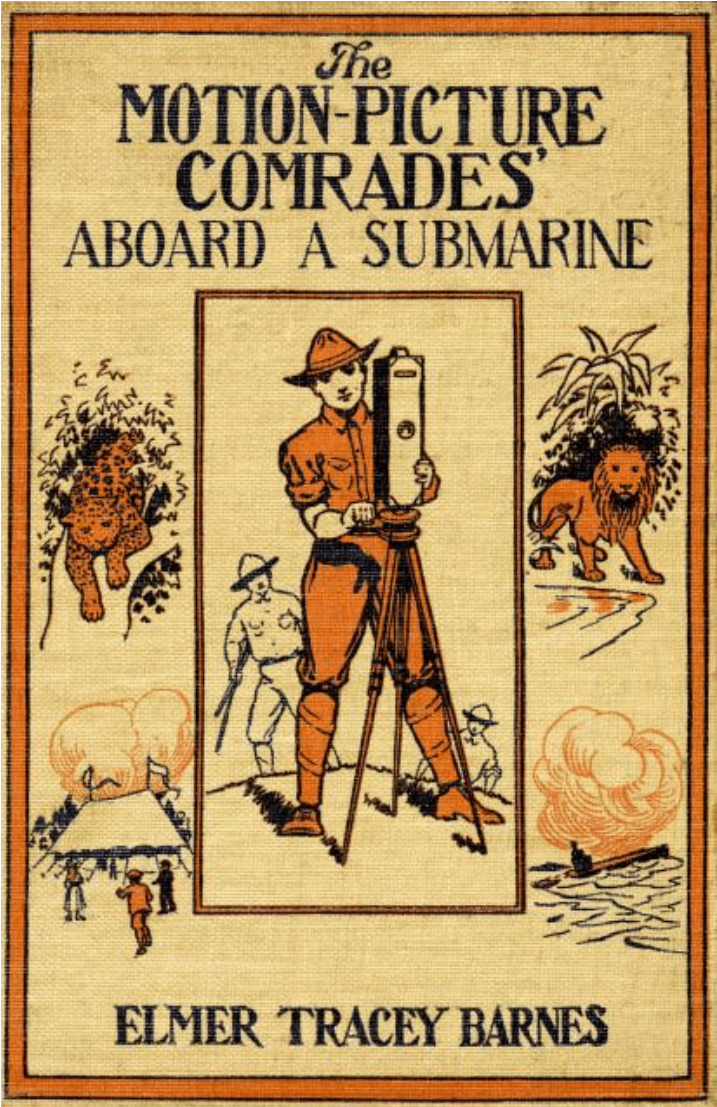


**LIGHTS, CAMERA, MURDER!:** PART 9  
by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 8 appeared in OPUNTIA's #394, 413, 429, 451, 478, 495, 520, and 531.]

**The Early Days.**

Think back to those days just before 1900. Anyone wanting to hear music had to make it themselves or pay admission to a theater to hear a band. The performing arts meant stage plays, not streaming on a smartphone. Thus the spread of silent movies meant the dawn of a science fictional era, when ordinary people could see drama and fantasy on a silver screen.



Authors were quick to leap into the market. Elmer Tracey Barnes was one of them, publishing in the 1917 a book series called The Motion Picture Comrades, available as free pdfs from [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)

These books were aimed at the Tom Swift market of boy readers, where action and adventure were the rule. The young lads (or lasses; they had their own series) kept busy collecting plot coupons. The Comrades, instead of just having adventures, also committed them to celluloid with the new-fangled motion picture camera.

There were five books in the series, beginning with a trip with a circus, then off to African jungles, the Rio Orinoco, and underwater in a submarine. The plots were a string of alarums, dastardly villains, treasure hunting, faraway places, restless natives, and cutting-edge devices such as radio and horseless carriages.

**It Is Written.**

THE PUZZLE OF THE HAPPY HOOLIGAN by Stuart Palmer was originally published in 1941 and reprinted by Otto Penzler in 2018, which was the edition I read. This was a Miss Marple story about schoolteacher Hildegard Withers of New York City.

She took her summer vacation in Hollywood, where she got a job on a movie set filming the life of Lizzie Borden. Someone whacked the screenwriter, figuratively that is, not 40 with an axe. Withers and the LAPD raced each other to a solution.

The novel was written as humorous, since that is about the only way daily life in a studio can be described. The feuds and murders as were and still are in Hollywood were copied and repeated. The casualty toll rose as killers and victims alike grubbed for money and title credits.

“It Was Bad Enough” by Ron Goulart (1983 November, ELLERY QUEEN MYSTERY MAGAZINE) was a humorous story about Beans Katzman, an actor on the downward slope. His ex-wife Juliet had written a tell-all book about his life in television and movies, and how booze, drugs, and loose women had brought him down.

Worse yet, Juliet sold the book to a Hollywood studio via her new boyfriend. At the time, a serial killer was making the rounds, so Katzman decided to

murder them and pin the blame on the killer. Unfortunately a fender bender put the kibosh on his plans and he was accidentally shot dead by the police who thought he was the serial killer.

## **Aliens.**

AGENT TO THE STARS (2005) by John Scalzi concerned the arrival of the Vherajk, aliens from somewhere out there. They had actually been observing Earth unnoticed for several centuries and decided now was the time to make themselves known. They got their knowledge of the English language and human behaviour from television and movies.

Trouble was, they were blobs the size of a breadbox and smelled like rotting fish. Hollywood agent Thomas Stein was hired to introduce them to the general public. When he asked why they just didn't land on the White House lawn, they replied they had monitored the presidential campaign debates and were too scared to approach the government.

The plan was to place the aliens into science fiction movies as friendly aliens. Get the public used to smiling when they saw a foul-smelling blob. Stein worked with a Vherajk called Joshua for want of a better name. A water cooler bottle was used to haul Joshua around, who stayed at Stein's house for security reasons.

The news media, that is, the Hollywood trade papers, suspected Stein of something but didn't know what. Busy times, in between dirty fighting with other agents trying to steal his clients. Joshua merged into Stein's dog after it died from a heart attack, which made it easier to get around.

One of Stein's actresses suffered a fatal accident. Joshua moved into her brain but couldn't save her. Some fancy work was done using a not quite brain transplant.

After various alarums and slapstick routines, the finale came at the Academy Awards when Joshua deliberately showed himself as an alien. They never did find out who won Best Picture.

A good read and very amusing. Well recommended.

## **Murderous Matters.**

SUSPENSE was one of the great anthology series of radio, airing from 1940 to 1962. The announcer would intone "*Tales well calculated to keep you in* [dramatic pause] *SUSPENSE!*" Episodes are available as free mp3s from the Old Time Radio Researchers at [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary)

This series had the distinction of being the very last old-time radio show ever aired. The episodes were a mixture of mystery, fantasy, science fiction, and weird fiction. Well worth perusing.

"Shooting Star" was written by Ruth Borne and aired on 1954-11-25. A studio executive J.D. decided to drop starlet Gaye Lansing from her contract. She went off the deep end and threatened him with a gun to give her a new contract.

Most of the episode was the back story of her struggles to achieve stardom. She held J.D. hostage while waiting for the contract to be drawn up.

There was a sustaining commercial in which an announcer recited lines from the U.S. Declaration of Independence. He sternly lectured the audience on the importance of how the signers of the declaration meant what they said when they signed the document. Sort of like a contract, the listener will think.

Interruptions occurred during the wait. A delivery boy, then J.D.'s wife. Gaye did a lot of acting to keep them away. Meanwhile she planned his murder to make it look like suicide. She drove him to the heights of fear.

Help finally arrived but J.D. was dead from a heart attack. Since he never signed the contract, she had nothing.

THE CASE OF THE BLACK PEARL (2014) was a novel by Lin Anderson. The setting was Cannes, France, where the glitterati were convening for the famous film festival. Angele Valette, leading lady of the movie THE BLACK PEARL, was on board the yacht of a Russian oligarch when she disappeared, along with his fabulous black pearl.

Angele's sister Camille Ager asked local fixer Patrick de Courvoiser to find her, thus kicking the plot into gear. He began sniffing around the money people, the producers, and film investors.

Not an easy task, for all of them lived in fear of enquirers and not without reason. Most of them lived in fear of creditors and tax auditors. The production crew of the movie wasn't much better.

de Courvoiser moved among the high society and the ultra rich. He meted out justice without the law to get in the way. Many alarms occurred but all the combatants were careful not to frighten the movie folk. No one wanted publicity of any kind.

Valette, who was no angel, was returned along with the pearl, free to continue her movie career. The oligarch and his prispeshniki were quietly terminated on board the yacht during the denouement. All very sophisticated, like James Bond in a tuxedo.

### **Starships.**

In 1973, Harlan Ellison and Ben Bova were entwined with 20th Century Fox Television in a series called THE STARLOST. Borrowing from Robert Heinlein's novel ORPHANS OF THE SKY, the premise was a generation starship whose occupants did not know they were on a starship drifting off course.

Production of the series was a disaster. The CTV network in Canada joined Fox in a low-budget project, trying to use an untested SFX system that failed miserably. The network management were unsympathetic and unknowledgeable about science fiction. The crippled series flopped, and was little mourned.

Ellison wrote an extended rant about the fiasco. Bova's revenge was to write a novel THE STARCROSSED, about a Hollywood production of a science fiction show. It was first published in 1975 and is available from Amazon as print-on-demand, where I got my copy.

THE STARCROSSED opened with Bill Oxnard, a physicist who had invented an improved 3-D holographic system that would replace flat television. He and independent studio owner Bernard Finger were trying to convince New York City financiers to bankroll the device.

The catch was the financiers wanted one Top Ten show done in 3-D before they would cough up the money to manufacture the holographic projectors. Oxnard

and Finger hired Ron Gabriel as the writer. He was a noisy bastard, not unlike H\*\*\*\*\* E\*\*\*\*\*.

