

Ode to E Pluribus Unum for Sunday January 7 2024

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The SAR and the Milky Way



Image Credit & Copyright: Julien Looten

This broad, luminous red arc was a surprising visitor to partly cloudy evening skies over northern France.

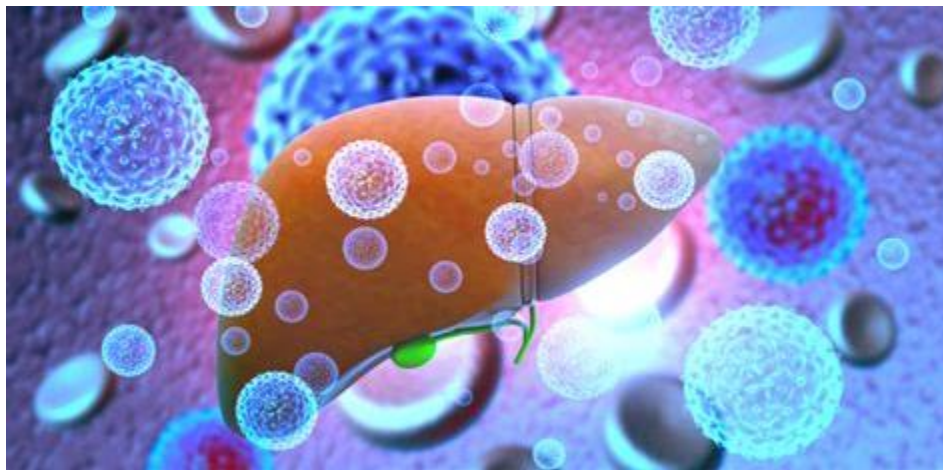
Captured extending toward the zenith in a west-to-east mosaic of images from November 5, the faint atmospheric ribbon of light is an example of a Stable Auroral Red

(SAR) arc. The rare night sky phenomenon was also spotted at unusually low latitudes around world, along with more dynamic auroral displays during an intense geomagnetic storm.

SAR arcs and their relation to auroral emission have been explored by citizen science and satellite investigations. From altitudes substantially above the normal auroral glow, the deep red SAR emission is thought to be caused by strong heating due to currents flowing in planet Earth's inner magnetosphere. Beyond this SAR, the Milky Way arcs above the cloud banks along the horizon, a regular visitor to night skies over northern France.

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Stem Cell Treatment Shows Promise in Reversing Liver Disease



labiotech.eu

Mortality due to end-stage liver disease ranks as the 12th leading cause of death in the United States. Liver transplantation remains the primary treatment for this condition, but a severe shortage of organ donors highlights the urgent need for alternative therapeutic approaches. The quest for innovative treatments has led researchers at Boston Medical Center and Boston University's Center for Regenerative Medicine to explore the potential of a groundbreaking stem cell treatment.

<https://bit.ly/3Nsswsw>

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The Disruption of AI in CTE Is Real

An ACTE expert panel urges CTE educators to jump on the AI train as it's already left the station.



(Image credit: Pixabay)

During ACTE's recent CareerTech VISION event for career and technical education (CTE) professionals, panelists presented overwhelming evidence that educators have to embrace AI in education—particularly in career and technical education. The tone of the panel was urgent and unequivocal: If CTE educators have not yet tested or used generative AI, they are well behind.

Any CTE program needs to focus on preparing students for the workforce in which AI will be essential. This is the biggest technological shift since the creation of the internet, and educators must be significantly involved. It is the responsibility of CTE educators to ensure that students have the tools and ethics to use AI responsibly, which can be done

by guiding their exploration of AI tools and platforms, showing them the discrepancies, and helping them to be ready to manage AI competencies.

According to the panel, banning the use of AI in schools is short-sighted. AI is already embedded in the workplace, and by not teaching students how to use it, CTE educators are taking away an opportunity to be ready for work and careers.

