

Jasper and Fort McMurray are much different in scale, making the fires differ too, but many things are common with them. Including the horrific mess left in hastily abandoned food stores.

Rotting food and closed highways a concern as Jasper evacuation nears second week

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“Rotting food in fridges and freezers without power can unfortunately result in contamination to homes. We’re aware of this, and are working to restore power to as much of the townsite as possible in order to minimize this risk,” Parks Canada said in the statement, released on Sunday.

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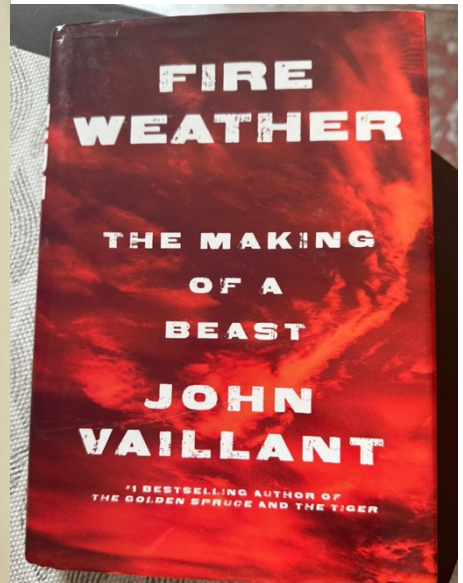
FIRE WEATHER

well. In the city’s twenty-five thousand or so surviving homes, apartments, restaurants, and grocery stores, a regime change was under way. It began, most often, in the kitchen. After a week or two in the unseasonal heat, perishables began to ripen and then to rot. Alberta is beef country, but hunting and fishing are popular here as well, and the abundance of meat, combined with high wages and a big-box mentality, meant that, in addition to refrigerators, meat freezers were common items in garages and basements. As the temperature rose, and all that meat decomposed, gases were generated, pressure built, and seals failed. By mid-May, many of the city’s fridges and freezers stood in pools of clotting blood. Inside, the contents took on lives of their own. Dairy products that weren’t cheese already were well on their way, and any leftover meals from May 3 were unrecognizable. Even through the heavy smoke, the rank and wayward odor of putrefying flesh was compelling, and flies caught wind of it. With the flies came maggots, which begat more flies. Warm and contained, with unlimited food and nothing to disturb them, breeding conditions were ideal. Outside, patrolling police, firefighters, and gas and electricity technicians saw nothing out of the ordinary as they made their rounds, but inside, any building with food in it was being colonized and transformed.

Insurance adjusters were some of the first to enter these putrid, teeming habitats, and one compared some of the sights he encountered to “CSI murder scenes.” By then, many generations of flies had hatched, multiplied, and died; the growth was exponential. Another local adjuster opened a utility door in a client’s house only to find the interior seething with mice. In the malls around town, the supermarkets had transformed into Olympic-sized petri dishes; floors and shelves were carpeted with dead flies while the cavernous spaces above buzzed and swirled with the living. Left to their own devices, the lobsters in the live tank at Save-On-Foods had turned on each other, but the rats never had it so good. Where there weren’t vermin, there was rampant mold in a rainbow of colors. One adjuster marveled at the bread aisle, where every bag had blossomed into a psychedelic terrarium—save for one brand. After three weeks, the Wonder Bread looked as fresh as it had on May 3. Meanwhile, even in the tidiest homes, mold—from decaying food, water leaks, and neglect—

Fire Weather, another John Vaillant masterpiece, remains apropos. He even went to lengths to document the carnage in supermarkets.

TJB



Eat Wonder Bread: You won’t need to be embalmed when you die.

RECKONING

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proliferated along with its attendant odors, which were further intensified by the penetrating stink of burned trees, cars, and houses that permeated everything. All told, about twenty thousand refrigerators and freezers were declared biohazards and had to be thrown away. Strapped shut and wheeled to the curb, they still stank, and this drew bears in from the surrounding woods. Nature would not be denied. Neither would Wayne McGrath. Following his evacuation