

Continued from p. 387

The fact that he announced the event of his observation in a cryptic message to a friend, is evidence that he had previously discussed the consequences of Copernican theory, and the expectation of finding that Venus displays phases similar to the phases of the moon. One does not send encoded messages, unless the recipient is in prior possession of the code....

Carl M. King  
Sarasota, Fla.

... Assume that when the Castelli letter arrived, Galileo had been observing Venus for weeks, spellbound, trying to discover what other wonders the planet would reveal, but also afraid that he would not be able to keep the secret much longer. Galileo would then have been horrified by the fact that even his students could figure out the importance of observing Venus, and would have quickly protected his discovery by sending out the famous cypher.

Dr. Demetrios Matsakis  
U.S. Naval Observatory  
Washington, D.C.

### Lies, lies

In reference to the article on lie detector policy ("Study Disputes Reagan Lie Detector Policy," SN: 11/5/83, p. 292) I'm afraid semantics once more raises its multiordinal head to obfuscate the issue by inappropriate labelling.

Speaking as a skilled operator, there is no such thing as a "lie detector" — there are only truth verification devices and techniques. But we're stuck with this erroneous label in common currency, and this is as misleading to the uninitiated as calling peak-traffic slow-down periods "the rush hours."

In my 30-odd years of experience with poly-

graphy and the Psychological Stress Evaluator, I've found that skilled operators can approach 100 percent accuracy in verifying true statements, and become adept at modifying questions which elicit ambiguous responses to back a specific falsehood into a corner. A checkmate is not a confrontation, or a kill; it is an inescapable admission of defeat. This is precisely why successful interrogations so often result in an admission of guilt, rather than a stubbornly entrenched denial.

And yet, although wildly disparate accuracy figures are continually tossed about in this old argument, rarely are they qualified by an accurate skill rating of the operator, which is the most critical issue. Anyone can buy a polygraph system and, after a rudimentary course of instruction, set himself up as a polygrapher—tantamount to taking a typing course in preparation to becoming a computer expert.

I suggest that anything as heavy as the establishment of a federal policy should be operators' qualifications in truth verification rather than ambiguous statistics on a questionable process such as "lie detection."

Charles Wallach  
President, Behavioral Research Associates  
Canoga Park, Calif.

In the Reagan administration's widening use of the polygraph to catch federal workers who breach security as well as in the increased application of the polygraph by business for general personnel screening, important psychological factors are totally left out from consideration.

Many law-abiding and upstanding people harbor skeletons of youthful forbidden actions or misdeeds in their mental closets. Many people also carry various burdens of unconscious

guilt feelings for even fleeting unacceptable wishes in their childhood.

For these reasons one subjected to a so-called lie-detector examination may react somatically — with signs of fear arousal, for instance — as if he were guilty of something committed recently, while this supposed "self-betrayal" may well have reference to a long-forgotten and supposedly buried past.

Zellig Bach, Ed.D.  
Clinical Psychologist  
Lakehurst, N.J.

### Open season on craters

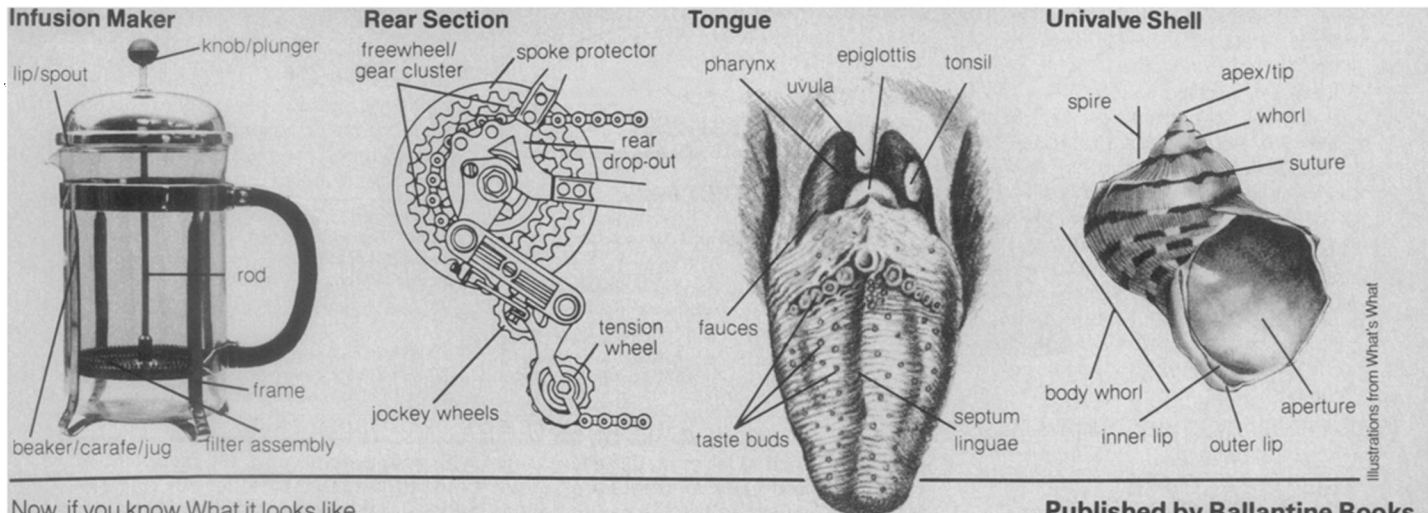
I wonder if McHone, Dietz and colleagues ("Search goes on for elusive crater," SN: 11/12/83, p. 312) have checked out the area of the Canada Basin. There's what looks like an obvious bull's-eye at approximately 81°N., 123°W. Or the seemingly extensive ray system emanating from approximately 78°N, 143°W. Then there's the wall about the Wrangel Abyssal Plain and another bull's-eye just northwest of that. On charts and maps of the region this doesn't all look like volcanism. The fact that these locations are so far north and under water, and maps and charts of the region are not that accurate, suggest to me the need for a close look.

John F. Leahy  
Chualar, Calif.

### Cry babies

What kind of research project ("Baby cries: Whispers of future illness?" SN: 11/19/83, p. 327) is this anyway? A guy goes around snapping little babies with a rubber band to make them cry? I'd deck this marauder of the obstetrics ward if he snapped my kid, and I'm not a violent person. And can you picture trying to explain this project at a cocktail party? Snapping babies, really!

Lewis M. Cook  
Concord, Calif.



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397

