

science news[®] to the editor

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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: Scanning electron microscope photographs of microtektites found in a Caribbean deep-sea core. The star-shaped pits and internal crystals, never seen before, may be clues to the parent material and, therefore, to the origin of tektites. See story p. 92. (Photos: Billy P. Glass)

Publisher	E. G. Sherburne Jr.
Editor	Kendrick Frazier
Aerospace	Everly Driscoll
Behavioral Sciences	Robert J. Trotter
Medical Sciences	Joan Arehart-Treichel
Natural Sciences	Jonathan Eberhart
Physical Sciences	Dietrick E. Thomsen
Science and Society	John H. Douglas
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Assistant to the Editor	Esther Gilgoff
Production Manager	Davida Daemon
Books	Margit Friedrich
Circulation Manager	Lawrence Cope
Advertising	Scherago Associates, Inc. 11 W. 42nd St., New York, N.Y. 10036 Fred W. Dieffenbach Sales Director

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High-quality

I have just read the article by Everly Driscoll on "A spectacular visitor from deep space" (SN: 7/14/73, p. 24).

The article is very informative in addition to being well written. I would like to congratulate the magazine for this high quality; keep up the good work!

Farouk El-Baz
Research Director
National Air and Space Museum
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C.

Your cover diagram for the article on the comet of the century is in error in showing the magnitude on Jan. 3, 1974, to be minus 1. It should read minus 3. But what is important is that on Dec. 24, 1973, about dawn there is an annular solar eclipse of the sun, the path of which runs through central and northern South America and a partial eclipse of the sun in eastern North America, which would give an opportunity to study the Great Comet, 1973f, at mag minus 6.4.

George C. Wilson
Farmington, N.M.

(The minus 1 figure should have read minus 3, which is considerably brighter. Brian Marsden told us this week he now tends to believe the comet may reach a brightness of minus 4 on Jan. 3. But he cautions that the situation is still too uncertain to give a precise estimate.—Ed.)

Your article about the comet Kohoutek and comets in general is most interesting and welcome. Thank you!

The diagram on the cover shows comet Kohoutek's position "as seen approx. 5:30 p.m., EST." I judge that the "EST" means Eastern Standard Time, in which case I question why that time zone is specified. Would not the diagram be equally applicable at the same "local" time (or clock time) for any and all longitudes?

N. O. Parker
Malibu, Calif.

(Mr. Parker is correct. The times given are valid regardless of an area's time zone. EST was used only as an example.—Ed.)

Freedom of choice

I disagree with the statement "What is the point of diagnosing cancer early if patients cannot be treated early," con-

tained in "Promising tests for cancer" (SN: 6/9/73, p. 367).

If this CEA test indicates you have early cancer, you then have your *freedom of choice* to either sit back and wait for the tumors to develop or you can participate in a clinical cancer research program while repeating the CEA test to monitor progress.

Ethics are involved only if this test is not made available as soon as possible, independent of treatment.

Robert F. Armeit
A.B., B.S., M.S. (E.E.)
Morris Plains, N. J.

Science in science fiction

I greatly enjoy SCIENCE NEWS, and found the article on extraterrestrial life (SN: 7/14/73, p. 29) quite interesting. However, I must complain about the introductory paragraph. Mr. Thomsen, for some reason, chooses to join a throng of reviewers who feel that science fiction is mostly silly.

In fact, while it is true that science fiction, much as any literary genre, has its share of worthless trash, and frothy pieces meant only for amusement, there are in the SF literature a number of very competent speculations on the physical and social aspects of extraterrestrial life. Many science fiction writers are themselves scientists, and many more spend as much care in their speculative research as does any scientific research worker.

Despite the traditional scorn of literary critics, and the only recent interest in science fiction on campus, we have always felt that scientists and science publications were our allies; and it is a little disconcerting to see one of my favorite publications take a swipe at science fiction in such a casual manner.

I'm probably overly sensitive. In any event, I continue to enjoy SCIENCE NEWS. I do ask that once in a while you might give another view of science fiction.

Jerry Pournelle, Ph.D.

President
Science Fiction Writers of America
Studio City, Calif.

(Mr. Thomsen pleads poetic license. Several of us ardent science fiction admirers on the staff have sentenced him to read selections of Poul Anderson, James Gunn and Arthur C. Clarke.—Ed.)

*Address communications to Editor,
Science News, 1719 N Street, N.W.,
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