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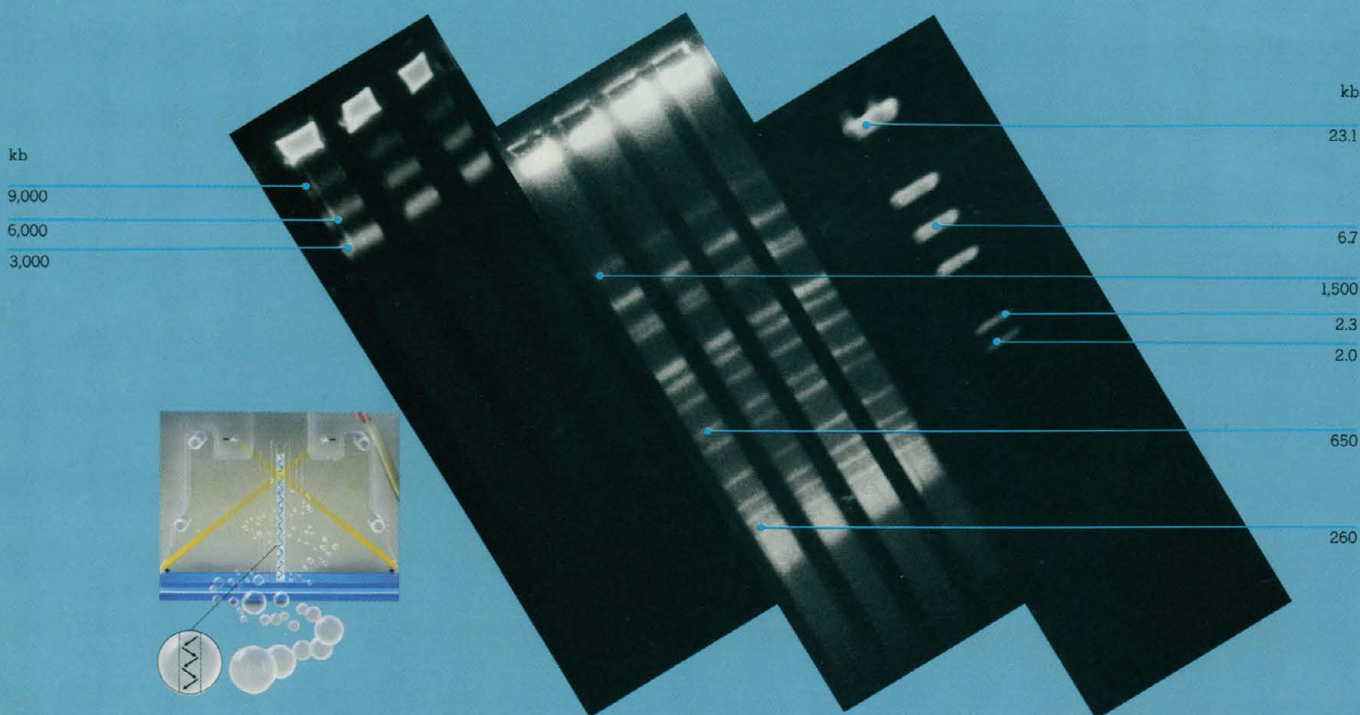
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Sylvia Porter Personal Finance	74

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Carbon Copy Plus	\$118
Crosstalk XVI	93
IS Talk	37
Mirror II	52
PTCL	146
Relay Gold 2.0	138
Relay Silver	112
Side Talk	90
Transporter 1.4	221

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dBase III Plus	\$398
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Database Manager 2	221
dBXL	98
Enable	408
Fastpak Data	60
Microsoft Works	146
PC Converter Plus	60
PFS: First Choice 2.0	108
Q & A	208
Rapid File 1.2	221
R:Base System V 1.1	428
Reflex 1.14	86
Thinktank	146

GRAPHICS

Generic CADD	58
Graph-in-the-box	57
Grasp 3.0	74
Harvard Graphics	238
In-A-Vision	298
Microsoft Chart 3.0	248
Newsroom Pro	49
PFS Graph	105
Print Shop	39
Print Shop Companion	30
Printmagic	45
Sign Master	158
VP Graphics	75

LANGUAGES

Basic Compiler 5.36	\$268
Macro Assembler 5.0	96
Pascal Compiler	188
Quick C	58
RM Basic	450
Smart Guide for DOS	22
Turbo Basic 1.1	60
Turbo C	60
Turbo Pascal	60
Turbo Tutor 4.0	60

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Gem Desk Top Publisher	\$238
Gem Desk Top	37
Harvard Total Project Manager	378
Timelink Plus III	37

SPREADSHEET

Lotus 1-2-3 2.01	\$299
Javelin	83
Microsoft Excel	298
Multiplan	118
PFS: Professional Plan	105
Quattro	128
Swift & Easy	37
Swiftcalc PC w/Sideways	42
VP Planner	55

UTILITIES

DOS Rx	\$60
Dr. DOS	37
Fastback 5.14	88
Framelock	30
Genifer	213
Keyworks	74
Mace Utilities	55
Memory Mate	52
Norton Utilities-Advanced	83
PC Tools Deluxe	59
Quick Index III	111
Runtime	112
Sideways	41
Turbo Lightning	57
Windows	63

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Bank St Writer Plus	\$49
Celebrity	67
Easy	74
Filemover	45
Microsoft Word	198
Multimate Adv. II	278
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Q & A Write	118
Samna Word IV	446
Volkswriter Dlx Plus	74
WordPerfect	198
Word Finder	45

Software for "MACINTOSH"

dBASE MAC	\$298
Blue Start	33
Clickart Publications	37
Colormate	56
Decision Map	108
Dollars & Sense	112
Double Helix	273
Easy 3D	112
In Talk 3.0	146
Laser Author	44
Lazerstart 2.5	71
MAC Vision	224
Mainstreet Filer	75
Microsoft Chart	78
Microsoft Excel	296
Microsoft Works	198
Microsoft Multiplan	118
Power Point	228
Printworks for MAC	56
Quartet	37
Runtime	112
Spellswell	53
Timelink	18
Turbo Pascal	74
Turbo Tutor	52
Typing Tutor IV	44
Voila	75
Word Finder	44
Write Now	131

Software for "APPLE"

Animate	\$52
Book Ends	93
Dazzle Draw 128K	45
Deluxe Paint 2GS	75
Dollars & Sense	89
Fanta Vision	37
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Circle No. 23 on Readers' Service Card

699 This Week in *Science*

Editorial

701 World Competition in Biotechnology

Letters

705 College Calculus: How Should It Be Taught?: M. M. GRELLER; A. RALSTON ■
The 3 K Microwave Background and Olbers' Paradox: P. MARMET
■ Biology Teaching: S. L. WEINBERG

News & Comment

710 Europe Seeks Strategy for Biology ■ Focus on the Genome
712 Field Test Data Inadequate, OTA Says
713 Science Budget Squeeze and the Zero Sum Game
714 Anti-Acne Drug Poses Dilemma for FDA
715 Fresh Look at Acid Rain
716 Toxic Waste R&D Effort Stalled
OECD Sets Guidelines for Cooperation
717 NAS Elects New Members
718 Animals of Invention

Research News

719 Obstacles to an AIDS Vaccine
721 Mathematics at 100
722 Exploiting the Insights from Protein Structure
724 A New Tool Maker in the Hominid Record? ■ One Species . . . One Tool

Articles

740 Segregation of Form, Color, Movement, and Depth: Anatomy, Physiology, and Perception: M. LIVINGSTONE AND D. HUBEL
750 Supernova 1987A!: S. E. WOOSLEY AND M. M. PHILLIPS
760 The Design of Molecular Hosts, Guests, and Their Complexes: D. J. CRAM

Research Articles

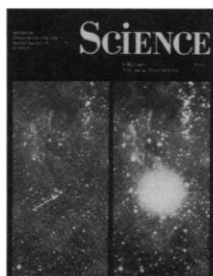
768 Visualizing Gene Expression in Time and Space in the Filamentous Bacterium *Streptomyces coelicolor*: A. SCHAUER, M. RANES, R. SANTAMARIA J. GUIJARRO, E. LAWLOR, C. MENDEZ, K. CHATER, R. LOSICK

