

SCIENCE NEWS®

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COVER: The Viking 1 orbiter has taken the closest photos ever made of the inner Martian moon, Phobos, including this image made Feb. 20 from a distance of only 120 kilometers. The picture shows an area of about 3 by 3.5 kilometers, with features as small as 10 to 15 meters visible despite some "smear" due to the motion of the spacecraft. The large grooves are the mysterious striations seen earlier by Viking and now apparent as grooves rather than chains of craters. Craters shown range from 1.2 kilometers in diameter down to the limit of resolution, suggesting a terrain similar to the lunar highlands. The dark region above the limb is not evidence of any atmosphere, but rather an artifact of the computer processing. See p. 149. (Photo: Viking 1/JPL)

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LETTERS

Hard questions on Huntington's

The development by the three doctors of an animal model for Huntington's disease (SN: 10/23/77, p. 263) is without doubt a tremendous advance in medicine. The additional work of the other three doctors is equally praiseworthy. That science continues, despite odds, to help people with diseases, such as the ones described, is a real service.

However, I take exception to your last sentence: "If such a marker is found, it might then be used to identify Huntington's victims before they reproduce, or even to identify human fetuses with the disease, thereby giving parents the option of aborting a baby with Huntington's."

Might I ask a few questions?

After identifying victims before they reproduce—what then? Deprive them of an inherent right?

What test is foolproof in reporting that a baby will really be the inheritor of the malady?

Do parents really have the "option of aborting a baby with Huntington's?"

Are we to deprive a human being of his/her right to life by abortion?

Why not trust that those who labor in this area will come up with a cure or control for the ravages of this disease? Or did these learned persons pose this as a corollary of this study?

Sr. Virginia Murphy
Saint Joseph School
Fort Wayne, Ind.

Pain and anger

Regarding your piece on "Pain and Anger" (SN: 1/22/77, p. 60): Let's not be hasty and confuse cause-and-effect with simple correlation. Perhaps if I suffered from untreatable pain, I too would report significantly more angry feelings than my non-hurting neighbors.

Though more cogent data are possibly available, the results as presented in your magazine drew a quick and simple-minded conclusion.

Dale D. McConkey Jr.
Madison, Wis.

The Foxbat furor

Rep. Bob Carr (D-Mich.) has responded at length to letters published in SCIENCE NEWS critical of his criticisms of the Soviet MiG-25 Foxbat and the strengths of Soviet air

power, as described in an earlier news article. (SN: 110:231, 355, 371). We do not have infinite space for a debate on the relative strengths of Soviet-U.S. fighter power, but in fairness we herewith present, in condensed form, several of Mr. Carr's main points of rebuttal:

In modern air combat, advances in weaponry and in aircraft speeds have placed maximum speed and altitude into the same category as maximum speed in your family car: an interesting but irrelevant capability you will never use except under the most freakish circumstances. I invite your readers not to take my word for this, but to consult any fighter pilot with extensive proficiency in air-to-air combat developed within the last half decade. . . .

Any armed U.S. penetration of Soviet airspace will be at low altitude. Low-flying aircraft can only be tracked by a look-down radar, since the ground masks land-based radars. Neither the MiG-25 nor any other Soviet aircraft has a look-down radar that works over land, therefore, the Soviet defense is presently unable to locate and track our attacking aircraft regardless of what missile the MiG-25 carries. . . .

Numerical comparisons of strategic reconnaissance aircraft are meaningless box-score exercises. We have mothballed a number of SR-71s not because we couldn't afford to fly them but because we didn't need to fly them as the quality of our spy satellites improved and took over much of the role previously given to aircraft. . . . We have all the quality and quantity of high-speed reconnaissance aircraft we need and then some, and that is what counts.

Bob Carr
Member of Congress
Washington, D.C.

No action till shake up?

Your report on the *Argo Merchant* oil spill (SN: 1/1/77, p. 6) made the point that Congress is now likely to pass some long overdue tanker safety laws. I hope we will not have to wait until the next catastrophic earthquake in the United States before Congress provides adequate funding for research on minimizing the adverse impact on people and property.

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