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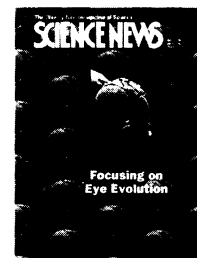
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Letters

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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