Reports

777 Direct Observation of the Femtosecond Excited-State *cis-trans* Isomerization in Bacteriorhodopsin: R. A. MATHIES, C. H. B. CRUZ, W. T. POLLARD, C. V. SHANK
779 The Nature of the Interior of Uranus Based on Studies of Planetary Ices at High Dynamic Pressure: W. J. NELLIS, D. C. HAMILTON, N. C. HOLMES, H. B. RADOUSKY, F. H. REE, A. C. MITCHELL, M. NICOL

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COVER Supernova 1987A—an exploding star. On 23 February 1987, light and neutrinos reached Earth from the brightest supernova in almost 400 years. “Before (left) and after (right)” photos show the star that exploded and the supernova shortly after outburst. Photographs were taken using the 3.9-meter Anglo-Australian Telescope in New South Wales, Australia. See page 750. [Courtesy of David Malin, copyright 1987, the Anglo-Australian Telescope Board]

- 781 Hand of *Paranthropus robustus* from Member 1, Swartkrans: Fossil Evidence for Tool Behavior: R. L. SUSMAN
- 784 Insulin-Resistant Diabetes Due to a Point Mutation That Prevents Insulin Proreceptor Processing: Y. YOSHIMASA, S. SEINO, J. WHITTAKER, T. KAKEHI, A. KOSAKI, H. KUZUYA, H. IMURA, G. I. BELL, D. F. STEINER
- 787 Two Mutant Alleles of the Insulin Receptor Gene in a Patient with Extreme Insulin Resistance: T. KADOWAKI, C. L. BEVINS, A. CAMA, K. OJAMAA, B. MARCUS-SAMUELS, H. KADOWAKI, L. BEITZ, C. MCKEON, S. I. TAYLOR
- 790 Translocation and Rearrangement of Myeloperoxidase Gene in Acute Promyelocytic Leukemia: S. C. WEIL, G. L. ROSNER, M. S. REID, R. L. CHISHOLM, R. S. LEMONS, M. S. SWANSON, J. J. CARRINO *et al.*
- 793 Changing the Identity of a tRNA by Introducing a G-U Wobble Pair Near the 3' Acceptor End: W. H. MCCLAIN AND K. FOSS
- 796 Middle Mississippian Blastoid Extinction Event: W. I. AUSICH, D. L. MEYER, J. A. WATERS
- 798 Directional Selection and the Evolution of Breeding Date in Birds: T. PRICE, M. KIRKPATRICK, S. J. ARNOLD
- 800 Proteosome-Lipopeptide Vaccines: Enhancement of Immunogenicity for Malaria CS Peptides: G. H. LOWELL, W. R. BALLOU, L. F. SMITH, R. A. WIRTZ, W. D. ZOLLINGER, W. T. HOCKMEYER

Technical Comments

- 803 New Zealand Marine Terraces: Uplift Rates: C. M. WARD; W. B. BULL AND A. F. COOPER ■ Guanylate Cyclase and the Adrenal Natriuretic Factor Receptor: S. A. WALDMAN, D. C. LEITMAN, J. ANDRESEN, F. MURAD; R. K. SHARMA

AAAS News

- 807 AAAS-African Programs Under Way: A. A. WILSON AND LISBETH A. LEVEY ■ Forum to Focus on Science Teaching ■ Pacific Division Meets in Corvallis, 18 to 22 June ■ Call for Nominations ■ Reminder for Members ■ Regional Seminar Focuses on Caribbean Science and Technology ■ Obituaries ■ AAAS Council Meeting, 1988: M. WHITE ■ AAAS Members Elected as Fellows on 15 February 1988

Book Reviews

- 817 Hospital Structure and Performance, *reviewed by* M. L. FENNEL ■ Pottery Analysis, R. L. RANDS ■ Sedimentation in the African Rifts, R. G. COLEMAN ■ Geology and Geochemistry of Abyssal Plains, D. E. BUCKLEY ■ Books Received

Software Reviews

- 824 PC Software for Artificial Intelligence Applications: H. EPP, M. KALIN, D. MILLER

Products & Materials

- 832 Automated Sample Handling ■ Microcentrifuge Tube ■ Inverted Microscope ■ Graphics Supercomputer ■ Fast 3-D Graphics on PCs ■ X-ray Fluorescence Analyzer ■ Literature

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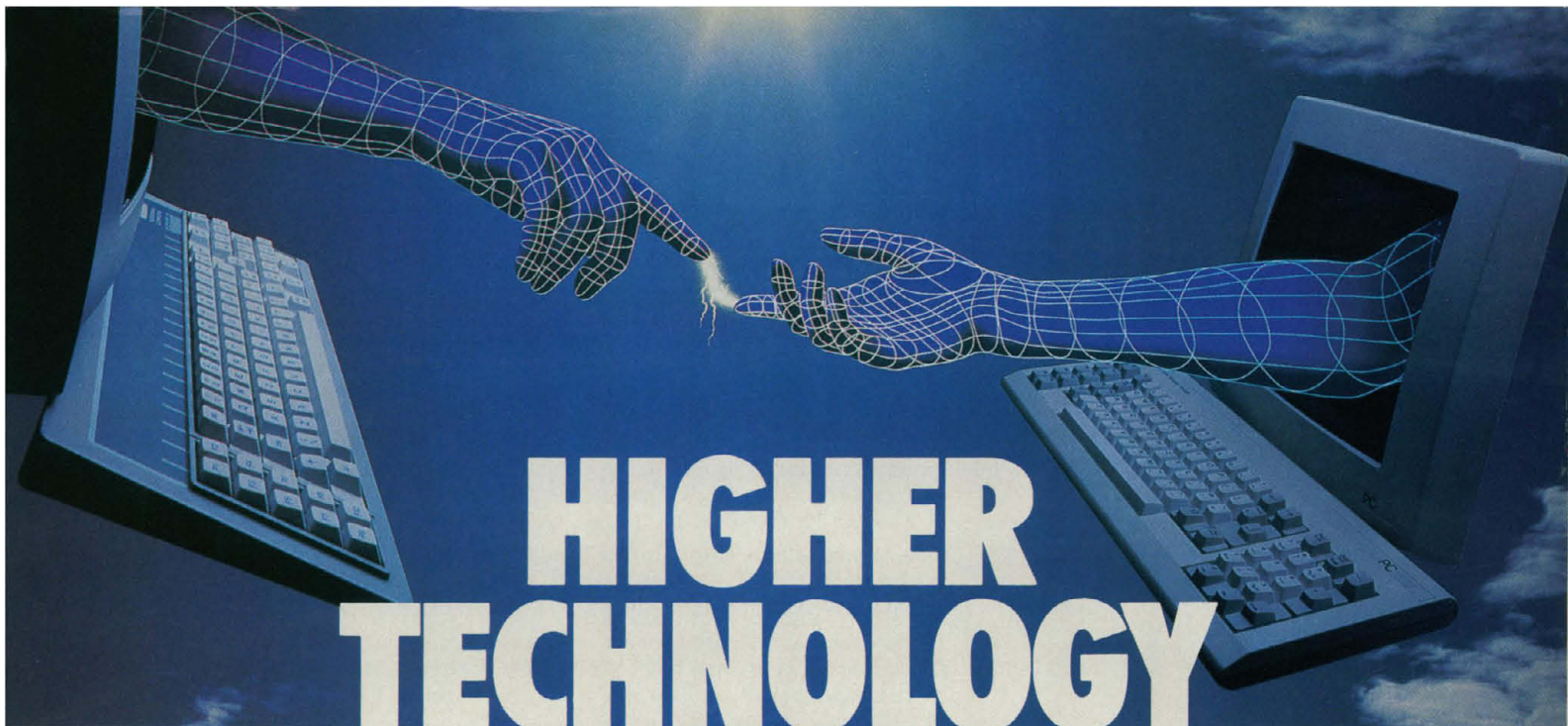
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This Week in SCIENCE

Insight into vision

A visual image has color, depth, movement, form, and texture (page 740). Anatomic and physiologic studies in monkeys and perception studies in humans indicate that these components are processed by separate channels and that the segregated, parallel processing begins in the eye and continues as far into the brain as has been probed. There is also some supportive clinical evidence that distinct circuits process individual components of an image: stroke victims sometimes have selectively short-circuited vision, experiencing, for example, loss of only one segment of vision such as color vision. The experimental studies and the insights they provide into the structure, function, and evolution of the visual system are described by Livingstone and Hubel. It is enigmatic that visual images seem to be unified, when, in fact, processing keeps the parts of the whole separate from one another.

