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Letters

Remembering a lesson of the past

I would like to comment on the proposed testing of a genetically engineered insect-killing virus in a real-world environment on one-fifth-acre plots ("Mothra Meets Its Match," SN: 9/3/94, p.154). Has anyone considered that this venomous culture may also kill birds that feed on these insects?

Remember what DDT did years ago to the bird population: It can happen again.

Walter S. Zahn
Holmes Beach, Fla.

Researchers believe these viruses kill only the insects. — T. Adler

Luthier's invention

In 1950, a Parisian luthier replaced the sound post in a fine cello belonging to cellist Madeline Foley with his patented sound post ("To Build a Better Violin," SN: 9/3/94, p.152). It was of comparable length but hollow, with a hole in the side at each end.

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Cover: From apples to galaxies, matter throughout the universe falls under the influence of gravity. Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity posits that gravity is simply a consequence of the curvature of space and time. But two researchers contend that Einstein's formulation of his theory may have serious shortcomings. (Illustration by G. Dana Berry, Space Telescope Science Institute)

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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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Madeline and I were amazed at the improvement in the cello's sound, as was her teacher, Pablo Casals. Later, I had the luthier install a hollow sound post in my violin, and it enhanced the violin's sound as well.

To my mind, this little-known invention marked the greatest improvement in the tonality of stringed instruments in the past 300 years.

James S. Thurston
Noblesville, Ind.

Good health boosts social life?

Frankly, I am fed up with theories that claim a "positive attitude" or "social involvement" makes people healthier ("Death comes knocking when you're alone," SN: 9/3/94, p.159).

I am 44 and have had a chronic illness since age 14. When I am well, I am a very outgoing, socially active person. When I had to quit teaching public school, it was not by choice or lack of social involvement (one can't get more socially involved than enjoying working with 35 youngsters every day) but because my chronic illness had returned.

The one line in the SCIENCE NEWS article —

"Perhaps people with better social lives are healthier to start [with]" — makes a lot more sense.

Barbara E. Peterson
Long Beach, Calif.

New twist to T cell therapy

"T cells cure leukemic mice" (SN: 9/10/94, p.165) describes a new twist in cancer therapy in which T cells from a child diagnosed with leukemia are used to treat cancerous mice. Besides curing the mice of an early form of leukemia, this approach to cancer therapy has an unanticipated benefit: Finally, investigators are exploring an area of medical research that should please the animal rightists.

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