

OPUNTIA 386



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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.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY: HIGHWAY 93

photos by Dale Speirs

Still working my way through about 100 megabytes of “And then I hiked up this mountain” photos. The Trans-Canada Highway runs north from Banff to Lake Louise. About halfway along, at Castle Mountain, it intersects at right angles with Highway 93.

The latter highway starts from the base of the mountain, crosses overtop the Bow River and then the Trans-Canada, heading due west. It climbs over the continental divide, which is both the boundary between Alberta and British Columbia, and between Banff and Kootenay National Parks.

Highway 93 then descends into the Vermilion River valley, which not long after makes a right-angle bend and heads due south to Radium Hot Springs.

I made a trip on July 4, starting at Silverton Falls at the south end of Castle Mountain, but only going down Highway 93 as far as the bend, it being a full day’s trip with stops along the way for tourist hikes.

The cover photo was taken from Silverton Falls looking due west at Storm Mountain. At lower right is the Trans-Canada and Highway 93 interchange. The actual roads are screened by spruce forest.

I then turned about 180°, being careful not to fall into a crevasse, and took a photo of Silverton Falls.



Below: Silverton Creek below the falls as it wends its way to the Bow River. It is a babbling brook all the way along, not because of boulder rapids but because there are so many fallen tree trunks acting as miniature weirs. Look closely under the water's surface and you can see the old spruce logs that created the rapids.

At right: Highway 93 bridge over the Bow River, with Castle Mountain in the background. Ospreys have nested on the bridge for decades. The current year's hatch had already fledged and left the nest by the time I took this photo.



Below: On the far side of the Trans-Canada Highway, Altrude Creek runs parallel to Highway 93 down to the river at the bridge.

At right: I then headed west on Highway 93, stopping at the continental divide. As every tourist does, I made it a point to stand with one foot in Alberta and the other in British Columbia.

Strictly speaking, the sign is in error. The eastbound waters do not flow into the Atlantic Ocean. With one exception, Alberta’s waters eventually end up in the Arctic Ocean, either directly or via Hudson Bay. Along the Alberta-Montana border is the Milk River drainage system, which flows south into the Gulf of Mexico via the Missouri-Mississippi system.



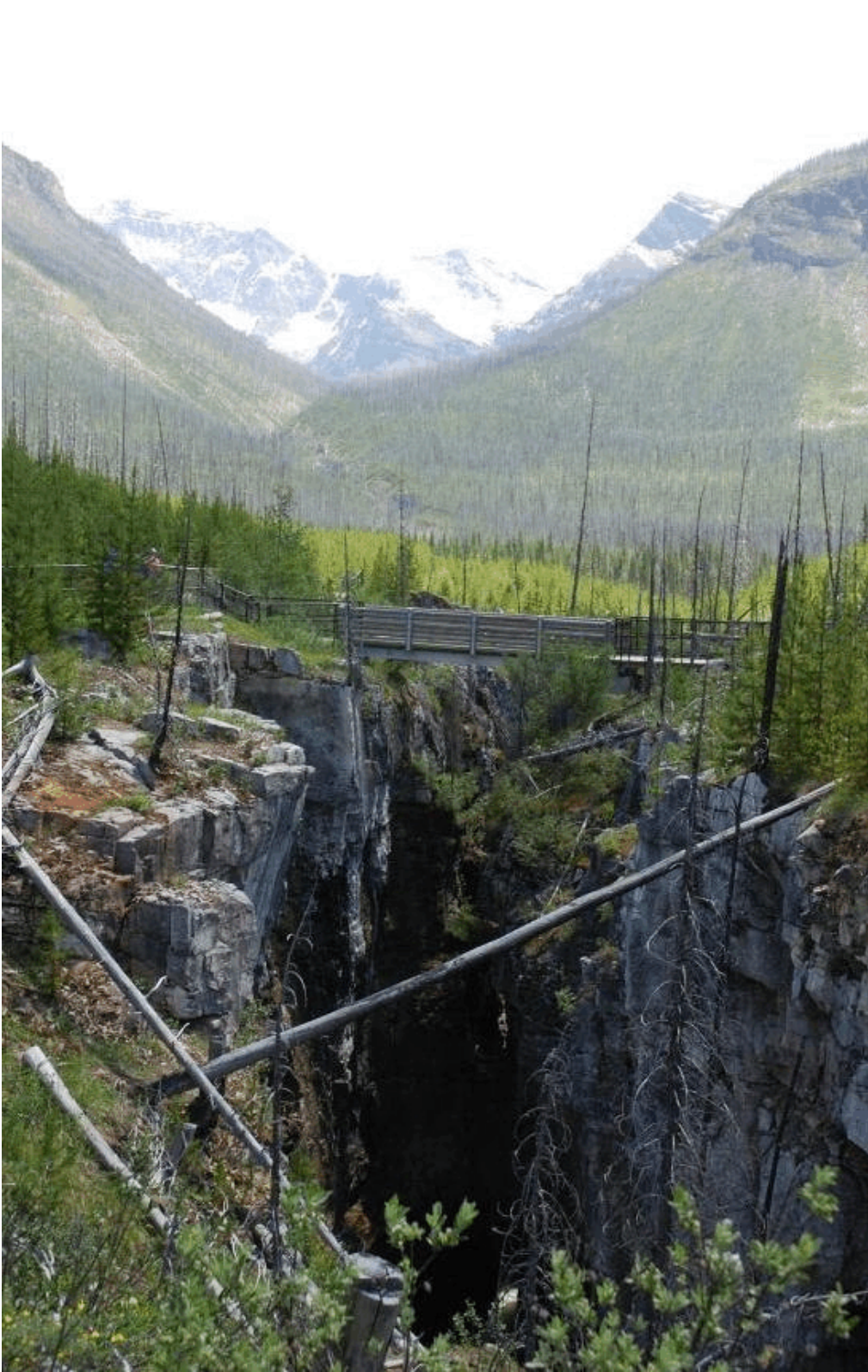
Below: Most of Kootenay National Park was burned over by a massive forest fire in 2003. In the 14 years since, a heavy stand of pine (no spruces) has grown up to head height. The natural succession will repeat itself.