10 Best Practices for AI and CTE

1. Embrace AI and use it first for simple tasks to create efficiencies. Then use it to individualize instruction and for formative assessment tools aligned to standards.
2. Be creative and conscious of internal bias and ethics. Focus on DEI and access.
3. Encourage students to use apps and tools to start moving toward an integrated curriculum using AI.
4. Prepare students for jobs of the future by partnering with industry to solve real problems.
5. Invest in prompt engineering—automate when you can and save human intelligence for complex challenges.
6. Remember that AI cannot replicate human emotion. Use it to help students learn foundational AI skills. On assessments, ask reflective questions so students can analyze the situation. If the assignment can simply be completed by AI, it's the wrong assignment. Teachers need to use their own creativity and critical thinking to assess the use of AI.
7. Given how quickly ChatGPT and Jasper are improving their tools, help students develop their own unique voice with these tools. Have students document how they use AI, so they understand accountability while demonstrating their authentic writing.
8. Be mindful of ethics and shared data.
9. Think of ChatGPT as an assistant for both teachers and students. It can do projects outside teachers' core competencies to enrich students' learning experiences.
10. Look five years ahead to try and determine what are the professional skills AI will NOT replace? Emphasize the development of those skills.

If used properly, AI won't replace anyone. It is a tool that will provide opportunities to devote human creativity to more complex tasks.

The ACTE panelists included: Katelyn Boudreau, Director of Technology at Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School, Massachusetts; Rachael Mann, CEO, EdFuture.org; Cory Ortiz, Dean of School of Career Education, University of Alaska Southeast; Gabriella Rosu, Chandler-Gilbert Community College in Arizona; and Angel Pineiro, Jr., VP of Strategic Academic Relationships, CompTIA.

By Annie Galvin Teich for Tech & Learning

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A flight attendant was stationed at the departure gate to check tickets.

As a man approached, she extended her hand for the ticket. He opened his trench coat and flashed her.

Without missing a beat, she said, "Sir, I need to see your ticket, not your stub."

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Humans and Fire Changed LA's Ecosystem Forever



*As human-ignited fires burned and transformed the landscape of La Brea around 13,000 years ago, ancient bison (*Bison antiquus*) fled the flames and become entrapped in asphalt seeps (illustrated). The bison, along with six other species of megafauna, soon disappeared from the Southern California region, a new study finds.*

Cullen Townsend, courtesy of NHMLAC

Mammals like ancient bison and dire wolves couldn't survive the fiery shift that took place 13,000 years ago.

<https://bit.ly/3Egnafb>

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A woman was picking through the frozen turkeys at the grocery store but she couldn't find one big enough for her family.

She asked a stock boy, "Do these turkeys get any bigger?"

The stock boy replied, "No ma'am, they're dead."

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Perseverance rover celebrates 1,000 Mars days on the Red Planet

The car-sized robot landed on Feb. 18, 2021



NASA

Perseverance and its tiny robotic partner, the Ingenuity helicopter, landed inside Mars' Jezero Crater on Feb. 18, 2021. Ever since, the big rover has been hunting for signs of ancient Mars life on the floor of the 28-mile-wide (45 kilometers) Jezero, which is a great place to do such work.

<https://bit.ly/48fh9w0>

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As the kid who was stopped for speeding rolled down his window, the policeman got out of his vehicle and approached the kid saying, "I've been waiting for you all day." The kid replied, "Yeah, well I got here as fast as I could."

When the cop finally stopped laughing, he sent the kid on his way without a ticket.

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Videos of Workers Doing Their Job Perfectly



1funny.com

<https://youtu.be/SK6AwDQdxek>

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A truck driver was driving along the freeway and noticed a sign that read:

Low Bridge Ahead.

Before he knows it, the bridge is right in front of him, and his truck gets wedged under it.

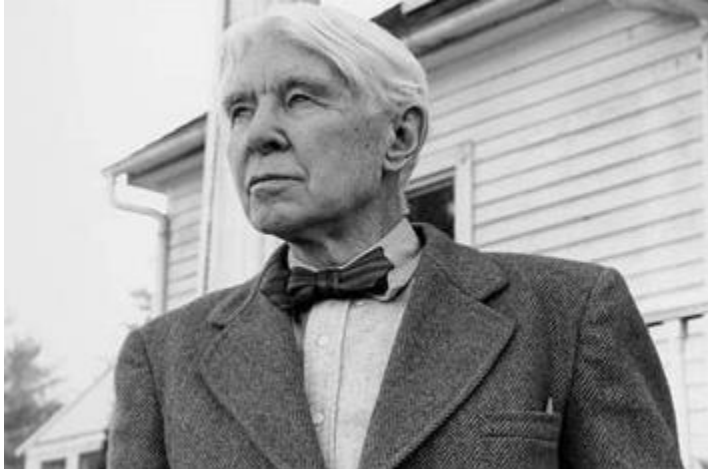
Cars are backed up for miles. Finally, a police vehicle arrives.

