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## This Week

- 148 Siberian Rocks Clock Biological Big Bang
- 148 'Knockout' ties cancer gene, kidney growth
- 149 Mars Observer: The sounds of silence
- 149 1976 dioxin accident leaves cancer legacy
- 150 Calcium supplements and the danger of lead
- 150 Lean times and fat times recorded in teeth
- 151 Sulfur-aluminum supercharges a new battery
- 151 Measuring the deflection of light by Earth
- 151 Simple test for Alzheimer's

## Research Notes

- 153 Behavior
- 153 Biomedicine

## Articles

- 154 All Rights Reserved

Cover: The U.S. government, private companies, universities, and foreign governments all have filed patents on tens of thousands of tiny fragments of human DNA. Despite unresolved legal questions, the patent race is having a profound impact on science and on medical progress. (Illustration: Taina Litwak)

- 158 The \$1.5 Billion Question

## Departments

- 147 Letters
- 159 Books

Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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## Letters

### TLC for your PC: The last word

Regarding "Turn those PCs off!" (SN: 6/26/93, p.403), I have come to the following conclusions after repairing computers for more than eight years: If you turn your computer on in the morning and plan to use it later in the afternoon or evening, it is *far better to leave it running* than to power down and back up again. Just make sure to use a screen saver so you won't burn an image into the cathode ray tube of the monitor.

Gregg Frug  
West Hills, Calif.

### Comet bits bombard K-T boundary?

"Cretaceous extinctions: The strikes add up" (SN: 6/19/93, p.391) and the recent discovery of the tidal disruption of a comet that passed too close to the planet Jupiter suggest that it was not the single "hit" at Chicxulub that did in the dinosaurs. Perhaps a single large comet passed close enough to Earth to be

tidally disrupted into several smaller fragments of various sizes. Over a relatively short period of time — a few days, months, or years — the fragments rained down at random locations worldwide. The largest hit Chicxulub, and smaller fragments landed in the Pacific Ocean, the central United States, the Indian Ocean, and other sites showing evidence of a Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) impact.

This scenario sidesteps the problem of multiple impacts from several different comets or asteroids all striking Earth at the K-T boundary. Differences in composition might be explained by imagining that the parent body itself had originally aggregated from several smaller objects in the distant past.

George Olshevsky  
Editor, ARCHOSAURIAN ARTICULATIONS  
San Diego, Calif.

### Any use for manned space station?

I wish your article on the plans for the U.S. space station ("Clinton backs scaled-down space station," SN: 6/26/93, p.406) had asked

whether a space station serves any useful purpose. THE ECONOMIST (May 1, 1993) studied the question and concluded that it does not, saying: "The arguments that a new industrial revolution is waiting to happen in space are, for now, unconvincing. The useful research that can be done requires neither a large station nor a permanent manned presence."

Douglas Sczygelski  
Dayton, Ohio

### Correcting a slip of the pen

In "Alcoholics Offer Surprises in Long Run" (SN: 6/5/93, p.356), Bruce Bower reports, "Ironically, the heaviest abusers of alcohol both died and recovered most often."

That's a neat trick and one certainly in keeping with the surprises promised by the title! Perhaps Mr. Bower meant to write that abusers "either died or recovered" most often.

Jeffrey I. Slonim  
New York, N.Y.

Indeed he did — and so did we. — the editors

SEPTEMBER 4, 1993

147