

Notes & Briefs

Sonofusion, Burnt Sponges, Smelling Technosexual, etc.

After publishing phony research by a notorious South Korean cloning researcher Hwang Woo Suk in 2004 and 2005, the journal *Science* appointed a panel of experts to scrutinize the review process for paper submissions, seeking to improve the journal's procedures for detecting fraudulent work.

In its report, the panel warned that “no realistic set” of publication procedures “can be completely immune to deliberate fraud,” but advised the journal to institute a process of “risk-assessment” designed to gauge the likelihood that the papers accepted for publication were intentionally deceptive. “Papers that are likely to have high visibility,” it added, “for example, in climate, energy, human health, etc., should get special scrutiny.” The panel also recommended that *Science* collaborate with other leading scientific journals, like *Nature*, to develop a standard review process requiring authors to supply extensive primary data and more details on coauthors and individual contributions to the research.

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Robert Adler, an Austrian-born inventor with over 180 U.S. patents to his name, died on February 15, 2007 of heart failure. Described by obituarists as the father of the remote control, Adler invented Zenith’s “Space Command” in 1956—the device that first made it possible for couch potatoes to space out in front of the tube. Adler, who in 1996 said, “I hardly ever turn on the TV” and “never channel surf,” applied for his final patent just weeks before his death at age 93.

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Calvin Klein, Inc., in an attempt to recreate the success of its fragrance CK One, has recently launched a new scent, CK in2u, and with it, a new word for the lexicon of hipness: “technosexual.” Members of the “technosexual generation,” according to the

company, have been reared on computers, receive and transmit information at lightning speed, and busily conduct relationships through diverse electronic media—they are, in short, the sort who might arrange for a casual romantic encounter with just the brief text message “in2u.” Company spokesmen say the fragrance for this new generation is designed to be, as its members are, fast-acting, direct, and seductive. This is achieved, for women, with the scents of pink grapefruit, bergamot, red currant, and neon amber; for men, with lime, cocoa, and musk.

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Purdue University has cleared researcher Rusi Taleyarkhan of charges of misconduct regarding his work on “sonofusion.” Taleyarkhan published papers stating that he had produced a tabletop nuclear fusion reaction using sound waves to collapse bubbles in a beaker. Scientists have thus far been unable to generate small-scale fusion reactions, so Taleyarkhan’s technique would have significant consequences for energy production in the future—if it were for real. Other researchers, unable to replicate the findings, are highly skeptical of his data; a few suspect fraud. Although Purdue, after investigating the matter, has announced itself satisfied with Taleyarkhan’s work, much of the scientific community remains unsatisfied with the university’s.

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On February 1, 2007, the Eiffel Tower and other Parisian establishments went dark for five minutes

to mark the eve of the U.N.'s latest report on climate change. The following month, landmarks in Sydney, Australia turned off their lights in unison for a full hour in hopes of, as one Australian environmentalist put it, sending "a very positive signal that we can do something." No word on how many tourists had their lives forever changed by these noble self-denying sacrifices.

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In an unusual confirmation of a common cultural stereotype, a middle-aged German motorist got his car stuck on a railroad track in Bremen in January 2007 after blindly obeying the orders of his satellite navigation system. According to police spokesmen, "the friendly voice from his satnav told him to turn left," and so he did—driving over the curb of the busy street and lodging his vehicle on a railway track, thereby delaying about a dozen subsequent trains. German police report a growing number of motorists blaming their navigation systems for accidents, including a 53-year-old who made an ill-fated right turn into a toilet hut, and an 80-year-old who, having overlooked a construction sign, plowed into a sand bank.

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Researchers at the University of Florida recently announced that household sponges can be made cleaner by zapping them in the microwave for two minutes, a process which kills much of the bacteria residing in their nooks and crannies. Enthusiastic homemaking hygienists who acted on

this suggestion when it was first covered in the press reported being "pissed off" with the results: a charred sponge and a smelly kitchen. It turns out that, in their haste, many had overlooked the researchers' warning that the technique works best with wet sponges: "The heat, rather than the microwave radiation, likely is what proves fatal to the pathogens. Because the microwave works by exciting water molecules, it is better to microwave wet rather than dry sponges or scrub pads."

