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Cover: A remarkable variety of sea animals wearing rigid skeletons sprang upon the scene during the Cambrian period, beginning some 570 million years ago. No one knows for sure why the shelly coats evolved so rapidly. But recent fossil discoveries offer clues to what — or perhaps who — might have prodded the evolutionary sprint toward skeletons. This diorama, depicting a slice of seafloor life roughly midway through the Cambrian, highlights a trilobite (left) — the “cockroach” of the ancient seas — and its arthropod cousins, the shrimp-like *Canadaspis*. (Photo: Smithsonian Institution)

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Skeletal Revolution

Letters

Assessing asbestos risks

I am uneasy about the article “More jobs linked to asbestos hazards” (SN: 6/16/90, p.373). In the first place, no distinction was made between the two mineralogical forms of asbestos, amphibole and serpentine. Amphibole asbestos is the primary cause of asbestosis and mesothelioma. However, in the United States it has long been replaced by serpentine asbestos, which, being difficult to ingest into lung passages, presents a much lower hazard.

It is particularly important to include such details in surveys of firefighters (who may have been involved with older buildings containing the amphibole variety) or machinists exposed to a workplace environment of 50 to 70 years past. Conclusions reached about exposure to an amphibole asbestos environment do not apply to the modern environment, or at least are subject to stringent qualification.

There is another problem of surveys of older workers, in that the habit of smoking will

exacerbate the effects of even serpentine asbestos. If the surveys do not control for whether subjects smoked or not, potentially misleading conclusions about asbestos hazards will be inescapable.

Michael J. Dunn
Auburn, Wash.

But a detail?

I agree with Edmund Storms' assertion (Letters, SN: 6/9/90, p.355) that scientists should work toward explaining the experiments supporting the existence of cold fusion, rather than searching for a facile method of dismissal. However, I cannot accept his description of Pons and Fleischmann's use of the media as “. . . but a detail in this age of rapid communications, especially in view of the potential importance of this discovery.”

Had Pons and Fleischmann presented their research through established channels, the current level of division and bickering that afflicts the community investigating the existence of cold fusion could have been avoided. Regardless of how viable and useful cold fusion

might prove to be, their use of the media was inappropriate. What was gained by informing the public of this research so prematurely? Were any lives saved?

If we use the emotionally charged arena of the news media to present and debate our work prior to vigorous peer review, we take a step away from our pursuit of objectivity and move toward a mode of presentation that catches the attention of those not versed in our work.

In doing so, Pons and Fleischmann decreased the credibility of all scientists in the eyes of the public.

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CORRECTION

In “Insect Inscriptions” (SN: 6/16/90, p.376), the butterfly depicted with an “89” on its wing is not a hairstreak of the family Lycaenidae but a species of the genus *Diathria*, family *Nymphalidae*.

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