Finger's two chief flunkies were Les Montpelier and Brenda Impanema. They ran interference for him as required and did errands. Another supporting character was agent Jerry Morgan, as unscrupulous as they came. The producer Sheldon Fad was in the middle, trying to keep the peace between co-workers who hated each other.

Just a typical Hollywood operation. Except it wasn't Hollywood. The 3-D series, now named THE STARCROSSED, would be made in Canada to save money. Once in the Great White North, the real troubles began.

Oxnard discovered the model of the starship had fins and wings. He had to explain to the prop men why this was no go. They got huffy about it. Gabriel, meanwhile, learned that by agreement, the initial scripts had to be written by Canadians. He was presented with hoary old ideas such as "And their names were Adam and Eve" and "But it was only a dream".

After some screaming, he was told the truth,. The submitted scripts were the best from a high school writing contest. The advantage was the teenagers wouldn't be paid real money, that is, union scale. Another saving for the budget.

Money was, however, put where it would be seen. The leading lady was a voluptuous bimbo. There was no doubt her ample bosom would be on constant display during the series. The leading man, as per contractual obligation, was Canadian, a hockey player recently retired from the game. He was incoherent in both official languages.

The acting alternated between wooden (the bit players) and uncalled-for ad-libs (the leading actors, who held writers in contempt). Finger stayed in Hollywood, where he put half the budget money on a Super Bowl bet, hoping to pay off his debts with a big win.

Eventually all the characters got what they deserved, for better or worse. The wrap-up of the novel involved quite a lot of scene jumping back and forth, with a touch of wish fulfillment. All told, a good read even if you don't know the back story.

**Behind The Scenes.**

REMAKE (1995) by Connie Willis was a short novel set in the Hollywood of the not too far future. Alis was a dancer who wanted to be in the movies, but she was two decades too late. The narrator was a promoter whose main job was trying to keep track of the latest studio mergers and who the executives were.

Live action movies had been supplanted by computer graphics. Mash-ups and gan films were as easy as using a laptop. All the actors were copyrighted and regularly rehashed into modern movies. Producers regularly inserted their girlfriends into old movies as chorus girls, and modern actors as the leads. Just try and find the original movie version.

The novel didn’t have much of a plot. The story was a road trip through Hollywood studios where everyone was doing remakes and no original scripts were done. The narrator kept searching constantly for public domain film clips he could string together into a movie. His pursuit of Alis was almost an afterthought.

MURDER AT THE ACADEMY AWARDS (2009) by Joan Rivers and Jerrilyn Farmer was based on the comedienne’s experience of red carpet ceremonies, ghosted by the latter author. Rivers invented the red carpet interview in its modern form, where actresses showed off their gowns, explained a bit about them, and answered other questions.

The protagonist was Maxine Taylor and her daughter Drew. Maxine was used to celebrity train wrecks, but not to starlet Halsey Hamilton, fresh out of rehab, falling dead at her feet onto the red carpet. Making a death scene funny was something only Rivers could pull off.

Indeed the entire novel was suffused with red carpet scenes that only someone who had done countless premieres and parties could personally know. In between chasing celebrities, Maxine and Drew investigated the rehab centre.

They pushed and shoved for space at the funeral. Anyplace else, a funeral is arranged by morticians and clergymen, but in Hollywood the funerals have producers.

Joan, pardon me, Maxine eventually sleuthed out the murderer, who killed Halsey for what was only slightly nastier than the usual Hollywood business.

**Other Realities.**

DEADLY SUMMER (2018) by Denise Grover Swank was about former actress Summer Butler, lately of Sweet Briar, Alabama, and definitely formerly of Hollywood. She was broke, had a toxic family, and only two possible choices for income, a nude photo shoot or a reality television show.

She had played a teenage sleuth in her better days, so the reality show would have her solve cases in her hometown. Titled “Darling Investigations”, the show got a ratings boost when Summer found a real corpse.

The list of suspects kept the audience busily voting. The only spoiler in the plot was that the murderer highly resented Summer for barging in. Since a murderer can only be executed once, Summer was named “Most Likely Victim”.

Filming the show wasn’t easy. The crew went to interview the town drunk who might have seen something, hoping to get a good take of a homeless person. Instead he had sobered up and put on new clothes from the thrift store so he would look his best for the camera.

Bad enough as well for the Deppity Dawgs, who had to deal with a Miss Marple with a camera crew following her. She did get along well with the chief of police, whom she had dated in high school. Too well, as they were photographed in a compromising situation.

The grande finale was a parade for the village fete. The mascot was a boll weevil. The showdown with the killer was filmed live on tape. He didn’t realize that if a cameraman threatened at gunpoint set the camera down that it was still running.

Best of all, not only was the murder solved, but the series was picked up for a second season.

**Cozy Murders.**

THE GHOST AND MRS MEWER (2014) by Krista Davis (pseudonym of Cristina Ryplansky) was a novel in a cozy series about Holly Miller of Wagtail, Virginia. She operated the pet-friendly Sugar Maple Inn.

A cable television series “Apparition Apprehenders” was filming local supernatural sites. The crew stayed at the Inn. They didn’t have far to go for a story when one of their assistants, Mallory Gooley, was murdered nearby.

Meanwhile, the village carried on. The ghost tours continued. Besides ghost hunters, there were diamond hunters, seeking a supposed treasure. The television crew dashed about the county, somewhat hampered by the attrition among the Apparition Apprehenders.

Mallory’s death wasn’t murder after all. Notwithstanding that, the crew had many back stories for explanation in the denouement.

## **SERIES DETECTIVES: PART 16**

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 15 appeared in OPUNTIA #402, 406, 425, 448, 459, 467, 472, 477, 485, 491, 497, 500, 509, 517, and 528.]

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

### **Leonidas Witherall.**

THE ADVENTURES OF LEONIDAS WITHERALL was heard during the 1944-45 season, and was loosely based on the novels of Alice Tilton, pseudonym of Phoebe Atwood Taylor.

The character was a bachelor who owned and operated a boys school, which today might make listeners go hmmm. He taught a class in English literature and his vanity was that he looked much like Shakespeare.

Witherall also wrote the Lieutenant Hazeltine radio series. This was not a secret from his friends and as a result of which he was frequently dragged into amateur sleuthing. His friends figured that if he wrote about detectives then he must be one himself. He tried to explain that the real world didn’t operate the same as fictional detecting, but to no avail.

His housekeeper Mrs Mollett was played by an actress who gave her character one of the worst stage Irish accents heard anywhere, begorrah.

“Mrs Mollett Disappears” was written by Howard Merrill and aired on 1944-07-30. The doorbell rang and she answered it. Witherall heard her scream. He ran to the door but Mrs Mollett had vanished. So began the mystery.

Since there were no clues, the police could do nothing. Witherall began calling friends but they hadn’t seen her. The next evening the doorbell rang again. T was Mrs Mollett, bedraggled and exhausted.

She said she had been kidnapped. When she opened the door, someone yanked her outside, put a blindfold on her, and drove off with her to their lair. What they wanted was her keys, as she cleaned for a dozen homes.

One of those homes was a wealthy man named Trink who had just left for several weeks vacation in Canada. She had the combination to Trink's safe, incredible as it may seem. He was a trusting soul indeed and wanted her to polish his silverware while he was away.

The thieves somehow knew that, but she was stubborn and wouldn't give them the combination. Eventually she escaped out into the night and made her way home. Witherall telephoned the police but they were busy with a robbery.

At Mollett's insistence, she and Witherall went sleuthing. Remembering sounds and vibrations from her involuntary trip, she and he retraced the route and found the house where she had been held. A party was underway, so of course they investigated. Two unarmed middle-aged citizens against the mob.

Witherall was not very subtle, and the host marked him immediately. A henchman was summoned to escort him into the basement from whence he would not return. Witherall darted into the party, where the thieves had to be discrete about trying to capture him.

Assorted alarums ensued as expected, but discretely on both sides as each maneuvered and counter-maneuvered. Eventually though, someone turned the lights out, shots were fired, the police arrived, and no one had a good time at all.

"Murder At Dandy's Dream" aired on 1944-09-10. Writer credit was chopped off this transcription by some long-ago OTR fan. Mrs Mollett had gone to a mountain resort called Dandy's Dream Domicile. On her recommendation, Leonidas Witherall followed for his own rest.

Being a murder magnet, he never got any. Hardly had he arrived when the fire alarm jangled. Not the resort but a cabin across the road. A man staggered outside, suffering from the smoke.

Leonidas and Mollett tried to help him. The man wanted to go back inside to retrieve a diamond. As Leonidas properly told him, no diamond was worth risking one's life. However when told of the value, Leonidas went inside to retrieve it. He succeeded.

He also discovered the diamond was a fake. The man, named Button, said Mr Dandy had sold him the fake gem. Dandy, however, denied any transaction had taken place.

Button, having failed to get a receipt for a \$30,000 cash transaction, wanted blood. Witherall inserted himself into the dispute, which soon was revealed to be a squabble over trafficking in stolen diamonds. Button then accused Witherall of stealing a valuable letter opener while recovering the diamond.

Mollett found the letter opener, firmly lodged in Dandy's back. Button was surprised how calm she was about the murder. She, being one of those people who never know when to shut up, explained that she and Witherall found murdered bodies everywhere they went. *"That's quite a character reference"*, conceded Button with sarcasm.

All those at the resort viewed the body, then Witherall telephoned the police. They would be hours getting to the remote resort. He suggested that everyone play beanbags to pass the time until the police arrived. The suggestion did not go over well.

There was method in his madness. The letter opener had been thrown into Dandy's back through an open window. Witherall wanted to see who threw beanbags hard and accurately.

