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Letters

On bookworms and myopia

I have great problems with the results of the research done at CUNY on nearsightedness ("Boring" reading and nearsightedness," SN: 7/11/87, p.23). My nearsightedness developed no later than the period in which I was learning to read. The reading material at that stage has large print and many colorful illustrations.

Besides the fact that the myopia may have developed before I was introduced to books, I have a cousin who is more profoundly myopic than I; I was a bookworm, but she was a tomboy at that age. Can there be a genetic inclination toward nearsightedness that, perhaps, the reading matter stimulates?

Carmen M. Lorenz
Walla Walla, Wash.

Dangerous discards?

Reader Robert Pelz (Letters, SN: 6/13/87, p.371) is quite right in his statement on

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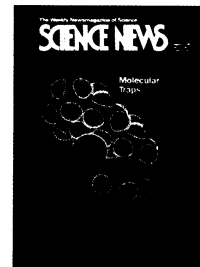
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Cover: The synthesis of simple molecules with cavities of a given size and shape allows chemists to study how biological systems recognize particular molecules and catalyze certain chemical reactions. In the computer-generated illustration shown, an iodobenzoate template delivers a chlorine atom (large, bright-green sphere) to a specific hydrogen atom (grayish-green) of a steroid. Such directed reactions by "enzyme mimics" lead to practical new processes for synthesizing chemical compounds. (Illustration: R. Breslow)



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mercury batteries used on hearing aids, watches, cameras and so forth, but who told him the so-called "flashlight" batteries (D and C, plus AA, etc.) contain lead? Most of them feature a carbon-zinc construction, while most of the rest are "alkaline" (i.e., metal-zinc), none of which, to my knowledge, has any lead in it.

There is a clear danger, however, in discarding batteries. Many (but not D and C cells) contain such heavy metals as silver, nickel, cadmium, the aforementioned lead and mercury, to say nothing about the electrolytes employed. U.S. battery and cell manufacturers should institute a recycling program for spent batteries, all the more valuable because of these metals' market value.

Roberto De Leon
San Juan, Puerto Rico

No added sulfites

I would like to take exception to "Wines and sulfites: A necessary marriage" (SN: 6/27/87,

p.409), in which researchers Ough and Crowell conclude that "there's no way a decent wine can avoid [sulfites]." I don't add any chemicals to my wines, including sulfites, and I would say from the international awards I have won that they are "decent" wines, especially my Rhubarb-Raspberry, which won a Gold Medal in 1985. I would hope in the interest of fair reporting you will publish the fact that award-winning wines can be made without adding chemicals.

Duane C. Peterson
Peterson & Sons Winery
Kalamazoo, Mich.

That, apparently, is true — but the award-winning wines in question are not entirely free of sulfites. Chemical analyses supplied to SCIENCE NEWS by Mr. Peterson indicate that these wines contain from 16 to 30 parts per million sulfur dioxide. He notes, however, that his firm, unlike virtually all other U.S. wineries, does not add the antioxidant to its wines but instead relies solely on natural processes to provide low levels of it.

— J. Raloff