SCIENCE NEWS®
The Weekly Newsmagazine of Science
Volume 155, No. 2, January 9, 1999

This Week

Articles

Research Notes

Departments

Cover: Giant tube worms sway in the hot brines spewing out of a seafloor geyser. Discovery of such vent creatures 20 years ago sparked the notion that chemicals in the brines could have spawned life on Earth. Recent laboratory experiments indicate that this controversial theory might be right. **Page 24**
(Photo: NOAA)

Visit SCIENCE NEWS ONLINE for special features, columns, and references.
http://www.sciencenews.org

Letters

Listen up there

The article "A dozen new planets . . . and still counting" (SN: 9/26/98, p. 197) indicates that the scientific community is getting increasingly more adept at locating planets around stars similar to our own. If this is the case, would it not make sense to coordinate the search for extraterrestrial intelligence with the search for new planets? In other words, as more and more stars like our own are located with planets, should not the search focus on possible communication originating from those planets?

Robert E. Panoff
Miami, Fla.

Some of the stars examined in searches for extraterrestrial intelligence are the same ones thought to have planets. —R. Cowen

Use it, don't abuse it

I would be inclined to think that there is a commercial use for *Caulerpa taxifolia* ("Rogue Algae," SN: 7/4/98, p. 8) that is perhaps being overlooked: cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, fertilizer, or food. What I'm saying is that uses for the plant should be studied before yet another alien is introduced into this sea.

James R. Durham
Colorado Springs, Colo.

Some light on dark matter

Your article on the source of cosmic rays ("Birth zone shrinks for top cosmic rays," SN: 8/15/98, p. 101) doesn't mention dark matter. Is it a possible source?

Ann Morgan
Manzanita, Ore.

The hypothetical superheavy particle mentioned in the article would be a form of cold dark matter at least 10 trillion times more massive than a proton. This type of particle might inhabit a spherical region known as the galactic halo, encompassing our galaxy. If it exists there in sufficient numbers, decays of the particles could have produced the rare, ultra-high-energy cosmic-ray strikes that have been detected, some theorists contend. —P. Weiss

What you see is what you get

Regarding "Why Guys Get Fancy" (SN: 8/29/98, p. 141), could it be that female choice prevails for those male parts which the female can be aware of prior to insertion of the male organ? Lock and key may predominate for male physical sexual characteristics that are not observable by the female prior to insertion.

Lamar Robert
Chiang Mai, Thailand

Selenium as an antioxidant

In the article "Can selenium avert prostate cancer?" (SN: 9/19/98, p. 188), it is stated that ". . . how it might work against cancer remains unclear." However, selenium is known to be a powerful antioxidant. Since free radicals are suspected as a leading cause of cancer due to DNA damage, it should not be surprising that the protection offered by selenium is due to the prevention of damage to DNA in prostate cells.

H.H. Denman
Wayne State University
Detroit, Mich.