OPUNTIA 316

System Administrator Appreciation Day 2015

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When sending me an emailed letter of comment, please include your name and town in the message.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: SHEEP RIVER
photos by Dale Speirs

Sheep River is named after bighorn sheep, not the domestic species. It is an hour's drive southwest of Calgary. This view looks west up the river in the foothills between the Kananaskis and Highwood mountains. In the distance is Mount Gibralter.

Mount Gibralter is at the southern end of the Kananaskis mountains. Like most of its fellow summits, it is named after a World War One warship.

Sheep River has numerous waterfalls and rapids because it cuts through tilted strata.

On the next page is Bluerock Creek, a tributary of Sheep River.

BOTANICAL FICTION: PART 1
by Dale Speirs

Prelude And Apology.

My university degree is in horticulture and I spent more than three decades working as a professional horticulturist before retiring in 2010. I have enjoyed science fiction since I was a young boy roaming the SF bookshelf of the Red Deer Public Library. Bookshelf singular, as back in those days Red Deer was a small town in more ways than one, and so was its library, which at that time occupied part of the second floor of City Hall. In 1967 it finally got its own building thanks to funding for Canada's centennial.

I was fortunate though, because our farm was only a ten-minute drive away, and Mom did all her shopping in town. I accompanied her each week and while she was in the supermarket I would be across the street browsing the stacks for new worlds and adventures. The library had the basics, from Asimov to Clarke to Heinlein to Bradbury and on to a mixture of minor authors and lots of anthologies. The librarians knew me and I could check out any book I wanted. I wasn't restricted to children's books, as I was at the school I attended.

For various reasons I never became a cattle rancher but neither did I want a desk job shuffling paper all my life. Horticulture was a reasonable compromise as an outdoor job. After graduating from the University of Alberta in Edmonton in 1978, I immediately moved to Calgary because it had a warmer climate, and here I have been ever since.

My SF reading expanded considerably in the big city. In those pre-computer days, I indexed my reading on 2x4 index cards with the idea that in some far distant day I would do something with them. Suddenly it is the 2000s, which seemed so far away and are now in their second decade. Those index cards have been silently reproaching me in my retirement. As I read through the magazines and books, I kept notes on individual stories, thinking that some day I would write them up by theme. Someday has now come. I did already review some fiction related to algae in OPUNTIA #51.1B, mostly about red tides.

Insofar as botanical fiction is concerned, the number one topic is the carnivorous plant. They exist in real life, although none are man-eaters, but as a subject of horror there were few better. There are other botanical themes as well, which will be covered in subsequent parts.

Carnivorophytes: Man-Eating Trees.

In southeast Asia there are many species of *Nepenthes*, a vine whose leaves are rolled into pitchers. The pitchers have smooth waxy interiors to prevent insects and small mammals from climbing out, and often have hoods to keep flying creatures in. The bottom of the pitcher is filled with rainwater and digestive juices excreted by the pitcher. The lip of the pitcher has downward-pointing spines to further prevent escape. Prey eventually fall back exhausted, die of starvation or drowning, and then are digested. The pitchers of some species can grow to the size of a beer pitcher and trap small mammals.

The *Nepenthes* vines grow up trees for support and hang from the tree branches. The earliest European explorers mistakenly assumed that the tree was the carnivorophyte. By the time the stories got back to Europe, much garbled en route, the legend of the man-eating tree was born, and became a staple of action-adventure fiction. Often the tree was transplanted to a Central or South American jungle, where *Nepenthes* is not found. The man-eating tree is dated from 1878 supposedly in Madagascar, and then in 1882 in the Philippines.

(from AMERICAN WEEKLY, 1925-01-04)

"The Tree" by Jack Skillingstead (2005, ON SPEC MAGAZINE) is a different twist on carnivorous trees. This is about a tree in some suburban woods that uses a treehouse as a trap.

"The Land Where Songtrees Grow" by Scott Sanders (1982 September, MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SF) takes place on an alien planet where an expeditionary force is sent down to find out what happened to the first one. The world is covered by swamps (another case where authors don't know much about planetary ecology) with the dominant vegetation being trees that sing every dawn and dusk. Humans are lured into the swamp waters by the singing and become one with the trees. That is, the trees send roots into the unresisting humans and digest them from within, leaving only the heads and lungs to sing.