Most retired to their rooms but Witherall went back to the resort office to snoop. He found some files and as he was looking at them he was slugged unconscious. Someone had thrown a beanbag hard and fast. Upon reviving after Mollett found him, he saw some pages had been torn out of the files.

Unperturbed, he checked more files and found the name of a Nebraska man who stayed at the resort in 1940. Telephoning him long distance (after all, it was the resort's money), Witherall asked if he could recall any really good beanbag players at the resort.

He got an answer and next decided to go swimming in the lake. He was attacked in the water by the beanbag thrower. The police finally arrived, giving Witherall a chance to expound at length about champion beanbag throwers. After identifying the killer, Witherall went swimming again.

**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 Derringer Society” aired on 1946-07-08. Nothing to do with the gun but rather a fan club for Dr Derringer stories. He was a fictional superscience detective, a mixture of Jules Verne, Tom Swift, and Nick Carter.

Gregory Hood and several other fans belonged to a dinner club, which operated on the lines of the Baker Street Irregulars. The script writer Anthony Boucher was a prominent Sherlockian, belonged to the Baker Street Irregulars dinner club, and wrote for the Holmes radio show, so one can easily see the antecedents of this episode.

The opening was set at a club dinner, normally stag but that night graced by the presence of Julia Hayes. She claimed to predict the near future, giving as examples the destruction of the Hindenburg zeppelin and the death of Mussolini, to the day and the hour, well before those events.

At the dinner, she predicted that Alfred Chester, a member at the table, would be murdered that night at 23h15. He was, stabbed in the back by an unknown right-handed assailant.

Dr Barton, a psychiatrist, had brought Hayes to the meeting. He mentioned to Hood that she had been left-handed as a child but forcefully trained to be right-handed. She then correctly predicted the death of another member.

The police were naturally suspicious. While interrogating her, she predicted Hood’s death. Since he was booked for the series, there was no suspense. She was wrong and he would survive. The organist went berserk with a crescendo when she made her revelation.

He was quickly cut off by the Petri Wine spokesman, who touted the merits of Petri Muscatel. Enjoy a glass after dinner with fruit or cake. As long as no one predicted your death.

Sanderson Taylor suggested Barton might have hypnotized Hayes into committing the first two murders. However it is known that hypnotized persons cannot commit a crime against their will. She was interrogated but turned into a blubbing mess.

Hood proved Barton was the actual killer, using Hayes as a stalking horse. Then she returned and tried to kill Hood. She was holding the knife in her left hand.

Nonetheless Barton was arrested for the murders. He didn’t blab a confession. It seems probable he would be acquitted in court since the case would be almost impossible to prove.

Hood had another worry. Two club members were dead and a third one was headed to the electric chair. There would have to be a recruiting drive to bring the numbers back up. The announcer applied for admission by offering a case of Petri Wine.

“Forgetful Murderer” aired on 1946-07-29. Gregory Hood and Sanderson Taylor strolled out one evening and happened by a crowd gathered in front of a jewelry store. The night watchman had been murdered during a smash-and-grab raid.

The police were there but of course we know who would solve the crime. Hood didn’t actually do any forensic work at the scene but kept walking to his parked car after Taylor went his own way. Driving off, Hood then discovered a femme fatale in his car.

She told him to call her Toffee. Away they went to a musical segue, which jumped to a conversation in the police station three days later. Another jewelry store robbery and murder.

Hood and Taylor were opening a retail store for Hood’s import business. The next scene had them discussing shop and then Toffee. Hood said he had a delightful evening with her several scenes back. She then vanished without him learning anything about her.

Gino the watchman arrived for his first night on the job in the shop. Hardly had he stepped in when a police detective arrived. A third jewelry store murder had occurred.

The murders had a pattern. Each time the robber slugged the watchman unconscious, then stabbed him dead. After looting the store, the killer left a trivial object such as a handkerchief, a stethoscope earpiece, and a strange piece of long thin metal that no one could identify.

Hood thought the metal thingy looked familiar but couldn't quite place it. The detective told Hood he could have it until his memory was jogged. Whoa there! I'm sure chain-of-custody rules for crime scene evidence were in effect back then. A policeman wouldn't hand over physical evidence to a civilian, even if he was a good Miss Marple.

Toffee reappeared in Hood's car and a good time was had by all. He accidentally poked her with the metal piece which was in his pocket. She told him it was a pipe cleaner for the shank of the pipe. Her father had one just like it.

The next day Hood told the police, who informed him a fourth robbery murder had occurred. This time a silver cigarette lighter was left at the scene. Number five was Hood's new shop, and Gino was the victim. The clue left by the killer was some pages torn from a novel.

Things looked grim, so Petri Wine stepped in with a recommendation for Petri Burgundy to relax you while eating hamburgers, and Petri Sauterne for chicken. No suggestions about what to relax with when dealing with murder. I'd suggest a bottle of Thunderbird wine but that is made by the Gallo family.

Back at the crime, Hood narrowed the culprit down to a doctor's house, Dr Christopher Partington. Toffee was in residence. She was the perfect hostess, serving a nice glass of sherry. One suspects that if Pabst was the sponsor, she would have served a beer.

Hood lectured her on subconscious guilt. The telephone rang and she answered it as Dr Partington. Yes, she was a pipe smoker with a man's name and had a split personality named Cathy Peters, who was a murderous psychotic. "*We use the same body*", she sobbed.

## **Nick Carter.**

This detective first appeared in print in 1886, predating Sherlock Holmes, and often appeared on stage and in movies. Nick Carter appeared in his own pulp magazines and dime novels, written by house authors. Some of the pulp magazines are available on [www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org).

NICK CARTER, MASTER DETECTIVE aired on old-time radio from 1943 to 1955. Episodes are available as free mp3s from [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary). In this incarnation, he had boundless confidence in his ability and came across as arrogant to all, including his secretary/girlfriend Patsy Bowen. He had his own laboratory, a huge library, and kept better files than the FBI.

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

"The Unwilling Accomplice" was written by Ralph Burke and aired on 1944-10-29. A society thief branched out into bank robbery by kidnapping Wayne Belden, the president of the National Loan and Trust. The thief sent a bragging notice to Carter.

\$50,000 was missing from the main vault which, however, contained the body of Belden. Carter suspected Butler Pierce, who was squiring Belden's daughter, and Pierce's chauffeur Jim Martin.

Carter's investigative method was to break into Pierce's house and find the stolen loot. He confronted Pierce but since there was 15 minutes to go, the case wasn't that simple. Carter was slugged unconscious and Pierce escaped with the loot.

The police picked up Martin. Carter worked on him, pointing out that he would fall on a murder rap. Martin was uncooperative. He was released and Carter sent his agents to openly tail him as a bit of psychological warfare.

Martin scoffed but he wasn't the hero. Pierce made contact with Martin, convinced he was a squealer, and was about to shoot him dead. Carter and the police arrived in the nick of time (pardon the pun) and arrested Pierce. Next stop would be the electric chair.

“The Witness Saw Nothing” aired on 1946-02-24 and was written by Alfred Bester. Out in a suburban area, Mrs Grogan lived at the far end of Lundy Lane. As the episode opened, the elderly woman was entertaining Mrs Denning in her cottage.

Grogan had publicized a rumour that she had \$50,000 in cash scattered throughout her cottage in various hiding places. She told Denning that wasn’t true. She had made up the story because she was lonely and no one came to visit her. Her plan seemed to be working, as suddenly people began dropping by.

Denning left in a huff at the implication she was only interested in the money. Arriving at the cottage, not in a huff but in anticipation, were two sharp-practice men. They bound and gagged Grogan, then began looking for the cash. They couldn’t find it and were much vexed.

They didn’t believe her denials. One of them tapped her a little too hard on the head with a homemade sap and accidentally killed her. Mentioned in passing was that the sap was filled with steel shot. Note that well.

Just then another visitor arrived, who identified himself as Albert Higgins, vacuum cleaner salesman. They bluffed him by saying that Grogan was away but would be interested in talking to him the following afternoon.

Only after Higgins left did they realize he could identify them to police once the murder was discovered. They went to work, trying three times to kill Higgins with staged fatal accidents. His sister Barbara insisted Albert go to Nick Carter.

Since the murder hadn’t yet been discovered, Higgins couldn’t give Carter any reason why he had been targeted, if indeed the accidents were arranged and not random bad luck. Carter took the case and went to the police, but they had no reports of anything near Lundy Lane.

What soon happened though was the disappearance of Higgins. He stepped into a general store and vanished. When Carter arrived after back-tracking Higgins’ path, he found the proprietor unconscious from a sap. A few steel shots had spilled on the floor. Carter picked them up and had his assistant begin checking their source.

Patsy Bowen got Higgins’ sales log book report for the previous day. The details took Carter to Lundy Lane where he found Grogan’s body. Much rushing about

by Carter and the police. The murderer had been tracking Higgins and saw him meet Carter. Instead of killing him outright, the killer first wanted to learn what Higgins had told Carter.

Basically nothing, since Higgins didn’t know about the murder. The two men didn’t believe him until they read a false newspaper report planted by Carter that identified someone else as the killer, with Higgins as the witness.

In that case, they had to keep Higgins alive, as he was their alibi. Meanwhile, Carter, Bowen, and the police managed to narrow down the neighbourhood where the two criminals lived. Off they went to find them and Higgins. And so they did.

Carter tied up some loose ends for Bowen in the epilogue, then announced a schedule change for the show, henceforth to be heard Tuesday nights instead of Sundays.

### **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 he knew and had been.

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. 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*”.

“Fog Over Murder” was written by John Roeburt and aired on 1953-10-13. Dr Banner was a psychiatrist with an amnesiac patient given the temporary name Clark Smith. The latter was resisting recovering his true identity, and suffering depression and severe anxiety.

The symptoms indicated Smith might have committed a serious crime for which his psyche was suppressing the memory for the fear of consequences. Banner wanted Barrie Craig to investigate Smith's background.

