

OPUNTIA

363

New Year's Day 2017

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

AULD LANG SYNE 2017

photos by Dale Speirs

Calgary's biggest New Year's Eve party is traditionally at Olympic Plaza, downtown across from City Hall. If the temperatures are warm, not below -10°C, I go there with my trusty Nikon digital SLR camera.

2017 is the 150th anniversary of Confederation, so Canadians are celebrating with additional fervor. Calgary's Mayor Neheed Nenshi promised a bigger than usual countdown show and fireworks display. The weather forecast was just at the freezing mark, but then it began snowing in the afternoon, with no letup until the following morning. I wasn't going to stand in falling snow, trying to keep my camera lens dry for fireworks photographs, so I stayed home and listened to old-time radio shows. The photo at right is the closest I got to fireworks.



For several winters now, I have been meaning to take a sequence of photos of my front yard showing the passage of time as seen in the snow. It isn't evident in summer, but in winter the tracks left by wildlife suggest my lawn gets as much traffic as out on the freeway. I finally remembered to do so just before Christmas 2016.

The photo sequence begins just after a 15-cm snowfall. Below is my front yard on the morning of December 24.



Snowshoe hares are common urban residents; every block has at least one, and when walking about I have seen as many as a half dozen in view at once. Squirrels are also ubiquitous. Magpies are the only birds that leave tracks on the ground, but chickadees are common in the spruce trees.

This photo was taken in the afternoon of December 24. A snowshoe hare has hippity-hopped its way across the yard. Daytime temperature was -15°C.



Christmas midday as I left the house en route to my brother's place for the family dinner. More tracks, probably the same individual. What they live on in the snow is beyond me. I draw your attention to the thick snow on the spruce branches and the fence rails in the background. Compare with the next photo.



The afternoon of December 27 after a weak chinook began. The wind has shaken off the snow on the branches and begun to reduce the thickness of the snow on the ground. Chinooks do not melt snow. The snow crystals sublimate directly into the air from solid to water vapour without any intermediate liquid state. Temperature is at zero. Notice the squirrel tracks along the yuccas.



The morning of December 28. The ground is showing through in the lee of the house. It doesn't show up well in the photo, but the snow thickness further out in the side yard is now about half what it was, and the fence rails are dry. Temperatures staying at the freezing mark.



The afternoon of December 30. This was a weak chinook and only gusted up to about 60 km/hr. Calgary has had strong chinooks up to 100 km/hr that raised the temperature from -25°C to +10°C in four hours and stripped all the snow away completely.



Turning the camera to the left and looking out to the street from the front steps, just after I set up my bird feeder. I only run it during the winter. The birds can fend for themselves easily enough during the summer. The squirrel traffic has hammered down the snow. They can't reach the feeder but the birds are sloppy



eaters, so the squirrels and snowshoe hares cleaned up the spilled seeds on the sidewalk.



Chickadees are not afraid of humans and do well in cities. By moving slowly, I was able to get some nice photos.



New Year's Day morning. 15 cm of snow fell overnight, so I was quite content to stay at home and do without the festivities and fireworks. This re-set the clock on my photo sequence.



I make it a point in my retirement that each day I get out of the house and at least go for a walk if nothing else. No lounging around inside all day, unshaven and only in a bathrobe. On New Year's Day, I went out for a bus ride and a walk.

At a shopping centre, I saw this car high-centred on a concrete median. Obviously the driver couldn't see the median in the snow. If he had been driving a car with a normal wheelbase, it would have given him an unexpected jolt, but continued on its way. This Smart Car perfectly straddled the median and spun out. You couldn't get it more firmly stuck if you tried on purpose.



THE ORIGIN OF THE MAPLE LEAF FLAG ILLUSTRATED BY PHILATELY

by Dale Speirs

In 1964, Prime Minister Lester Pearson initiated action for a new Canadian flag, and touched off what historians agree was one of the most acrimonious debates in Canada's history. Few Canadians know that the flag had its origins in the Suez Canal crisis of 1956. The flag design was given Royal Assent in 1965.

Pause for a diversion and digression. I am active in the Calgary Philatelic Society, editing its bulletin CALGARY PHILATELIST and serving in various capacities on its Show Committee. The CPS hosts an annual show called CALTAPEX, and roughly every five years or so takes on a national show. For CALTAPEX 2015, the theme of the show was the 50th anniversary of the Maple Leaf flag. I put together an exhibit showing the flag on stamps.

2017 is the 150th anniversary of Confederation, so I've converted my exhibit into an article which will be submitted to a philatelic publication. Since few, if any, OPUNTIA readers follow the philatelic literature, I will run the article here as well, illustrating it with material from my exhibit.

The Red Ensign.

The Red Ensign was never Canada's official flag by statute law. The use of the Red Ensign was by informal observance and tradition. It was also common to use the Union Jack flag. Until 1921, there were numerous variations of the Red Ensign, with no standardization of the symbols on its fly. (The fly is the right half of a flag, when viewed with the flagpole on the left.)

Canadians were not obligated to use a given design, and some citizens liked to modify the Red Ensign to suit themselves. Many Red Ensigns were personal designs by the flag makers, with the fly having all sorts of crests and coats of arms.

After 1921, Canada adopted an official Coat of Arms, which was used on the flag. In 1945, the Liberal government established the final version of the Red Ensign and made it official by an Order-In-Council (cabinet decree). The matter was not brought before the House of Commons because Prime Minister Mackenzie King preferred to avoid controversy. He wanted a different design but knew it would never succeed, so he left it for a future generation to decide.