The cop gets out of his car, walks to the truck driver, puts his hands on his hips and says, "Got stuck, huh?"

The truck driver says, "No, I was delivering this bridge and ran out of gas."

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Carl Sandburg (1878-1967)



thefamouspeople.com

The American poet, historian, novelist, and folklorist worked in various occupations—as a barbershop porter, a milk truck driver, a brickyard hand, and a harvester in the Kansas wheat fields. When the Spanish-American War broke out in 1898, he enlisted in the 6th Illinois Infantry.

In 1914 a group of his Chicago Poems appeared in Poetry magazine (issued in book form in 1916). In his most famous poem, “Chicago,” he depicted the city as the laughing, lusty, heedless “Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.” Sandburg’s poetry made an instant and favourable impression. In Whitmanesque free verse, he eulogized workers: “Pittsburgh, Youngstown, Gary, they make their steel with men” (Smoke and Steel, 1920).

Steichen the Photographer, the life of his famous brother-in-law, Edward Steichen, appeared in 1929. In 1948 Sandburg published a long novel, Remembrance Rock, which recapitulates the American experience from Plymouth Rock to World War II. Complete Poems appeared in 1950. He wrote four books for children—Rootabaga Stories (1922); Rootabaga Pigeons (1923); Rootabaga Country (1929); and Potato Face (1930).

My head knocks against the stars.

My head knocks against the stars.

My feet are on the hilltops.

My finger-tips are in the valleys and shores of universal life.

Down in the sounding foam of primal things I reach my hands and play with pebbles of destiny.

I have been to hell and back many times.

I know all about heaven, for I have talked with God.

I dabble in the blood and guts of the terrible.
I know the passionate seizure of beauty
And the marvelous rebellion of man at all signs reading "Keep Off."

My name is Truth and I am the most elusive captive in the universe.

Dream Girl

You will come one day in a waver of love,
Tender as dew, impetuous as rain,
The tan of the sun will be on your skin,
The purr of the breeze in your murmuring speech,
You will pose with a hill-flower grace.

You will come, with your slim, expressive arms,
A poise of the head no sculptor has caught
And nuances spoken with shoulder and neck,
Your face in pass-and-repass of moods
As many as skies in delicate change
Of cloud and blue and flimmering sun.

Yet,
You may not come, O girl of a dream,
We may but pass as the world goes by
And take from a look of eyes into eyes,
A film of hope and a memoried day.

Fog

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

Theme in Yellow

I spot the hills
With yellow balls in autumn.
I light the prairie cornfields
Orange and tawny gold clusters
And I am called pumpkins.
On the last of October
When dusk is fallen
Children join hands
And circle round me
Singing ghost songs
And love to the harvest moon;
I am a jack-o'-lantern
With terrible teeth
And the children know
I am fooling.

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What Is ketamine and What Are Its Effects?



drugscience.org/uk

Ketamine hydrochloride, AKA ketamine, is a controlled substance [approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#) to induce and maintain general anesthesia via intravenous or intramuscular injection. It's not approved by the FDA for psychiatric treatment.

"FDA has not established safe or effective dosing of ketamine for any psychiatric indication because ketamine has not been approved for these uses," reads [an October post](#) on the agency's website. "These factors may place the patient at risk for serious adverse events, misuse, and abuse."

AD

It "distorts the perception of sight and sound and makes the user feel disconnected," which is why it's referred to as a dissociative anesthetic hallucinogen, according to [the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration](#). The DEA's website says that "an overdose can cause unconsciousness and dangerously slowed breathing."

Ketamine [first caught interest as a counterculture drug in the 1970s](#) and re-emerged as a club drug "Special K" in the 2000s.

[Dr. Nolan Williams](#), an associate professor in Stanford University's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, previously told USA TODAY that it's unclear exactly how ketamine affects mood because "there are many mechanisms happening at once."

