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Cover: From aboard one of two Mars-orbiting Soviet spacecraft, to be launched next month, a laser beam zaps a spot on the surface of the Martian moon Phobos while a mass spectrometer waits to analyze the resulting vapors. (Illustration by Michael Carroll)



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Letters

Third thoughts on second code

The term "second genetic code" ("Second thoughts on second genetic code," SN: 5/28/88, p.341) was introduced by Christian de Duve in a "News and Views" commentary in the same issue of NATURE that contained our paper (Vol.333, pp.140-145). His restatement of the question of the rules for synthetase-tRNA recognition has sparked a great deal of useful discussion and renewed interest in the problem. To imply that this designation is my own, or that it is now designated as "Schimmel's code," is unfair to Professor de Duve and to me.

It was Professor de Duve's commentary in NATURE that sparked the outpouring of interest from the press that was then focused on our work. I had prepared no press release and was taken by complete surprise by the inten-

sity of interest from the media. Although I referred people to his commentary and to him, nonetheless most of the interest focused on our work. Whenever the question came up, I also referred reporters to other research in the field and to the individuals who are conducting that research. Shortly after the publicity broke I departed for a trip to China that lasted until the end of May. I regret that this commitment prevented me from being available to respond to further inquiries that arose at the time.

William McClain confirmed one of our results, as a result of receiving critical information from our laboratory. At our request, he acknowledged that this information influenced the direction of his research (SCIENCE, Vol.240, p.793). It is a concern that he failed to cite the NATURE article in his publication, because he had a copy of this manuscript five weeks prior to his submission to SCIENCE.

Impressions given in the press of our

characterization and interpretation of the work have been unfortunate in some cases. I encourage all interested parties to read our paper, because it is that which describes our results and the interpretation we have made.

Paul Schimmel
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I compliment C. Vaughan for "Second thoughts on second genetic code." The scientific content was superior and substantially more realistic than other popular accounts of the work that I have seen. Also, the description of the "small scientific controversy" was played at the right level.

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