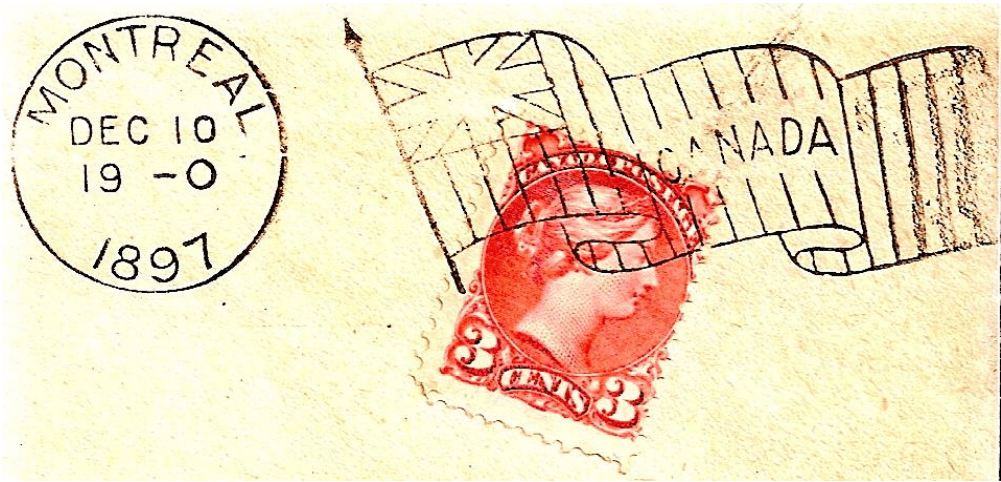
Below is a postcard circa the first decade of the 1900s, showing a building festooned with fifty or more flags. Based on the military personnel in ceremonial dress drawn up in ranks, and the crowds surrounding them and watching from the rooftops, this is almost certainly a Dominion Day celebration on July 1st of an unknown year. (The postcard is mint and undated by the printer.)

The building would not have so many flags for any other type of holiday. A few of the flags are Union Jacks but the majority are Red Ensigns with blank flies. This isn't because the postcard printer couldn't reproduce crests on the fly, since the Union Jacks on the ensigns are quite clear. It seems probable that these Red Ensigns actually were blank on the flies at the ceremony.



The Red Ensign in any form was never honoured on Canadian stamps during its lifetime. A stylistic version of it, more like a pennant, was used by the Canadian Post Office (as Canada Post then was) for machine postmarks on various occasions.

Below is an 1897 example of a flag cancel, as close as the Canadian Post Office ever got to showing the Red Ensign as a primary subject.



Another such style of postmark was the flag cancel for the 1937 Coronation. These are modified Red Ensigns, not Union Jacks per se. The Union Jack did appear on the 1942 10-cent stamp depicting the Parliament Buildings. The maple leaf, by itself as a symbol, frequently occurred on stamps as an ornament in the frames.



In the aftermath of the adoption of the Maple Leaf Flag, the Ontario and Manitoba legislatures retaliated in 1966 by adopting Red Ensigns as their flags, each with the appropriate provincial crest on them (top of next column). At the time, both provinces were controlled by Tory governments, and explicitly made it clear that they were acting in spite against the federal Liberals.



Enter Nasser And Pearson.

Before entering politics, Prime Minister Lester Pearson had a long career in the Canadian diplomatic service. He was Canada’s agent in trying to broker a peace agreement with Egyptian President Gamal Nasser, after the Suez Canal was nationalized by the Egyptian government in 1956. The British and French military forces occupying the canal area were disconcerted by a proposal by Pearson to interpose a United Nations peacekeeping force. This was intended to allow the British and French governments to save face when forced to withdraw, after finding out the hard way that imperialism circa Queen Victoria wasn’t acceptable anymore in the post-WW2 world.

Nasser made good use of postage stamps as propaganda about the defeat of the British and French forces, if not in combat, then by diplomacy. Below are four stamps issued in 1956 and 1957 during the height of the crisis by the Egyptian Post Office. They were multilingual in English and French, just to drive home the point to foreign stamp collectors.

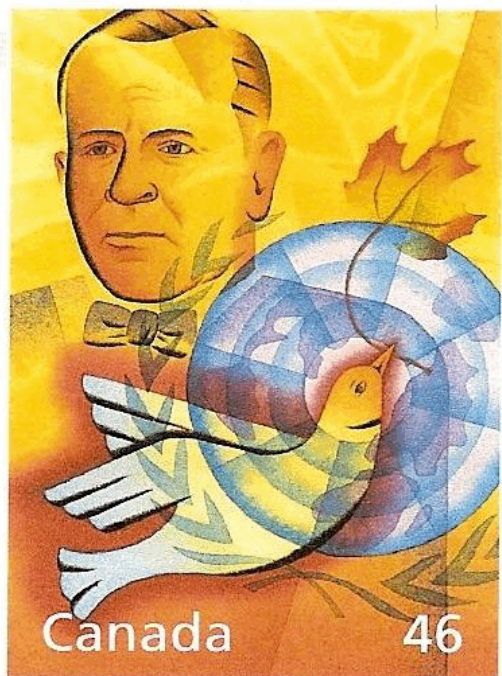


Pearson had a major problem in working the deal. Because Canadian troops wore uniforms similar to the British, and carried a flag with the Union Jack on it, Nasser objected to the troops coming to Suez. Matters were made worse by the insensitivity of the Canadian Minister of National Defence, who proposed to send the Queen's Own Calgary Regiment as Canada's contribution to the peacekeeping force. The Minister was completely oblivious of the feelings of the Egyptians, who had just been fighting the Queen's Own West Surrey Regiment from England.

Pearson could do nothing to shake the Colonel Blimps in Canada. He failed to make them understand that Canada was not the "honest broker" it liked to portray itself as, but was viewed by Third World nations as a lackey of Britain. It was this background that remained with him in later years, and prompted him to act when he became Prime Minister [1].

Pearson eventually succeeded in establishing the first United Nations peacekeeping force, as a result of which he later won the Nobel Peace Prize. When the United Nations Post Office began issuing a series of stamps of all its member nations' flags, the stamp depicting the Maple Leaf flag on a U.N. stamp became particularly appropriate for this topic.





In the run-up to the year 2000, Canada Post issued a stamp in the Millennium series that made reference to Pearson's achievement. It depicts a dove carrying a maple leaf through the United Nations logo.

The Politics Of The Flag.

When he became Prime Minister, Pearson initiated action in 1964 for a new flag. He wanted to eliminate the Union Jack and the fleur-de-lys in any new design, and substitute maple leaves as more

appropriate for Canada. No one could accuse Pearson of lack of courage. His announcement that such a new flag would be brought in was made at the annual convention of the Royal Canadian Legion. It was probably the most hostile audience he ever faced in his political career [2].

The debate in the House of Commons was sidetracked by procedural nitpicking, and generated more heat than light. Former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, now the Opposition Leader, led the charge.

He was not against a new flag as such but wanted the Union Jack kept on it. While he used that publicly as his reason for opposing a Union-less flag, he wrote in his memoirs that the real reason was that Pearson



didn't follow proper procedure in bringing the matter before the House of Commons. Diefenbaker resented having the new flag design sprung on him and his fellow Tories by surprise [3].