My first stop after going over the continental divide was Marble Canyon, a crevasse eroded by Tokumm Creek down as deep as 20 metres. At the trailhead is a short hike up a slope but most of the crevasse is along the flat bottomlands of the creek. Numerous foot bridges criss-cross the crevasse (pardon the alliteration). Below is the outlet of Tokumm Creek just before it empties into the Vermilion River. On the next few pages are views of the crevasse.









Waterfall at the head of the crevasse. For scale, notice the tourists at upper right of the photo.



STATELY PILES: PART 1

by Dale Speirs

I’ve never envied those who live in giant manor houses. As anyone knows who owns a house of any size, it is a money pit. The big houses just magnify the problems. Sewer drains backing up, a ferocious heating bill (or air-conditioning bill, depending on the climate), constant maintenance and repairs, and the servant problem since all those rooms need vacuuming and a dozen bathrooms need the toilets scrubbed. Then the roof leaks.

Whenever I watch a movie or television episode set in a manor house, particularly a Victorian-era one filled with bric-a-brac, I wonder to myself how many staff are needed to dust and vacuum the rooms.

Manor Houses Murders.

There is an entire sub-genre of mystery fiction devoted to crime done in stately piles. The family that resides within may be rich but they’re not necessarily safer than if they lived in the mean streets. This type of murder mystery has faded with time as manor houses become rarer, and because so many of them were written or filmed that they became a tired cliché.

THE MOONSTONE (1934) is a British movie based on a novel by Wilkie Collins. The titular gemstone was stolen from an Indian temple and brought to a manor house in the heart of the Yorkshire moors. It is stolen a second time, murder is attempted, and Scotland Yard investigates.

The usual suspects are trotted out. A German moneylender demands repayment on his loans or else he’ll foreclose on the manor. The son of the house is a womanizing cad for whom the word ‘dastardly’ was invented. The grim elderly housekeeper hasn’t approved of anything since the Reformation. The brainless young heroine who flutters through life. A maid desperately hiding her criminal past. The handsome young man who we know will save the day. His sinister Indian retainer who is supposedly a Hindu but wears a Sikh turban.

The plot works out the way these stories usually do. Watchable. There are only brief flashes of mild humour, not the fun of the American-style mysteries. My copy is in the Mill Creek DVD pack of 50 Mystery Classics.