Firstly, Craig visited Smith, now living as a beachcomber nearby. No help there, as he was happy with no responsibilities. There were some very slight clues from words that Smith had repeated during psychoanalysis, so Craig followed them up.

One of the clues led to a hamlet where the sheriff and the barber were the same man. He said only one man had ever disappeared from there, Lloyd Beamer, about six years ago. His wife Polly was still there so Craig talked to her.

He jolted her enough to make her faint, possibly a heart attack. She had not been on the best of terms with Lloyd who was an abusive husband. Since his disappearance she had built a new life running his bottling business. She was obstructive to Craig's enquiries.

Before leaving, Craig talked to the plant manager Roy Howie but fared no better. In the segue to the next scene, Craig remarked that an important part of visiting a one-horse town was knowing how to get out alive.

Taking the local taxi to the railway station, someone shot at Craig. He patched himself up at the barber shop, where the sheriff bandaged him, charging only the price of a haircut. The sheriff figured the gunman was Howie, who was courting Polly. No way to prove anything, so Craig continued to the railway station.

On the train back home, Craig met Polly. Her demeanor had changed. She was now quite friendly but Craig wasn't susceptible to her lures. She wanted to meet Clark Smith. Craig arranged the match. She confirmed Smith was Lloyd.

Out of nowhere, Craig said Lloyd had a mermaid tattoo. Smith didn't and confessed. Craig accused Smith of being a blackmailer. He admitted it, having seen Polly murder Lloyd. Craig said he had bluffed about the tattoo to get Smith to talk. Polly fainted.

"Angel Of Death" was written by John Roeburt and aired on 1955-01-05. The episode began with Ritchie Stemson rescued from drowning by Barrie Craig. Ritchie seemed doped and only functioning with a few brain cells.

After being pulled to shore, he didn't show much gratitude, but his wife Natalie did. She sent a cheque to Craig for \$1,000, of which \$100 was to replace his suit and shoes ruined in the rescue, and the rest in appreciation.

Craig rendezvoused with Natalie at Club Socrates. The waitresses dressed as Cleopatra, the waiters in Roman togas, and the customers reclined on couches for fine dining. Not a Greek in sight. Nobody commented on it.

Natalie confirmed Ritchie's dopiness and frequent near-fatal accidents. She offered Craig \$4,000 to be Ritchie's companion for a month. Ritchie wasn't cooperative, demanding \$500 a week from Craig to play nice.

Craig talked to a doctor friend and checked with Waldo Stemson. Waldo was Ritchie's brother and owned a fish market. He resented his brother, formerly Natalie's chauffeur, high-hatting him. Waldo did say Ritchie was healthy and didn't have a history of clumsiness.

Next stop was the office of Natalie's father, a millionaire back when a million was real money. No satisfaction there. Craig went back to Ritchie's apartment.

He found his client lying dead on the sidewalk, spreadeagled and bloody after an 18-storey fall. Somebody in the crowd of gaping spectators had called an ambulance but there was no rush needed.

Not long after, Craig revisited Waldo, who allowed that he hadn't been entirely honest about his brother. Ritchie indeed had a history of accidents and head pains. Craig didn't believe the revised story and asked him who paid him off. Craig's conclusion was that someone was slipping drugs into Ritchie's food and drink.

Waldo admitted that Natalie and her father were in cahoots. When Craig questioned Natalie, she admitted that Ritchie was blackmailing her father and she was part of the price.

Craig pointed out that the autopsy would show drugs in Ritchie's body. At that point the episode abruptly ended. The listeners could guess the consequences.

## Casey.

CASEY, CRIME PHOTOGRAPHER aired on radio from 1943 to 1955. The title varied several times but is generally remembered by this version. The series was based on novels by George Harmon Coxe. The episodes were written by Alonzo Deen Cole.

The hero was Casey, first name never given, who was a newspaper photographer. He was accompanied by reporter and girlfriend Ann Williams.

The intro and outro were usually at the Blue Note Café, where Casey and Williams hung out. The bartender Ethelbert was a few millilitres shy of a full shot glass. He was used as the comic relief and a sounding board so that Casey could explain the plot.

“The Demon Miner” aired on 1947-03-20. Six coal miners had been killed within a short time, apparently by some sort of underground monster, a white-faced demon miner. Understandably they were reluctant to work in the mine.

Casey and Ann Williams were assigned by their editor to investigate. They were just as reluctant to go down below. Casey went to the library to read up on coal mining. But first a message from Anchor Hocking Glass about Fire King ovenware. Your troubles are over when you bake food with their glassware.

Meanwhile, back at the mine, Casey and Ann went searching for the demon miner. They found a suspect miner who spoke with a Transylvanian accent but to be fair there were several other suspects.

Also found in the rubble was a powderpuff laced with coal dust. Casey surmised the killer used it to blacken his face after each killing and thus disguise himself as an ordinary miner. Too late Casey learned the powderpuff was Ann’s. She said it must have fallen out of her pocket.

Casey left her alone and went down a side passage to see what he could see. The demon miner appeared and tried to molest her. Casey returned in the nick of time. The miner did his best imitation of Peter Lorre as he went into a monologue about getting revenge after thirty years of working in the mines.

After a break for a spiel about Anchor Hocking glass jars, Casey and Ann adjourned to a tavern. The loose ends were tied up, including the revelation from Ann that she found her powderpuff in her jacket pocket. The one that Casey found really did belong to the killer.

“Death In Lover’s Lane” aired on 1948-07-08. Someone was killing young couples in the local Lover’s Lane. The police quickly settled on a local woman just released from an institution.

They were tipped off by a resident. He was a psychology professor. She was outright psychotic, and seemed the culprit. The Inspector ran her in. He was soon dismayed when his sergeant and troops arrested a hermit living in the woods adjacent as the suspect. The hermit put up a fight but was eventually captured.

Since the episode still had ten minutes to go, Casey and Ann Williams did some more investigating. Parked in the lane, they drew out the true killer, the professor. He liked to experiment on how people reacted when they knew they were going to die.

Anchor Hocking Glass interrupted with a commercial. They proudly touted their newest and greatest invention, the non-refundable bottle. Drink it dry and then toss it into the garbage. No need to take the bottles back for recycling. Convenient, eh?

“Unlucky Numbers” aired on 1950-06-15. At the Blue Note Café, Ethelbert was lamenting to Casey that his girlfriend Gladys wanted them to be married. He was in a quandary.

Ann Williams arrived with news for Casey that their editor Bert wanted them to do an exposé on the numbers racket. Bert evidently had the greatest faith in them, not only to write the story but to survive after the gangsters read the newspaper.

Ethelbert gave them the name of Steve Polachek, a young man who played the numbers. He lived with his mother, who said he was addicted to gambling. The sad story was predictable.

Many alarums occurred, with gangsters straight out of Damon Runyon, only not as polite. There were excursions, the final one of which was a high-speed car

chase that did not end well for the bad guys.

The denouement, with Casey and Williams recovering at the Blue Note, ended with Polachek reforming, Mama delighted, but nothing more said about Ethelbert's dilemma.

**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 Joyce Wallace Case" was written by Russell Hughes and aired on 1950-03-12. Richard Diamond was hired by actress Joyce Wallace after someone fired a bullet into her apartment.

She was separated from her husband Barton Webb and was in a child custody dispute with him. The child never had a speaking part and was never mentioned again. There was no indication who presently had custody.

The next alarum was a bunch of roses sent to her which contained a snake. Not poisonous but only Barton knew she had a deathly fear of snakes. He denied sending a snake.

Ballistics tied the bullet to his Mauser .25, which he said had gone missing a few days ago. Diamond subsequently interrupted a argument between the couple, both of whom lied liberally to him. They reconciled amidst a tangle of loose threads left unexplained. And so to the piano and serenading with Helen Asher, a song from Joyce's current show. She called him Rick.

"The Al Brenner Case" was written by Blake Edwards and aired on 1952-01-25. Richard Diamond was approached by Tiny Gillespie, a professional stool pigeon, to help find a skip. Al Brenner was supposed to testify before a grand jury but declined the honour and disappeared.

There was a \$5,000 reward for Brenner. This prompted Gillespie to ask Diamond for help on a 50/50 basis. That turned out to be 100% for Diamond after Gillespie's body was found.

A clue was a mixture of grass seed and chemical fertilizer on Gillespie's pants. Diamond phoned a garden centre in the area where the deceased had been found. From there he identified a likely location for Brenner, where an order had been delivered.

Diamond succeeded too well, and found himself at Brenner's gunpoint. A henchman worked him over, intending to beat him to death as he had with Gillespie. Since Diamond was a continuing character he survived. No suspense in that.

The police arrived in the nick of time, as they so often do. All ended well, with Diamond collecting the \$5,000 and serenading Helen Asher.

There was, however, a bad news twist. Diamond gaily spent all the reward. He forgot he had to pay income tax on the money, and got a nasty bill from the friendly folks at the tax agency.

**Johnny Dollar.**

YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR was the second-last of the old-time radio series, airing from 1949 to 1962. (The final episode of SUSPENSE aired immediately after the final episode of YTJD.) Almost all the OTR shows had died off by 1955.

The episodes were standard half-hour weekly shows except for a year starting in 1955 October, when the series aired as daily 15-minute installments comprising one complete episode each week, or in other words, 75-minute episodes.

Johnny Dollar was an insurance investigator based in Hartford, Connecticut. Each episode began with a claims adjustor from an insurance company ringing

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

“The Molly K Matter” was a five-part episode that aired in middle October 1955, and was written by Les Crutchfield.

Molly K was a ship bound for Yokohama with a cargo of wheat. It suddenly sank just outside San Francisco Bay. Supposedly the ship hit a sunken derelict in the fog. Two men died. Capt. Edgar Brawley stood to collect \$500,000 from the insurance company.