Tommy Douglas, leader of the NDP in the House of Commons, had no feelings either way about a new flag. He was disgusted by the vicious nature of the debate and the squabbling over procedural details. In watching Pearson and Diefenbaker during the flag debate, he remarked that they were: "... *two old bulls out on the prairie bashing their heads together.*" He was a monarchist but supported Pearson's design of three maple leaves, although he later changed over to the single-leaf proposal [4].



Three Leaves.

The final design of the flag was different from what Pearson had proposed. He wanted three maple leaves, and even got the Canadian Post Office to issue a stamp on May 14, 1964, showing what he had in mind, although not in the exact design of his flag.

In Volume 3 of his memoirs, Pearson wrote: "*By this time, I knew pretty well what design I favoured myself, and even got the Post Office to put out something similar in the guise of a stamp. My first and favourite design proposed light blue bars top and bottom with a red maple leaf on a white background.*" [2].

On the next page is a first-day Rosecraft cover of the three-leaf stamp. Its cachet is peculiar in that it burbles on about how Canada was founded by two races, while the stamp was specifically intended to acknowledge with the third leaf that there were others who helped make the country. One reason Pearson wanted three maple leaves was to acknowledge with the third leaf the contributions of aboriginals and all the other immigrants.



... Ave. S.W.,
Calgary, Alta.



The Flag Is Designed.

Pearson preferred a flag with blue bars and three maple leaves, but eventually acceded to the single-leaf design that was adopted. The Pearson version was shown on the back cover of the 2015 flag stamp booklet issued by Canada Post. It is the middle flag of the three designs shown.

Diefenbaker returned to the attack on September 1, unsuccessfully trying to pin down Nicholson about who ordered the stamp issued. The PMG did admit that he chose the colours for the three-leaf stamp but claimed they were picked so as to better be detected by automatic sorting machines. Diefenbaker couldn't shake him and therefore moved on to non-philatelic aspects of the flag debate [5].

The Tories were hampered by the fact that in 1959, when Diefenbaker was Prime Minister, the Canadian Post Office had issued a stamp with three maple leaves of a very similar design. The stamp was for the bicentennial of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

Like Pearson's later stamp, it showed three maple leaves on a single stem, although they were green. In the debates of the House of Commons, Nicholson was able to piously point to the 1959 stamp and ask the Tories why they would think there was anything wrong with the 1964 version. The Tories had no answer, although everyone in the Commons knew perfectly well what Pearson was up to with his stamp.



When the flag debate was at its height in 1964, designing a new flag became a national sport, second in popularity only to hockey. Thousands upon thousands of designs were sent to Ottawa. Many citizens tried to work in both the Union Jack and the fleur-de-lys into the design, while others went in the opposite direction with abstract designs. In 2015 when Canada Post issued a stamp for the 50th anniversary of the flag, the first-day cover showed a few of the many designs that flooded into government offices.



In early 1964 when discussions about the new flag began in earnest, John Matheson (Liberal M.P., Leeds County, Ontario) and Alan Beddoe (a retired Royal Canadian Navy officer) were actively involved in the design of the flag. The Coat of Arms granted to Canada in 1921 stated that Canada’s official colours were red and white, but Pearson was wedded to the idea of red, white, and blue on the flag.

The design initially submitted to the House of Commons on June 15 was three red maple leaves on a single stem on a white background, with blue bars at each end of the flag. After long emotional debates in the Commons, the design was referred to a special committee on September 10. The committee sat 41 times in six weeks and studied about 2,000 designs, as well as listening to testimony from experts on history and heraldry.

George Stanley, Dean of Arts at the Royal Military College in Kingston, Ontario, broke the impasse by proposing a red and white flag based on the College’s flag, substituting a single maple leaf for the college crest. The RMC’s flag is shown below. Matheson then negotiated a deal with the NDP to accept this design, and the Tories were thus out-voted in committee [6]. Pearson was persuaded that the three-leaves design was too closely identified with himself to get through the Commons, whereas the cleaner single-leaf design didn’t have the political baggage.



In 1976, a pair of stamps were issued honouring the centennial of the RMC, one of which showed a colour guard carrying what at first glance appears to be a Maple Leaf Flag.



However, a closer look shows it is a different RMC flag, a standard with a crown and logo of the college superimposed on a maple leaf. This should not be confused with the original design modification that produced the Maple Leaf Flag.

The First Maple Leaf Flag Stamp.

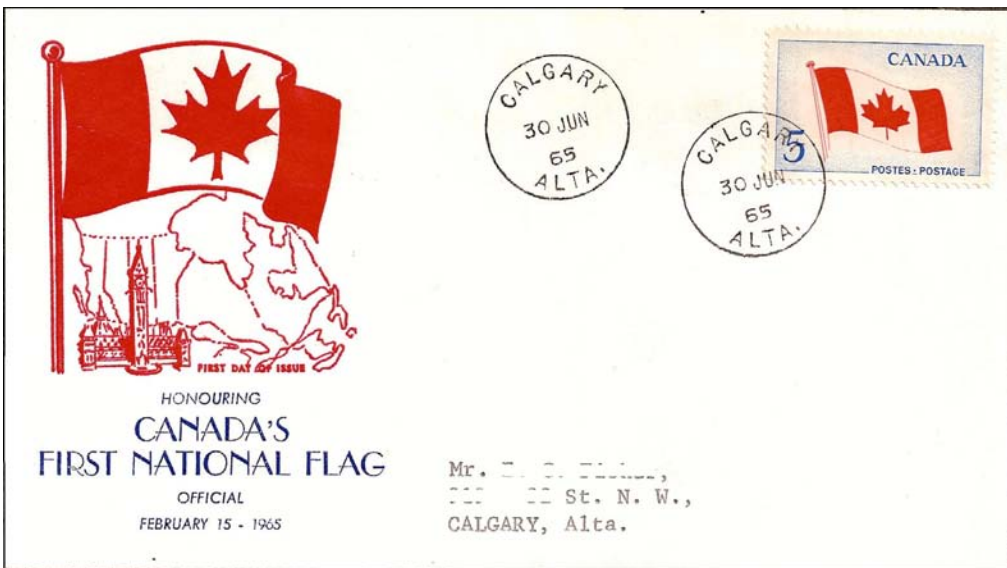
Bizarrely, the new flag was first depicted on a stamp issued not by the Canadian Post Office, but by South Korea, five days before the Canadian stamp came out. South Korea was commemorating the Allies of the Korean War. Its stamps depicted the flags of the main combatants, of which the new Canadian flag stood out prominently on one of the stamps.