From that same DVD pack is BULLDOG DRUMMOND’S SECRET POLICE (1939), part of a series of B-movies based on novels by H.C. “Sapper” McNeile. (There was also a Bulldog Drummond radio series.) In the movies, Captain Hugh “Bulldog” Drummond was always just about to be married to his long-suffering fiancée Phyllis Claverling. There would be a murder, or she would be kidnapped, or for a change of pace a close friend would be kidnapped, and the wedding would be postponed to the next movie.

This particular movie takes place at the manorial estate of Rockingham, where the wedding is to take place. Another guest is Professor Downie, who announces there is a fortune in treasure hidden in the place, and only he has the cipher that will disclose its location. Naturally the wrong person hears him say this. Can you guess who the first murder victim will be?

The wedding is once again postponed while the treasure hunt takes precedence, not to mention finding the murderer. Rockingham is the kind of place where the butler tells Drummond: “*Your rooms are in the East Wing, sir*”, and sends a guide along with them so they don’t get lost. The big house is honeycombed with secret passageways. It’s the kind of stately pile where, when frantically trying to get into a locked room where murder has been done, Drummond takes down a genuine medieval battle axe decorating the hallway and chops his way in through a solid hardwood door.

The main excitement begins about 03h00 when all hell breaks loose as everyone is roused out of bed and chased around in the dark manor. The murderer who stole the cipher can’t get out of the house because the local constabulary have cordoned off the place. Drummond leads the inhabitants in a floor-by-floor search. The murderer desperately searches for the treasure while simultaneously trying to evade the posse. The chase goes behind the walls into the secret passageways and rooms that haven’t been used in decades.

After much to-ing and fro-ing in the catacombs, the treasure is found and then lost down the storm sewer drains. The bad guy follows, and Drummond and his posse barely survive. From there to the wedding, which is neatly delayed again in the process of tying up a loose thread that disrupts the ceremony.

PERIL IN PAPERBACK (2012) by Kate Carlisle is a cozy mystery novel in the Bibliophile Mystery series. The Miss Marple in this series is a rare books and antiques expert named Brooklyn Wainwright. (One of the rules of cozy mysteries is that female detectives have unfeminine first names.)

Wainwright is staying for a week at the mansion of Grace Crawford to assist in cataloguing her vast library. The big house has rooms filled with books, a salon decorated in 1700s French brothel style, and corridors that seemingly vanish. Crawford is a billionaire corporation executive who has written a roman a clef about her years in industry and her family and friends. She distributes copies to her guests to read, and evidently at least one takes mortal offence.

The action begins with a guest drinking a poisoned glass of tea meant for Crawford. She also announces, foolishly in advance, that she is going to change her will and cut out some of her relatives. The author has the decency to write: *I didn't want to mention that if Grace was serious about taunting her relatives with the possibility that she might change her will, she was taking this homage to the House Party Mystery game too far.*

A blizzard immediately sets in to isolate the manor, thereby checking off another cliché on the list. More murder attempts are made but fail, others die in supposed accidents, and the list of suspects is almost the same as the list of survivors.

The roman a clef and will changing prove to be red herrings as the culprit had been moved by jealousy. Once all the clichés are ticked off, the murderer is exposed. In one final burst of clichés, she blabs all in the usual *Yes, I did it! And I'd gladly do it again!*

Manor House Mirth.

MURDER BY DEATH is a 1976 comedy movie, written by Neil Simon, using a dozen big-name stars to play the parts of famous fictional detectives invited to spend a weekend in an isolated manor house.

Lionel Twain has invited his guests and told them that whoever solved a murder to take place at midnight in the big house would receive \$1 million, worth more then than today. If they couldn't do it, then they would be publicly humiliated as failures at their craft. The detectives are parodies easily recognized from their prototypes: Inspector Sydney Wang and his #1 son, Dick and Dora Charleston, Milo Perrier, Sam Diamond, and Jessica Marbles.

The dead won't stay dead and keep reappearing to confuse the detectives. They themselves are threatened with death by various means, such as a venomous snake in their bedroom, a descending ceiling that will crush them, poison gas,

or a bomb. The house has fantastic secret rooms that are duplicates of each other, so getting lost in the manor means really getting lost. Each detective also has his or her guilty secrets exposed.

