

## **MINISODE: Aestaology should be a word**

### **Ologies Podcast**

**June 26, 2018**

Haaaaaay. It's your old wizened, leathery lifeguard Alie Ward, dozing under an umbrella while I should be making sure you're not drowning, and I'm here for a little slice of a minisode for your Ologies appetite this week.

Why, Ward, why? Well, this is a shorty around the longest day of the year, for a few reasons. Number one, I'm working on a two-part Mars episode for next week that'll blow your rocket boosters right off. And number two, and this is a little crazy and exciting, but I'm shooting a brand-new science show for a very cool network, and I'm shooting like 16-hour days. Like, I wake up at 5am, rush to set, get home at 8pm, rush to bed. I have been wearing mismatched socks for two weeks, just plucked from my clean "lonely socks" bag, and I'm pretty much snorting whey protein instead of having dinner because there's just not time.

So, I'm putting this together to give myself a little bit more time to work on next week's episode because it's going to be so good! And also because, y'all, I love summer. So much. We just had the longest day of the year, it's officially Summer, and even as a summer goth in head-to-toe second-hand black wool garments as a teen, I loved summer. Cobalt twilight at 9pm, iced tea sweating on a porch, barbecue smoke, family reunions. Bonus points for getting out of California to see weird bugs and hear charming accents. I just always loved it.

This week's minisode is all about some obscure summer disciplines, and if there are any that pique your interest tell me on social media and maybe I can hunt an Ologist down to further explore. Think of this episode like a variety sampler pack, like little cereals, and I'll await your hollerin' and maybe we can make one or two happen if you really love them.

*[Intro Music]*

-----

Now, before we dive in, just a big thanks to all the Patrons for making the show possible. I pay the wonderful Steven Ray Morris to edit it, I couldn't do it without him or you. And thank you to everyone who decks themselves out in Ologies wares from OlogiesMerch.com - get yourself a dang tank top for Summer, or a \$20 T-shirt in any color. Maybe a Dad hat to keep the broiling sun off of your face. It supports the podcast and also helps you find other Ologites in the wild. Maybe for a Summer romance?

You can also spread the word about the podcast just by tweeting, or 'gramming, or rating and reviewing. Make sure you're subscribed, because sometimes iTunes will just unsubscribe you from things, it happens to me all the time. And as you all know, I'm a giant sappy creep and I love reading

your very sweet reviews. I didn't know you could review via Stitcher too, until yesterday, so for this minisode, I'm going to shout out sososmanysarsahs who wrote:

*'If Lin-Manuel's Twitter Feed Was a Science Podcast.' This podcast, which features interviews with "ologists" in a wide variety of fields, is a bright spot in a world that can be a bit cynical about expertise and knowledge. It's highly informative, a great resource for finding out more about all kinds of fields, and inspires me to work hard, learn more, and not be afraid to start by asking a "dumb" question.*

Thank you so much! What a comparison, dude. So thank you for leaving those reviews. I read them and they make me so happy on days when I'm tired and I have not washed my hair, which is a lot of the days.

Okay: aestaology. Is this a real word? No it's not. This is an entirely fictitious word I just made up using the Latin 'aesta,' meaning Summer. The study of summer, it doesn't exist! So, straight out of the gate, I just served you up a whole heaping bag of horseshit, and I'm sorry. Another word I considered fabricating that doesn't exist (and I looked it up) is Hydropolemology. That would be a great word for this episode because it would mean the study of waterfighting. Okay, just in trying to find out if that was a real word, it led me down this rabbit hole. Is there a study of water fights? Please say there is! There's not. But I did find out, that in Poland, they have a tradition called Wet Monday, that involves soaking each other just mercilessly. Now according to Wikipedia:

*Boys throw water over girls, and then they spank them with pussy willows or sneak into girls' homes at daybreak and throw containers of water over them while they're still in bed, then the screaming girls would often be dragged to a nearby river or pond for another drenching. Sometimes a girl would be carried out, still in her bed, before both bed and girl were thrown into the water. Particularly attractive girls could be expected to be soaked repeatedly during the day.*

This somewhat horrific and very soggy tradition is known as Smigus Dingus and evidently, and thankfully, it seems to have evolved into a more omni-sexual affair, involving little boys and girls soaking each other. And according to my getting sucked into a YouTube vortex of adults running from other adults sloshing buckets in the street, and childrens armed like tiny hydro-militias supersoaking the fuck out of each other, it's a pretty popular thing.

