

Science[®] News

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Of the Week

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Rethinking the dilatancy theory | 252 |
| Sleep-inducing peptide isolated | 252 |
| Neutral weak currents: maybe? | 253 |
| Discrepancies and QED | 253 |
| The perils of margarine | 253 |
| Morgantown's transit fozzle | 254 |
| Mercury: Odd planet out | 254 |

Research Notes

| | |
|-------------|-----|
| Biomedicine | 260 |
| Gerontology | 261 |
| Geophysics | 261 |
| Behavior | 262 |

Articles

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| Split brain and free will | 256 |
| Hyperactivity and lights | 258 |

Departments

| | |
|---------|-----|
| Letters | 250 |
| Books | 263 |

COVER: Phrenologists were debunked before they could pinpoint the exact location of free will in the brain. A more scientific look at the brain, especially the results of split-brain operations, suggests that perhaps physicists should take up the search for free will. See p. 256.

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April 20, 1974

(continued from previous page.)

The title is the message

Your reporters do not ordinarily miss much, but the D.O.S. Gnome seems to have concealed one very important aspect of his Division's work (SN: 3/30/74, p. 214).

I have noticed for a long time that the titles of scientific papers, especially in biology and medicine, are growing longer and longer. (The first paper in the March 12 issue of *BIOCHEMISTRY* has 32 words.)*

The same is true of doctoral dissertations, and the recently published index to dissertations gives the clue to what is happening, and why.

These papers are now indexed by computers programmed to select key words in the title. The more "key" words the title contains, the more often the paper or dissertation is indexed, and the more places it appears.

In university departments and industrial laboratories where salary and promotion may be measured in part by frequency of citation, a long title with many unusual key words will invariably be listed more often, and is likely to be cited more often, than a paper with a short title.

I foresee the time when the title and abstract will take up the entire first page of the paper in most journals. There may be editorial objections (e.g. probability of incomplete citation) to titles that carry over to a second page. On the other hand, with adequate thought in distributing punctuation and a careful study of William Faulkner, there is no reason why we should not soon see instances in which the title is the paper.

P. Schuyler Miller
Pittsburgh, Pa.

* "Characterization of Mitochondrial Deoxyribonucleic Acid from Grande and Petite Yeasts by Renaturation and Denaturation Analysis and by Transfer Ribonucleic Acid Hybridization; Evidence for Internal Repetition or Heterogeneity in Mitochondrial Deoxyribonucleic Acid Populations" by James Casey, Paul Gordon and Murray Rabinowitz.

Superfluous articles like John H. Douglas' "Off the Beat—The Gnome of the D.O.S." have no place in SCIENCE NEWS. People read SCIENCE NEWS because time limitations restrict them to reading concise summaries of new developments in the field. "Off the Beat" is more appropriate for SMITHSONIAN magazine. I am sorry I wasted my time reading the article.

I can do nothing but compliment you

on every other aspect of your magazine, however. Keep up the good work.

Lawrence Morello
Biscayne Park, Fla.

It was with delight and relief that I read John Douglas' "The Gnome of the D.O.S." this evening . . . for I have been reading/reviewing a 36-pound, five volume, \$600,000, three-thousand-plus page Department of the Navy environmental impact statement for the Trident submarine support facility at Bangor, Wash. While their authors lack John Douglas' skill, they capture the spirit as this not untypical paragraph illustrates:

"The Navy has completed preliminary engineering studies for the development of the Trident Support Site. The plans include provisions for reducing or eliminating adverse environmental effects. As design advances, the Navy will, as far as possible, incorporate safeguards against environmental hazards. Planned environmental controls include measures to protect the environment . . . etc., etc."

—p. 271, Vol. I
Trident Support Site EIS draft
March 1974

Unless it is privileged information, does the Navy enlist, contract or employ their resident D.O.S. Gnomes? They obviously make use of more than part-time talent. For \$600,000 taxpayer dollars they did a lot of talking, but not much saying.

Steven C. Wilson
Bainbridge Island, Wash.

Food, seals and people

Gerald T. Kauffmann voices a common misconception (SN: 3/16/74, p. 179) when he defends a potential harvest of Antarctic seals because "Antarctic seals are so abundant, and world food supplies so short, that seal meat should be used as a food source."

The problem is basically not one of too little food, but one of too many people. Killing the world's wildlife to feed the masses is no solution. The problem must be attacked at its roots—by lowering the birth rate until it equals or is less than the death rate.

Roger I. Lanse
Ketchikan, Alaska

A matter of gender

Please give us females credit where it's due! With reference to your remarks on the solar wind (SN: 3/30/74, p. 209), I have spoken with Dr. D. S. In-triligator on a couple of occasions and can certify that she is a woman.

Carol Rubin
California

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251