One has to be a mystery fan to catch all the references, but most of the in-jokes are easy. The ending has Twain giving not a J'accuse! meeting but a diatribe against mystery authors who don't play fair with readers. He cites the last-minute introduction of new characters into a mystery, withholding clues from the reader, and introducing sudden twists at the end that could not have reasonably been guessed. So say us all.

CLUE was a 1985 comedy movie based on the board game by Parker Brothers. It's not as bad as one might expect from such origins, although screenplay writer Jonathan Lynn was prone to coarse humour.

The gimmick of the theatrical release was that the movie had three different endings. Theatres showed one ending, and if you were a completist, you had to buy three tickets. I don't imagine the studio picked up much in the way of extra revenues but it was a cute gimmick. The DVD is set up so that the viewer can pick one ending at random or play a revised ending that uses all three in sequence, the last one being declared the true solution.

The movie begins with the characters being invited as guests to a lonely manor house. The host is Mr Body, who is blackmailing all the guests. Following the board game, they are Mrs Peacock, Mrs White, Professor Plum, Mr Green, Colonel Mustard, and Miss Scarlet. The major domo is Wadsworth, the butler or perhaps not, for facts and identities are not constant in the movie.

The beginning of the movie more or less trundles along, starting with the guests arriving one by one. Then, again one by one, their faults and reasons for being blackmailed are expounded at length. After that, the weapons come out: the noose, the knife, the gun, the lead pipe, the candlestick, and the pipe wrench.

From there, the body count steadily increases, but the basic players remain alive to squabble over who the killer is. After the sixth murder, Wadsworth remarks "*This is getting serious.*" The final quarter of the movie is overly frenetic, with the characters spending most of their time running back and forth as a group, from one room to another and back again. All that shouting and dashing about makes for a tiresome ending.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

FROM: Lloyd Penney
Etobicoke, Ontario

2017-07-23

OPUNTIA #378: A marvelous view of the Rockies on the front cover. You’ve got a photographer’s delight just outside your front door, and even more when you travel. I’ve been close to there only when travelling cross-country by train.

I think the idea of the Little Free Library is a great one, and I do see them from time to time. Still, I hear about insane things happening in the country to the south. One I heard recently was a homeowners being dragged out of their house, arrested, and prosecuted because they had a little library at the end of their driveway. Perhaps there was a zoning problem, or the boxes had to be registered.

[From what I’ve read, some American suburbs have very strict zoning laws which were the cause of the conflict. The City of Calgary has no problem with them on private property. If they are on a City boulevard, By-Laws will not act unless an unfriendly neighbour makes a big fuss.]

I will not agree with the two Toronto librarians who say the boxes are elitist. I could use one of the boxes, because Yvonne and I are reluctantly weeding our book collection, and getting rid of about 25% of the number.

Mad scientists? Even they have daughters, too. Who are these crazy women who marry the mad scientists? I admit to enjoying the original THE OUTER LIMITS, but I liked the remake much more. We do have a Selectric or two in our locker, as a just-in-case. The original THE OUTER LIMITS was always fun as the stories were often good, even if the presentations were not. As do many, I prefer THE TWILIGHT ZONE, scripts a little better, but the production values often superior.

My previous letter of comment: I have heard of costumed groups in downtown Toronto who needed protection from certain members of the populace.

Here’s our report on the World Wide Party! We found ourselves at a Tim Horton’s at 9pm on June 21, so we did what we would usually do, a toast to all fans in every direction.

OPUNTIA #379: More great photos, this time of glaciers. With the new government to the south, I suspect the glaciers which now need protection will melt away even faster than originally predicted.

[They’ve been steadily melting away since the end of the last Ice Age, so I find it implausible to pin the blame on human activity.]

Our 150th birthday celebrations in Toronto seemed a little muted, with so many groups announcing they would not take part in such a symbol of Canadian domination and cultural appropriation. Nonetheless, we had ourselves a good time with local celebrations in Etobicoke. So much of the celebrations seemed more concerned with buying the right merchandise.

[The whiners didn’t get much support in Calgary. I think part of the reason is that the city has good relations with the Treaty 7 tribes surrounding it.]