Carnivorophytes: Shrubs And Herbaceous Critters.

The most famous carnivorophyte story is THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS (1951) by John Wyndham, when large and mobile killer plants roam the streets. Leroy Yerxa had an earlier version of carnivorous Triffid-like plants in "The Garden Of Hell' (1943 May, FANTASTIC ADVENTURES).

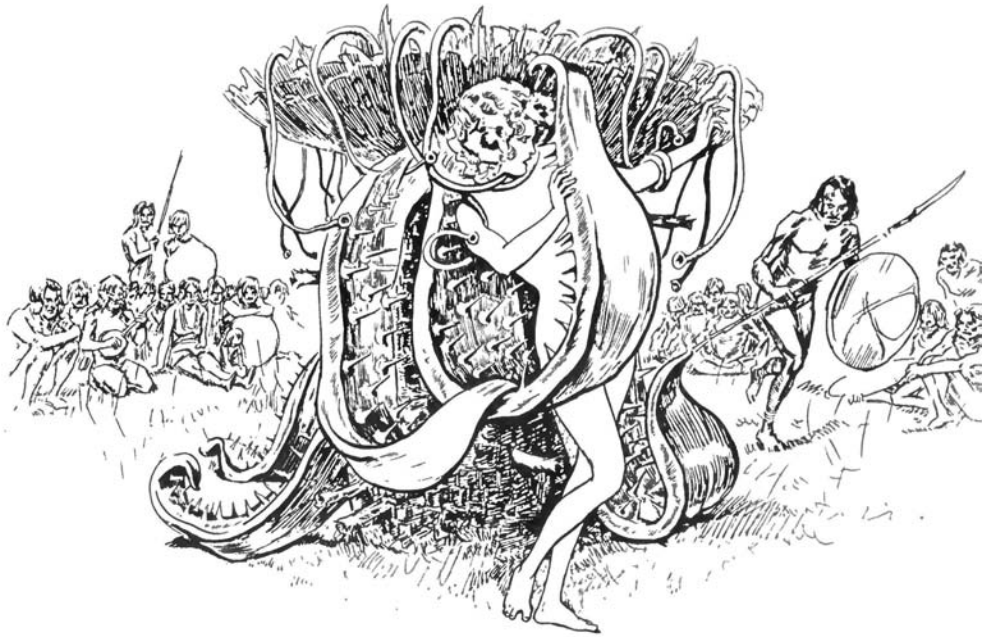
A less successful invasion of carnivorophytes was inflicted upon the reading public by Kenneth McKenney in his 1975 novel THE PLANTS. It is set in a stereotypical rural English village where garden plants of all species suddenly turn carnivorous one summer. It appears that humanity is being punished for its sins, but more realistically the reader is being punished for having picked up this book and read the stilted dialogue.

Planting seeds can create problems. L. Sprague de Camp wrote "Property Of Venus" (1955 July, GALAXY) about a spaceman who sells some homeowners seeds of plants from Venus. Two species turn out to be carnivorous and one is a singing bush. Havoc is created in the neighbourhood for obvious reasons.

There was even a musical, THE LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS, about a carnivorous plant. It began life in 1960 as a cheap Roger Corman movie, he who never let quality interfere with the budget. It was revived in 1982 as a stage musical, then re-filmed as a movie musical in 1986. Not to be taken seriously, but if you're drunk and have nothing else to do, the second movie is bearable on DVD.

Carnivorophyte stories go way back but I'm not a completist and in any event it would take years to track them all down. From the 1905 August issue of ARGOSY is "Professor Jonkin's Cannibal Plant" by Howard R. Garis (who also ghost-wrote the first 25 Tom Swift books). The story is a spoof about man-eating plants, which even back then were a cliche of action-adventure stories. Prof. Jeptha Jonkin shows off a small carnivorophyte he just received from Brazil to his friend Bradley Adams. Jonkins describes it as *Sarracenia nepenthis*, which is a nonsense name, and in any event the pitcher plant genus *Sarracenia* is only found in North America. The flower is the pitcher trap, again nonsense, because all pitcher plant traps are rolled-up leaves.

