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Cover: Olympic gold medalist Sergei Grinkov, shown with his skating partner and wife Ekaterina Gordeeva, died suddenly last year. New findings suggest that a common genetic flaw played a key role in Grinkov's fatal heart attack. Additional research on sudden death in athletes shows that most die of cardiac defects. (Photo: Reuters/Blake Sel/Archive Photos)



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Letters

Plagued by an error

The following quotation from "Germ warfare: New threat from terrorists" (SN: 5/18/96, p. 311) contains an error: "Last year, an Ohio militia enthusiast was arrested after he sent away for and received plague virus from the American Type Culture Collection in Rockville, Md." Plague is caused by *Yersinia pestis*, a gram-negative bacterium.

Robert T. Turner
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Population convergence?

In "Peking Man grows much older in new study" (SN: 5/11/96, p. 292), reference is made to the theory that populations of *Homo sapiens* may have evolved separately in various parts of the world—specifically, Africa and Asia. I have read this notion in

other articles, but I've never seen a thorough explanation.

The idea that distant populations could evolve into the same species seems to border on the impossible. My understanding of population genetics is that distant populations diverge, not converge. Help me with this one!

Will Handy
Lake Dallas, Texas

When discussing the theory that *H. sapiens* may have evolved separately in different regions, researchers mean that it continued to evolve in more than one region, not that it originated in more than one. See "Erectus Unhinged" (SN: 6/20/92, p. 408) for a more detailed explanation. — B. Bower

DDT's environmental effects

I read with interest Jay Lehr's letter (SN: 5/25/96, p. 323) complaining about the discontinuance of DDT "despite [its] never hav-

ing been proven to be a human carcinogen."

What about its proven effects on the rest of nature? Surely this is an indefensibly shortsighted view—that if it doesn't seem to kill people directly, then it is okay.

Andrew Bernat
Professor of Computer Science
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El Paso, Texas

I take exception to the three letters defending pesticide use. The wholesale production and use of toxic chemicals in and around the food chain is indefensible when one realizes that workable alternatives exist and are in use. If we had our priorities in order, we would be doing far better without pesticides than we have done with them.

Then "environmental hysteria" would disappear.

Hugh M.S. Lovel
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