Johnny Dollar interrogated Brawley, who was extremely hostile. His background was suspect and he was obviously fearful of the investigation. Later a woman telephoned Dollar and asked for a rendezvous in the waterfront at night.

After a confrontation with a goon named Dean Sutton, he met with her, who said she was Edgar's daughter Helen. The ship was named after her mother. Sutton was her boyfriend who had consigned the wheat.

In the conversation, Helen mentioned the ship was heavily mortgaged to a Chinese woman Lu Tang, aka Shanghai Lu. After leaving the warehouse, Dollar was accosted by a crewman named Josiah Hawkins, who told him only one man died in the wreck. Benny Wong had been reported dead but actually survived.

Bill Mack was the dead man, a friend of Hawkins. Further, the crew believed the ship was sabotaged. Hawkins said Mack didn't drown but had his throat cut.

Brawley appeared and lived up to his name by starting a brawl. He lost. Dollar went off to talk to Shanghai Lu about Wong. She told him Wong had been an explosives expert in the last war. Shortly thereafter Dollar was slowed down by Brawley filing charges of assault against him.

The harbour police were sympathetic but had to follow procedure. Dollar got their attention when Lu Tang telephoned the police and told them she had located Wong. Arriving at the hideout, they found Wong shot dead and Sutton trying to depart.

However the evidence showed Sutton was innocent. Brawley became the prime suspect for the police. Dollar thought otherwise, that Helen was the culprit. Dollar found out that the wheat was insured by Sutton with a different company.

Helen got to Dollar first with a gun, but was interrupted by Sutton's arrival. Shots were fired. A boat was blown up. Helen and Sutton didn't survive. Total expenses were \$547.60. Capt. Brawley was left with nothing. He lost his ship, daughter, and insurance claim.

“The Valentine Matter” was written by John Dawson and aired in the first week of November 1955. This was a five-part daily episode.

A hotel bellhop in New Orleans walked off with \$7,500, a diamond necklace, a hotel station wagon, and the manager's wife. The insurance company hired Johnny Dollar because they had insured the necklace. By the time he arrived, the police had wrapped up the case, bellhop and all.

With time to kill before the return flight, Dollar wandered around town doing the tourist thing. He recognized Dan Valentine, a retired gangster, and had dinner with him. The next morning a pair of gunmen wounded Valentine with two bullets from silenced guns as he walked down the street.

NOPD Inspector Dubacca and Dollar investigated but Valentine refused to cooperate. The insurance company called Dollar and asked him to stay on because they had a \$50,000 life insurance policy on Valentine.

Dubacca and Dollar trudged about collecting clues and suspects. Dollar managed to locate Valentine's wife Anne, now living as Anne Ward. She was trying to protect her daughter Teresa, who didn't know about her father. Dan fled the hospital despite his wounds, which put him in jeopardy because he was in poor medical condition. All and sundry tried to find him.

Conrad Webster was a name that came up, a decayed lawyer now living as an alcoholic and doing well in that position. Webster handled Dan's financial affairs, including a trust fund for Teresa, who lived in Massachusetts.

The newspapers did their own investigating and exposed the Wards' identities. Shortly thereafter, Dan and Anne departed this world by gunfire from the same gunmen.

Webster went missing. Dollar went out to Dan's house and discovered Teresa had arrived in town. She had just learned about her parentage. Webster was eventually found, on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain. Ballistics from his body matched the previous shooting, as did the next victim, Teresa.

Dollar saw the two gunmen and fired at their getaway car. They crashed but didn't survive. By now, the supporting characters had been thinned out so much that it was a wonder Dubacca and the insurance company manager were still alive.

The gunmen were Italian brothers from New York City. Their father came out to claim the bodies. He refused to explain the connection but Dollar discovered that Anne was his daughter. The old man not only disowned her for marrying Valentine but everyone else.

The whole thing was a vendetta that destroyed two families. Total expenses were \$1,290.38.

### **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 Big Step" was written by Robert Mitchell and Eugene Levitt, and aired on 1950-02-28. The client was Betty Cantor on behalf of a friend Shirley Vitello who was in a dither about something but wouldn't say what.

Betty said she noticed Shirley reading a newspaper article, then suddenly panicking and running out. Shirley was a laboratory assistant to Dr Abraham Soffman, who developed new dyes. Her husband Gilbert was a pianist.

Philip Marlowe went out to the Vitello house. No one was at home so he let himself in through a back window. Private detectives can do that. He found a newspaper with a story on page 5 clipped out.

Soffman showed up and let himself in through the front door with a key. After the two men got over their mutual surprise at seeing each other, they were quite amicable.

Soffman said he had come over because Shirley hadn't shown up for work. The two men noticed a desk drawer open. Therein was a box of ammunition, with nine bullets missing. Soffman said he knew a handgun was kept there but it was missing.

He also had found in the laboratory a discarded slip of paper regarding an airline flight from Los Angeles to New York City, booked for Ruth Briton. Marlowe told Soffman to hold the fort there while he went over to Gilbert's studio.

En route, Marlowe stopped at a news agent and bought a copy of the newspaper. Turning to page 5, he read the missing story. A man named Morris Deneker had been run over by a taxi. In the hospital, he learned he was dying. Therefore he confessed to some sort of crime, not specified in the newspaper article.

Marlowe found Gilbert in his studio, pounding away on the piano. After a quick briefing, Gilbert said Shirley had once worked for Deneker and that Briton was her old friend visiting from New York. Departing the studio, Marlowe was sapped unconscious by Shirley. In old-time radio, every private detective was so rendered once every episode.

Upon waking up, Marlowe went back to the Vitello house. Soffman was still there. He said Deneker was a rival chemist who had anticipated or perhaps stolen some of Soffman's new dyes. The next excursion was to the hospital where Deneker lay. The police said Shirley had been seen lurking about.

More excursions around town. Shirley confessed to the industrial espionage of the stolen dye formulas. She got the drop on Marlowe, then left to commit suicide at the Redondo fishing pier. She succeeded.

Or so it appeared. Gilbert had set up the murder to look like suicide. He got what was coming to him. The orchestra worked itself into a frenzy and so to the closing credits.

"The Angry Eagle" was written by Robert Mitchell and Eugene Levitt, and aired on 1950-04-18. In the guise of a sportswriter, Philip Marlowe was working at a boxing training camp out in the country.

His job was to keep the peace between boxers, trainers, and managers. The women weren't much better, as the wives and girlfriends squabbled constantly. There was more fighting outside the ring than inside.

The camp owner was Raleigh Lance. The place was perched on cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Note that well, as Lance might have been better off operating on the flatlands in the interior.

Not an easy task for Marlowe. He collected the back stories, angry ones. The gathering storm seemed to rotate around one of the boxers, named Danny Eagle. He wasn't the casualty though.

Lance's body was found on the rocks at the bottom of the cliffs. He was pushed. The rest of the episode was turning up the details such as payoffs, a nasty divorce, and a final burst of gunfire. The loose threads were tied up and Marlowe headed back to the safer environs of Los Angeles.

### **The Shadow: Introduction.**

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 original bwah-ha!-ha!.

The radio series had a complicated genealogy that began in 1930 and didn't evolve the familiar version of The Shadow until 1933. Several dozen episodes are available as free mp3s from [www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary](http://www.otrr.org/OTRRLibrary). The series lasted until 1954.

Lamont Cranston and The Shadow both dealt with Police Commissioner Weston but not simultaneously of course. Weston was usually the arresting officer and frequently worked without any uniformed officers present.

Not tenable in a genuine police department, where a real commissioner is a desk-bound bureaucrat and does not involve himself in individual cases.

The lovely Margo Lane was the only one who knew his real identity. She had no visible income but maintained a nice apartment and spent most of her time being squired about town by Cranston.

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.

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. In the late 1940s, credits were often given, but rarely before or after. 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 Shadow: The 1940s.**

"The Return Of Carnation Charlie" aired on 1940-02-04. The criminal in question always wore a carnation for good luck and attributed the flower to his ability to escape punishment. That is, until his murder trial, when Commissioner Weston refused to let him have carnations for his lapel.

Charlie went to the electric chair vowing revenge on everyone. The first victim was the florist who refused to supply carnations to Charlie. The body was discovered by Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane. Of course it was.

Then the henchman who betrayed him received a small coffin full of carnations. The ghost of Charlie appeared and exacted a macabre revenge. The Shadow, for no reason explained, went looking for a crook named Slim Banister.

He haunted Mrs Banister about Slim's disappearance and why she received \$50,000 in cash after he vanished. Carnation Charlie next haunted Weston and explained the trick.

Slim, a double of Charlie, had been dying of heart disease and agreed to substitute in the chair in exchange for a legacy to his wife. The Shadow arrived in the nick of time, as he usually did.

"The Destroyer" aired on 1945-03-25 and was written by Alfred Bester. Yes, the science fiction writer. This was basically an extended bwah-ha!-ha! by a maniac who liked to blow up apartment buildings. Much of the narration was the internal thought processes of the arsonist.

Lamont Cranston quickly fixed on three suspects. They had slipped up and revealed inside information only the killer would know. Thereafter Cranston and The Shadow began the process of elimination.

The Destroyer said his greatest triumph would be the destruction of the city at noon tomorrow. Since this episode aired four months before Hiroshima, the puzzle was how a single device could wipe out a city.

The answer, as Cranston surmised, was to blow up a dam above the city and let the flood waters wipe away the inhabitants. I don't know the geography of New York City but have to wonder if there was such a dam above the city that could do the job.

A moot point anyway, as The Shadow met The Destroyer on site and vanquished him. Now The Shadow would be the only bwah-ha!-ha!-er around, at least until the next episode.

"Murder With Music" was written by Joe Bates Smith, and aired on 1946-02-03. The episode opened with the sounds of a woman Jennifer James being murdered, followed by a commercial for vitamin capsules to keep you healthy.