Highlighting differentiation

STREPTOMYCETES are soil bacteria that form colonies in which physiologically distinct cells perform specialized functions (page 768). It takes several days for a colony to mature. Substrate mycelium cells initially burrow down into the medium on which the colony is growing; later aerial mycelium cells grow upward out of the substrate cells and eventually produce spores. When and where various genes are turned on and off within the colony during this complex differentiation process has now been studied by Schauer *et al.* through the use of a "reporter" gene cluster, *luxAB*. This cluster was transferred into streptomycetes cells next to different genes; as indigenous genes were expressed during differentiation, their promoters concurrently turned on nearby *luxAB* genes. The location of active genes was devilishly simple to identify because, when the *luxAB* gene cluster is turned on, the enzyme luciferase is produced and light is emitted: steps in morphologic differ-

entiation are in this way spatially and temporally illuminated.

Fast-forward chemistry

A state-of-the-art laser system has made it possible to directly observe steps in a chemical reaction that goes from reactant to product within 500 femtoseconds (10^{-15} seconds) (page 777). In the prototype experiment, the retinal prosthetic group of bacteriorhodopsin, a light-sensitive bacterial membrane protein that pumps protons through the membranes of *Halobacterium halobium*, was observed to isomerize from a trans to a cis configuration. Mathies *et al.* experimentally induced the chemical transformation with 60-femtosecond optical pulses; dynamic structural changes were followed spectrophotometrically with 6-femtosecond resolution. The spectroscopic signature (a direct monitor of a structural change) at 150 femtoseconds showed the prosthetic group twisting; the torsional displacement of the prosthetic group resulted in a permanent change in the molecule's geometry.

Inside Uranus

NEW models of the interior of Uranus and new ways of testing these models have been developed since Voyager II took a close-up look at the distant planet in 1986 (page 779). Uranus consists of ice, gas, and rock and has a powerful but uneven magnetic field. Nellis *et al.* have investigated in the laboratory how methane, ammonia, and a mixture of water, ammonia, and isopropanol called synthetic Uranus—all thought to be prevalent on the planet—behave under simulated planetary conditions. During passage of a strong shock wave, the materials were molecularly ionized and dissociated. Conductivity was strong within certain high temperature and pressure ranges, accounting for (and constraining calculations of) the internal dynamo that produces the planet's magnetic field. All materials deep within the planet are likely to be dense and stiff; conditions in

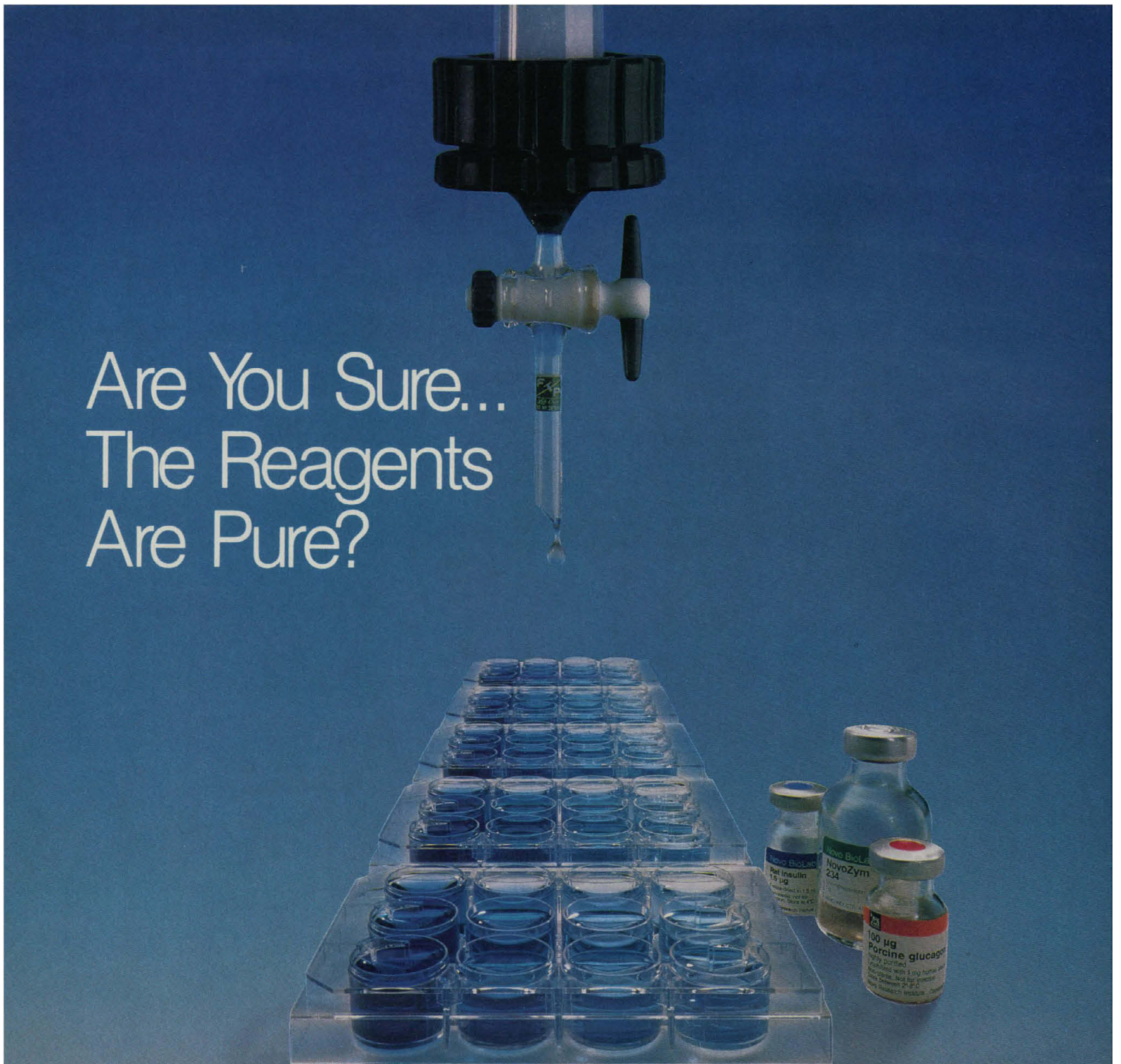
Uranus might thus be right for production of diamond-like carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen.

Hand bones and tools

HAND bones discovered at the 1.8-million-year-old Swartkrans site in South Africa indicate that the extinct hominid *Paranthropus robustus* could have made and used tools (page 781). Bone and stone artifacts suitable for digging or preparing foods were also found. It had not before been appreciated that *P. robustus*, like contemporaneous species *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*, had grasping fingers and a human-like thumb. However, the shapes, sizes, and muscle insertion sites of the 22 hand bones found indicate similarities to human hands and major differences from monkey and ape hands, which are adapted for power grasping during climbing. *Paranthropus robustus* had a small brain and large teeth, and the species' extinction has been attributed to a presumed combination of low intelligence and an inability to use tools and engage in other sophisticated behaviors; Susman suggests that, since it is now clear that *Homo* did not have a monopoly on the capacity to use tools, some other explanation must be found for the survival of *Homo* and not *Paranthropus* species (see also Lewin, page 724).

The bottom lines

THE explosion of the 10-million-year-old blue star Sanduleak -69°202 into Supernova 1987A was astronomical in every way: the energy output in the first second exceeded by two orders of magnitude the energy output of the sun through its entire lifetime, supernova neutrinos from the star's collapse were detected deep within the earth, temperatures may have reached 10 billion kelvin in the exploding star's core, and astronomers and astrophysicists were afforded the opportunity of a lifetime—to test old theories and formulate new ones about how stars live and die (page 750).