But rather than affecting dopamine or serotonin, [neuroscience studies show](#) that ketamine instead targets a neurotransmitter called glutamate, which promotes the brain's ability to create lasting, new lifestyle patterns.

Some experts have also speculated that the dissociative experience of a ketamine "trip" may be responsible for reducing depressive symptoms. Though there's no evidence that the trip directly affects mood, [Dr. Alexander Papp](#), a board-certified psychiatrist and assistant clinical professor at UC San Diego, says some of his patients have credited ketamine's psychedelic properties to their improved outlook on life.

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It was mealtime during an airline flight.
The flight attendant asked passenger John, "Would you like dinner?"
"What are my choices?" John asked.
"Yes or no." she replied.

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Digits Of 2023: Weird Numbers from Around the Web

~11k: How many washboards the Columbus Washboard Co. still sells annually, down from 1m+ in the 1940s. Sales jumped 57% in 2020 during the pandemic, but it's not all about doing laundry — percussionists make up ~40% of sales.

\$1.3B+: How much Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Phantom of the Opera" grossed in NYC alone during its legendary 35-year run on Broadway. The show closed due to unsustainable operating costs of \$950k/week.

\$51: Average amount workers who returned to the office this year spent per day on things like coffee, meals, parking, and commuting. This figure increased to \$71 for those who needed pet care, and dropped to \$15 for those who worked from home.

383.2B+: Possible latte variations Starbucks can make. Drink customizations add \$1B+ in revenue annually — but workers loathe them and customers hate the wait times. Consequently, Starbucks has invested billions toward finding ways to churn them out faster, including switching to smaller, easier-to-scoop ice cubes.

1.3m+: Players who completed Larian Studios' "Baldur's Gate III," winner of The Game Awards's 2023 game of the year. Most importantly, players pet Scratch, the RPG's lovable dog and certified good boy, 48.5m times.

237: For those who enjoy complaining about "kids these days" and their smartphones, that's the median number of notifications US teens receive on an average day. They only engage with a median of 46 per day, thanks to blocking, filtering, or prioritizing apps — but the max number was a whopping 4.5k+ notifications delivered with 1.2k+ seen.

\$1.1B: Taylor Swift's new net worth. Like it or not, 2023 was the pop star's year. Her Eras Tour became the first to gross \$1B+ and added \$4.3B to the US's GDP, while her concert film set AMC's new record for single-day ticket sales at \$26m.

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Discovery Of 'Calendar' Rock Carvings from Ancestral Pueblo



Among the artworks, archaeologists discovered a series of spirals that may have been used as a calendar.

(Image credit: Jagiellonian University)

Spiral petroglyphs carved into a canyon wall on the Colorado-Utah border may have been used as a calendar by the Ancestral Pueblo

<https://bit.ly/3trdU60>

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Shallow feast



Clement Brun

Marine biologist and photographer Clément Brun witnessed orcas and humpback whales feeding on giant herring bait balls in Norway. In this online feature, he shares more about this special experience.

Right in front of me, a pod of orcas worked together to push a herring bait ball towards the coastline. At the shore, there was no easy escape for the fish. They became an easy target in the shallows. The fish were trapped in water that was less than 10 metres deep, surrounded by orcas who were soon joined by several humpback whales.

<https://bit.ly/41yw4zt>

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FightingThe Climate Crisis Through Connected Beehives

Beewise uses AI and remote management to care for and stabilize colonies.



Mateusz Atroszko/Getty Images

Tech Brew recently caught up with Beewise co-founder Eliyah Radzyner—who is a beekeeper himself—about how advances in hive technology can help the global food supply stay ahead of the climate crisis.

Radzyner emphasized that there’s an unbreakable link between healthy honeybee populations and thriving agricultural operations. On the flip side, there’s also a direct correlation between harsh environmental conditions and colony collapse. According to Beewise, 40% of bee colonies disband every year, while, per the USDA, 80% of flowering plants depend on bee pollination.

“Bees are dying from extreme heat, extreme cold. They’re dying from pests that were introduced from other places in the world, and dying from viruses and macro pesticides,” Radzyner said. “Bees are facing all these threats, which are really devastating the bee population.”