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The prevalent use of e-mail by scientists will make it much harder for historians of science to assemble a complete record of researchers' communications, according to Robert P. Crease of the State University of New York at Stony Brook. "We could not hope to understand the development of quantum mechanics...without studying the vigorous exchanges of letters between the likes of Bohr, Dirac, Heisenberg, Pauli and others as they thrashed out the theory in the 1920s," Crease wrote in a recent article in *Physics World*. "Indeed, the historian David Cassidy decided to write his biography of Heisenberg only after accompanying the physicist's widow to her attic and seeing her drag out a trunk of Heisenberg's personal letters." Crease quotes Spencer Weart of the American Institute of Physics: "We have paper from 2000 B.C., but we can't read the first e-mail ever sent. We have the data, and the magnetic tape—but the format is lost." Two preservation projects—the Persistent Archives Testbed

Project and the Dibner-Sloan History of Recent Science and Technology Project—aim to archive electronic documents for posterity.

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Willing to pay \$700 to steer clear of parallel parking forever? That's the going rate for a new feature that parks one's car with the push of a button—a feature which Toyota now supplies at the request of roughly 70 percent of buyers in Britain. Lexus is following suit with its “Intelligent Park Assist” in its LS 460 flagship sedan, promising to make city streets that much safer from hapless suburbanites trying to park.

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After an extensive search in 2006, scientists were unable to spot China's Baiji Yangtze dolphin. They now anticipate its extinction. The “goddess of the Yangtze” has been described by the less romantic as a “living fossil” that survived three million years on the river. If extinct, the Baiji is the first known cetacean species to be wiped out because of human activity.

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In 1994, Dr. Bob Chastant, a Louisiana orthodontist, began collecting DNA samples from his patients in an effort to track the identities of children in kidnapping or disfiguring accidents; now at least nineteen other orthodontists are contributing to Kid ID, Chastant's latest database of DNA information, fingerprints, and digital photographs. Parents are increasingly signing on to have DNA profiles made for their children, and police stations

and various private companies are supplying the resources. Some officials argue that kidnappings and disfiguring accidents are too rare for such large-scale and expensive DNA-collection efforts to be worthwhile.

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It's not just the humans in modern sports who have been relying on performance-enhancing substances. On February 14, 2007, an “illegal substance”—anonymously reported to be jet fuel—was found under the hood of the Toyota Camry belonging to NASCAR's two-time champion Michael Waltrip. The substance was detected during inspections before the season-opening Daytona 500, prompting the immediate seizure of the vehicle and placing an ugly blot on Toyota's anticipated debut at the races.

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This past December, the residents of San Francisco were subjected to a pungent public conditioning stunt when the California Milk Processing Board decided to dabble in olfactory advertising. Cardboard strips emanating the scent of freshly-baked cookies were placed in several public bus shelters, in hopes of encouraging citizens to seek out a glass of milk.

The cookie campaign crumbled after one day, following complaints ranging from potential allergic reactions to a concern that the smell of nonexistent cookies would only taunt homeless people congregated inside the bus shelters.

Apart from these problems, the measure simply did not seem to work as

expected: those interviewed did not report craving a glass of milk—they wanted cookies.

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If you've fallen and you can't get up, two companies are marketing a helping hand—or rather, a watchful eye. New York-based Living Independently Group and Texas-based Lusora are offering in-home electronic monitoring services by which baby boomers can baby-sit Mom and Dad. The system uses wireless motion detectors to track seniors' movements throughout the home, alerting emergency response workers and appropriate caregivers to suspicious trends—like inactivity that may signify a fall.

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Spas in the Big Apple have discovered another way to help New Yorkers cope with the wounds of modern life:

Those suffering from the repetitive-stress injury “BlackBerry Thumb” can now find relief in the “tech finger massage,” a full-body, hour-long, sixty-dollar massage from the Graceful Services spa on Second Avenue.

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The voice-recognition software that comes with Microsoft's new Vista operating system can, the company has admitted, be hijacked by unwelcome voices. Malicious audio launched through the Web or sent by e-mail could, with the user's microphone and speakers turned on, delete files, execute commands, or shut down the computer. The vulnerability was first discovered by Vista users and reported by bloggers. Security researchers at Microsoft have responded with a statement that “additional barriers... would make [such] an attack difficult.”