So I was looking at YouTube videos of all these weird Polish water fights, and then it led me to remember; if a hydropolemologist was a job, I have interviewed literally the top master of this field, and I totally forgot about it. This season on *Innovation Nation* for CBS, I flew to Atlanta to meet Lonnie Johnson. He is a mechanical and nuclear engineer, he worked for the Airforce and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory. He worked on the Galileo mission to Jupiter, the Saturn Cassini mission, the Mars Observer project. He's a serial inventor, total genius and has been since his youth. Also among his creations: the Super Soaker.

One day in the early '80s he thought, "I wonder if my daughter could just smoke these neighborhood jabronis in a waterfight." And when your dad is a rocket scientist, what results is a

PVC pipe watergun with an empty Pepsi 2-liter as the fuel tank. He tried it in his bathroom, it shot across the room and he was like, "Well dang, I believe I've invented something very legendary." A few patents and decades later the dude has made at least \$73 million dollars off of this invention.

[Clip from *Innovation Nation*]

*Alie:*        *How many patents do you have?*

*Lonnie:*    *Over 100 patents.*

*Alie:*        *Over a hundred!...So this is just a tiny fraction of them.*

*Lonnie:*    *There was some engineering involved in putting this whole thing together, but you know, compared to a spacecraft it's pretty simple. [laughs]*

So if hydropelemology were a thing, Lonnie Johnson would have another honorary degree. So says Dadward VonPodcast.

That concludes the potion of ficticious ologies involving the summer, on to actual summer ologies!

As discussed in the Fallogies episode in October: a cucurbitologist knows all kinds of secret shit about pumpkins but also [*echoing for emphasis*] about melons! [*DJ airhorn*] Were you to encounter a melon specialist like perhaps, Zhu Linjie, one of Shanghai's top professional watermelon experts, you could say: Cucurbitologist, tell me your melon thumping secrets.

Apparently, one thing to look for when picking a watermelon... I'm gonna dish out some watermelon secrets. Are you ready? Okay. You have to look for the patch on the underbelly of the melon; this is the light patch where it's been in contact with the ground. That patch should be creamy yellow in color, the lighter and whiter it is means it's not quite ripe yet. Also, it should feel heavy for its size. And you know when you thump a melon in the store, and you just do it to look cool before you make off with it to the check stand but you have no idea why you're doing it or what you're listening for? According to cucurbitologists it should have a dull, hollow sound. Another thing you can do is just buy from a farmer's market and say, "Hey, pick me a good one."

Also, seedless watermelons were invented by a midwestern plant specialist named Orie "O.J." Eigsti and nobody wanted them, for decades. He was like, [*old-timey piano music and haughty old-timey voice*] "I invented a seedless watermelon but you ghouls enjoy spitting seeds at each other? What the fuck! These seedless melons are where it's at, folks. Idiots."

He kept peddling them and finally they began taking off in the 1980s. According to an interview with him in the *Chicago Tribune*, which was conducted in his 90s, he saw them flourishing in a supermarket and said to himself, "Huh. After all these years, it feels pretty good." And there's something in my soul that's so happy that the seedless watermelon specialist got to see his invention really take off, because it was decades of him being like, "How can you not want a seedless watermelon? What's wrong with you??" And we all want 'em.

Also, don't toss those rinds, folks. According to Watermelon.org, you can cut them up and add them to stir fries and eat them. You can also pickle the rinds. So at your next barbecue, just walk around with an empty pillowcase and start loading up on everyone's chewed up cast-asides, and be like, "Mmm yummers, gunna brine this up and dine on it in several months!" You have my blessings.