<https://bit.ly/3NH2vG1>

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Half a Large Intestine

A Semicolon

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The Surprising History of the Fair Isle Sweater



edition.cnn.com

https://www.cnn.com/style/the-surprising-history-of-the-fair-isle-sweater/index.html?utm_source=join1440&utm_medium=email

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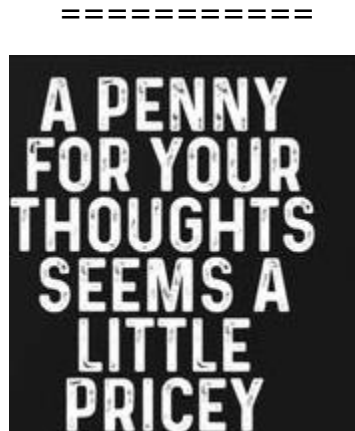
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Construction Workers on Another Level

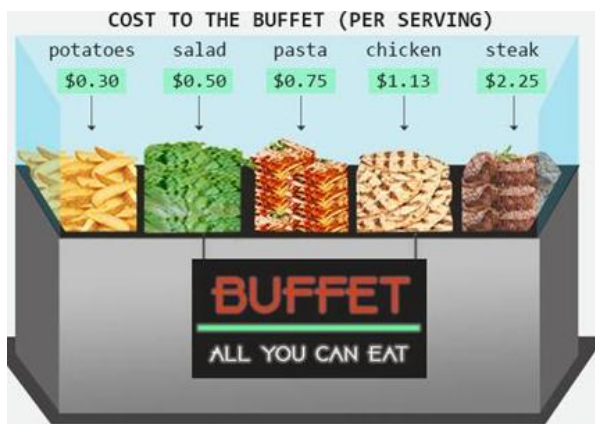


youtube

https://youtu.be/FxNIQ_zvsvU?t=30



The Economics of All-You-Can-Eat Buffets

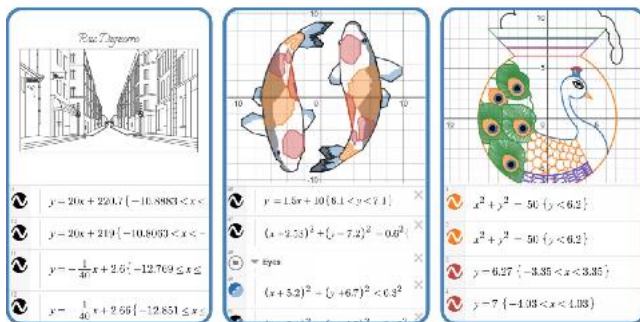


: Restaurant wholesalers, buffet owners; Graphic: Zachary Crockett **•HUI**
the hustle

<https://youtu.be/lGmJ1SP9YOk>

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What is Desmos and How Can It Be Used for Teaching?



Desmos is a math teaching tool that uses graphing to create advanced visuals

Desmos helps take students from a basic understanding of graphs into far more complex possibilities. In fact, there is an annual Desmos competition that has entrants create complex and often beautiful artwork outputs using math to build the images in graph form.

<https://bit.ly/4aaG7hW>

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Tesla Cybertruck Is Here: 7 Key New Things We Learned

Tesla has delivered its first Cybertrucks, and now we finally know the SUV's price and trim details.



Tesla

The Tesla Cybertruck starts at \$60,990, and that's for the rear-wheel motor version, which won't even be available until 2025. If you want something that might be available in 2024, you'll have to go for one of the other trims: the all-wheel-drive variant, starting at \$79,990, or the Cyberbeast, tri-motor version, which starts at an eye-watering \$99,990.

<https://bit.ly/473Pspf>

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The 18 Best EVs Coming in 2024

Tesla and BYD battled it out to be the major electric car player in 2023, all while global EV sales approached 10 million. Here are our picks for the best EVs of 2024.



Cameron Getty

<https://bit.ly/47pIXNt>

I think I'll wait for Ferrari's EV.

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I Took My Car in for Its 40k Service, and ...

