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Cover: Computer models are starting to illuminate what goes on within Earth's metallic core, concealed from view by 2,800 kilometers of rock. The yellow surface depicts extremely fast currents of iron alloy within the outer core. Whipping around toward the east, these currents cause the solid inner core (red mesh) to rotate faster than the rest of the planet. The turquoise mesh indicates the boundary between the core and the overlying mantle. (Image: Gary A. Glatzmaier)

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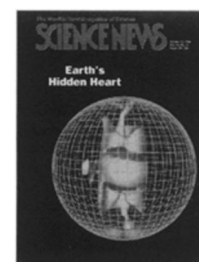
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Letters

Nomenclature cleanup

Botanical cleanup sounds like a good idea, but we'd better know what we're working with ("Botanical Cleanup Crews," SN: 7/20/96, p. 42). You write, "Grasses, such as cattails, bulrushes, and *Spartina*, grow in the wetlands"!!?

Hitchcock's *Manual of the Grasses of the United States* lists a genus *Spartina*, but no manual of grasses will list cattails (*Typha*) or bulrushes (*Scirpus*).

Thomas W. von Alten
Boise, Idaho

Lapses in memory research?

As a psychotherapist who specializes in treating adults who were severely abused as children, I am always disturbed when I read articles about memory that imply that remembrances of trauma are subject to the same distortions as recollections of ordinary

events ("Remembrance of Things False," SN: 8/24/96, p. 126).

Traumatic memory is implicit memory. Ordinary, or narrative, memory is explicit. They involve different areas of the brain.

Some very exciting PET scans have been done with survivors of trauma who volunteered to be "triggered" so they could have flashbacks and other symptoms of reexperiencing traumatic events. These studies showed that the limbic system is the most active part of the brain during these symptoms, while the cortex shows little activity, especially in the region that governs speech.

I also have great difficulty when researchers assume that knocking over a punch bowl at a wedding or even putting one's hand through a window is comparable to being raped by one's father at the age of 5. Moreover, little, if anything, is said about how adults convince children—and, later, family members convince the adult incest survivors—that nothing happened, that they are only making it

up. Children—and adult survivors—are far more compelled to believe that their parents didn't abuse them than they are to create fantasies that they did.

And what about the perpetrators who don't remember what they did, who alter their own perceptions of reality so as to be able to live with themselves? It would be a refreshing change to see some of that research highlighted.

Deborah Feller
New York, N.Y.

Has anyone studied false memories in connection with measures of suggestibility—how easy it is to hypnotize a person, for example? The article makes me wonder if the people in whom false memories are more easily created are also the easier hypnotic subjects. This may be a better predictor than the mechanisms of memory itself.

Mark Pottenger
Los Angeles, Calif.

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