This may or may not be a design error stamp, depending on how one interprets the design. Canada fought in the Korean War under the Red Ensign, so that might be considered the correct flag. However, South Korea was honouring the countries, not the actual battles, so it would have been wrong to show an obsolete flag. The proportions of the red bars on the maple flag are slightly off, but this is a common problem on foreign stamps, some of which reduce the bars to stripes.

On June 30, 1965, having been pipped at the post by South Korea, the Canadian Post Office issued the first Canadian Maple Leaf Flag stamp. The date was chosen because while it would have been nice to have it out on July 1, the post offices would be closed for the Canada Day holiday. Those were the days when first-day covers were not yet monopolized by the CPO, and many private FDCs were issued. A couple of examples are shown on the next page.





References.

- 1] Pearson, Lester B. (1975) MIKE: THE MEMOIRS OF THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LESTER B. PEARSON. VOLUME 2. Published by University of Toronto Press. Pages 261 to 263
- 2] Pearson, Lester B. (1975) MIKE: THE MEMOIRS OF THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LESTER B. PEARSON. VOLUME 3. Published by University of Toronto Press. Pages 270 to 281
- 3] Diefenbaker, John G. (1977) ONE CANADA. VOLUME 3. Published by Macmillan Company, Toronto. Pages 222 to 226.
- 4] McLeod, Thomas H., and Ian McLeod (2004) TOMMY DOUGLAS: THE ROAD TO JERUSALEM. Published by Fifth House Ltd, Calgary. Pages 331 to 332
- 5] Hansard (1964) HOUSE OF COMMONS DEBATES. VOLUME 7. Pages 7289, 7533 to 7534, 7541, 7573
- 6] Stanley, George F.G. (1965) THE STORY OF CANADA'S FLAG. Published by Ryerson Press, Toronto. Pages 63 to 73

The Maple Leaf Flag Stamp Revived.

The 1965 flag stamp was a nice clean design which has stood the test of time quite well, unlike some of the atrocities issued by the Canadian Post Office during the prior decade. When Toronto hosted the International Philatelic Youth Exhibition in 1982, Canada Post issued a souvenir card depicting the stamp.

CRY UNCLE AND LET SLIP THE DOGS OF WAR: PART 3

by Dale Speirs

[Parts 1 to 2 appeared in OPUNTIA's #361 and 362.]

The Girl From UNCLE.

This series was a one-season spin-off from TMFU. Ian Fleming's suggestion to name the Girl as April Dancer was accepted. The show died when the main series did, and some critics blame it for siphoning off viewers. Notwithstanding that, the main cause for TMFU's death appears to be poor scheduling in the fourth season, not GIRL.

In the TMFU paperback THE STONE-COLD DEAD IN THE MARKET AFFAIR (1966) by John Oram, there was a minor bad guy named Dancer. The novel was written just as the GIRL series was being discussed. It was published as British paperback #4 early in that series but did not appear in the American series until the penultimate issue #22 at the end of the lifespan of TMFU. This threw off many North American readers, for whom the name was a clanger.

There is a passing mention of Dancer and Slate in TMFU paperback #14, THE UTOPIA AFFAIR (1968), when Waverly deals with them in his office: *"He was called back to his duties a moment later when a team of agents, a sleek dark-haired girl and a young Englishman, was called in for a quick briefing and a fatherly, cautionary word of encouragement before setting out on an assignment."*

The pilot episode of GIRL was a Season 2 episode of TMFU aired on 1966-02-25 as "The Moonglow Affair", written by Dean Hargrove. It had different actors playing April Dancer and her partner Mark Slate than for the series. It was intended to capitalize on the success of TMFU. Unfortunately the series didn't begin production until TMFU was dying, and only lasted one abbreviated season. Like TMFU series, there was a digest magazine and five paperbacks, as well as some odd-job books.

Mary Ann Mobley played April Dancer in the pilot episode because the first choice, Stefanie Powers, was not available at the time. Powers was used for the GIRL series. Mark Slate was played by the English actor Noel Harrison. The show was blatantly sexist, but then again so was almost all other television at the time.

The Girl's Magazine.

THE GIRL FROM UNCLE MAGAZINE was a short-lived bimonthly that ran from December 1966 to December 1967. It never made money in its seven issues. Margulies only agreed to publish it to protect his literary rights for TMFU MAGAZINE, which itself was a marginal operation. It was evident that television fans were not literary people in general.

The GIRL stories in this magazine were written the same way as the MAN magazines, and under the same house name. The lead story, billed as a novel but only eighty pages or so, was mostly about Dancer and Slate. I say mostly because Solo and Kuryakin kept butting into the novels, as if the editors didn't think Dancer and Slate could carry the load by themselves.

Like TMFU MAGAZINE, the GIRL issues carried a variety of short stories after the lead novel that were unrelated to UNCLE. Some were mysteries and others were spy stories. There was a series involving Desiree Fleming, secret agent for an unnamed Washington, D.C., agency. She was evidently intended to gather in Dancer fans.

