

Best of Last Week—SpacePerspective cabin design, making web surfing faster, new way to treat metabolic disorders

April 18 2022, by Bob Yirka



This image rendering handout courtesy of Space Perspective released April 7, 2022, shows the exterior of the spaceship Neptune capsule floating above Florida

It was a good week for space science as a team with members from the U.S. and Taipa, Macau, discovered [a 4-billion-year-old relic from the early solar system heading our way](#), although the comet, with a diameter of 130 meters, will not get any closer than 1.5 billion kilometers from

the sun. Also, a new entrant into the space tourism business, SpacePerspective [revealed illustrations of its swish cabins](#), which will be attached to a massive balloon, hoisting passengers to an altitude of 30 kilometers—high enough to see the blackness of space. And NASA and ESA announced that [the James Webb telescope's coldest instrument reached its operating temperature](#). The instrument was chilled to -266 degrees Celsius to prevent the telescope's electronics from interfering with infrared light readings.

In technology news, a combined team from National Renewable Energy Laboratory and MIT announced the development of [a new heat engine with no moving parts that is as efficient as a steam turbine](#). Their thermophotovoltaic cell works similarly to photovoltaic cells on solar panels. Also, researchers at the University of Wisconsin–Madison discovered that [videoconferencing apps may be listening even when the microphone is turned off](#). Although they do mute conversations, the team found, they do not stop collecting data. And a team with members from several institutions in Germany announced that they had developed [next-generation solar cells that reached 24% efficiency](#). Also, a team at Duke University found [a way to make web surfing feel instantaneous, even though it is not](#), by tweaking the way networks are put together.

In other news, a team at the University of California, Irvine, found [a possible way to rejuvenate the immune systems of elderly people, reducing their risk of infectious disease](#). It was accomplished by reversing the rise in branched glycans that comes with aging. And a team with members from several institutions in the U.S. found that [changes in vegetation shaped global temperatures over the last 10,000 years](#).

And finally, a team at Yale University uncovered [a regulator of body weight that could lead to new treatments for metabolic disorders](#). The protein called augmentor-alpha was found to regulate body weight in mice.

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