Lamont Cranston and Margo Lane were at a private piano recital which ended before the dying James staggered into the room and fell dead on the floor. The

main suspect was her ex-boyfriend Brad Bartholomew whose alibi was that he had been in a nightclub.

The Shadow interrogated the nightclub owner and learned the alibi was false. Cranston and Lane went snooping in the hotel basement and found Bartholomew's body.

Margo screamed, as she usually did, which was the standard cue for a cutaway to the middle commercial, this time for cold tablets. Back at the episode, The Shadow found another suspect who immediately fingered someone else.

Hither and yon went Cranston and Lane. The killer silenced Jennifer who laughed at him, and Bartholomew because he saw the murder.

The denouement was at a piano rehearsal at 04h30. The time was specifically stated, which makes the listener wonder why they were rehearsing at that ungodly hour. There was a twist ending in which the murderer tried a third time but was rudely interrupted by Cranston.

### **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.

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

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.

Blackie's nemesis was NYPD Homicide Inspector Farraday. The name was originally spelt in the usual way with one 'r' but after the series got going for some reason the extra letter was added. In the early episodes of the 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.

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.

"Archie Grant's Club 77" aired on 1949-02-23. There was trouble down at the aforementioned nightclub with the aforementioned proprietor. The collection money from one of the rackets that Archie Grant operated went astray.

Danny Jackson was the henchman responsible for the cash and to say the least was in a nervous condition. The cash was stored in a locker, the key to which became the MacGuffin of the plot when it went astray.

Inspector Farraday wanted to bust Grant for his slot machine operation. A moll named Cinderella Beauregard (she preferred Cindy) was in fear of Grant and came to Farraday for protection. He gave her the brushoff.

Meanwhile Jackson hijacked Boston Blackie at gunpoint and took him to the locker. If there was no key, then at least he could get a professional safecracker like Blackie to pick the lock. The box proved to be empty.

Grant was busy elsewhere, beating up dissatisfied victims and searching for Jackson. All the principals eventually convened at Club 77 for assorted altercations.

Blackie smuggled a recording machine into Grant's office to record him talking about murders and attempting to kill two henchmen. Farraday burst into the room in the nick of time. Grant would go up the river to sit in a chair.

"Nobody At The Door" aired on 1949-05-11. Mary Weston and Boston Blackie were at his apartment. The doorbell rang, but no one was there. An empty envelope was left.

After a commercial for Champagne Velvet beer ("*You can be sure it's pure*"), the story resumed with a hoodlum named Johnny, the one who had delivered the envelope.

He was riding in a car driven by Ginger, who sang at the Golden Club and was the moll of Charlie Evans. Note well that she liked to sing "Loch Lomond". It was her theme song.

Evans was an ambitious hoodlum hoping to displace James Martin as the kingpin of the city's organized crime. The envelope contained evidence against Martin, which Evans expected Blackie to take to the police.

One has to wonder why Evans didn't just drop it in a street letter box addressed directly to the police. He could afford the postage.

Be that as it may, Johnny resented how Evans treated him, and went to see Martin. Johnny said he had removed the papers, read them to confirm they were about Martin's illegal activities, and presented them to Martin as a bargaining chip.

Johnny wanted in as a big man in Martin's organization. Martin wasn't pleased that Johnny now knew all the details. His counteroffer was two bullets in Johnny's chest. Never sup with the Devil.

Evans was unaware of this and telephoned Inspector Farraday to say that Blackie had all the information on Martin. When Farraday contacted Blackie and Mary, he learned of the empty envelope. As that was happening, Martin telephoned Evans, told him what happened, and said he would pay a visit.

Evans and Ginger tried to run but were trapped. She immediately tried to change sides by buttering up Martin but he didn't believe her. He shot both of them dead.

Pausing only for a commercial extolling the quality ingredients used in Champagne Velvet, then a summary by the announcer of the plot so far, Farraday and Blackie continued to the Evans apartment.

Finding the two bodies, Blackie then summarized the plot once more. He asked Farraday to announce Evans' death but withhold information about Ginger.

He then convinced Mary to impersonate Ginger and loiter around the Golden Club singing "Loch Lomond".

Martin's henchmen were regulars at the club. When they saw Ginger there, word would quickly get back to Martin. She did better than that, panicking the men, who thought they saw a ghost. Blackie arrived and took Martin in, with the gun he used to kill his three victims. Ballistics would send him to the chair.

**Michael Shayne.**

Michael Shayne began as a series of novels by Davis Dresser, writing under the pseudonym of Brett Halliday. As a fictional detective, Shayne appeared not only in print but as an old-time radio series, movies, television, and a mystery fiction digest.

Dresser quit writing Shayne stories after 1958 but farmed out the Halliday pseudonym as a house name to other writers, so the stories continued to appear for decades afterwards.

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

From 1944 to 1948, Shayne was located in San Francisco and had a pretty secretary named Phyllis Knight. Wally Maher voiced Shayne as a relatively sedate and average detective.

From 1948 to 1950, Shayne lived in New Orleans without a secretary. He was voiced by Jeff Chandler, who narrated the show in tones of rising hysteria, even if he was just crossing the street. That period could best be described as frenetic. Thereafter a variety of forgettable actors portrayed him.

"Pirates In San Francisco Bay" was written by Tom Petty and aired on 1945-04-30. Michael Shayne and Phyllis Knight met with SFPD Inspector Faraday. The latter should not be confused with NYPD Inspector Farraday, whose nemesis was Boston Blackie.

A college professor's wife Annabelle Porter was found in a canoe in the bay. She said her husband was murdered by pirates who boarded their yacht in the bay.

Professor Porter had oil money, before anyone asks how he could afford a yacht. Faraday said the yacht was being used by a movie company and the pirates were actors. He figured it was a publicity stunt. On board, the facts changed his mind.

Jim Fonda was Porter's nephew, the black sheep of the family, always in trouble. The two men had a loud argument and Fonda left the yacht uttering threats. The pirates showed up that night and kidnapped her.

Her husband's body was found in the water the next day. His body was weighted down with volumes of the Encyclopedia Britannica. The professor's secretary Bill Taylor said his employer had been paying sums of money to Fonda for an unknown reason.

The Hollywood studio complained about the yacht being tied up as a crime scene. They had to pay the crew and pirate cast even though they weren't working. Faraday was more concerned about finding Fonda.

Annabelle said her husband had been murdered the night before but the coroner said the body had been in the water for two or three days. Then Fonda's body was dredged up. Annabelle and Taylor fled but were caught. They turned on each other and blabbed all.

"The Case Of The Generous Killer" aired on 1948-09-04, no writer credited. The case began when Michael Shayne was given \$100 by messenger and asked to visit the client on a ship docked at New Orleans.

Shayne found the man dead. The deceased was supposed to be a cop killer named Victor Groves, whose face and fingerprints were unknown to police. A snitch named Weasel didn't survive to the first commercial. He was killed because he would have been able to identify the body as a patsy and not the real Groves.

The alarums were narrated by Shayne at the top of his lungs in lieu of acting out the scenes. Shayne was slugged unconscious but revived after the commercial and continued reading aloud the plot.

The police used Shayne as bait to draw out Groves. They put a tail on Shayne to help grab Groves. Unfortunately Shayne muffed the job by walking in the wrong direction. He inadvertently lost his shadow, who had been told to wait at the opposite end of the street.

Groves was a master of disguise but Shayne was a continuing character, so the outcome was foregone. Shayne did survive by the merest happenstance but the NOPD weren't happy with him. All was well that ended well though.

Shayne lived to shout another day. Listen to this series with the volume turned way down.

### **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.

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 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. Each episode began with Spade telephoning Effie and telling her to rush down to the office to meet him there and dictate a report on the case he had just solved.

The report was a letter to a local police officer keeping him informed of criminal matters or occasionally addressed to the client. On one occasion, he told Effie to bring a pencil and \$20,000 in cash. *"But Sam, where am I going to find a pencil at this time of night?"*

"The Bluebeard Caper" aired on 1948-08-08 and was written by Robert Tallman and Gil Doud. The client Ned Towers was worried about his sister Sylvia's engagement to Jefferson Davies Calhoon.

Calhoon's three previous wives all died on their honeymoons. Ned feared the worst for Sylvia, particularly since Calhoon had just taken out a \$100,000 life insurance policy on her. She wouldn't listen to Ned.

Spade interviewed Sylvia but she was either oblivious or putting on an act. Calhoon arrived and was just plain put out. He asked Sylvia to leave the room while he and Spade talked man to man. Calhoon, by the way, had a Southern accent thick enough to cut with a knife.

The first strike was made by Spade, who mentioned Calhoon's previous wives. He replied by asking how much Spade wanted to keep quiet when Sylvia died. They dickered over prices, breaking some furniture in the process. After rendering Calhoon unconscious, Spade went looking for Sylvia but couldn't find her in the house.

From there, acting on information received, he went to a carnival playing at the Cow Palace arena. He found Ned performing as a knife swallower. Sylvia wasn't his sister and he told Spade he was no longer interested in pursuing the case.

Spade therefore began wandering down the aisles of the freak show. He found Sylvia, who was an escape artist and snake handler. He also found that she was Calhoon's three previous wives. They had been working a life insurance racket under various names.

Calhoon arrived and demanded from Sylvia the life insurance policy. She told him the papers were in a basket by the door. He reached in and was bitten by one of her snakes.

"The Betrayal In Bumpass Hell Caper" aired on 1949-01-16 and was written by Robert Tallman and Gil Doud. The narration began with Sam Spade relaxing in his apartment reading a western novel set in a town called Bumpass Hell. He recited it out loud, a collection of gunfighter clichés strung together to produce the opening paragraph.

His reading was interrupted by his landlady Mrs Kelsey, a battleaxe if ever one was born. She dragged him upstairs to quieten a loud domestic dispute. The combatants were Rosemary Fell and her estranged husband Joe Donagan.