Be that as it may, Jonkin experiments with the little plant and by over-feeding it he manages to get it to grow 20 feet tall and 3 feet in diameter over several months. He feeds it with beefsteaks three times a day once it gets up to giant size, climbing a ladder up to the top of the trap to drop in the food. The Professor accidently falls into the trap while Adams is visiting him. Adams wants to cut the Professor out with an axe but Jonkin tells him there is some chloroform in the cabinet and to use that to relax the plant and open the lid on the pitcher. Adams succeeds, and Jonkin resolves to henceforth feed the plant with a pitchfork from a safe distance.



(from AMERICAN WEEKLY, 1920-09-26)

"The Light-Kill Affair" by Robert Hart Davis (1967 January, THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E. MAGAZINE) is about a mad scientist working for THRUSH to produce human-eating plants for world subjugation. Not much more to be said; THRUSH was always up to something.

Kit Reed's story "The Vine" (1967 November, MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION) is about a family which cares for an enormous vine. The vine is carnivorous and pulls its victims below the surface with its motile roots. A family member tries to kill the vine, which defends itself. The villagers let it wipe out the family and then provide a new keeper.

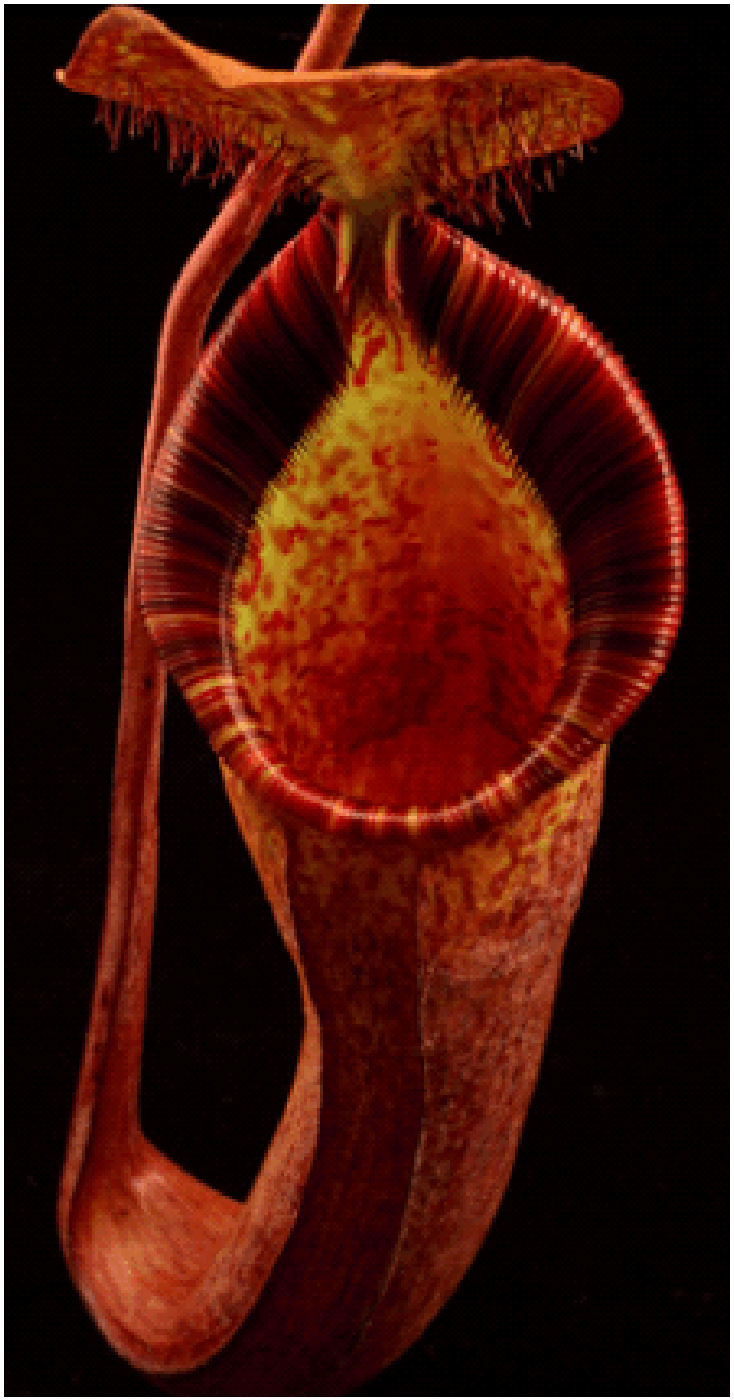
Howard L. Myers had a story "Polywater Doodle" (1971 February, ANALOG) that will mean more to those of us who are of a certain age and remember what polywater was (see OPUNTIA #70.1F for a history of polywater). A man stranded on an alien planet is lassoed by a plant which does not kill but simply hangs on to its victims until they die and decay to provide soil nutrients. He manages to kill the plant and discovers its sap is polywater with pseudo-sentience. He keeps it with him and later uses it to escape a prison ship. I miss polywater; it was so science fictional.

