Two age-30ish men knocked on the door of a Sebastian, Texas, woman at 12:30 a.m. on Aug. 3, asking for water and if they could please come inside to charge their cellphone — and the woman apparently cheerfully invited them in, later offering them use of her back-yard shed to grab some sleep. She did not learn until a short time later, when a law enforcement manhunt widened into her neighborhood, that they were wanted for murdering a U.S. Border Patrol agent. Officers arrested the pair inside the shed.

A team of researchers from the University of Texas at Arlington announced recently that they had developed a prototype of a wind turbine that might deliver electricity in tiny bursts to devices like smartphones — since it is about half the size of a grain of rice. (Tiny solar backpacks already exist.)

The new normal

One of the emerging occupational skills for Emergency Medical Technicians, according to first responders interviewed in a June Wall Street Journal feature, is merely holding up blankets at accident scenes — to block onlookers from their apparently uncontrollable urge to take gruesome photos to send to their friends.

A royal pain

In Multnomah County, Ore., in July, a Romanian princess pleaded guilty to cockfighting. Irina Walker, 61, was born in Switzerland where her father, King Michael I, lived after abdicating the throne. She came to Oregon in 1983, where, in a second marriage in 2007, she...
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fell in with former deputy sheriff John Walker, and was assisting him in the gambling and cockfighting business, according to a USA Today report.

Lettering in ‘Call of Duty’

Chung-Ang University in South Korea announced in April that its Department of Sport Science would begin accepting — as legitimate “student athletes” — video gamers.

Turtle power

Researchers from England’s University of Lincoln revealed in July that red-footed tortoises are not only “inquisitive” but make decisions in their brain’s “medial cortex” region, associated with “complex cognitive behavior” (because they have no “hippocampus,” which is a typical decisionmaking area). The tortoises thus pecked-out (and learned) touch-screen decisions (for rewards of strawberries), and in fact, said researcher Anna Wilkinson, learned as quickly as rats and pigeons and faster, actually, than dogs.

Industry Trends Report

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Movies come to life

In July, officials at the Djanogly City Academy in Nottingham, England, broke up an attempt by five students (ages 11 to 14) attending a daytime-locked-down school to escape by tunneling under a security fence. They had discovered the boys’ metal cutlery hidden at the scene.

Least competent criminals

A 40-year-old man (not named by the Seattle Post-Intelligencer) was arrested in that city on July 31 after a several-hour, epically inept crime spree. Attempting to rob a restaurant, he was turned down by employees and customers, then turned down by two potential carjack victims (the first of whom added insult by pulling out her cellphone camera and shooting video), before giving up just as police arrived. (His only take was the $15 he had swiped from the restaurant’s tip jar.)

Readers’ choice

An airborne banner being towed by an airplane came loose in Fremont, Calif., in July and floated down, landing on a house, frightening the residents. The sign advertised GEICO insurance.

A 10-foot-tall pine tree in Los Angeles’s Griffith Park, dedicated in 2004 with a plaque to the late musician George Harrison, was recently destroyed by an infestation, and another will be planted in its place, according to a city councilman. The infestation was by beetles.

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