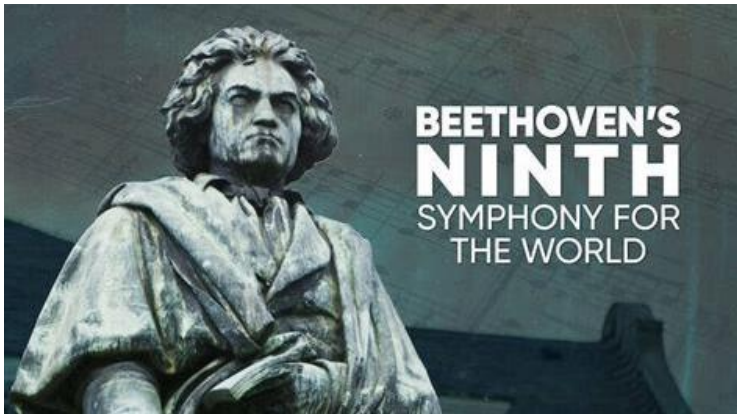


vs

https://youtu.be/y3_cghqyOU?t=4

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Beethoven's 9th Symphony's Ode to Joy and Then the Rest



reddit.com

Ode to Joy <https://youtu.be/ceX5jJ5fggs>

Chicago Symphony, Beethoven's 9th <https://youtu.be/rOjHhS5MtvA>

Yeah, I think the Ode to Joy is pretty nifty and you can hum it without much thought, but...

The but is what makes the 9th the crown jewel in the master's crown, the culmination of his incomparable symphonic genius. Please listen and marvel at both.

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The Most Exciting New Trains Coming in 2024



The new generation of Austria's Nightjet sleep trains offers capsule-style mini-cabins for solo travelers.

Alex Halada/AFP/Getty Images

Our increasingly urbanised global population demands good mobility – within cities and between them. Many of us are also looking for a fast, reliable and sustainable alternative to the misery of congested highways or short-haul air travel. Countries across the globe are investing billions of dollars in new infrastructure that will keep us moving into the second half of the 21st century.

<https://bit.ly/47o1IB6>

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10 Facts About Americans and Alcohol as 'Dry January' Begins



therehab

As Americans hang fresh calendars and debut New Year's resolutions, some will swear off alcohol, whether as part of a "Dry January" challenge or a longer-term goal. Here are 10 key facts about Americans' behaviors and attitudes when it comes to drinking alcohol and how these have changed over time, drawn from surveys and sales data.

<https://bit.ly/48swhXx>

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Flashmob At Budapest, Hungary -- My Homeland, My Homeland



youtube.com

<https://youtu.be/fTXmaD08-Zs>

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The Golden Arches Come for Dunkin' and Starbucks



*CosMc's logo on futuristic sign for the new restaurant.
McDonald's*

CosMc's has no dining room and no Big Macs. But it does have plenty of drinks and a whopping four-lane drive-through.

What is CosMc's? McDonald's shares first details about its new beverage-led store

After a week of growing hype and fuzzy shots posted on X, McDonald's has announced the launch of CosMc's. Located in the Chicago southwest suburb of Bolingbrook, it's a spin-off "concept" from the famed burger chain that focuses on drinks and snacks.

At this small store, there will be no french fries, no burgers, and no seats nor dining room. Instead, expect boba (bubble tea), breakfast sandwiches, and a whopping four-lane drive-through. But most of all, know that nothing you see here is final. According to the company, this first CosMc's is a learning lab, a test bed for refinement of just about every idea as it plans to open 10 more pilot locations in Texas before the end of the year. Even this first location probably won't be architected like others to come; it's a retrofit of an old Boston Market.

Whereas McDonald's is best known for a menu of food and meals, the CosMc's "otherworldly" menu is "designed to boost your mood into the stratosphere, if only for a few moments," according to the press release. It's "snackier" than traditional fast food; more like Starbucks, Dunkin', or the rapidly growing Oregon-based coffee chain, Dutch Bros.

"There's definitely a rush right now toward [the beverage] space," notes Danny Klein, editorial director of the trade publication QSR magazine. Coffee with light, often sweet, bites has been a winning formula for restaurant chains in recent years. He points out that Starbucks added more locations last year (429) in the U.S. than any other chain, followed by the coffee-less Crumbl cookies (363). Dutch Bros. also neared the top of the list with an additional 133 stores.

Beyond coffee, CosMc's inclusion of boba is notable on top of more Starbucks-adjacent, customizable coffee and fruit drinks. The boba market is growing, although by how much is unclear—one estimate shows U.S. boba consumption tripling between 2021 and 2028, while another global estimate points to \$1 billion in growth by 2027. Food offerings include brioche egg sandwiches (available all day), McPops filled-donut bites, pretzel bites, cookies, and other baked goods. (Notably, McDonald's is also offering McMuffins and an M&M'S McFlurry.)