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World Competition in Biotechnology

Virtually every developed country and many developing countries have targeted leadership in biotechnology as a national goal. In efforts to compete with the United States in applications of molecular biology to produce pharmaceuticals, would-be competitors are latecomers, with limited prospects. But in agriculture, the picture is quite different, and the United States could become second-rate. In the United States, generous support of biomedical research for decades led to great advances in molecular biology and to the training of a large number of talented people capable of advancing the biomedical sciences. Would-be competitors have limited reservoirs of expert personnel. Another favorable factor for the United States has been an abundance of venture capital, which was in short supply elsewhere. For some possible competitors the cost of development and clinical trials of pharmaceuticals (\$75 to \$100 million) needed to gain approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration is an inhibiting factor.

In contrast to federal support of biomedical research, funds for basic research in plant biology have been meager and the sums provided individual investigators have been tiny. Consequently, the knowledge base of the molecular biology of plants is limited. The level of conventional agricultural science in other countries is comparable to that here, and in some instances possibly superior. Expertise in the new biotechnology is widespread. Average yields of wheat per hectare in the Netherlands are more than twice those in the United States as are yields in the United Kingdom. There are mitigating factors, but these do not cancel the contrasts in yields. Our balance of agricultural trade has dwindled.

The crop surpluses in the United States have been used as an argument for curtailing research. However, if we move slowly in exploiting new biotechnology, we will lose competitiveness fairly rapidly. The time span and the investment required to introduce modified plants or symbiotic bioengineered microorganisms is small compared with that required for pharmaceuticals. Economics is one reason for pursuing vigorous development of plant biotechnology. Other benefits include diminished need for fertilizers and pesticides. Were productivity to be increased, less land would be required for crops, with less related soil erosion.

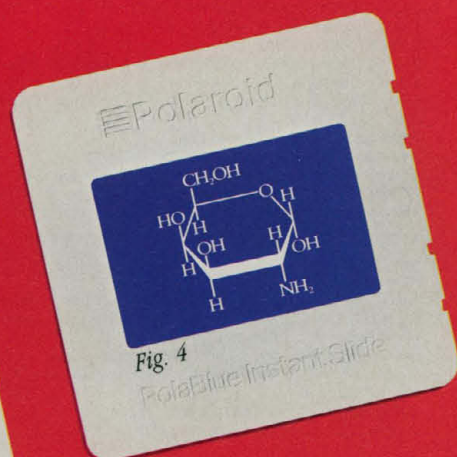
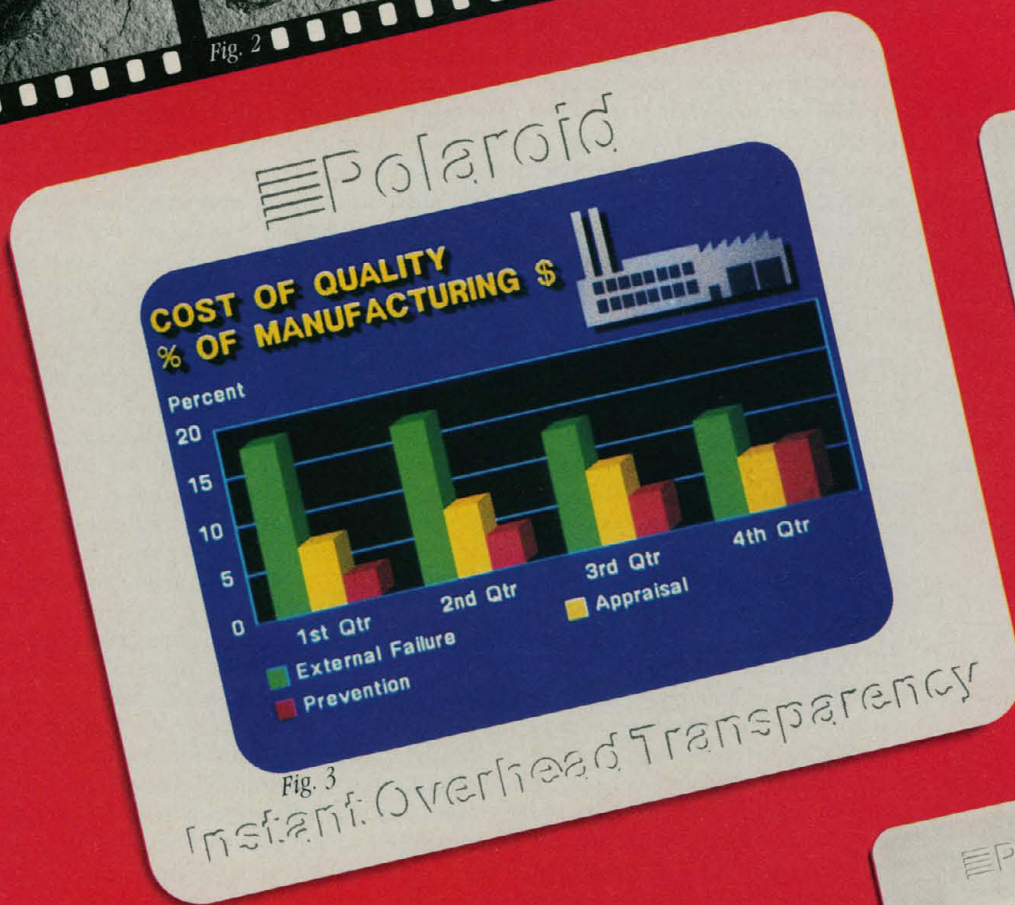
Major companies are devoting substantial funds to agricultural biotechnology. Their efforts are complemented by many new, small outfits. But progress has been greatly impeded by regulatory processes and legal actions. Although some caution in introducing new technologies is warranted, caution has been overdone. For example, there has been concern about introducing into the field a corn plant with a single altered gene. But Howard A. Schneiderman has pointed out that to convert a corn plant into a weed would require hundreds of genetic changes, because corn does not have a "weedy personality."* Regulations should take into consideration the basic characteristics of plants into which a gene or genes are to be incorporated. Some of our crop varieties require human assistance for survival.

Another area in which progress is being impeded is in the introduction of beneficial soil microorganisms. A prejudice exists against organisms whose DNA has been modified by recombinant technology. But during most of this century, rhizobia (designed to enhance nitrogen fixation) have been added to millions of acres of agricultural soil. Roughly 10^{18} rhizobia improved through mutation by chemicals or radiation are added each year. This release has not produced a negative environmental impact. Inoculants of selected mycorrhizae have greatly helped in restoring wastelands. In estimating potential hazards of introducing modified organisms, the gene's location in the genome is important. A gene located on a plasmid is much more likely to be transferred to another organism than is a gene that is part of a chromosome.

Advances in molecular biology have created great opportunities for advances in agriculture. The United States can persist in a policy of starving agricultural basic research and of overregulating biotechnology. Others may not follow such a path.

—PHILIP H. ABELSON

*H. A. Schneiderman, "Biotechnology: A key to America's economic competitiveness in health care and agriculture," speech at the Second Annual American Society for Microbiology Conference on Biotechnology, San Diego, CA, June 1987.