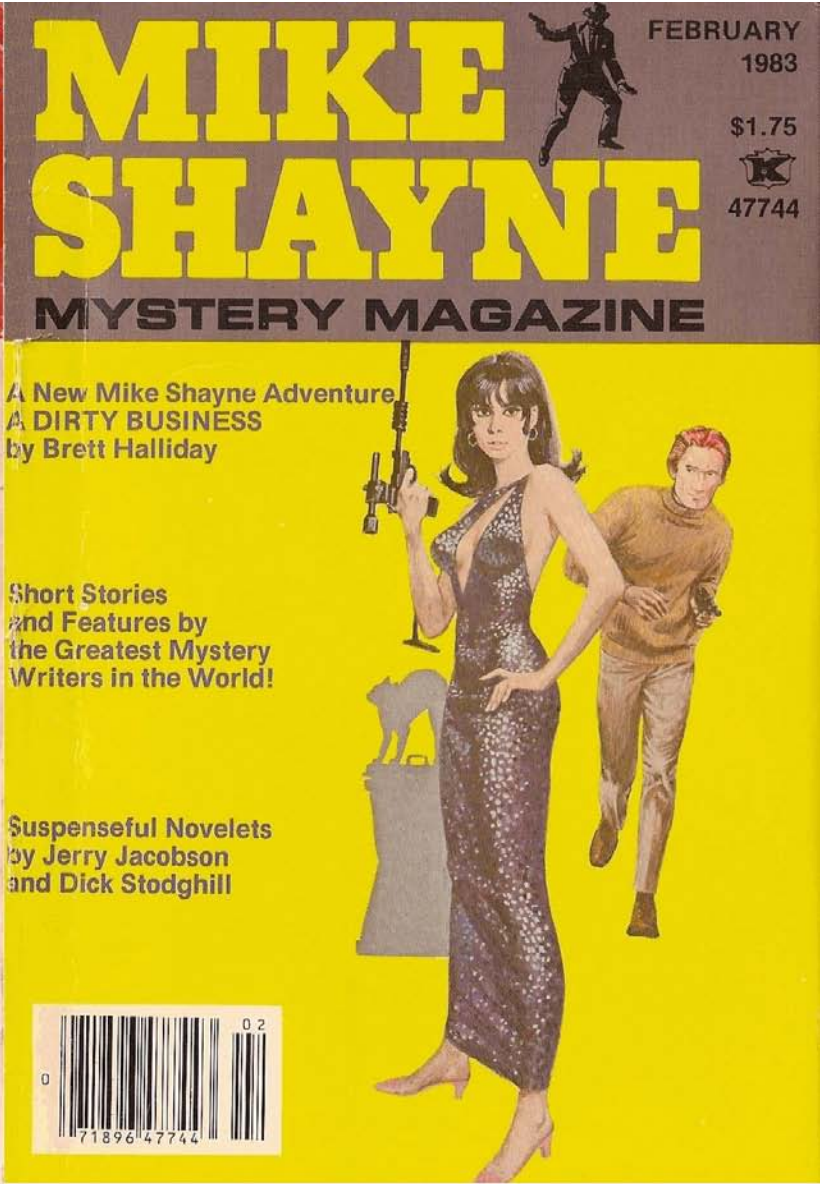
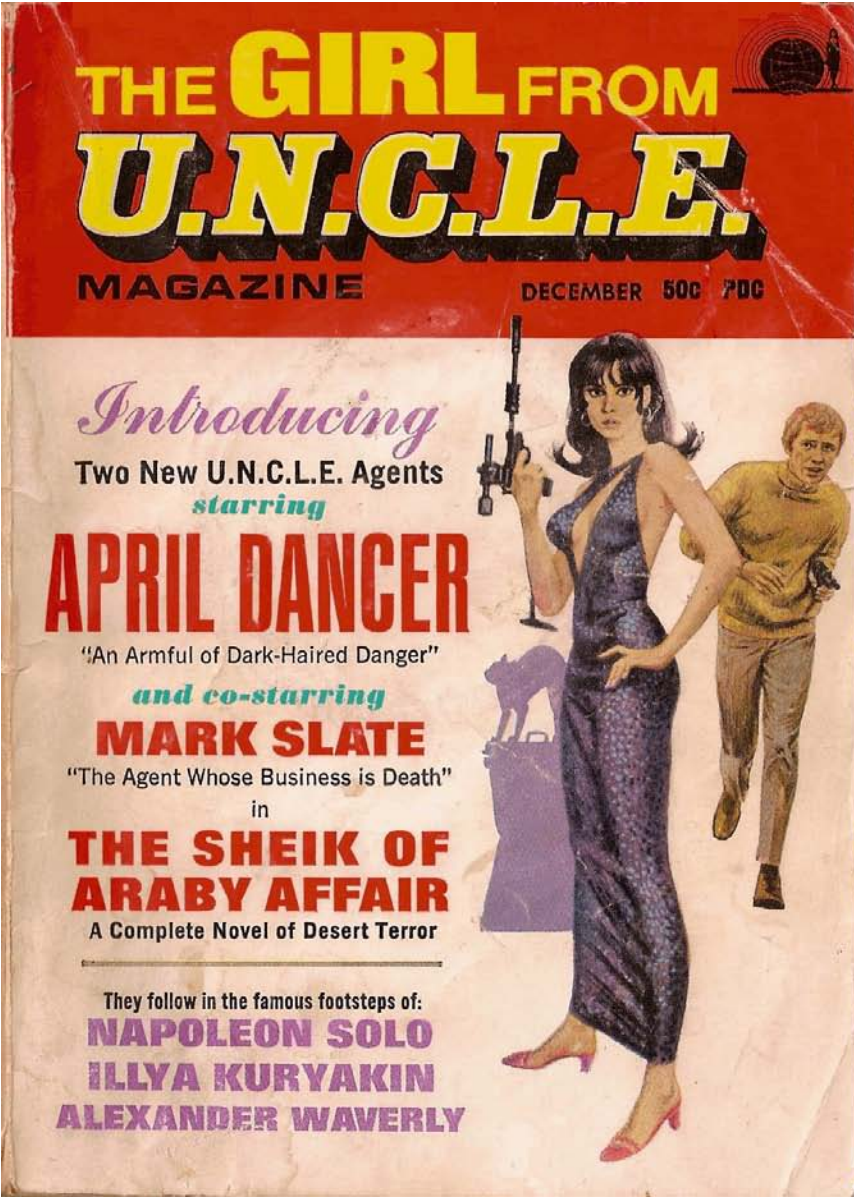
The first issue of GIRL carried the novel "The Sheik Of Araby Affair". Dancer romances an Arab sheik who is co-operating with THRUSH on a secret project in the sheik's desert oasis. They intend to rule the world and all that usual stuff. It reads fairly well, actually. There is a twist ending when Solo and Kuryakin show up, in disguise, and help bail out Dancer and Slate.

The novels weren't too bad but the plotting left something to be desired on occasion. An example is "The Sinister Satellite Affair" in the final issue of GIRL. An orbiting atomic bomb had been launched by Red China (as it then was, today we just call it China), with the assistance of THRUSH, who have their own independent agenda.

After eighty pages of to-ing and fro-ing, it all comes down to the penultimate page. A THRUSH agent activates the satellite to rain multiple warheads down on the cities of the world. Solo and Kuryakin take charge, and in a matter of seconds manage to get the command codes for the satellite and deflect the bombs out into space. Nobody could do it that fast, but the last-second countdown is a time-honoured tradition in action-adventure fiction.

The older sibling of the UNCLE magazines was MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE. All shared a common editorial staff who did not hesitate to recycle artwork or stories. I never liked the Shayne stories so I only have a few issues of the magazine. As I browsed them, some of the SHAYNE covers looked familiar, and I was able to pair up their original sources from the GIRL magazines. I'm sure there are many more re-used artworks. It was not unknown among certain pulp publishers to wait a few years and use art again in a different magazine, sometimes modifying it. Artists had no rights back then, and certainly no creative control.