Speaking of barbecues, let's talk pyrotechnology. Pyrotechnics, wait isn't that... fireworks? God I hoped so! When I started researching this episode I was like, "What if I had a pyrotechnologist on to talk about the bombs bursting in air, and 4th of July displays and baseball games and skybooms and such?" But I found out that fireworks people are technically pyrotechnicians, not pyrotechnologists. So, firework talk will be limited to Uncle Alie telling you: Don't blow your goddamn hands off this summer, okay? Just be careful. And if you're drunk, let someone else explode stuff. Just sit back and watch. Don't say I never helped you.

But pyrotechnologists are actually anthropologists who study chillin' and grillin'. Barbeques. Cooking with fire. BUT WAIT. What is a barbeque and why can't I spell it? Well, it comes from the Spanish for barbacoa, which is derived from a Caribbean word meaning a rack made of sticks. Those were used either for sleeping on like a cot or for smoking meat or fish above a fire. There you go. Americans added the qu at the end, and you can spell it either way but lets be honest: all caps BBQ is the easiest and no one wants to fuck around with "is there a c and also a q in it?"

Also there is *heated*, fiery debate on the etymology of barbeque. The first time it was recorded in English was in 1661, by Edmund Hickeringill, a British churchman with a shady history, who was describing cannibalism in Jamaica, writing, "Some are slain, and their flesh forthwith Barbacu'd and eat." But Barbeque Historian, and yes that is a job, Andrew Warnes wrote a whole book on the colonialist and racist origins of the word and says that Hickeringill was full of shit and he was making up tales, and that barbecue is one of America's oldest and most beloved traditions.

Going back in time a bit, humans first started to learn about fire control maybe as far back as 1.7 million years ago, really getting good at it about 125,000 years ago. There's the hotly talked about cooking hypothesis, which credits charring otherwise inedible starchy food with human's ability to grow bigger glucose hogs known as our brains. When was the last time you ate a raw potato and slayed at Words with Friends? Like, never. Think about it.

Another thing to mull over while waiting for your melon rinds to pickle: Why historically have women been expected to cook, while men handle outdoor grilling? What the fuck? I tried to look for an answer and found that a cultural anthropologist Richard Sweder has written such a book about many psychological societal mysteries on different continents, aptly titled *Why Do Men Barbecue?*. I found this after googling, naturally: why do men barbecue? If I ever read that book I'll report back. But the consensus on the web is because much of outdoor grilling just involves standing around looking busy while other people are inside fussing over Jell-O, and macaroni salad, and icing down fruit platters. And you only have to do it for one season out of the year. So you're like, "Sure I'll be a grill master."

But if you were to ask Yale researchers about pyrotechnology, not only would the archaeologists talk about cooking relics, but they would also point you to periods of time when we really started to make fire work for us: glazing vessels, hardening weaponry, doing metallurgy things.

Pyrotechnology: So many directions to go. So when you're outside this summer gazing into a campfire just think, there are people who been indoors, writing books about your hairy, scared relatives gazing into a campfire.

And one last ology, on the topic of fiery summer evenings: Lampyridology. What the hell is that, Ward? It's the study of fireflies! Which are not flies at all, but rather beetles with super magic butts. Do you call them fireflies or lightning bugs? You probably all muttered aloud on the subway, or a jogging path, or into your knitting, [*lots of voices speaking over each other saying 'lightning bugs' or 'fireflies'*].

[*little pause, then just Alie saying alone*] Peenie wallies.

Okay, what?! One researcher, Bert Vaux, a linguistics professor at the University of Cambridge, polled 10,000 Americans and found that around 40% say both words interchangeably. 30% just say "firefly," and almost 30% say "lightning bug." Meanwhile, 0.02 percent (only 2 people in a whole study of 10K) call these glowing summer cuties "peenie wallies." I did not know that was a term, but next time I see one, I do know that it will be formally addressed as Your Honor [*royal-sounding trumpets*] Captain Peenie Wallie.