"Precious Thing" by Barbara Owens (1983 December, MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SF) is a prosaic story about a battered wife who seeks refuge from her troubles by growing plants. One of them grows very large indeed, and when her abusive husband tries to destroy it, it turns out to be carnivorous. The wife muses about other people she dislikes, and decides to invite them over one at a time whenever the plant needs feeding.

"Raising Cane" by Janet Kagan (1991 March, ASIMOV'S) is a continuation of her series about the planet Mirabile and its introduced biota with mixed-up genes. It appears at first glance that this is the story when sugar cane develops sticky coats of glue that are big enough to trap large mammals such as the cattle. It turns out though, that the cane is native and almost went extinct before humans arrived because its seeds could not be propagated when the animal that did so died out. Cattle, however, turned out to be an ecological replacement but when the canes grow up into dense stands of glue sticks, the problems are obvious.

A similar story is "The Mad Scientist And The FBI" by Stephen Tall (1970 December, GALAXY). A gardener plants some mail-order seeds and discovers the plants are alien species. The plants are capable of tactical movements such

as slashing with their leaf edges to cut up others. Internecine warfare breaks out in the thickly-planted beds, and later in defense of fruit pods. You wouldn't want to stick your hand in there to pick a flower.



Not fiction but fact is that there are plant breeders who select carnivorous plants for colours or shapes.

Of relevance to SF fans is a new cultivar *Nepenthes* cv. Hans Ruedi Giger (shown at left), described in the 2015 March issue of CARNIVOROUS PLANT NEWSLETTER.

If the name Giger doesn't strike a familiar note, he was the Swiss artist who created the aliens and organic technology for the ALIEN movie series.

LONG, LONG AGO
by Dale Speirs

New Wave.

Back in the 1960s, a fad blew up in science fiction called New Wave. Its proponents used style over substance, substituting university-taught small-press writing for plots, and vignettes for character development. It burned out in due time when publishers discovered that readers preferred to buy books with an understandable narrative, not stories whose paragraphs were chopped up and re-arranged in random order, or plotless stories whose characters lived futile lives and spent their time emoting instead of doing something. Setting such stories on a spacecraft didn't make them SF.

ENGLAND SWINGS SF (1968) is an anthology of New Wave short fiction by Judith Merril. It wasn't the origin of New Wave but is widely considered to be one of its seminal works and a landmark in SF writing in general. I've been thinning out my library and before I donated my copy of this book to the Little Free Library I decided to re-read this anthology. I hadn't looked inside it in four decades, so I wanted to see if its stories stood the test of time. I was prepared to dismiss them as failed experiments but was pleasantly surprised that a few of them are still readable. The vast majority of the authors are forgotten; I only recognized seven names as still remembered today.

This isn't a KTF review so I won't spend any time on the bad poems, chopped-up stories with paragraphs re-arranged in random order, or typographical tomfoolery. Some of the stories are re-writes of Golden Age authors, fairly obvious but because they had a good text to start with, they at least read well. Contrary to popular belief, New Wave stories were seldom, if ever, original in anything. They were simply SF stories reformatted.