The numbers of invisible men in early SF because tedious after a while, even with high believability on the part of me, the reader. I admit my interest in SF continues to wane. I find less room for creativity in fandom today. I am finding that creativity, and the ability to participate, in other areas like steampunk.

Re: Milt Stevens’ letter of comment: Bill Rotsler did indeed advocate that the best way to costume is to consider your body type. In today’s fandom, such an attitude is considered sexist, ageist, fat-ist and more. There are six-foot-tall elves, and 400-pound Sailor Scouts, and much more. The most important things is participation. I understand Rotsler’s Rules, but today, some of those Rules are very much out of date.

OPUNTIA #380: I have seen so many of the huge cranes as you depict on the front cover, and inside too, fold up like old Meccano sets when they are tasked to lift something so heavy, or even the slightest bit off balance.

A punk piper? Dime a dozen, I am afraid. I remember seeing a video of one in Seattle, wearing a Darth Vader helmet, riding a unicycle, and having flames coming out of his pipes.

OPUNTIA #381: The idea of Canada 150 was a good one, but doesn't anyone know what a sesquicentennial is?, or are the citizens considered that dense?

[I suspect the main problem is trying to pronounce that word without tangling your tongue or spitting on someone. Besides, "Canada 150" takes up less space on posters and souvenirs.]

You remind me that after his many struggles with life, Rodney Leighton has succumbed to death, through open heart surgery, and a heart that simply couldn't be suitably repaired. I tried my best to respond to his assorted zines, but I suspect he thought little of me because I live in Toronto, the city the Rest of Canada loves to hate, and he was no different. I hope he shall be remembered for his zine activities.

[He spent too many years out in the bush as a lumberjack. As I know from personal experience from pruning 31,000 trees during my career with Calgary Parks Dept, handling a chainsaw when you are in your 50s or 60s is not the same as when a young man. I think Rodney and I are the only zinesters who chainsawed trees as part of a living, save Nils Helmer Frome, Canada's first SF fan back in the 1930s.]

I would love a sheet of 5 cent purples from the Republic of Whimsy [produced by Theo Nelson of Calgary]. Such sets of stamps could brighten up just about any collection or letter.

OPUNTIA #382: I know the big Toronto sign in Nathan Phillips Square is a copy from elsewhere, but it seems so many Canadian municipalities are also going with the big neon letters. The city of Hamilton down the highway also has a set, and I am sure there's more here and there.

[My understanding is that the federal government provided the signs to select cities as part of the Canada 150 celebrations.]

You're right on the humidity [in metro Toronto]. We were out today, and it is very humid right now. I have been all the way out west to the Sooke Potholes on Vancouver Island, but within Canada, I have never been east of Montreal.

The Canada 150 celebrations: Ian Tyson is singing again; good to hear. I remember he'd lost his singing voice for some time. Looks like it was a fight to get it back.

[His voice was very gravelly and he had to sit in a chair to sing, but considering he is 83 years old, everyone allowed for that.]

OPUNTIA #383: Re: Stampede breakfast at CBC Radio Canada. Next time I am in Calgary, I'd like to visit the CBC building. I am sometimes in the big CBC building on Front Street West in Toronto, but of course, there's so much that cannot be seen because of guards here and there.

[That was the last Stampede breakfast at that location. The building is obsolete and scheduled for redevelopment, so CBC Radio Canada are moving to a new location which I have never seen, somewhere in northwest Calgary. The new building is purpose-built and long overdue. The old place is currently proposed for apartment towers since it is within walking distance of the downtown core.]

Great parade pictures. Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi is also someone I'd very much like to meet.

[Think of Ernest Borgnine as a Muslim. That describes Nenshi perfectly.]

Interesting comments on the life of Professor Moriarty. Perhaps crime pays better now than it did back in the Victorian era.