The pared-back menu, at least compared to a typical McDonald's, likely eliminates the need for significant pieces of equipment, which coupled with no seating area, significantly reduces store footprints, build-out costs, and operational complexity. It's easy to see how the CosMc's tiny store strategy mirrors the small-store rollout that Starbucks introduced in 2012, in which it eliminated most or all seating to prioritize serving walk-up and drive-through customers with minimal real estate footprint.

As for the name, CosMc's—that's inspired by a seldom-used alien mascot that McDonald's introduced in 1987, though the brand comes to life with hints of retro futurism that predates the '80s. McDonald's has reintroduced a Google-style design from its earliest midcentury stores. But it's hardly just a 1950s McDonald's all over again. For the logo, I'd thought McDonald's had swapped out its typical red for purple (and CosMc's glistens almost like the wet drips of a Grimace shake). In fact, McDonald's calls this color "CosMc's Blue," and it certainly reads more blue on the building set away from so much yellow. For the store sign, CosMc's features just one half of the golden arches, tilted like the tail of an emoji shooting star.

My interpretation of the concept: If McDonald's is your parent—"finish your milk and eat those apple slices with the Happy Meal!"—then CosMc's has arrived like your fun-loving aunt—"who wants to drink a rainbow?!?"

Time will tell how the new restaurant concept shapes up, but "from a marketing standpoint, it's just been amazing," notes Klein. He points to a franchisee on X calling this the biggest "thing" for the McDonald's brand since the company invested in Chipotle, and it's hard to argue with that. Even if CosMc's remains small, its boost for the fresh McDonald's brand already seems significant.



Evolution: Fast or Slow? Lizards Help Resolve a Paradox.

Why does natural selection appear to happen slowly on long timescales and quickly on short ones? A multigenerational study of four lizard species addresses biology's "paradox of stasis."



*At Miami's Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden live Anolis lizards, which occupy distinct ecological niches on trees. Clockwise from top left: The bark anole (*Anolis distichus*), a trunk specialist; the green anole (*Anolis carolinensis*), a low-canopy specialist; the brown anole (*Anolis sagrei*), a ground specialist; and the knight anole (*Anolis equestris*), a high-canopy specialist.*
Jon Suh

James Stroud had a problem. The evolutionary biologist had spent several years studying lizards on a small island in Miami. These *Anolis* lizards had looked the same for millennia; they had apparently evolved very little in all that time. Logic told Stroud that if evolution had favored the same traits over millions of years, then he should expect to see little to no change over a single generation.

Except that's not what he found. Instead of stability, Stroud saw variability. One season, shorter-legged anoles survived better than the others. The next season, those with larger heads might have an advantage.

<https://bit.ly/3OgcKlh>

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Flexible Phone Concept That Doubles as a Wristband



Motorola just showed off a concept phone that takes the folding concept further, with a phone that bends to create a bracelet, a 'tent', or even its own stand.

<https://bit.ly/3S8bPGa>

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What's inside Earth?

The center of Earth lies around 4,000 miles under our feet — but what lies beneath the outer crust and the inner core?



*Our planet is layered like an onion.
(Image credit: Rost-9D/Getty Images)*

The center of the Earth is almost 4,000 miles (6,400 kilometers) beneath our feet. To put that into context, the deepest humans have ever drilled is 7.6 miles (12.2 km) down, and it took geologists nearly 20 years to get that far, according to [Smithsonian Magazine](#).

<https://bit.ly/45AL7c5>

Albert Robida Sketched the Future in the 1800s

In the annals of science fiction and futurism, one name that deserves prominent recognition is Albert Robida. Born in Compiègne, France, in 1848, Robida was a pioneering illustrator, etcher, lithographer, caricaturist, and novelist, whose work in the late 19th century remarkably anticipated many aspects of the 20th and 21st centuries

