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Letters

Urging research on veterans' ills

Gulf War disease ("Illnesses of Gulf War vets stump experts," SN: 5/7/94, p.294) is no secret to sufferers of multiple chemical sensitivities syndrome (MCS). The symptoms are essentially the same—especially the medical profession's inability to understand it.

This research on Gulf War veterans is raising some interesting questions. The reports that some of the veterans' wives and children are having these symptoms makes me wonder about the fact that first my ex-wife, then I, and then my daughter got the condition. Other friends have told me of similar situations in their families.

Also, increasing numbers of MCS victims are being diagnosed as having chemically induced porphyria. I haven't read about any research among the Gulf War veterans testing this possibility. It also is something that should be researched.

V. Lee Grover
Ajo, Ariz.

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Cover: The quake that struck Northridge, Calif., in January tore down this highway overpass connecting Interstate 5 and state road 14. From recordings of the Northridge earthquake and others, seismologists are documenting newly recognized hazards threatening areas close to faults. (Photo: Andrew W. Taylor/National Institute of Standards and Technology)



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Possible abuses of face recognition

The computer program that allows a computer to identify a face has horrifying potential for abuse ("A Face by Any Other Name," SN: 4/2/94, p.216).

If a computer can pick out a terrorist's face in an airport crowd, then it will be able to identify persons attending an opposition political rally, a pro-life demonstration, or an environmental fund-raiser. Identified persons can then be targeted for harassment, loss of job, arrest, or death. If this program becomes cheap enough, you won't be able to walk into a store without the store knowing who you are, what you bought, and starting a dossier on you.

This is the last nail in the coffin of privacy.
Roger Anderson
Spokane, Wash.

Wanted: More info on quark events

After "sifting through 1 trillion collisions to find 7 million events showing interesting particle interactions," we are told ("At Last, Evidence of the Top Quark," SN: 4/30/94, p.276), physicists found "12 events, representing three

ways in which top quarks decay into other particles." Before the public can decide whether to laugh or cry at this news, it seems to me, we need not "more data" of the same sort, as claimed, but more information about the 7 million events.

What was it that made them "interesting"? Was it that some of them fit no known theory? Was it that some of them were literally impossible? Without such ancillary "evidence," it is apparent to the butcher's boy that these people—for all their exemplary patience and without meaning to at all—may be keeping a heavy thumb on the scales.

Being an amateur basement experimenter, I can testify to the almost insuperable difficulty of getting nature to reveal anything her interrogator does not want to hear. If 440 card-carrying physicists were engaged in the same interrogation project, I should think the probability of their hearing anything unwanted would approximate that of water boiling on a cold stove.

Thomas E. Phipps Jr.
Urbana, Ill.

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