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Letters

Turned to stone

Re "Giotto's Perilous Probe of Comet Halley"
(SN: 7/13/85, p. 20): It was Perseus, and not Jason,
who slew the Medusa.

Gary R. Nye
Linglestown, Pa.

True. Space Sciences Editor Jonathan Eberhart
says somewhat sheepishly that he [Eberhart]
would probably have forgotten his mirrored
shield, too. —Ed.

Rat race

I find it difficult to accept Michael Recht's discoveries on the activities of rats ("Where the rats are," SN: 6/8/85, p. 360), because one of his claims seems extremely improbable. Specifically, I am very surprised to learn of a Norway rat "covering 96 meters in less than 10 seconds," when 1984 Olympic champion Carl Lewis re-

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Cover: *What immortal hand or eye! Could frame thy fearful symmetry?* —William Blake, "The Tiger." The universe may have started from nothing and may eventually return to nothing. In between it makes its way through multiple patterns of symmetry. (Illustration: Robert Bourdeaux, after Blake's "The Ancient of Days," 1794)



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quired 9.99 seconds to cover 100 meters. Either there's a glitch here somewhere, or else an average rat with a 5-inch stride can keep up with a man with a 3-foot stride, and the fastest man in the world at that.

Richard Rostrom
Chicago, Ill.

There's no glitch. Recht states in his paper that "... rat 2 was timed during an intervegetation movement ... a distance of approximately 96 meters; it took slightly less than 10 seconds to cover that distance." —J. Raloff

Space babies

I find the information in "Parents don't always know best" (SN: 7/6/85, p. 9) questionable. Other research indicates that breastfeeding postpones ovulation. Many U.S. families are

using this as a method of natural family planning — with great success. Women I've known who have used this method accurately have babies at least two years apart — and often as long as 3½ years apart. However, this method of child spacing is often misunderstood, particularly by health professionals. It requires total breastfeeding for the first several months of the child's life; this means no bottles of formula, juice or water; no pacifier or thumb; nursing according to the child's needs, both day and night; and elimination of artificial schedules (such as every two to four hours). History indicates that this was a method of birth control used by our ancestors. Likewise, in developing countries it has helped to space babies — until formula companies began mass marketing practices there.

Rose Yonekura
Lincoln, Neb.

AUGUST 3, 1985

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