Examples are shown here of the Girl from UNCLE reappearing fifteen years later as a gun moll or a woman of easy virtue. Shayne was described as a redhead, so art showing Slate (a blonde) face-on was modified to change the face into Shayne's. Godawful it was too; the so-called artist who altered the original covers did a poor job. Compare the unaltered face of Slate on the December 1966 cover with the completely different and more primitive face of Shayne on the 1983 cover.



THE GIRL FROM U.N.C.L.E.

MAGAZINE

JUNE 50c PDC



APRIL DANCER

"An Armful of
Dark-Haired Danger"
and

MARK SLATE

"The Agent Whose
Business is Death"
in

THE DEADLY DRUG AFFAIR

Together they must track down
and destroy a hidden village
peopled with deadly robots —
before an unspeakable mission
is unleashed upon the world!

The New Complete
U.N.C.L.E. Novel by
ROBERT HART DAVIS



MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE



JULY 1983

\$1.75



47744

A New Mike Shayne Mystery
DEADLY MEMORIES
by Brett Halliday

A Novelet of the Pulp Era
GOBLIN FARM
by MIKE TAYLOR

Hard-hitting Short Stories
by Masters of Suspense!



The Girl's Paperbacks.

The GIRL paperbacks were published under authors' names. Three were only distributed in Britain. I have the first two, which were American editions. The cover of paperback #1 mis-spells Powers' name as Stephanie, rather than Stefanie. She was American-born of Polish ancestry. Her real name was Stefanie Zofia Federkiewicz. She took a stage name for obvious reasons.

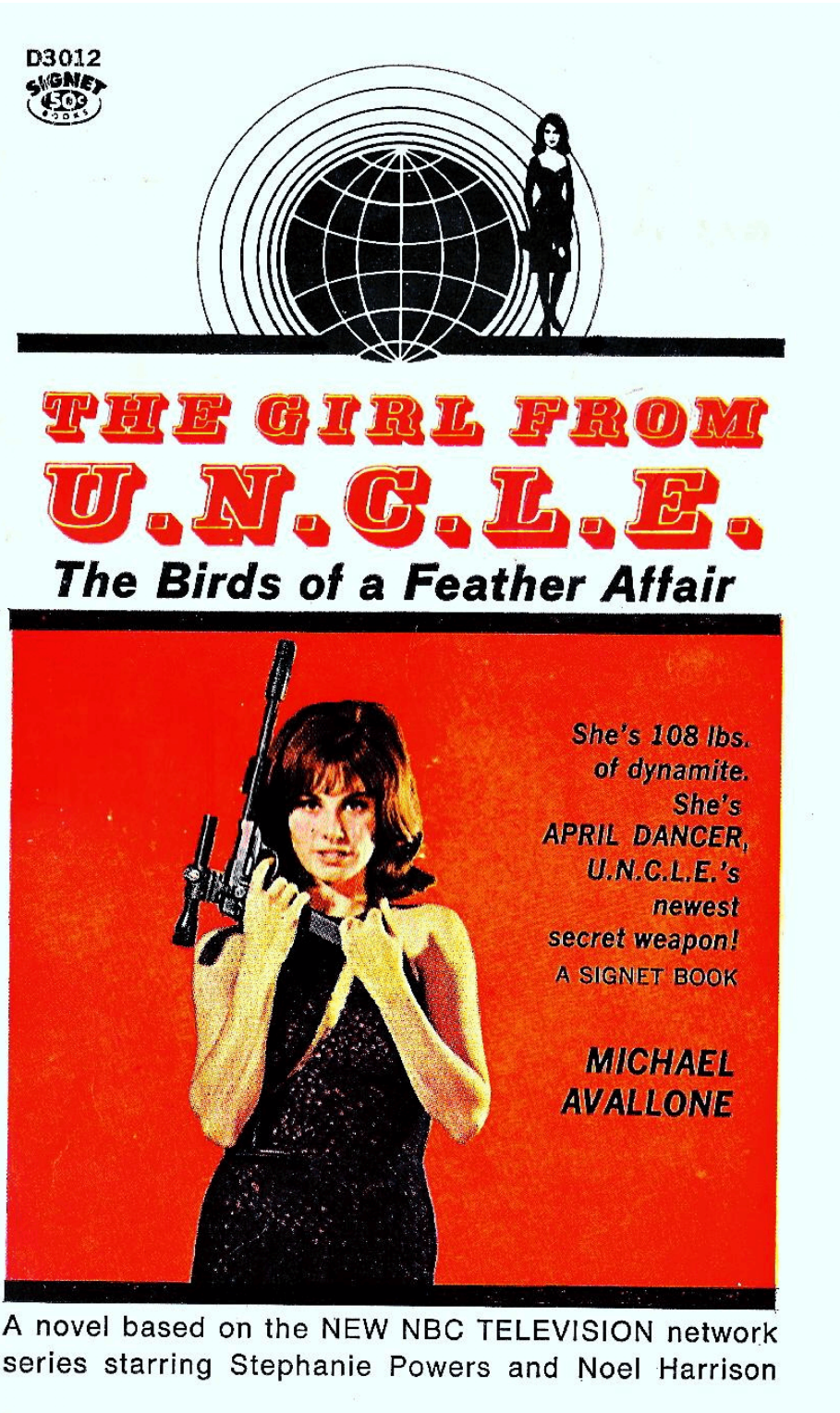
THE BIRDS OF A FEATHER AFFAIR (1966) by Michael Avallone is his usual pulpish style. I laughed out loud at page 23, when Dancer has captured a female prisoner who says to her: ““You're a fool”, the redhead hissed.”. This is a classic example of being sibilant without using the letter “s”.

Avallone undresses Dancer and other women in as many scenes as he can. The curves of every women are described, but not the men of course. The plot is convoluted, although some of it relies on hidden knowledge, especially in the last few pages. Dancer has a good cry at the end to relieve her stresses. Not to be read by feminists with high blood pressure.

Avallone also wrote paperback #2, THE BLAZING AFFAIR (1966) about an organization named TORCH, which even THRUSH feared. It was The Order Of Reich Crusade Hierarchy, a neo-Nazi group intent on establishing a Fourth Reich. They are attempting to corner the diamond trade in southern Africa so as to finance their world domination plans. (Don't forget this was at the height of apartheid in South Africa.) The outcome is predictable once the UNCLE agents get going.

