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Go slow on antiaddiction drugs

I encourage a "proceed with caution" approach to the clinical use of gamma vinyl-GABA ("Nicotine addiction curbed by new drug," SN: 1/2/99, p. 11). I have been involved in the study, prevention, and treatment of addictions for nearly 20 years.

An increased awareness of the genetic and neurobiological factors involved in the abuse (misuse) of, dependency on, and addiction to psychoactive drugs is the result of only the past 30 years of scientific research. These understandings are thus quite new and require much more research to better clarify our understanding and treatment of addiction.

*Dan R. Gray
Gladstone, Mo.*

Too hot to handle

You quote workers as saying that microbes are living "maybe at temperatures of 200°C or more" in the Pacific near the Juan de Fuca Ridge ("Life gets extreme in seafloor chimneys," SN: 1/2/99, p. 15).

Unless these microbes are constituted of something other than water, I find it very hard to credit this report because water boils at 100°C. Do we have any idea how life survives in water that hot?

*Bill Bruehl
Setauket, N.Y.*

Water boils at 100°C only at sea level air pressure. Deep in the ocean, water boils at a much higher temperature because the pressure is much greater.

—R. Monastersky

A cheater never tells

Kids quickly learn the "shortcut" method of doing exercises like $8 + 10 - 10$ and $8 + 10 - 8$ ("Math discoveries catch kids unawares," SN: 1/2/99, p. 5), especially when given concentrated practice in problems of this type. But the kids tell the researchers that they use calculation rather than shortcuts. From this, the researchers apparently infer that children use such shortcuts without realizing it. In my experience, kids realize they're using shortcuts but won't admit it to an adult because they view such shortcuts as cheating.

*Jamesine E. Friend
Shelby, N.C.*

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Cover: Grilling can leave meats with great flavor but a heavy dose of carcinogens. Researchers have created a collection of tasty recipes to either prevent those unhealthy compounds from forming or defuse their toxicity once they do appear.
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Truth as strange as fiction

As a person who grew up reading science fiction, I am not much surprised at what can be done with increased memory, speed, and sophisticated software ("Agents of cooperation," SN: 1/2/99, p. 12). Perhaps the programmers and researchers working with the "mobile agents" should consider the precautions displayed by the scientists who installed Isaac Asimov's *Three Laws of Robotics* in the positronic brains of their robots.

The mobile agents also bring to mind a story by Harlan Ellison, "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream!"

*Kaare B. Høst
Port Charlotte, Fla.*

The dye is past

A "new" fabric-dyeing process ("Metal grains dye fabrics in muted hues," SN: 1/2/99, p. 11)? Obviously, William Todd hasn't heard of the concept of mordanting, the soaking of fibers in metal-ion solutions as a precursor to dyeing with natural dyes. Iron, copper, and aluminum salts have been used as mordants for centuries (in the case of iron, millennia).

*Betty Creegan
Shiloh, Ill.*