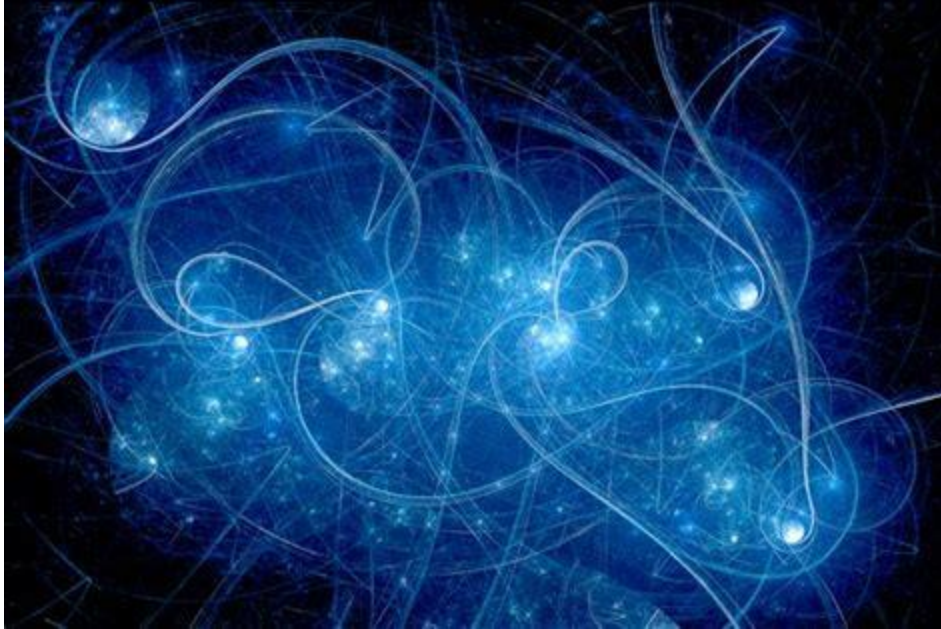


albert robida

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The 10 Most Popular Physics Stories of 2023



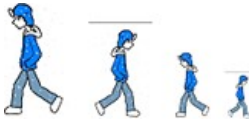
scientific american

Physics isn't a popularity contest, but the 10 most read articles published on the Physics World website in 2023 nevertheless make an interesting collection of highlights, lowlights and every kind of light in between. If you didn't spot these stories when they first appeared, here's your chance to find out what the fuss was about.

<https://bit.ly/48ofpkD>

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My Walking Thoughts



For Sunday January 7 2024

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Trip to Terra Incognita: Quantico, September 1959 (#5)

Obstacle Course



USMC

The strange area well away from the buildings at the far side of the grinder contained the mysterious obstacle course. Being an unknown, it was cause for some concern...an opportunity to become noticed, but I was determined to achieve anonymity through mediocrity.

Awaiting us at the compound was a group of 'trainers' eager it seemed to help us master the collection of artificial impediments along a well-worn tract that extended perhaps an eighth of a mile along a north-south fenceline."

"Ok, Candidates," Gunnery Sergeant Reeves said in what seemed a beseeching voice, "pay attention while one of the trainers shows you how to run the course." And we did, watching how a compact corporal wove his way effortlessly through the various features that gave this venue its name.

In fewer than four minutes he had run, crawled, climbed, swung through, and finally kipped over the final barrier without breaking into a sweat.

"Your turn," Gunny said with a wolfish smile, setting us in motion one squad at a time...me at the very end of the line.

From the beginning, the trainers began screaming at us as we moved through the obstacles, focusing particular savagery on those who were having problems. While their efforts looked supportive, it occurred to me they were there not to help but hinder.

When at last it became my turn, I had a pretty good idea of how to approach the barriers, finding that while each presented a challenge, none was as difficult as I had feared. By the time I completed the exercise I had overtaken a dozen or so others. In

the end I had to wait my turn to take on 'the wall,' a 15-foot-high wooden barricade with suspended ropes to scale it.

It turned out that roughly a quarter of the platoon failed the course on the first try and had to attempt it again. We 'conquerors' stood in ranks for the next half hour as a brisk wind arose to greet the arrival of the first of what seemed to me to be a steady line of the fall season's gulley washers.

Despite some physical discomfort I felt satisfied with my performance...completing the test in a decent time, yet mediocre enough to avoid notice. Drenched or not

, I was determined to continue such achievement the rest of my time there.

That evening just before lights-out I counted three more empty racks.

Next week: The dusty trail.

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