

Dyeing to know

Did Irving Ziderman ("Blue-Purple Dye of Antiquity Reborn," SN: 9/8/84, p. 148) identify the source of "the key ingredient in hyacinthine purple, known in biblical Hebrew as 'tekhelet'" more precisely than as "the banded dye-murex"?

Popular names of shells are notoriously difficult to equate with actual species. Ziderman may have been talking about *Bolinus brandaris*, which is similar to the shell pictured above the article, or about *B. cornutus* (shell b in the photo to the left of the article). Neither is known generally as "banded dye-murex."

The actual source of the ancient dye is a subject of wide interest among world malacologists.

Stuart Lillico, Editor
Hawaiian Malacological Society
Honolulu, Ha.

The Latin name for the mollusk Ziderman refers to as the banded dye-murex (pictured above the article) is *Murex trunculus*. —D. Franklin

As the word turns

As Ted Toal's letter on the term "interface" (SN: 10/6/84, p. 227) indicates, linguistic usage needs continual readjustment to coordinate new and old.

It should be clear that "Adam interfaces far-outs, on the wall" does not communicate well. I made the change of my meanings too rapid, accelerating the "natural process," as Toal calls it. Similarly, in "My fiance and I had an

interface last night," a technical term loses that precise definition for which it is valued. To an uninformed reader, "interface" could be any organic, physical, chemical, linguistic, spiritual or sexual interaction associated with the situation. Such interpretations can mislead, though they are sometimes provocative. But clear communication (and technical writing especially) is built on shared definitions designed to produce predictable results. If the new comes too fast, it brings confusion.

Richard Gardner
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On government interference

Yes, there is soil erosion taking place ("Soil Losses Eroding Food Security," SN: 10/6/84, p. 212). But "a leading pressure driving farmers to 'mine' their soils" is *not* the "ever growing demand for food." The leading pressure is government interference in the marketplace through inflation (causing farmers to either produce enough to pay the mortgage, or go belly up), sending out the wrong signals for production (either retraction or expansion) through government programs.

You state that "the study's authors believe that controlling erosion globally will probably require the involvement of governments." Governments *cause* the problems; they don't know enough to solve them. The solution is the full-scale implementation of private property rights, a laissez-faire system of economics.

Ben Dobbs
Exton, Pa.

Altruism or self-protection?

Since treated tissues appear to be effective in halting the transmission of colds ("Something to sneeze at," SN: 10/27/84, p. 267), it would be to my benefit to buy them for someone with a cold with whom I have close association. Similarly, it might be beneficial for businesses and medical insurance companies to buy them for their employees and clients.

If someone with a cold does not use treated tissues, or refuses to use some I buy for him, and I get a cold from that person, have we opened another litigative nightmare wherein that person can be held liable for my cold?

Clinton C. Brooks
Owings Mills, Md.

A plea for data

Unfortunately, few of us working in legal or political fields are in the habit of asking for empirical data before expressing opinions. We all have views about, but few actually know, what happens to defendants placed in mental institutions after successfully pleading insanity ("Not Popular by Reason of Insanity," SN: 10/6/84, p. 218).

What is the cure rate? What percentage is returned to society only to prey on it anew? It should not be a difficult study, since the raw data are available in most states. Legislatures seem reluctant to authorize studies at public expense. It would make a good subject for a doctoral thesis for some enterprising scholar.

Richard C. McLean
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