As Rosemary explained at the top of her voice, if she wanted to date Warner Hobson, then she would. After Joe was evicted, she tried to hire Spade. He declined the case and went back to his apartment to continue reading.

As he returned to Bumpass Hell, a shadowy man climbed the fire escape past Spade's apartment up to Rosemary's. Gunfire broke out upstairs. Spade pursued the man but got himself slugged unconscious. Rosemary rescued him.

The police were called, arrested Joe elsewhere, and Spade went back to chapter 4 of the novel. The next day the police telephoned Spade and told him that Hobson had alibied Joe. They had to release Joe.

Spade called on Hobson, who was quite amiable. He was running for public office and being a married man preferred to keep things from his wife Belita. Rosemary was trying to blackmail him, so he was the man who went up the fire escape. He only meant to frighten Rosemary, not kill her.

More excursions back and forth, interspersed with readings from Bumpass Hell. Rosemary was found dead in Hobson's apartment. His version was that she was despondent about losing him and committed suicide.

The telephone rang and Spade answered. The voice was Rosemary, pressing her demand for blackmail. They were recordings, of course. Spade and Hobson visited Belita and caught her with the recordings. She said Rosemary had made them as an audition for a radio show about a blackmailer. Belita was using extracts for revenge.

They used the recordings to bluff Joe into confessing to murdering Rosemary. And so back to Bumpass Hell. Which really exists, by the way. It is a fumerole and hot springs area in Lassen National Volcanic Park, California, named after its discoverer Kendall V. Bumpass.

### **George Valentine.**

LET GEORGE DO IT aired on radio from 1946 to 1954, sponsored by Standard Oil for its Chevron stations. The series was about George Valentine, a private investigator.

He solicited clients with a running newspaper classified advertisement in the Personals column that he cited in the opening credits: *Danger's my stock in*

*trade. If the job's too tough for you to handle, you've got a job for me. Write full details.*

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

"The Corpse That Took A Powder" was written by David Victor and Herbert Little Jr, and aired on 1948-08-23. The opening letter was written a young woman Marsha Palmer who said fear was driving her to suicide.

George Valentine and Claire Brooks went to Palmer's apartment. The scrubwoman told them to go on up to 3A, which confused them because the address they had been given was 4A.

At 3A they found Glenn Stratton, who said the place was his. He did, however, know Palmer and sent them up to 4A. The door was unlocked so they went inside and found her body in the living room.

Suicide, with a note. They went into the bedroom where the telephone was to notify the police. Coming back out, the corpse and note had disappeared.

Pause for digression. A common plot in mysteries is the disappearing corpse. Sometimes the corpse was dragged to a nearby spot but often it went into attics or distant places. What never seems to be appreciated is the difficulty of moving a dead person.

Assuming rigor mortis hadn't set in, a corpse will be floppier than a sack of potatoes. Four limbs going akimbo, and sagging in several places. The weight is not inconsiderable either. A young woman would weigh about 60 kg, and middle-aged men about 100 kg.

While not impossible with a firefighter's carry, few people are trained for such a lift. If rigor mortis had set in, then lifting corpses with splayed limbs would be almost impossible.

Meanwhile, back at the corpse hunt, Valentine and Brooks found the building superintendent. He hadn't seen anything. Further, when they asked about the scrubwoman, he said there was no such person. He did all the cleaning himself.

The police were not happy when they arrived and found nothing. Valentine and Brooks checked a theatrical agency to see if someone hired an actress to play the scrubwoman. When they had talked with her, she had used the phrase “at liberty” in passing, a phrase only used by actors.

They got lucky and found the woman’s photo. Her name was Emmy Reynolds. Off they went and found her. She had been hired by a man for \$50 cash but didn’t know his name. The police put out a dragnet for Palmer. Stratton found her in her apartment again, still dead. Trying a sideways maneuver, Brooks went to the model agency where Palmer worked.

She played a scatterbrain who had heard the news and ambitiously wanted the job vacancy. The supervisor shared some gossip, including the boss Mr Wyatt having a personal interest in Palmer. He matched the description of the man who hired Reynolds.

At the police station, where Stratton had been questioned, Valentine did his own questioning and caught Stratton in a lie. The police charged him, but Valentine wasn’t satisfied. He went off and questioned Wyatt, who spilled his guts. He was newly elected as president of the Liars Club and had set up Palmer to fake the letter as a joke.

Stratton was a jealous man. When Palmer told him she thought he was part of the joke, he snapped and killed her. What was left dangling was the loose thread, loose rope really, about why Stratton had moved the body.

“The Corpse On A Caper” was written by David Victor and Herbert Little Jr, and aired on 1949-01-10. George Valentine was hired to escort the body of a wealthy young woman back to her family in Mexico City. Consuelo Benales had died from natural causes while attending a private school in Los Angeles.

The school nurse Miss Birdeck made arrangements with Valentine and Claire Brooks. Dr Elwood Dryden had signed the death certificate but hadn't been seen since.

Off to the funeral home but from there nothing went right. Two goons barged into the funeral home with no sense of propriety. One identified himself as Bull Scarvic, husband of Consuelo. Needless to say, her parents back home would not have approved of him.

The corpse went missing, which upset Scarvic. Dryden’s body was eventually found, shot dead. Fingerprints in Consuelo’s school dorm room were identified as Ginger Santos. The deceased was either Ginger or Consuelo, nobody knew for sure. One had substituted for the other, but who was who was the confusing point.

Valentine found Ginger, an ecdysiast in a gambling joint. The interview did not end well but Valentine established that she was Consuelo. She had paid Ginger to impersonate her so that she could enjoy the wild life. The real Ginger was dead. Scarvic showed up, the police showed up, and introductions were made all around.

There was a jump to Valentine and Brooks driving Miss Birdeck back to the school. As they motored along, they chatted and provoked Birdeck to admit she killed both Ginger and Dryden. She blabbed all, letting out her anger at the young women.

Birdeck was overcome and delivered to the police. In the epilogue, Valentine explained away the loose threads to Brooks. Consuelo’s family wanted Valentine to escort her home but Brooks nixed that idea.

### **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 where he lived at the time.

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.

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

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

PETE KELLY’S BLUES aired in the summer of 1951 and was a brief sideline for Webb. 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.

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 PAT NOVAK, FOR HIRE came “Joe Denine” aka “The Only Way To Make Friends Is To Die”, written by Richard L. Breen and aired on 1949-06-19.

A couple of goons took Pat Novak for a ride. They wanted to find Joe Denine and figured Novak would help. He never heard of the guy. Denine was soon found in Novak’s apartment, thoroughly deceased. “*The colour of an old piece of abalone*”, said Novak. SFPD Inspector Hellman suspected Novak, as he usually did. Novak told him “*You couldn’t find a moose in a bathtub*”.

The MacGuffin was a safe deposit box held by Denine but no one knew where it was or what it contained. Novak did some sleuthing and so did Hellman, in between trading serious insults with each other. Such rude people.

Novak was rendered unconscious several times but that was par for the case. The obligatory femme fatale had some connection with Denine but wasn’t saying. She was definitely a predator, not a damsel in distress. “*You belong in the Everglades*”, Novak said to her.

Assorted supporting characters came and went, sometimes messily. There was a gun battle, the kind where ten shots were fired from a revolver without reloading. The grand finale was in a bank vault. The epilogue took five minutes to wrap up the loose ends and explain the chronology of who did what to whom when.

## SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

### Astronomy.

Sofue, Y. (2023) **Supernova-remnant origin of the Galactic-Centre filaments.** MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY 518:doi.org/10.1093/mnras/stac3137

[Numerous filaments of energy have been observed perpendicular to the disk of our galaxy, the Milky Way. Here it is proposed that we are looking at the vertical edges of cylinders of energy blasted out by supernova.]

Author’s abstract: *The mechanism to produce the numerous Galactic-Centre filaments (GCFs) that vertically penetrate the Galactic plane without clear evidence of connection to the disc remains a mystery.*

*Here, we show that the GCFs are explained by relics of supernova remnants (rSNRs) driven by hundreds of supernovae that exploded in the star-forming ring of the central molecular zone at a rate of  $\sim 2 \times 10^4$  per year in the past  $\sim 0.5$  megayears.*

*The evolution of rSNRs is simulated by the propagation of fast-mode magnetohydrodynamic waves, which are shown to converge around the Galactic rotation axis by the focusing effect. Tangential projection of the cylindrical wavefronts on the sky constitutes the vertical filaments.*

*The SNR model explains not only the morphology, but also the nonthermal radio spectrum, smoothed brightness over the distribution area consistent with the S–D relation of SNR, and the heating mechanism of hot plasma.*

### Planets.

Boekholt, T.C.N., et al (2023) **On the Jacobi capture origin of binaries with applications to the Earth-Moon system and black holes in galactic nuclei.** MONTHLY NOTICES OF THE ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY 518:doi.org/10.1093/mnras/stac3495

[An hypothesis that explains both the Earth-Moon system and binary black holes. Is that not better than a floor show or what?]