The lead-off story is "The Island" by Roger Jones, about three men trapped on an island after some end-of-the-world scenario. There is a distinct pecking order. The alpha male seems like a cruel man, bullying his underlings, but the #2 man finds out too late that the boss was maintaining a facade to keep up the spirits of the other two. The boss knew that no help would ever come to rescue them. It ends in squashed-bug fashion but not before #2 realizes that his boss was carrying a burden greater than the others knew.

"Signals" by John Calder is a neat twist on the 1920s "girl in the golden atom" stories. This grew from the idea that if atoms are like miniature stellar systems, there might be microscopic worlds at the atomic level, just as our universe might be an atom in someone else's world. Quantum mechanics made the idea obsolete by the 1940s, but Calder has some fun with it. Earth scientists have established contact with worlds up and down the atomic scale. Two of them are on adjacent atoms and go to war while the Earth scientists watch helplessly.

"The Singular Quest Of Martin Borg" by George Collyn is a re-write of Heinlein's story "All You Zombies" but without the time travel. Martin/Martita Borg undergoes multiple sex and identity changes and winds up almost back where he started after changing the universe. A deux-ex-machina is introduced at the end of the story to bring the plot to an end but this is redeemed somewhat by an amusing final line. After all the changes he introduces into the universe by his constant sex changes, Borg reaches the state where he has forgotten what it was he was planning to do.

The most famous story in this collection is J.G. Ballard's "The Assassination Of John Fitzgerald Kennedy Considered As A Downhill Motor Race". The events in Dallas are transcribed as if the narrator was reporting on a car race. Ballard also has a sequel story along the same lines with Jacqueline Kennedy, but like most sequels it doesn't live up to the original. Not to be outdone, Kyril Bonfiglioli has a story "Blastoff" which considers the crucifixion of Jesus as a launch into space.

Few of the stories in this anthology have staying power but if you pick up a cheap copy then you will get fair value at the lower price. It does make a useful artifact for any graduate student doing a thesis on New Wave fiction. It is too much of its time, the Swinging Sixties, just as cyberpunk would embarrass a later generation of authors.

Cyberpunk.

Cyberpunk was something that was too much of its time. Its main failing was that the authors, wanting to be trendy, were too specific about the details of their computers and too unrealistic about what they thought cyberpunks would be like. One of the basic principles discovered in the early days of writing SF was that it was best not to be specific about how a spacecraft looked and worked if it wasn't germane to the story. World-controlling computers with 20 megabytes of memory are pathetic today and detract from the story.

The heroes of cyberpunk were often street people living by their wits and the ability to jack into computers (USB ports hadn't been invented yet) and pull off amazing coding feats. If they were that amazing, they wouldn't have been living on the street, they would have been writing algorithms for Goldman Sachs. I worked 31 years in Parks Maintenance and saw many street punks and goths living in shrub beds, none of whom could code a Fortran loop much less divert $10 million from a bank account.

HEADCRASH (1995) by Bruce Bethke is about a super-coder named Jack Burroughs who works as a humble peon for MDE Corporate Management, your typical faceless multinational corporation. The story begins on May 15, 2005, in a world of 20-megabyte computers running wild on the Information Superhighway. President Al Gore is standing for re-election, which is funnier today than it would have been in 1995. The dialogue is written in an overly jokey tone that just verges on becoming out-of-date, not quite the "Groovy, man" that us Boomers used to say back in the days of the New Wave, but close.

In addition to his troubles with management, Burroughs is trapped inside a multi-level virtual reality game. Every time he thinks he has exited, he finds himself in a different game. He is also helping a friend find incriminating evidence to win a court case against a mega-corporation that happens to be a subsidiary of MDE. No one is sure who is in charge of the conspiracy, if indeed it is a conspiracy and not just mindless run-amok bureaucracy with keyboards. The computer systems have run so far out of control that everyone might as well be in the Matrix. But that was another story. Just take the red pill. Or was it the blue pill?