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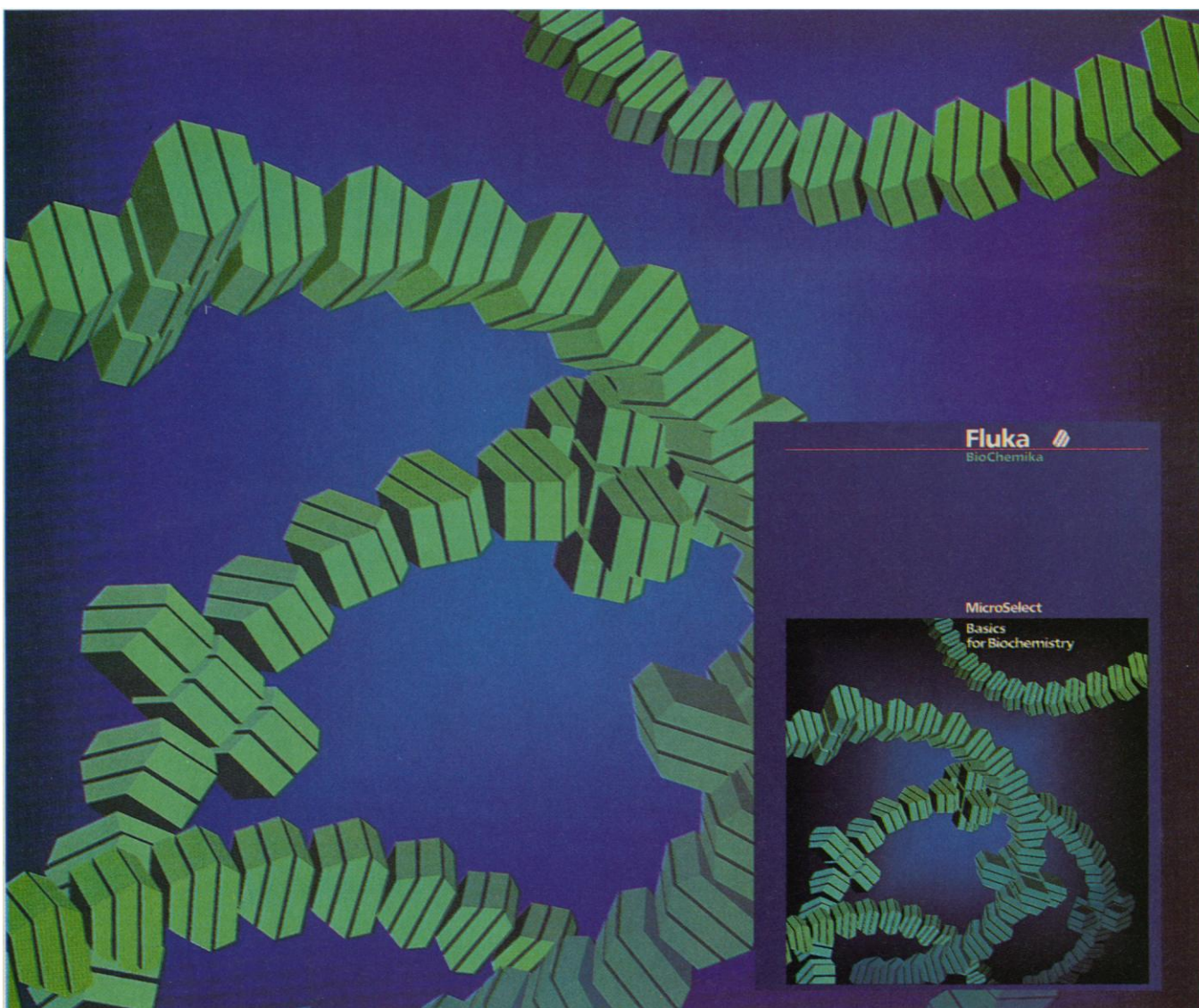
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As a biology teacher with 28 years of experience, mostly in high school, and as a biology textbook author, I wish to join in the great frog debate: dissection versus frog integrity. My students did some dissection, yet I feel that requiring a student to sue in order to avoid participation is silly. If a student of mine occasionally objected to doing dissection, with or without specifying a reason, I retained my equanimity. The student simply retreated to the back of the room and took up another assignment. More often than not, with the rest of the class happily (and noisily) engaged, the dissenting student would edge forward to see what all the excitement was about. Sometimes the boy or girl would have second thoughts and ask to join in the dissection. When such an activity has to depend on legal sanctions, its educational value is likely to be nil.

Yet dissections were not numerous in my course. I depended much more on behavioral studies of living animals, and to a lesser extent on studies of plants and microbes. Before the frog dissection lesson the students were given live frogs to observe in a variety of situations. An even more intriguing animal was the edible Burgundy snail, *Helix aspersa*. As science chairman in a high school on New York City's Lower East Side, with funds for supplies very limited, I had the task of providing 1500 biology students with living materials. But the Italian fish stores on Second Avenue provided snails at \$1 a pound (100 snails). With 2 pounds of snails and a few heads of lettuce, the student body had a fascinating lesson.

they are available they cost far more than a penny apiece. But we should not despair. Resources of living materials are almost unlimited; the limiting factor is teacher ingenuity. If three or four beans are put in a jar of water and incubated overnight, on the next day the culture will be swarming with bacteria. Students seemed never to tire of watching the swarming culture, with spirilla and bacilli vigorously swimming about. Nor did I ever tire of watching the bacteria through the microscope.

Are these activities “science”? I think not. They are more in the nature of natural history or “pre-science.” For this I offer no apology. James Watson began as a bird watcher. As a boy Charles Darwin collected beetles and birds’ eggs. As the Chinese proverb puts it: “Tell me and I hear. Show me and I observe. Involve me and I understand.” It is a standard axiom in education, honored more in the quotation than in the observance, that students learn by doing; learning is an active process. I tried to have my students “do,” and many of them have gone into science as a profession or vocation.

Robert B. Eckhardt reports that he found his biology course dull (Letters, 18 Mar., p. 1361). Horrors! Living creatures are endlessly fascinating to people and especially to young people. Give students live animals or living tissues to work with and they cannot help but find biology interesting. More than a few of my former students have told me that they were first attracted to biology when they watched and tested the beating heart of a freshly pithed frog.

Erratum: In Mark Crawford's story "Budget crunch stalls Super Collider" (News & Comment, 1 Apr., p. 17) the caption accompanying the photograph was incorrect. The superconducting magnet pictured was 4.5 meters long, not 17 meters, as stated.

