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COVER: Indian health workers stalk malaria-carrying mosquitoes in forests and marshes—one of many projects being undertaken throughout the world to eradicate tropical diseases. See p. 88. (Photo: WHO)

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Ode to Kohoutek

Here is something that materialized at the time of Comet Kohoutek's closest approach to earth:

Yes, Lucy, Comets Are Made of Snow!
Has anybody here seen Kohoutek,
The comet with the great P.R.?
We've all got comet-watcher's neck
But we've seen no comet so far!!
We've strained our eyes for that
shining tail—

Looked for the glow that was not a
star;

Taken a high-priced ocean sail
To find comet-tail glow in a cocktail
bar.

O, the public gets snowed by cereal,
Toothpaste, nail polish and glamor
cars;

And now by such things immaterial
As off-again, on-again shooting stars!!
O, Kohoutek, thy name is legion,
'Specially in the Mad. Ave. region!!

*James Fanning,
Mount Kisco, N.Y.*

The quest itself

I am rather surprised at one of the points made in L. Stevenson's letter (SN: 1/19/74, p. 35). He says that if conclusive results in physics research are not to be found (at least quickly), then the research is uninteresting, merely hard work. A good part of the excitement of research, any research, comes from the research per se, not from the final results.

Furthermore, only a handful of physicists contributed to relativity and quantum mechanics. This certainly shouldn't imply that the majority of physicists involved in more "mundane" fields find no reward.

*Larry Paul
Flushing, N.Y.*

'Review,' yes; statistics, no

I would like to commend you for your "Science News of the Year" carried in the Dec. 22-29 issue. It helped to reinforce many of the science achievements made over the last year which might otherwise easily have been smothered and forgotten in the voluminous news coverage presented. I cast my vote for making the summary a regular annual feature.

I wish, though, that your otherwise fine

reporting would show a little more concern for statistics. Take, for example, the article "Russians now in space too" in the same issue, in which you state ". . . Soviet space planners, however, have been less reluctant than their U.S. counterparts to send all-rookie crews into orbit. Of the 30 U.S. manned space flights, only 10 have included an astronaut who has flown one or more times before. . . . Only six of the 20 manned Soviet flights have carried a 'veteran'."

A simple 2x2 test on the proportions shows them to be significant only at about the .90 level (only about 1 chance in 10 that there is a true difference)! In short, the numbers could be reported as news but the remainder of the conclusions should not.

*Frederick P. Kent
Xerox Statistical Analysis
El Segundo, Calif.*

Oil-crisis article

The article entitled "The oil crisis: A whodunit for the great Holmes" (SN: 1/19/74, p. 36) is very poor reporting. At best, it is very naive.

It is nothing but a cute scenario based on the assumption that a conspiracy must exist. It certainly is not an objective piece of reporting such as one might expect from a science-oriented publication presumably trying to get at the true facts.

You have lost your credibility and I am canceling my subscription to SCIENCE NEWS.

*Dayton H. Clewell
New York, N.Y.*

If Science News must editorialize ("The oil crisis") please assign topics to qualified personnel. We have enough Jack Andersons without SN joining the ranks.

*D. N. Penton
Penton & Penton
Oil and Gas Properties
De Quincy, La.*

One thousand thanks to both SCIENCE NEWS and John Douglas for the oil crisis article. From where I sit it has been established for years that the country is run by big business. . . . Are we supposed to believe that the largest and wealthiest industry in the world is incapable of forecasting or planning ahead in such a way as to avoid this catastrophe?

*Ben Drisko
Camden, Me.*

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