Growing up in California, I didn't encounter a peenie wallie until I visited the East Coast in my 20s and I freaked out. I jumped around the lawn, I was chasing them like I was 4. Apparently, the West Coast and, oddly, just Massachusetts says firefly, the South says lightning bugs. I want to find Team Peenie Wallie and see if those two people know each other. They must, right?

A few fun lampyridology tidbits: firefly larva love to eat snails. Love 'em. It's weird. It's French. So how do they make their butts glow? They have a light organ in their lower half, think of it like a glow crotch, and oxygen combines with calcium and ATP (which carries energy to cells) plus a luminescent chemical called Luciferin. Also Luciferin sounds evil as hell, literally, and that's because it means 'light bringer,' which the biblical Lucifer was named for. And I guess how Lucifer became Satan, biblically, may have been because of a translation error with the Hebrew word meaning "howl," but honestly I just spent 15 minutes on so many websites trying to figure this out so, biblical scholars correct me on this one. I don't know why Satan is called Lucifer, but Luciferin, it's not evil, just a raver crotch on a horny beetle flashing it to say, "Haaaaay, are you my species because lets get it on and make snail-eating babies."

But in a kind of evil fact, some female fireflies mimick the mating flashes of another species to lure randy beetle dudes and eat them. They're like, "Oh, my god, we should totally get together, I would love to date you," and then they just eat them with their faces. According to Wikipedia, this species is referred to as the *femme fatale* of fireflies, which seems a little overly dramatic but I'll take it.

With that, it doesn't take a sarcologist, one who studies the muscular and fleshy parts of the body, to tell you to go put on some spandex underpants, and engage in hydropolemological warfare, then

cool off with a cucurbitological snack before you feast on pyrotechnologically-prepared cuisine. It's summer. You deserve it.

-----

Let me know if you want to hear more about any of these topics and I'll see who I can track down and thanks for having a mini listen to this eeny peenie wallie of an episode. I'll be back next week with tons of martian gossip.

Thank you Steven Ray Morris for tossing this together just hours before it goes up, to Erin Talbert and Hannah Lipow for being incredible admins to the jolly group of very curious folks on the [Ologies Podcast Facebook group](#). Get yourself some summer gear at [OlogiesMerch.com](#), tag it #ologiesmerch in your online posts so I can repost you on Merch Mondays. Thank you Shannon Feltus and Boni Dutch for running that merch site. Thank you as always to the beloved summer mustachioed Steven Ray Morris for editing.

The theme was written and performed by Nick Thorburn of the very vacationy-named band, Islands. And please, remember to ask all kinds of smart people all kinds of seemingly stupid questions because they secretly love it. If you're at a barbeque with someone, talk to them about beetle butts!

Also, speaking of secrets: I can proudly say... This is a bit of a humble brag. I've never peed in a pool. I was utterly shocked, I did an informal poll among friends and most people seem to pee in pools. Even hot tubs! I was like "Really?? Really?! You guys! I love you but... can we not pee in them?" I dunno, apparently it's not that bad for you, but also like, hmmm. Times are tough out there guys. Let's be kind to each other, let's not pee in the water that goes in each other's mouths. Unless it's consensual. Okay? Either way, *[slowed speech]* I love you lots.

Ask smart people dumb questions. Berbye.

*[Outro music]*

*[Peaceful beach sounds. Lapping waves breaking on the shore. Seagulls]*

*[Alie whispers]* Berbye.

*Transcribed by Rosie Thomas, Wolverhampton, UK, that lady whose face always seems really angry but inside she is happy thinking about sharks, dinosaurs, and cats.*

Here are some links which may be of interest:

[Peeing in Pools](#)

[FFF: firefly facts](#)

[Firefly vs. lighting bug vs. peenie wallie?](#)

[Firefly wiki](#)

[Seedless watermelon vindication](#)

[BBQ wiki](#)

[Lonnie Johnson](#)

[Smigus Dyngus, dingus.](#)

[Humans + fire](#)

[Why do men BBQ](#)

*For comments and enquiries on this or other transcripts, please contact [OlogiteEmily@gmail.com](mailto:OlogiteEmily@gmail.com)*