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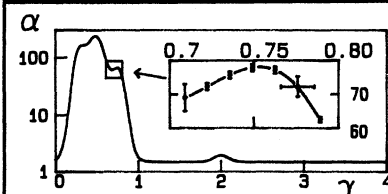
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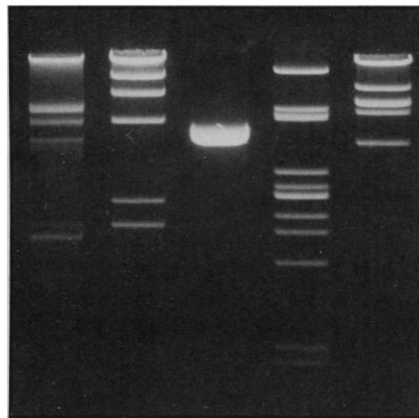
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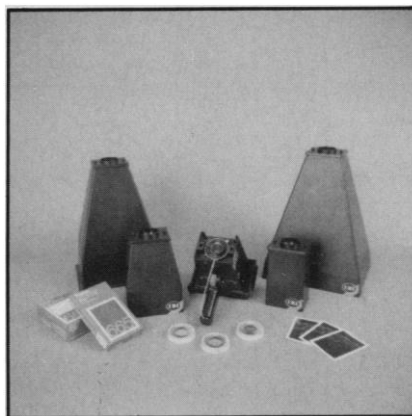
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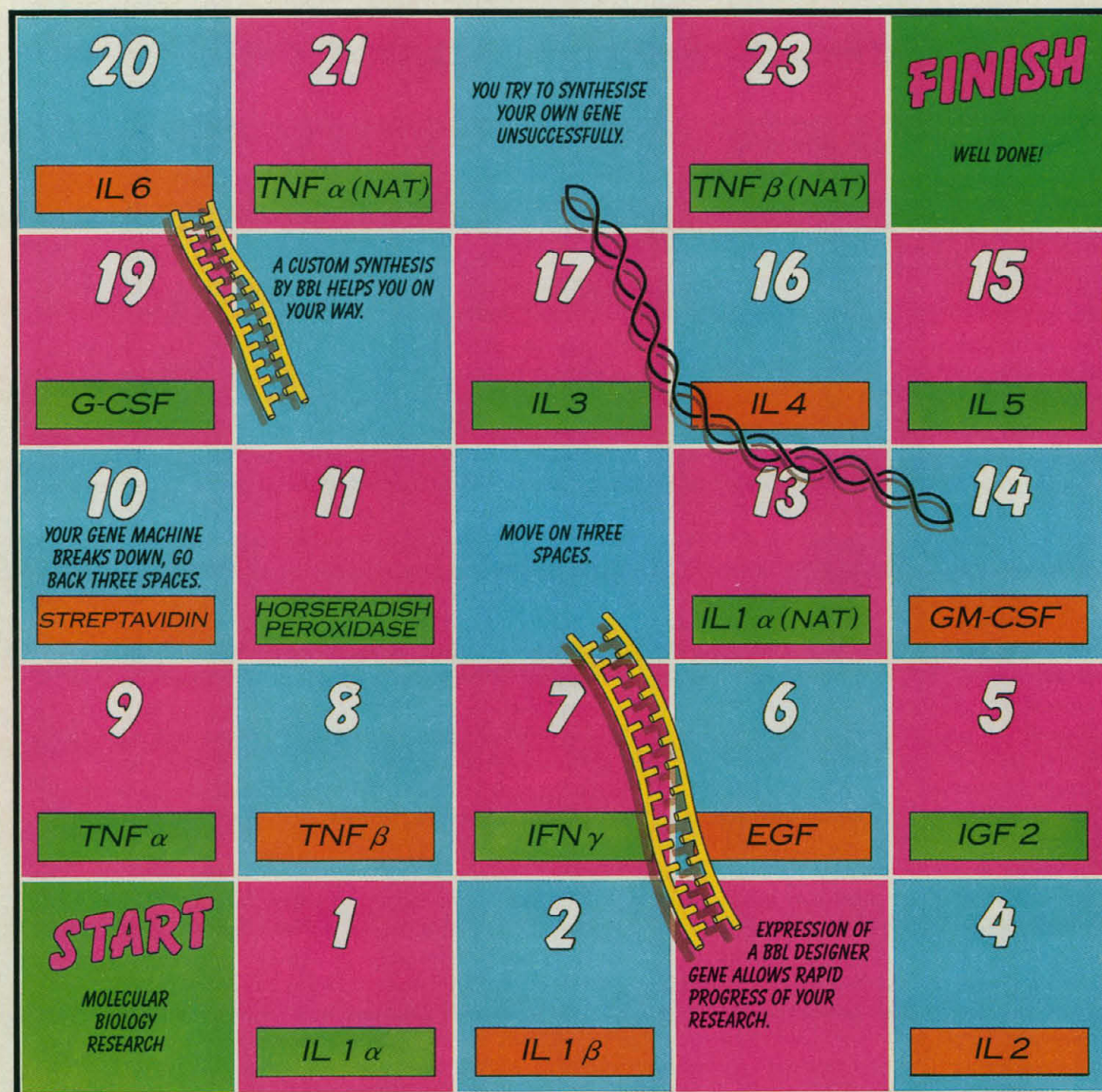
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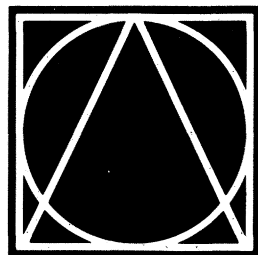
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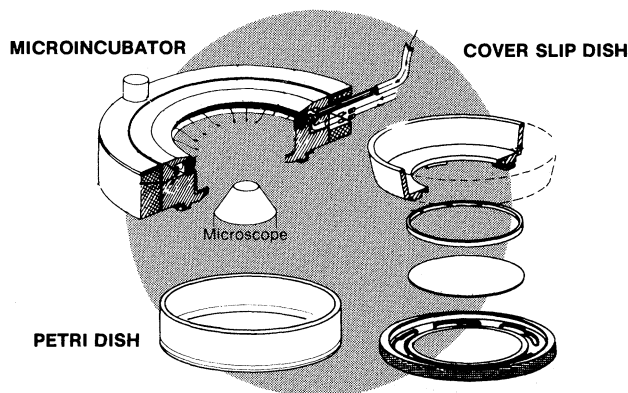
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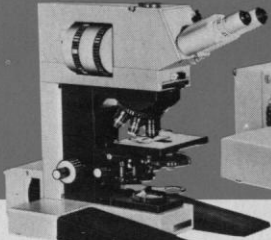
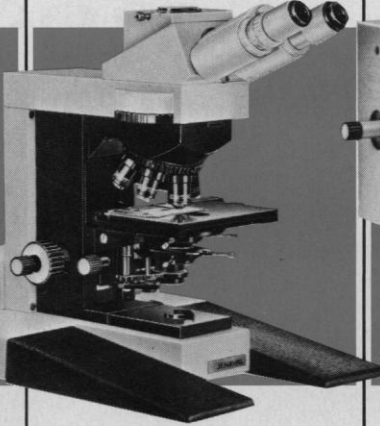
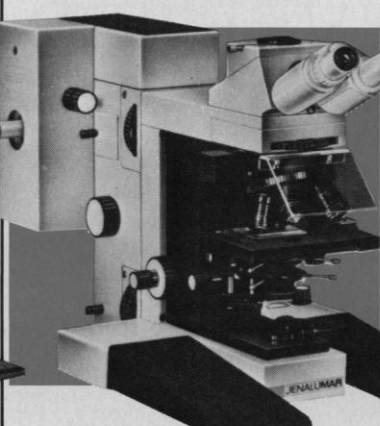
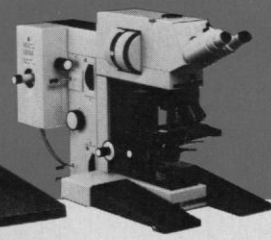
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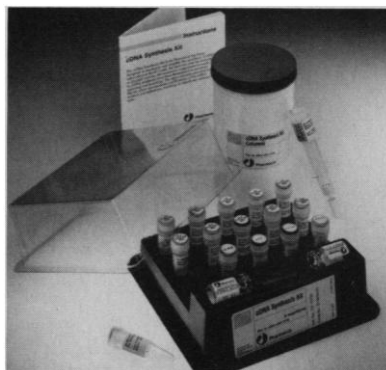
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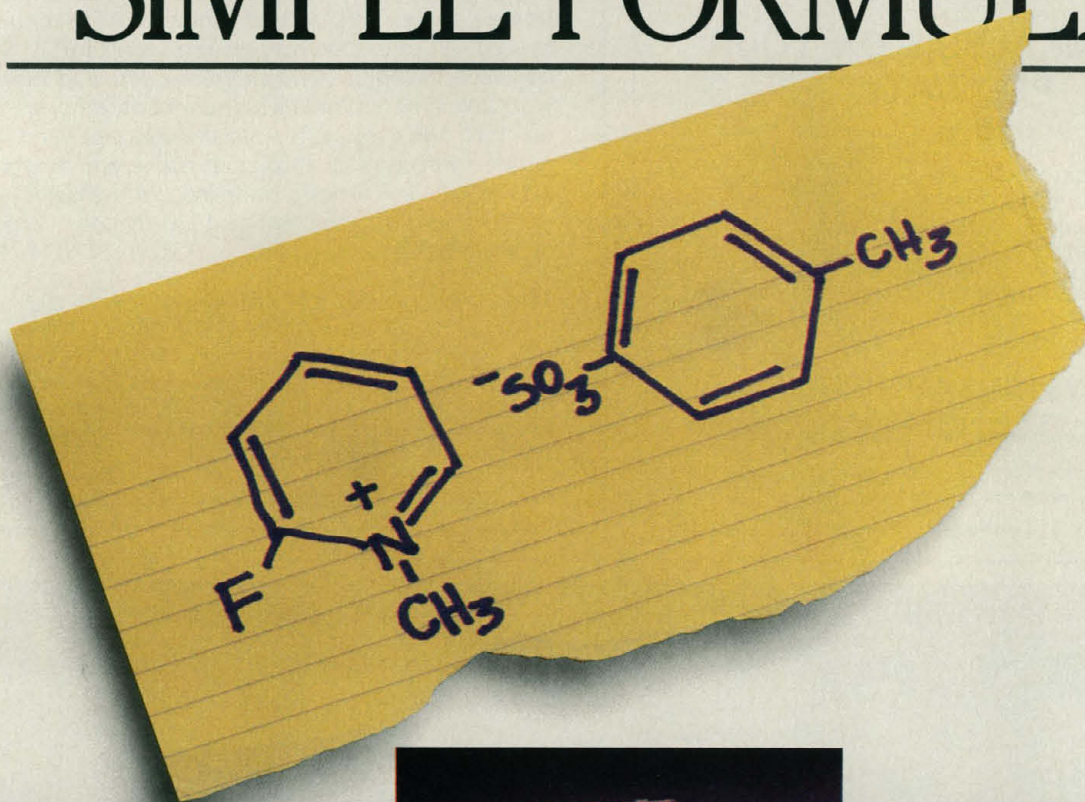
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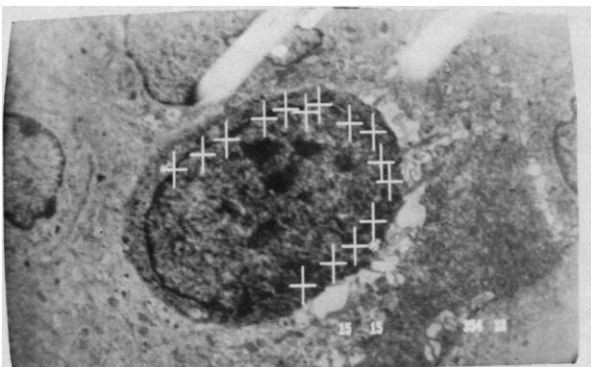


