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Cover: In fruit flies, a vertebrate gene governing eye development can induce extra eyes, such as this small, misshapen eye below the normal one (inset). Such findings challenge the traditional view that the remarkably different eyes of insects and vertebrates evolved independently. (Photo: A. Hefti, University of Basel, Switzerland; background illustration: Mark Gilvey, Design Imaging)
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Letters

A chilly prospect

"New station recommended for the South Pole" (SN: 3/22/97, p. 175) includes a sketch of a proposed science station for the South Pole. The photo of the original shows a building (dome) with a small surface area relative to its interior volume. The proposed building is the very opposite, with a large amount of surface area for the interior volume. There also appear to be windows all around. Given the low temperatures, I would want to spend as little of my budget on heating as possible!

Are you sure that the sketch is not for a tropical office building?

Mike Sitz
Park Rapids, Minn.

Accounting for urban hot spots

"Global Temperatures Spark Hot Debate" (SN: 3/15/97, p. 156) does not take into

account the fact that ground-based thermometers are located in cities. Cities are local hot spots that get warmer as their populations increase, a well-known phenomenon.

Harvey Morgan
Deming, N.M.

The records of ground-based thermometers take into account the well-known "heat-island effect" of nearby cities. Moreover, not all stations are located near cities. — R. Monastersky

Defending the defenseless

Aren't most of us descendants of survivors of the 1918 flu pandemic ("A Doughboy's Lungs Yield 1918 Flu Virus," SN: 3/22/97, p. 172)? Doesn't our DNA harbor natural genetic resistance to the 1918 strain?

John P. MacLean
Stafford, Texas

Survivors of the epidemic do harbor antibodies to the 1918 strain. Unfortunately, disease-

specific antibodies are not passed from generation to generation, so the rest of us remain essentially defenseless. — S. Sternberg

Essential difference

How apt that Ivars Peterson invoked Paul Erdős' notion of God's book of exquisite mathematical proofs in his article "Computers and Proof" (SN: 3/22/97, p. 176)! While the recent computer proof of the Robbins conjecture may not be in "the book," the real difference between a computer and a mathematician may be that the computer can't decide whether it's in "the book" or not.

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