The writing is at Avallone's usual level, such as: “ “Ah”, he murmured with relish, his dark eyes raping her.” (page 14). Avallone's works could be mined with profit to fill up countless installments of “Thog's Masterclass” in the zine ANSIBLE.

[to be continued]



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
Simi Valley, California

2016-12-27

Re: OPUNTIA #357: Your summary of stories where the protagonist's reports of imminent alien invasion aren't believed reminded me of an episode of the TV show **THIRD ROCK FROM THE SUN**. In this episode, the alien hunter isn't believed because he really is crazy and the people he thinks are aliens really aren't aliens. Unfortunately, he has been killing people he suspects of being aliens.

THIRD ROCK FROM THE SUN featured a quartet of amiable if somewhat confused aliens who have come to earth to study local conditions. They operate out of a college, so nobody thinks they are any stranger than the rest of the locals. The alien hunter correctly identifies them as aliens. They are in big trouble, since they really are aliens. Fortunately for them, the locals have noticed all the weird things about the aliens but like them anyway.

In **SATAN'S WORLD** by Poul Anderson, the aliens have set up a Google-type operation to find out all about us and what we know. The story appeared before Google had become what it is now. It's an insidiously good idea. How much do we really know about Google?

[I'm told that the houses of Google executives are blanked out on Street View and Google Earth. Can anyone advise?]

Re: OPUNTIA #358: Making a photo record of the city you live in is a great idea for you. You have the eye of an artist. In fact, you probably have two of them. The city of Calgary should hire you to produce promotional publications. You make the place look really great.

[I'm disappointed more zine editors don't show us around their home towns, especially if they do a pdf zine where colour photos cost nothing extra. In any large city, there is always something going on every weekend, or picturesque scenery if all else fails.]

Most people aren't so talented. Phone cameras make it easy for them to take pictures. There is nothing to inform them whether they should take pictures or not. If the human race were to become extinct at this instant, future alien archeologists would encounter some real mysteries. For instance, why would any species save several trillion pictures of cats? Don't look at me, I haven't a clue why people do it.

[The difference is that my generation (I am 61) learned photography in the era of film cameras, when it cost money to develop each shot. People therefore took time to compose a shot with balance and proper eye tracking. Nowadays, those with cellphone cameras take ten shots of a scene off kilter, then post them online without the slightest attempt at editing. I use a Nikon SLR digital camera for travels and a smartphone camera for snapshots around town. I compose the photos before clicking, then crop them on my laptop to get a final composition.]

There are other ways of recording your home town. Harry Warner did a marvelous job of describing Hagerstown, Maryland. At times, I think I knew more about Hagerstown than I knew about the city where I lived. All sorts of fan writers have given me all sorts of glimpses of all sorts of places. Those glimpses are one of the major appeals of fanzines.

[The earliest issues of OPUNTIA, back when it was print only, have lots of my accounts of life in Calgary and southern Alberta. Look for the .5 numbered issues. There's always something going on in Calgary, so I never lack for articles or photos. All you other zinesters, how about running your own series in your zines?]

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2016-12-30

Re: OPUNTIA #359: [re: Teddy Harvia cover] Greetings to the goddess, and lovely to see you again.

It's good to see that children do remember on Remembrance Day, but I wonder if they will continue to remember as they grow up. I have read recently that a number of cenotaphs are under threat of neglect or even being torn down because those who do remember have run out of money, or the Legion branch property they were on is for sale or under redevelopment. Money to save those

cenotaphs may have to come from a government, or at least transport those cenotaphs to a central location within each city.

[In all my travels around Alberta, I've only ever seen cenotaphs on public property and well maintained. As long as the squaddies are in Afghanistan, Iraq, and the Balkans, the children of Canada will have personal reminders of what real sacrifice entails.]

Re: Sherlockiana “The Case of the Vanishing Barque”; the first mate is Thomas Corbett? I remember Tom Corbett as being an early space opera hero. This makes me wonder if the Sherlockian pastiche was based on one of the old Tom Corbett story lines. I haven't been a member of The Bootmakers of Toronto for many years.

Re: OPUNTIA #360: It is a symptom of climate change that while we certainly have some snow in Toronto, Vancouver seems to have more. I've had a few Purdy's chocolates this Christmas, but in many ways, I can hardly wait for the holidays to be done. I have indulged, and have some pounds to shed. I am not going to feel guilty or shamed, for the season does have its tasty pleasures, but everything will fit better once it is all done.

[I gained two kilos from Christmas dinner at my brother's place, then entirely too much candy during Boxing Week. It'll take me a month to work it off.]

I would like to find the DVDs for the original WILD, WILD WEST. For me, there are steampunk themes in it, and I remember seeing them as a kid, so the combination of nostalgia and current interest is enough to want those episodes.

[I checked Amazon.ca on December 30, and the complete boxed set was \$39.99. I still stand by what I said, that it is not real steampunk.]

Re: OPUNTIA #361: The Christmas lights were special to us again this year. Each Christmas Eve, we head out after dark, and drive up and down local streets to see the displays of Christmas lights, and again, they did not disappoint.

[I like the free light shows. There's always something to enjoy.]

The pay telephones are slowly disappearing here, too. Most people have something resembling a cellphone/smartphone these days, but I guess the payphones are there as an ultimate backup. I know of one up the street, and a

back of four down the street, but cannot remember the last time I saw anyone using them. The subway stations here also have payphones in them, probably for those same safety reasons.

We hope your Christmas was a special time, it certainly was for us, but the year 2016 was, as others have said, 20-suck-steen. May 2017 be a better year for all of us, for it could hardly be worse for some. We finally do have a New Year's Eve party to go to, so see you in that far-off, SFnal year of 2017!

[2016 was an average year for me. No great problems, and the outside world didn't have much effect on my day-to-day life. 2017 will be a different story in Alberta. The lunatic NDP government imposed a carbon tax that came into effect on January 1. It increased gasoline pump prices 20% in one day, transit fares are up, and I hate to think what next month's heating bill will be like. I can afford it but a lot of people can't. The Dippers have no clue how real-world economics work, and are strutting around bragging about how they are saving the environment. Nevermind the poor folk. Since the carbon tax goes into general revenues, it is obviously just another tax grab in disguise.]