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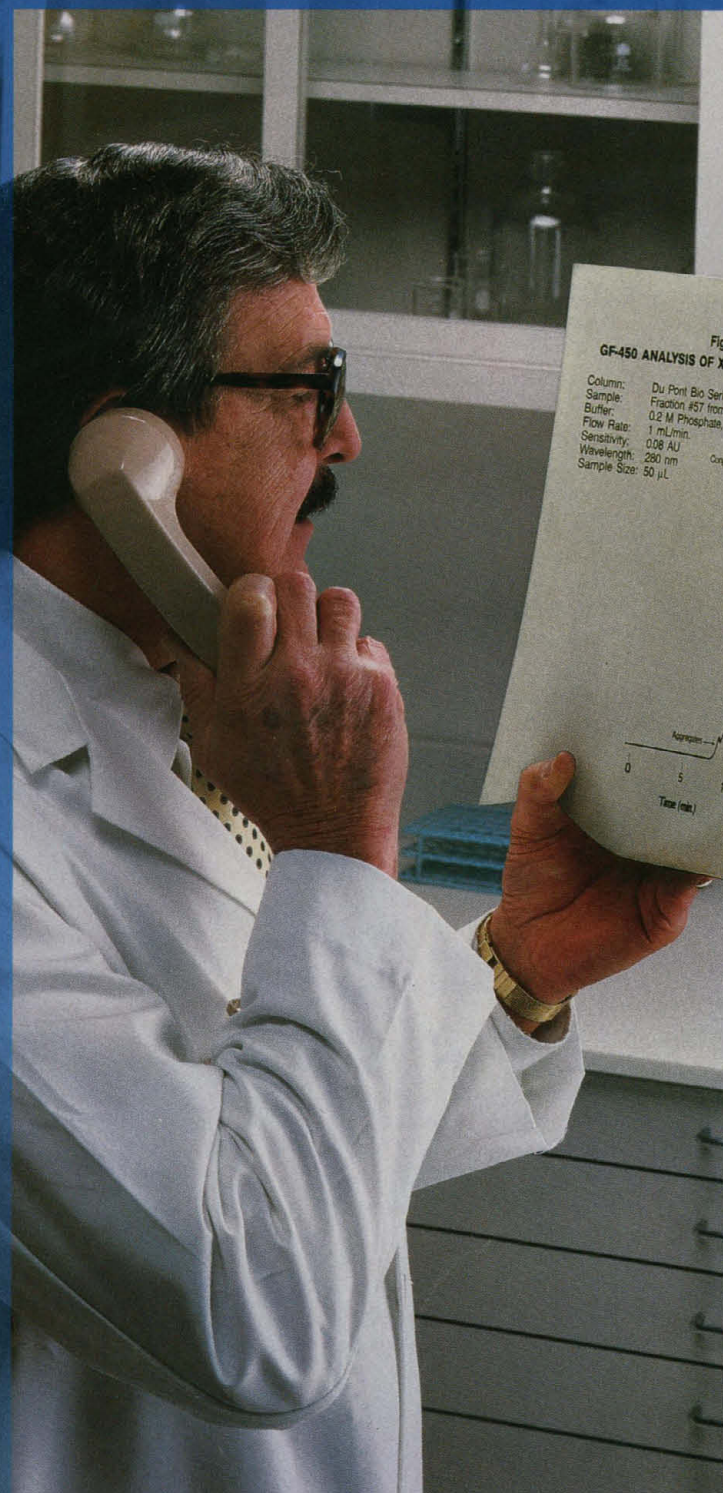