From the SF magazine FAR FRONTIERS #2 (1985 Summer), is John Park's "The Software Plague". It is the cyberpunk motif where everyone has implants in their skulls into which they can jack into computers and machines. Computer viruses were just beginning to reach public consciousness back then, and Park extrapolates what would happen if they could be used to take over people's minds. I don't see it myself because computers are digital and brains are analogue, but it is an interesting concept. In the real world, of course, demagogues have long been able to take over people's minds without computers.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Barrington-Leigh, C., and A. Millard-Ball (2015) **A century of sprawl in the United States.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 112:8244-8249

Authors' abstract: "*The urban street network is one of the most permanent features of cities. Once laid down, the pattern of streets determines urban form and the level of sprawl for decades to come. We present a high-resolution time series of urban sprawl, as measured through street network connectivity, in the United States from 1920 to 2012. Sprawl started well before private car ownership was dominant and grew steadily until the mid-1990s. Over the last two decades, however, new streets have become significantly more connected and grid-like; the peak in street-network sprawl in the United States occurred in ~1994. By one measure of connectivity, the mean nodal degree of intersections, sprawl fell by ~9% between 1994 and 2012. We analyze spatial variation in these changes and demonstrate the persistence of sprawl. Places that were built with a low-connectivity street network tend to stay that way, even as the network expands. We also find suggestive evidence that local government policies impact sprawl, as the largest increases in connectivity have occurred in places with policies to promote gridded streets and similar New Urbanist design principles. We provide for public use a county-level version of our street-network sprawl dataset comprising a time series of nearly 100 years.*"

Rasmussen, M., et al (2015) **The ancestry and affiliations of Kennewick Man.** NATURE 523:455-464

Authors' abstract: "*Kennewick Man, referred to as the Ancient One by Native Americans, is a male human skeleton discovered in Washington state (USA) in 1996 and initially radiocarbon dated to 8,340–9,200 calibrated years before present (BP)1. His population affinities have been the subject of scientific debate and legal controversy. Based on an initial study of cranial morphology it was asserted that Kennewick Man was neither Native American nor closely related to the claimant Plateau tribes of the Pacific Northwest, who claimed ancestral relationship and requested repatriation under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). The morphological analysis was important to judicial decisions that Kennewick Man was not Native American and that therefore NAGPRA did not apply. Instead of repatriation, additional studies of the remains were permitted. Subsequent craniometric analysis affirmed Kennewick Man to be more closely related to circumpacific groups such as the Ainu and Polynesians than he is to modern Native Americans. In order to resolve Kennewick Man's ancestry and affiliations, we have sequenced his genome to about 1X coverage and compared it to worldwide genomic data including for the Ainu and Polynesians. We find that Kennewick Man is closer to modern Native Americans than to any other population worldwide. Among the Native American groups for whom genome-wide data are available for comparison, several seem to be descended from a population closely related to that of Kennewick Man, including the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation (Colville), one of the five tribes claiming Kennewick Man. We revisit the cranial analyses and find that, as opposed to genome-wide comparisons, it is not possible on that basis to affiliate Kennewick Man to specific contemporary groups. We therefore conclude based on genetic comparisons that Kennewick Man shows continuity with Native North Americans over at least the last eight millennia.*"

Sibert, E.C., and R.D. Norris (2015) **New Age of Fishes initiated by the Cretaceous-Paleogene mass extinction**. PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 112:8537-8542

Speirs: The Cretaceous-Paleogene transition was the dinosaur extinction event.

Authors' abstract: "*Ray-finned fishes are the most diverse and ecologically dominant group of vertebrates on the planet. Previous molecular phylogenies and paleontological studies have shown that modern ray-finned fishes (crown teleosts) radiated sometime in the Late Cretaceous or early Paleogene. Our data suggest that crown teleosts came into their current dominant ecological role in pelagic ecosystems immediately following the Cretaceous-Paleogene mass extinction 66 million years ago by filling newly vacated ecological niches and marking the beginning of an "age of ray-finned fishes." Our study is, to our knowledge, the first geographically comprehensive, high-resolution study of marine vertebrate communities across the extinction. ... Ray-finned fishes (Actinopterygii) comprise nearly half of all modern vertebrate diversity, and are an ecologically and numerically dominant megafauna in most aquatic environments. Crown teleost fishes diversified relatively recently, during the Late Cretaceous and early Paleogene, although the exact timing and cause of their radiation and rise to ecological dominance is poorly constrained. Here we use microfossil teeth and shark dermal scales (ichthyoliths) preserved in deep-sea sediments to study the changes in the pelagic fish community in the*