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Hayniea, H.J., and C. Bower (2016) **Phylogenetic approach to the evolution of color term systems.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:13666-13671

Authors' abstract: “*The naming of colors has long been a topic of interest in the study of human culture and cognition. Color term research has asked diverse questions about thought and communication, but no previous research has used an evolutionary framework. We show that there is broad support for the most influential theory of color term development (most strongly represented by Berlin and Kay; however, we find extensive evidence for the loss (as well as gain) of color terms. We find alternative trajectories of color term evolution*

beyond those considered in the standard theories. These results not only refine our knowledge of how humans lexicalize the color space and how the systems change over time; they illustrate the promise of phylogenetic methods within the domain of cognitive science, and they show how language change interacts with human perception.”

“The model outlined in Berlin and Kay and subsequent work makes two evolutionary claims. First, the progression through the stages of color system development is hypothesized to be unidirectional. That is, languages gain basic color terms, but they do not lose them. Second, the order in which colors are added to a system is largely fixed. ... We also find exceptions to their predicted patterns, such as the loss of color terms in multiple subgroups.”

Paredes, E., et al (2016) **Evidence of isotopic fractionation of natural uranium in cultured human cells.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:14007-14012

Authors’ abstract: *“This paper shows that human neuroblastoma cells incorporated small amounts of uranium (U) after exposure to 10 microM natural U, with preferential uptake of the ²³⁵U isotope with regard to ²³⁸U. Efforts were made to develop and then validate a procedure for highly accurate $n(^{238}\text{U})/n(^{235}\text{U})$ determinations in microsamples of cells. We found that intracellular U is enriched in ²³⁵U by $0.38 \pm 0.13\%$ (2s, n = 7) relative to the exposure solutions. These in vitro experiments provide clues for the identification of biological processes responsible for uranium isotopic fractionation and link them to potential U incorporation pathways into neuronal cells. Suggested incorporation processes are a kinetically controlled process, such as facilitated transmembrane diffusion, and the uptake through a high affinity uranium transport protein involving the modification of the uranyl (UO_2^{2+}) coordination sphere.”*

Desjardins, Jeff (2016-12-27) **The changing anatomy of U.S. oil imports over the last decade.** www.visualcapitalist.com

In 2005, the USA imported 4,820,000 barrels per day of crude oil from OPEC countries, 1,630,000 bpd from Canada, 1,519,000 bpd from Mexico, and 2,116,000 from other non-OPEC countries.

In 2015, OPEC imports had fallen to 2,673,000 bpd, while Canadian oil became the largest source of imports at 3,166,000 bpd. Mexican imports fell to 685,000 bpd and other non-OPEC countries fell to 832,000 bpd.

In 2015, total American domestic production was 9,416,000 bpd and total imports from all countries was 7,363,000 bpd.

Speirs: These figures are why OPEC has declining political influence in the world. OPEC claims to have 81% of the world's proven oil reserves but those figures have never been subjected to an independent audit. Few in the petroleum industry believe them.

Bao, X., and D.W. Eaton (2016) **Fault activation by hydraulic fracturing in western Canada.** SCIENCE 354:1406-1409

Authors’ abstract: *“Hydraulic fracturing has been inferred to trigger the majority of injection-induced earthquakes in western Canada, in contrast to the Midwestern United States, where massive saltwater disposal is the dominant triggering mechanism. A template-based earthquake catalog from a seismically active Canadian shale play, combined with comprehensive injection data during a 4-month interval, shows that earthquakes are tightly clustered in space and time near hydraulic fracturing sites. The largest event [moment magnitude (MW) 3.9] occurred several weeks after injection along a fault that appears to extend from the injection zone into crystalline basement. Patterns of seismicity indicate that stress changes during operations can activate fault slip to an offset distance of >1 km, whereas pressurization by hydraulic fracturing into a fault yields episodic seismicity that can persist for months.”*



von Uexkull, N., et al (2016) **Civil conflict sensitivity to growing-season drought.** PROCEEDINGS OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES USA 113:12391–12396

Authors’ abstract: “Understanding the conflict potential of drought is critical for dealing effectively with the societal implications of climate change. Using new georeferenced ethnicity and conflict data for Asia and Africa since 1989, we present an actor-oriented analysis of growing-season drought and conflict involvement among ethnic groups. Results from naïve models common in previous research suggest that drought generally has little impact. However, context-sensitive models accounting for the groups’ level of vulnerability reveal that drought can contribute to sustaining conflict, especially for agriculturally dependent groups and politically excluded groups in very poor countries. These results suggest a reciprocal nature-society interaction in which violent conflict and environmental shock constitute a vicious circle, each phenomenon increasing the group’s vulnerability to the other.”

“To this end, we draw on new conflict event data that cover Asia and Africa, 1989-2014, updated spatial ethnic settlement data, and remote sensing data on agricultural land use. Our procedure allows quantifying, for each ethnic group, drought conditions during the growing season of the locally dominant crop. A comprehensive set of multilevel mixed effects models that account for the groups’ livelihood, economic, and political vulnerabilities reveals that a drought under most conditions has little effect on the short-term risk that a group challenges the state by military means. However, for agriculturally dependent groups as well as politically excluded groups in very poor countries, a local drought is found to increase the likelihood of sustained violence.”

Tsai, C.H., and Naoki Kohno (2016) **Multiple origins of gigantism in stem baleen whales.** SCIENCE OF NATURE 103:89

Authors’ abstract: “Living baleen whales (Mysticeti) include the world’s largest animals to have ever lived; blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus*) can reach more than 30 metres. However, the gigantism in baleen whales

remains little explored. Here, we compiled all published stem mysticetes from the Eocene and Oligocene and then mapped the estimated body size onto different phylogenies that suggest distinct evolutionary histories of baleen whales. By assembling all known stem baleen whales, we present three novel findings in early mysticete evolution.”

“Results show that, regardless of different phylogenetic scenarios, large body size (more than 5-m long) evolved multiple times independently in their early evolutionary history. For example, the earliest known aetiocetid (*Fucaia buelli*, 33 to 31 Ma) was small in size, about 2 m, and a later aetiocetid (*Morawanocetus*-like animal, 26 to 23 Ma) can reach 8-m long, almost four times the size of *Fucaia buelli*, suggesting an independent gigantism in the aetiocetid lineage. In addition, our reconstruction of ancestral state demonstrates that the baleen whales originated from small body size (less than 5 m) rather than large body size as previously acknowledged. Moreover, reconstructing the evolution of body size in stem baleen whales suggests that the initial pulse of mysticete gigantism started at least back to the Paleogene and in turn should help to understand the origin, pattern, and process of the extreme gigantism in the crown baleen whales.”