SEEN IN THE LITERATURE

Sloan, D., et al (2017-07-13) **The Resilience Of Life To Astrophysical Events.** arXiv:1707.04253v1 [astro-ph.EP], www.arxiv.org

Authors' abstract: *Here we explore the statistics of events that completely sterilise an Earth-like planet with planet radii in the range 0.5'1.5RC and temperatures of about 300 K, eradicating all forms of life. We consider the relative likelihood of complete global sterilisation events from three astrophysical sources: supernovae, gamma-ray bursts, large asteroid impacts, and passing-by stars. To assess such probabilities we consider what cataclysmic event could lead to the annihilation of not just human life, but also extremophiles, through the boiling of all water in Earth's oceans. Surprisingly*

we find that although human life is somewhat fragile to nearby events, the resilience of Ecdysozoa such as Milnesium tardigradum renders global sterilisation an unlikely event.

The effects of gamma-ray bursts (GRBs) on humans and land-based life could be disastrous as the eradication of the ozone layer would leave us exposed to deadly levels of radiation. However, in such circumstances life could continue below the ground. Significantly, several marine species would not be adversely affected, as the large body of water would provide shielding.

Even the complete loss of the atmosphere would not have an effect on species living at the ocean's floor. The impact of a large asteroid could lead to an "impact winter", in which the surface of the planet receives less sunlight and temperatures drop. This would prove catastrophic for life dependent on sunlight, but around volcanic vents in the deep ocean life would be unaffected.

Closer to the galactic centre, the stellar density is higher, and thus the likelihood of encountering a nearby supernova increases. However, this density is only sufficient to give a total rate of around 0.01 expected events per billion years, and thus total sterilisation through supernovae is still an improbable event.

Lingam, M., and A. Loeb (2017-07-14) Implications Of Tides For Life On Exoplanets. arXiv:1707.04594v1 [astro-ph.EP], www.arxiv.org

Authors' abstract: As evident from the nearby examples of Proxima Centauri and TRAPPIST-1, Earth-sized planets in the habitable zone of low-mass stars are common. Here, we focus on such planetary systems and argue that their (oceanic) tides could be more prominent due to stronger tidal forces.

We identify the conditions under which tides may exert a significant positive influence on biotic processes: abiogenesis, biological rhythms, and stimulating photosynthesis. As exoplanets closer to their host star (compared to the Earth-Sun system) can experience tides with a larger amplitude, we explored the role of tides in influencing many aspects of life-as-we-know-it. We have delineated some of the most plausible and salient phenomena below:

Tides can give rise to cycles of flooding and evaporation that generate temperature and concentration gradients necessary for the polymerization and

replication of self-replicating molecules, thereby proving to be important in abiogenesis.

Tides play an important role in:

- (i) fluid circulation and mixing,*
- (ii) applying selection pressure to prebiotic molecules through cycling,*
- (iii) setting up chemical gradients, and*
- (iv) exposing mineral-solvent interfaces. Each of these factors was, in turn, potentially important for life to originate.*

On planets where the light-dark cycle is absent, the tidal cycle may function as an effective biological clock; the latter has been shown to confer enhanced evolutionary fitness and metabolic homeostasis on Earth. Circatidal rhythms have been observed in several animals on Earth (e.g. fishes and crabs) and are likely to be more important on planets with stronger tides.

Tidal forces can generate large-amplitude Rossby waves. These planetary waves can induce nutrient upwelling and convergence, and thereby stimulate algal photosynthesis.

We argued that tides, due to a number of reasons, can lead to enhanced hydrodynamic transport, for e.g. by means of generating planetary waves. This factor has been argued to be one of the putative causes behind harmful algal blooms (HABs) that represent large-scale agglomerations of algae; on Earth, they have encompassed areas exceeding 100 square km.

HABs are characterized by a distinctive colour (e.g. red, green, brown) and spectral signatures, and thus may constitute genuine temporal biosignatures in surface reflectance light curves. Although their scope of detection lies beyond that of JWST, future telescopes such as WFIRST, HabEx and LUVOIR may be capable of detecting these phenomena.

Speirs: If exoplanets have oceans, they do not need a Moon-type satellite to generate tides if they are closer in to their star. Further, the sloshing of the water will from time to time generate blooms of photosynthetic microbes similar to algal blooms (red tides) on Earth. These blooms alter the spectrum of the planet as the algae float around it on the tides. Present-day telescopes cannot detect such spectra, but the technology is always improving and the time will come when we can read the reflectance spectra of planets in great detail.

AROUND COWTOWN

My neighbour's cat likes to keep an eye on things.