latest Cretaceous and early Paleogene. We find that the Cretaceous-Paleogene (K/Pg) extinction event marked a profound change in the structure of ichthyolith communities around the globe: Whereas shark denticles outnumber ray-finned fish teeth in Cretaceous deep-sea sediments around the world, there is a dramatic increase in the proportion of ray-finned fish teeth to shark denticles in the Paleocene. There is also an increase in size and numerical abundance of ray-finned fish teeth at the boundary. These changes are sustained through at least the first 24 million years of the Cenozoic. This new fish community structure began at the K/Pg mass extinction, suggesting the extinction event played an important role in initiating the modern "age of fishes." "

Alibert, Yann (2015) **A maximum radius for habitable planets.** ORIGIN OF LIFE AND EVOLUTION OF BIOSPHERES 45:319–325

Author's abstract: "*We compute the maximum radius a planet can have in order to fulfill two constraints that are likely necessary conditions for habitability: 1- surface temperature and pressure compatible with the existence of liquid water, and 2- no ice layer at the bottom of a putative global ocean, that would prevent the operation of the geologic carbon cycle to operate. We demonstrate that, above a given radius, these two constraints cannot be met: in the Super-Earth mass range (1–12 Mass Earth), the overall maximum that a planet can have varies between 1.8 and 2.3 Radius Earth. This radius is reduced when considering planets with higher Fe/Si ratios, and taking into account irradiation effects on the structure of the gas envelope.*"

Durmus, N.G., et al (2015) **Magnetic levitation of single cells.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 112:E3661-E3668

Authors' abstract: "*Cells consist of micro- and nanoscale components and materials that contribute to their fundamental magnetic and density signatures. Previous studies have claimed that magnetic levitation can only be used to measure density signatures of nonliving materials. Here, we demonstrate that both eukaryotic and prokaryotic cells can be levitated and that each cell has a unique levitation profile. Furthermore, our levitation platform uniquely enables ultrasensitive density measurements, imaging, and profiling of cells in real-time at single-cell resolution. This method has broad applications, such as the label-free identification and monitoring of heterogeneous biological changes under various physiological conditions, including drug screening in personalized medicine. ... Several cellular events cause permanent or transient changes in inherent magnetic and density properties of cells. Characterizing these changes in cell populations is crucial to understand cellular heterogeneity in cancer, immune response, infectious diseases, drug resistance, and evolution. Although magnetic levitation has previously been used for macroscale objects, its use in life sciences has been hindered by the inability to levitate microscale objects and by the toxicity of metal salts previously applied for levitation. Here, we use magnetic levitation principles for biological characterization and monitoring of cells and cellular events. We demonstrate that each cell type (i.e., cancer, blood, bacteria, and yeast) has a characteristic levitation profile, which we distinguish at an unprecedented resolution of 1 × 10-4 g·mL-1. We have identified unique differences in levitation and density blueprints between breast, esophageal, colorectal, and nonsmall cell lung cancer cell lines, as well as heterogeneity within these seemingly homogenous cell populations. Furthermore, we demonstrate that changes in cellular density and levitation profiles can be monitored in real time at single-cell resolution, allowing quantification of heterogeneous temporal responses of each cell to environmental stressors. These data establish density as a powerful biomarker for investigating living systems and their responses. Thereby, our method enables rapid, density-based imaging and profiling of single cells with intriguing applications, such as label-free identification and monitoring of heterogeneous biological changes under various physiological conditions, including antibiotic or cancer treatment in personalized medicine.*"

ZINE LISTINGS

[I only list zines I receive from the Papernet. If the zine is posted on www.efanzines.com or www.fanac.org, then I don't mention it since you can read them directly.]

[The Usual means $5 cash ($6 overseas) or trade for your zine. Americans: please don't send cheques for small amounts to Canada or overseas (the bank fee to cash them is usually more than the amount) or mint USA stamps (which are not valid for postage outside USA). US$ banknotes are still acceptable around the world.]

