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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: Researchers at the new National Institute of Aging are not looking for ways to extend our lives indefinitely, but their clinical, hormonal, immunological and cellular research efforts aim toward helping us all reach a healthier old age. See p. 26. (Illustration: Dale Appleman)

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LETTERS

Flattening the Jupiter effect

A recent development in the continuing search for "signs of pending doom" needs to come to the attention of all persons associated with the delivery of astronomical news to the general public.

John E. Gribbin and Stephen Plagemann have removed from their book, *The Jupiter Effect*, the statement that is the leading idea of their scenario (SN: 9/28/74, p. 197).

They apparently discovered that their editorial license expired as a result of their hand waving into being "a line of planets on the same side of the sun" (p. 127, 1st edition). Their change of position perhaps results from the fact that anyone can request from the U.S. Naval Observatory the heliocentric longitudes of the planets during the conjunctions of Mercury in 1982. By no stretch of the imagination does the data permit the use of such a line.

The first edition states "... and a super-conjunction with all nine planets in line on the same side of the sun." The second edition (76) has completely removed that statement and replaced it with a vague remark about "... the greatest number of conjunctions occurring between 1982 and 1984" (p. 128, 2nd edition).

I strongly urge all responsible astronomy lecturers/professors/interpreters/teachers to avail themselves of opportunities to alert the public to the editorial sleight of hand which has occurred.

Now that Gribbin and Plagemann have abandoned the concept graphically depicted in the cover illustration of their book, the man on the street must be apprised of that change. The whole book falls flat.

Robert G. Anderson
Astronomy Instructor/Planetarium Manager
Mt. Hood Community College
Gresham, Ore.

Questioning contact with LGM's

There is one paragraph in your recent article "Looking for LGM's" (SN: 11/20/76, p. 332) that I think deserves more attention than it is usually given.

We may all agree that radio messages travel quite slow and that advanced civilizations therefore most likely will have developed "something better" as a means of communications. But what makes us humans always feel so sure that these civilizations cannot wait in hopes of contacting backward civilizations like ours—and for didactic or altruistic purposes no less?

Didactic purposes? Their own possibly—but what makes us think that "they" would behave toward us any different than we do in our contact with our nearest "backward" relatives the apes and monkeys? Particularly considering that most likely we stand "closer" to those than any old extraterrestrial civilization stands to us.

What makes us think that any altruism on the "advanced side" (even considering they would be more generous than we ourselves usually are in this respect) could benefit us any more than our altruism can benefit our hairy relatives? Anybody ever tried to recite Shakespeare or calculus to them?

Personally I think that just so much as apes may have to evolve to "speech," will we have to advance to "the something better" in order to be considered any more interesting than to be studied or dissected let alone communicated with.

Henri DeLange
Seattle, Wash.

Be prepared

Thank you for printing the letter of John Van Devender (Dec. 4) regarding the Soviet Foxbat. In a few brief paragraphs, Mr. Van Devender has captured the essence of our defense problem. The only thing that I might add is that during our lifetime, the Soviets have never wavered from their objective of achieving total military superiority.

Some good advice for us is the maxim by the Roman writer Vegetius. "He who desires peace should prepare for war." It sounds harsh but that is the policy that allowed the Romans to hold their civilization together for several centuries.

H. Ray Lahr
Malibu, Calif.

Thunder and eggs

In sharing your article "Clicks hasten quail egg hatching" (SN: 12/4/76, p. 359) with my mother, she told me that she knew the sound of severe thunderstorms could prevent fertile eggs from hatching.

"Farmers have known that for years," she added. I've personally seen such eggs fail to hatch after a loud thunderstorm. Upon breaking the eggs open after their gestation period, they were found to show normal development up until the time of the storm.

Perhaps the loud sounds of thunder interferes with the embryo's ability to hear the other eggs' clicking and so affects their rate of development.

Alfred Fant Jr.
Austin, Tex.

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