

This Week

- 372 Infant Deaths Linked to Odd Heartbeat
Nathan Seppa
- 372 New bird species found in surprising place
Susan Milius
- 373 European crab leaps to Pacific prominence
Janet Raloff
- 373 Quick screening yields better catalysts
Corinna Wu
- 374 Ghostlike particles carry a little weight
Jeffrey Brainard
- 374 High-tech images shrink fossil braincase
Bruce Bower
- 375 Genome sequence aids war on tuberculosis
John Travis
- 375 Ambitious sky survey gets under way
Ron Cowen

Articles

- 376 Loops of Gravity
Calculating a foamy quantum space-time
Ivars Peterson
- 380 Immune Attack on Cancer
Researchers spur the immune system to rout malignancies
Kathleen Fackelmann

Letters

Life on Mars from Earth?

In NASA's careful attempt to avoid contamination of Martian rocks by Earth's sources of life, nothing was mentioned about the possibility of organic artifacts from Earth being found on Mars ("Scooping Up a Chunk of Mars," SN: 4/25/98, p. 265). If Mars rocks can land on Earth, is it not likely that, in the past, Earth material made it to Mars?

Thus, even if some "evidence" of life is found in the retrieved samples, how can we be sure that it did not originate on our own planet in a previous era?

*Del Dietrich
Campbell, Calif.*

Testing the biological quarantine process for the Mars robot on an actual mission to Mars sounds expensive and time-consuming. Why not test the process with a trip to the Moon?

It would be quicker and probably less expensive. Moreover, previous visits to the moon would provide adequate controls for comparison of possible contaminants, and

any snafus in handling the landing craft would be exposed.

*Tim Davis
Broomfield, Colo.*

Long before the probe's expected return in 2008, NASA's International Space Station

CORRECTION



Geoffrey Schmidt

In "Blood test, 3-D graphics win top prize" (SN: 5/23/98, p. 327), a photo of Jonathan Kelnor was incorrectly identified as a photo of Geoffrey Schmidt.

Research Notes

- 378 **Biology**
She's no help, but she's our mom
Change one gene, plants get healthier
Why do guys carry eggs on their backs?
- 379 **Biology**
Glowing bacteria may guard sea floor
Mutant microbes could work for EPA
- 379 **Geology**
Life at its lowest
A quest for Earth's core
- 382 **Biomedicine**
Virus, cervical cancer link clarified
Do high heels boost arthritis risk?
- 383 **Behavior**
Hooked on a feeling

Departments

- 370 Science News Books
- 371 Letters



Cover: A cluster of soap bubbles provides one way to visualize the microstructure of space on distance scales much smaller than the diameter of a proton. Such a picture emerges from recent efforts to determine the relationship between gravitation, general relativity, and quantum mechanics. **Page 376**

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should be in operation. What better laboratory for investigating potentially dangerous samples while remaining completely isolated from the atmosphere?

*Ian Randal Strock
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

It seems odd to me that no discussion is presented regarding the worst-case scenario represented by the *Andromeda Strain* example given at the beginning of the article. In the climax of that fictitious classic, the strain gets loose despite all precautions.

This brings me to my point.

Why parachute the samples down to Earth at all? Why not conduct the testing for toxicity in an orbital facility that can be directed into the sun should the worst occur?

*Bill Chandler
Shawnee, Kansas*

John Rummel, NASA's Planetary Protection Officer, replies:

"We tested some of the quarantine procedures as part of the Apollo missions to the moon.

Letters continued on p. 377