Figure 4
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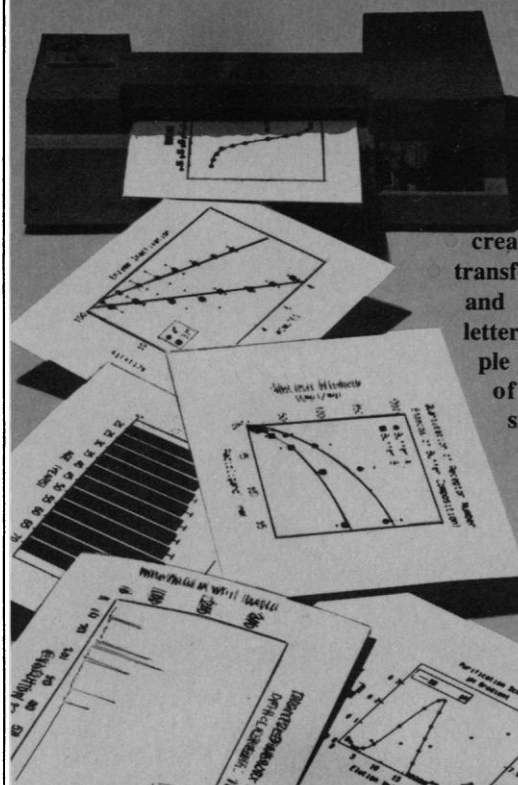
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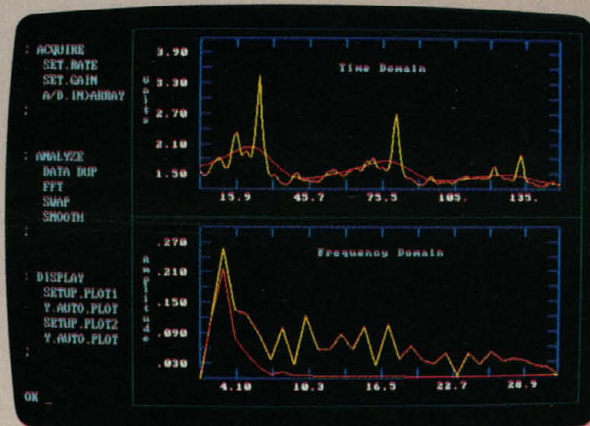
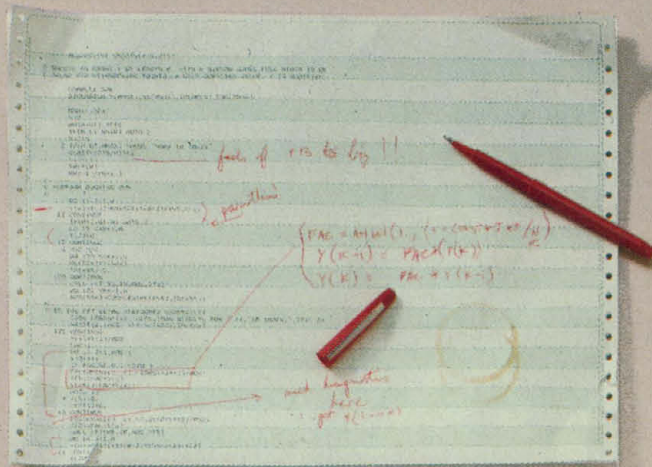
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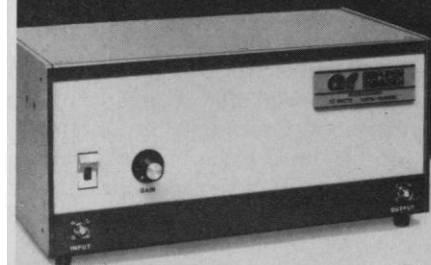
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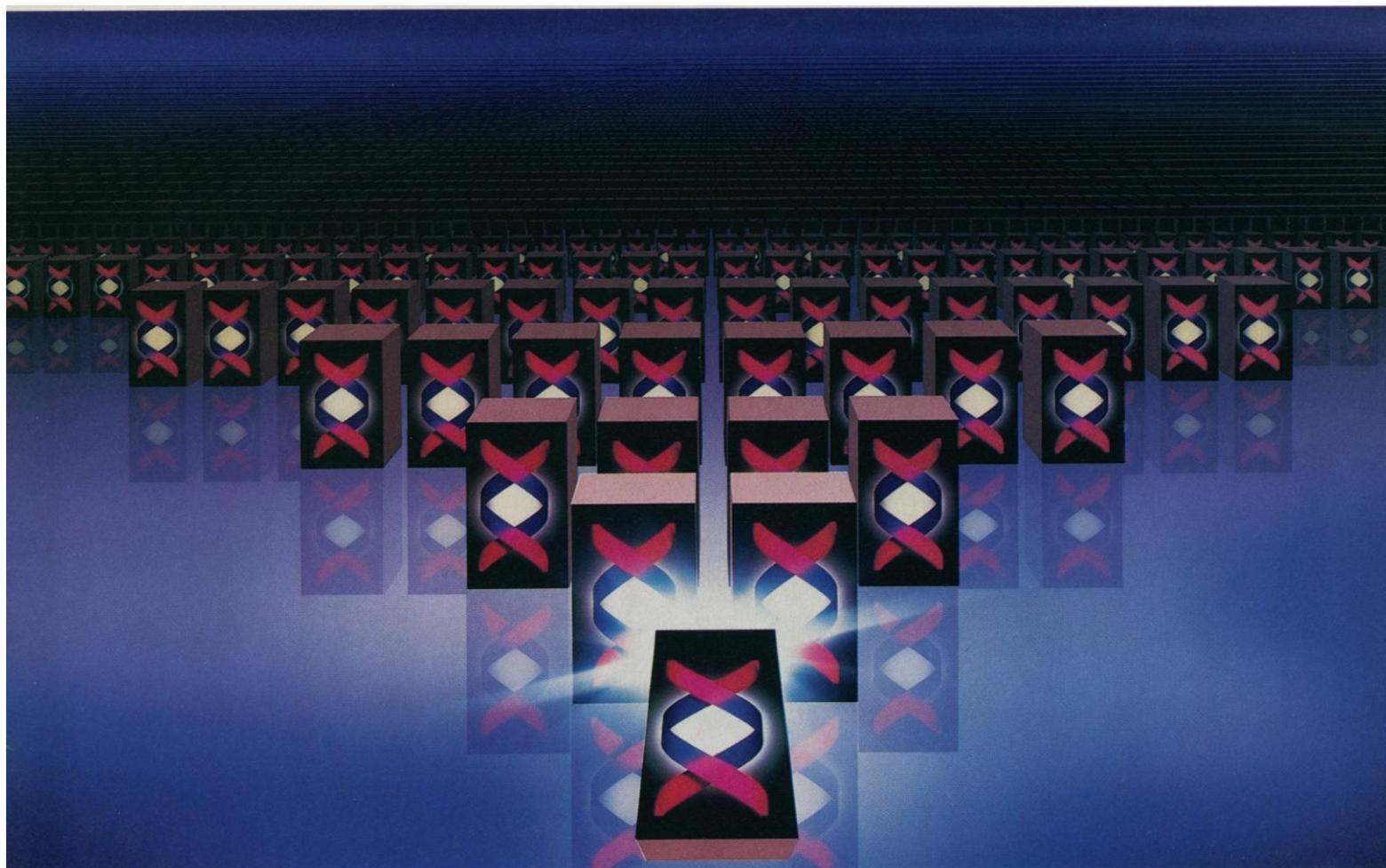
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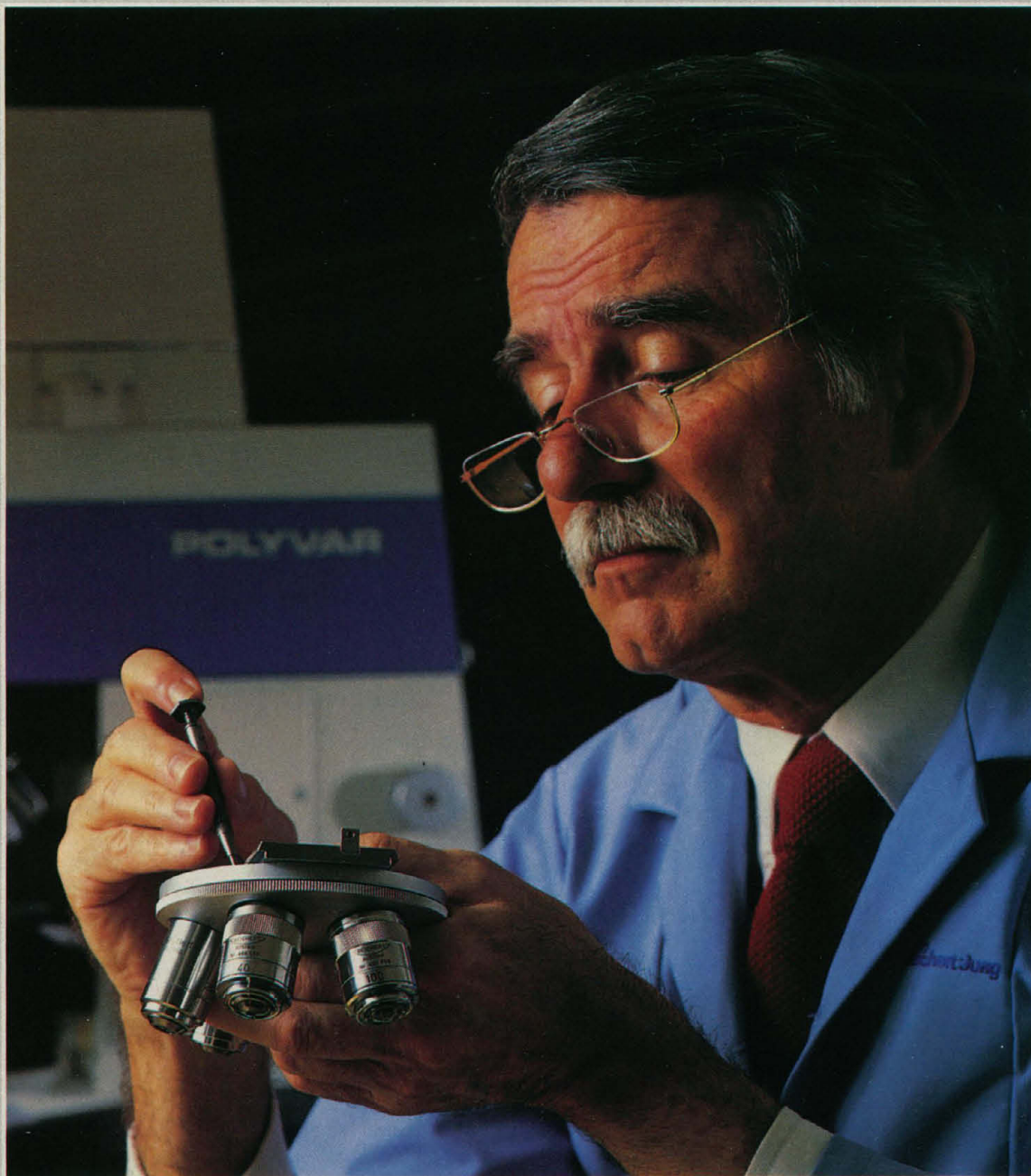
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