OSFS STATEMENT #435 (Available via email from Ottawa SF Society, editor@ottawasfs.ca) Clubzine with news and listings, this issue having notes on Otzi the Iceman and convenient electronic devices that eavesdrop on you.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Milt Stevens 2015-07-27
Simi Valley, California

In OPUNTIA #313, your article on telephones caused me to think about my feelings about the blasted devices. In general, I like technology and the things it produces. When I was a child I even liked telephones. I don't like them any longer. I am on the national no-call list. I have an unlisted number and have an answering machine on my line 24/7. This should be enough to give people the hint I really don't want to hear from them. It doesn't. One outfit has left over 100 recorded messages about refinancing my mortgage. I haven't had a mortgage in the last 20 years. At election time, recorded political messages descend like a hoard of locusts. I've learned to disconnect my phone when I receive the first political message, and I don't reconnect it until after the election.

Voicemail is another dubious invention. In the modern age, you can never reach an organic when you need one. "Your call is important to us but not important enough to answer. Please stay on the line while we torture you with recorded sound that might resemble music."

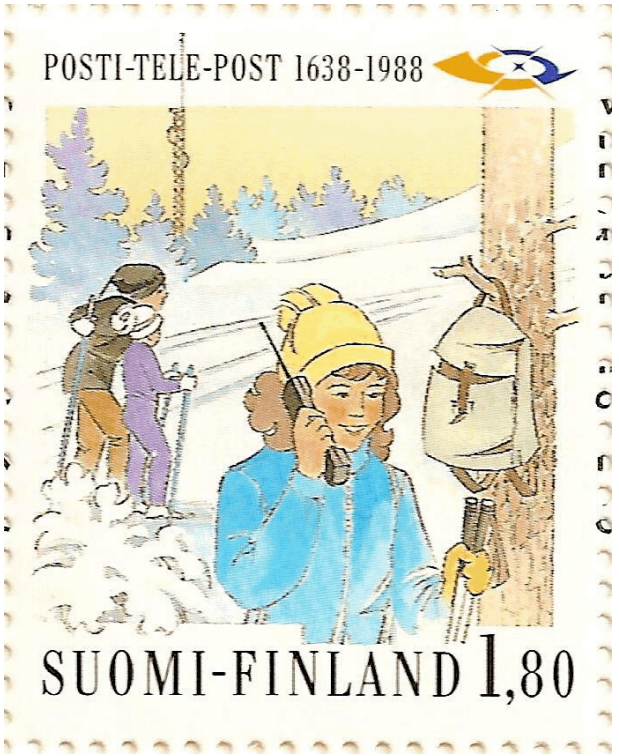
[I very seldom make or receive phone calls anymore, as my friends and family communicate with me by email or text. My smartphone plan allows 200 minutes per month, but in the last decade I have never used more than 15 minutes, and in some months it is zero. Telemarketing companies in Canada seldom bother me. My smartphone allows automatic rejection of any area code outside Alberta, since anyone I know elsewhere will email or text me instead.]

I have a cell phone, but it is only a phone. It doesn't connect me to the Internet or give me access to spiritual insight from God. I know people who can't get through a conversation without checking with the Internet at least once. In most cases, the conversation could have progressed reasonably well without the datum in question.

[Neither of my laptops is connected to the Internet, so I use my smartphone via public Wifi or the university computer and download to a memory stick. I connect the smartphone to my laptop with a USB cable to transfer pdfs and jpegs either way.]

I once had the experience of losing a con venue before the convention. That was at the 1980 Westercon, and it was the result of hostile action. A commercial con runner had been moving into Los Angeles. We had been ignoring him and going about our business. He decided there should be only four SF cons a year in Los Angeles and that he should run all of them. We had a tentative agreement with a hotel pending an actual vote as to who would have the right to run the next Westercon. While we were still counting votes, he went to the hotel and offered to sign for four weekends a year if they would forget about our tentative agreement. Naturally, they were willing to do that. When we discovered we had been skunked we scurried down the street and rented another hotel. By the time the next Westercon happened a year later, the commercial con runner had already gone out of business.

I Also Heard From: Scott Crow



Just as a space-filler to make the pages come out even, here is another Calgary utility box, this one on 16 Avenue NW at 9 Street.