Authors' abstract: *Close encounters between two bodies in a disc often result in a single orbital deflection. However, within their Jacobi volumes, where the gravitational forces between the two bodies and the central body become competitive, temporary captures with multiple close encounters become possible outcomes: a Jacobi capture.*

*We perform three-body simulations in order to characterize the dynamics of Jacobi captures in the plane. We find that the phase space structure resembles a Cantor-like set with a fractal dimension of about 0.4. The lifetime distribution decreases exponentially, while the distribution of the closest separation follows a power law with index 0.5.*

*In our first application, we consider the Jacobi capture of the Moon. We demonstrate that both tidal captures and giant impacts are possible outcomes. The impact speed is well approximated by a parabolic encounter, while the impact angles follow that of a uniform beam on a circular target.*

*Jacobi captures at larger heliocentric distances are more likely to result in tidal captures. In our second application, we find that Jacobi captures with gravitational wave dissipation can result in the formation of binary black holes in galactic nuclei.*

*The eccentricity distribution is approximately superthermal and includes both prograde and retrograde orientations. We conclude that dissipative Jacobi captures form an efficient channel for binary formation, which motivates further research into establishing the universality of Jacobi captures across multiple astrophysical scales.*

**Paleobiology.**

Sperling, E.A., et al (2022) **Breathless through time: Oxygen and animals across Earth's history.** BIOLOGICAL BULLETIN 243:doi.org/10.1086/721754 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Oxygen levels in the atmosphere and ocean have changed dramatically over Earth history, with major impacts on marine life. Because the early part of Earth's history lacked both atmospheric oxygen and animals, a persistent co-evolutionary narrative has developed linking oxygen change with changes in animal diversity.*

*Although it was long believed that oxygen rose to essentially modern levels around the Cambrian period, a more muted increase is now believed likely. Thus, if oxygen increase facilitated the Cambrian explosion, it did so by crossing critical ecological thresholds at low O<sub>2</sub>.*

*Atmospheric oxygen likely remained at low or moderate levels through the early Paleozoic era, and this likely contributed to high metazoan extinction rates until oxygen finally rose to modern levels in the later Paleozoic.*

*After this point, ocean deoxygenation (and marine mass extinctions) is increasingly linked to large igneous province eruptions-massive volcanic carbon inputs to the Earth system that caused global warming, ocean acidification, and oxygen loss.*

*Although the timescales of these ancient events limit their utility as exact analogs for modern anthropogenic global change, the clear message from the geologic record is that large and rapid CO<sub>2</sub> injections into the Earth system consistently cause the same deadly trio of stressors that are observed today.*

**Dinosaurs.**

Hone, D.W.E., et al (2022) **Generalist diet of *Microraptor zhaoianus* included mammals.** JOURNAL OF VERTEBRATE PALEONTOLOGY 36:doi.org/10.1080/02724634.2022.2144337 (available as a free pdf)

Authors' abstract: *Here we describe the remains of a small fossil mammal foot preserved inside the body cavity of the holotype specimen of the small feathered dinosaur *Microraptor zhaoianus*. This adds to the known diversity of diet for this genus, which also consumed birds, fish, and lizards.*

*Previous interpretations that *Microraptor* was an arboreal hunter of birds and adept hunter of fish are not supported. Although the various known stomach contents would be plausible prey items based on size, there is no clear evidence that any of them were predated rather than scavenged. *Microraptor* likely did both and foraged in multiple habitats.*

**Zoology.**

Cortese, A.R.B., and T.E. Reimchen (2023) **View from below: experimental manipulation of water surfaces to evaluate visual integrity of heron-like models through Snell’s window.** BIOLOGICAL JOURNAL OF THE LINNEAN SOCIETY 138:doi.org/10.1093/biolinnean/blac140

[What do fish see when they look up to the sky where a heron is standing?]

Authors’ abstract: *The water-air interface is a globally widespread habitat for interactions between prey and predators. We experimentally manipulated water surface conditions (flat, smooth waves, three levels of current-induced turbulence) and digitally quantified the visual integrity of above-surface models from a subsurface perspective.*

*Progressive fragmentation was present in each of the models (upright heron, crouched heron, vertical block, horizontal block) with increased departure from flat surface conditions.*

*Smooth directional waves produced multiple horizontal bands (shadows) that moved across the models while surface currents distorted the profile, including progressive disintegration of the models appearance into multiple fragments of different sizes.*

*This fragmentation is caused by scattered surface irregularities interacting with waves and is accentuated at the broken periphery of the optical window, reducing recognition of the models.*

*Unexpectedly, we found that bands and fragments emerging from different surface conditions resemble common frontal plumage patterns on some Ardeidae and shorebirds (Charadriiformes).*

*While these natural plumages are widely recognized to reflect a diversity of adaptations, including camouflage in terrestrial habitats, we suggest that their resemblance to water surface-induced fragmentation might also reflect foraging adaptations of predators though the water-air interface.*

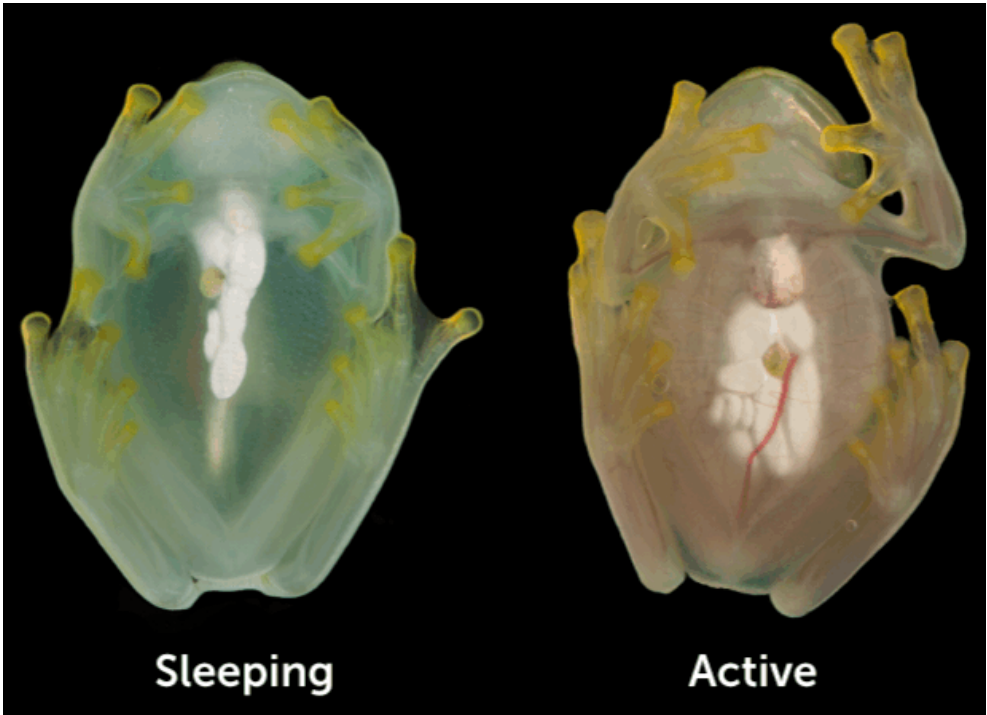
Taboada, C., et al (2022) **Glass frogs conceal blood in their liver to maintain transparency.** SCIENCE 378:doi.org/10.1126/science.abl6620

Authors’ abstract: *Transparency in animals is a complex form of camouflage involving mechanisms that reduce light scattering and absorption throughout the organism. In vertebrates, attaining transparency is difficult because their circulatory system is full of red blood cells (RBCs) that strongly attenuate light.*

*Here, we document how glass frogs overcome this challenge by concealing these cells from view. Using photoacoustic imaging to track RBCs in vivo, we show that resting glass frogs increase transparency two- to threefold by removing ~89% of their RBCs from circulation and packing them within their liver.*

*Vertebrate transparency thus requires both see-through tissues and active mechanisms that “clear” respiratory pigments from these tissues. Furthermore, glass frogs’ ability to regulate the location, density, and packing of RBCs without clotting offers insight in metabolic, hemodynamic, and blood-clot research.*

[Images are from this paper.]



**Environmental Science.**

Malhi, Y., et al (2022) **Logged tropical forests have amplified and diverse ecosystem energetics.** NATURE 612:doi.org/10.1038/s41586-022-05523-1 (available as a free pdf)

Authors’ abstract: *Old-growth tropical forests are widely recognized as being immensely important for their biodiversity and high biomass. Conversely, logged tropical forests are usually characterized as degraded ecosystems. However, whether logging results in a degradation in ecosystem functions is less clear.*

*Shifts in the strength and resilience of key ecosystem processes in large suites of species have rarely been assessed in an ecologically integrated and quantitative framework.*

*Here we adopt an ecosystem energetics lens to gain new insight into the impacts of tropical forest disturbance on a key integrative aspect of ecological function: food pathways and community structure of birds and mammals.*

*We focus on a gradient spanning old-growth and logged forests and oil palm plantations in Borneo. In logged forest there is a 2.5-fold increase in total resource consumption by both birds and mammals compared to that in old-growth forests, probably driven by greater resource accessibility and vegetation palatability.*

*Most principal energetic pathways maintain high species diversity and redundancy, implying maintained resilience. Conversion of logged forest into oil palm plantation results in the collapse of most energetic pathways. Far from being degraded ecosystems, even heavily logged forests can be vibrant and diverse ecosystems with enhanced levels of ecological function.*

*Human-modified forests, such as selectively logged forests, are often characterized as degraded ecosystems because of their altered structure and low biomass. The concept of ecosystem degradation can be a double-edged sword. It rightly draws attention to the conservation value of old-growth systems and the importance of ecosystem restoration.*

*However, it can also suggest that human-modified ecosystems are of low ecological value and therefore, in some cases, suitable for conversion to*

*agriculture (such as oil palm plantations) and other land uses. Selectively logged and other forms of structurally altered forests are becoming the prevailing vegetation cover in much of the tropical forest biome.*

*Such disturbance frequently leads to a decline in old-growth specialist species, and also in non-specialist species in some contexts. However, species-focused biodiversity metrics are only one measure of ecosystem vitality and functionality, and rarely consider the collective role that suites of species play in maintaining ecological functions.*

*An alternative approach is to focus on the energetics of key taxonomic groups, and the number and relative dominance of species contributing to each energetic pathway. Energetic approaches to examining ecosystem structure and function have a long history in ecosystem ecology.*

*Virtually all ecosystems are powered by a cascade of captured sunlight through an array of autotroph tissues and into hierarchical assemblages of herbivores, carnivores and detritivores.*