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Letters

Biological undoing

Could the disease described in "Counting falling starfish in California" (SN: 8/17/85, p. 101) be the starfish equivalent of AIDS? Perhaps the starfish — and humanity — won't have to worry about Nemesis lurking in the depths of space to do us in. Rapid extinctions can have biological answers, answers not excluding humans.

I have always had the fear that something trivial would do us in, something on the order of the dye on the strings of teabags.

J.B. Post
Philadelphia, Pa.

Name that nova

Now that we have encountered SN1985f, an apparition too bright to be called a nova but somewhat dull for a regular supernova ("Supernova encounter of the third kind," SN: 8/10/85, p. 84), we have a problem of nomenclature.

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Cover: Benjamin Franklin's frayed coat, gnarled fingers and worn book are more the result of air pollution and acid rain than of old age. Scientists are beginning a systematic study of the role of acid rain in damaging structures like this marble statue in Washington, D. C. (Photo: I. Peterson) Inset: Behavior of the takin, a legendary animal of remote Chinese mountains, has now been observed by scientists (p. 148). (Photo: George B. Schaller)



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We could call it "a greater nova," *nova maior*. Or we could call it either "a lesser supernova," *supernova minor*, or "a least supernova," *supernova minima*. Or maybe we should revert to what SCIENCE NEWS called it in the first place: "a supernova of the third kind," *supernova tertia*. Not bad!

Arthur J. Morgan
New York, N.Y.

Chemical concerns compounded

In "EPA approves Compound 1080 for collar use" (SN: 7/27/85, p. 54), you state that Compound 1080 has been banned since 1972. I believe only the collars were banned. In California, various county agricultural commissioners routinely use 1080-treated grain baits to kill ground squirrels. There are three basic restrictions on its use: (1) it must be used according to its label instructions; (2) it cannot be used on federal lands; (3) it must be applied by members of the county agricultural commissioner's staff

or by California Department of Agriculture personnel. Unfortunately, even with these as well as other discretionary precautions, some domestic animals and wildlife are occasionally killed by secondary poisoning.

My own experience in the enforcement of pesticide regulations has shown me that the misuse of agricultural chemicals is a common occurrence, and that the regulating bodies of government are not at all anxious to prosecute violators. Susan Hagood and Dick Randall of Defenders of Wildlife are justified in their concern about the use and misuse of the 1080 collars.

Bruce C. Johnston
Goleta, Calif.

According to EPA spokesperson Al Heier, the toxic collars didn't exist in 1972, and were only used experimentally in the last few years. Compound 1080 was banned after 1972 for use against predators—most commonly, it had been used in carcass baits. Limited use for rodent control was allowed in California, Colorado, Nevada and Oregon.
— J. Mathewson

SEPTEMBER 7, 1985

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