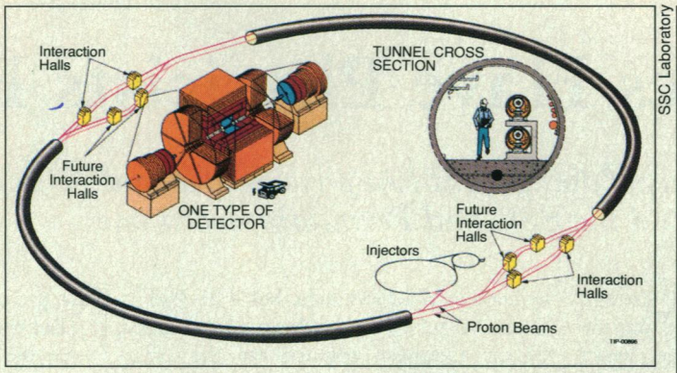
Doomed Detector?

■ The scientific agenda of the Superconducting Super Collider is in a state of uncertainty as researchers continue to battle over a proposal by MIT physicist Samuel Ting to build one of two major detectors for the machine. Indeed, *Science* has learned that SSC director Roy Schwitters is privately considering scuttling Ting's detector altogether.

Last December, the SSC's Program Advisory Committee (PAC) approved a proposal by George Trilling of the University of California at Berkeley to build one detector, but told Ting to rework his L* detector proposal to include a coherent management structure, greater involvement by U.S. physicists, and a realistic price tag (*Science*, 4 January, p. 24). Ting brought a revised proposal to the PAC on 10 March, but the committee still found it wanting.

Ting reportedly offered to create a board of directors chaired by Caltech physicist Barry Barish—an arrangement designed to insulate the project from Ting's abrasive management style and to allow Barish to recruit other U.S. physicists. But the PAC still gagged on the L* cost estimate, which some observers now put at $740 million—well above the $500-million limit the SSC Laboratory had imposed. Ting says European groups would shoulder much of the financial burden, but the PAC was skeptical.



Disagreements over L could strand the SSC with a single detector.*

When it became clear that the PAC was not going to approve the revised L*, Ting reportedly threatened to pull out of the venture altogether. Schwitters later joked that L* may "never" be approved. For now, however, he insists that the SSC Laboratory is still counting on two large detectors. As *Science* went to press, Schwitters planned to meet with Ting and Barish on Wednesday in what might be his last attempt to resolve their differences.

Zagury Investigated

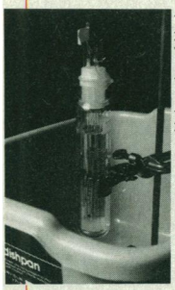
■ Daniel Zagury, the controversial French AIDS researcher who won notoriety in 1987 by testing a potential AIDS vaccine on himself, is facing an investigation by the French government into some of his work involving human subjects. The investigation will focus on two experiments Zagury conducted at the St. Antoine Hospital in Paris which involved an active immunotherapy in AIDS patients and tests of a potential AIDS vaccine on seronegative volunteers.

This inquiry comes on the heels of a decision by the U.S. National Institutes of Health to suspend collaboration between NIH researchers and the Université Pierre et Marie Curie, where Zagury works. NIH's Office for Protection from Research Risks had found evidence that U.S. researchers involved in the collaborations failed "to provide and document adequate protections" for the human research subjects (*Science*, 15 March, p. 1306).

Zagury's troubles were sparked, in part, by a recent article in *The Chicago Tribune* alleging, among other things, that Zagury tested an AIDS vaccine in Zaire on children as young as 2 years old. But Zagury told *Science* that the children—nine in all—were vaccinated only on compassionate grounds. Their mothers, who were being treated for AIDS, insisted on protection for their children. The French government has no plans to investigate these experiments.

Cold Fusion: Battle of the Books

■ The month of May will bring two books on cold fusion that should generate some heat.


University of Utah

A new book by Oak Ridge physicist Frank Close alleges that University of Utah scientists B. Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischman committed a "serious error in judgment" in representing a certain cold fusion experiment they published in 1989 in the *Journal of Electroanalytical Chemistry*. According to a recent account of the book in *The New York Times*, the two made their claim more convincing by shifting the peak of a gamma ray spectrum by 0.3 MeV. Pons and Fleischman withdrew this data more than a year ago.

A more sympathetic view of the field will be offered by Eugene Mallove, a science writer in the MIT news office, who will argue in his upcoming book that cold fusion has gotten a raw deal. Mallove claims that physicists have administered a "coup de grace" to a promising field, and contends that journalists have overlooked experiments showing "clear evidence" of nuclear reactions—such as the work of Los Alamos researcher Howard Menlove, who claims to have detected neutron bursts consistently in a titanium-deuterium gas system.

Although Mallove's thesis bucks the conventional wisdom, he can claim at least one prominent supporter: UCLA physicist and Nobel laureate Julian Schwinger has contributed a laudatory blurb for the cover.

Who's right? Judge for yourself: Close's work is *Too Hot to Handle: The Race for Cold Fusion* (Princeton University Press), while Mallove's book is *Fire from Ice: Searching for Truth Behind the Cold Fusion Furor* (John Wiley & Sons).

■ In an unusually proactive step for a traditionally cautious agency, the World Health Organization (WHO) has invited representatives of the major pharmaceutical companies to a meeting this May to wrestle with one of the most vexing issues involving AIDS drugs: how to make expensive therapeutics available to poor African countries that need them most (*Science*, 15 March, p. 1312).

The meeting will consider a variety of schemes that could afford a way around this problem. For instance, WHO might purchase vaccines and drugs at cost, or national governments might offer companies extended patent protection for new products or tax breaks for their development efforts. WHO is happy to entertain other creative suggestions for solving the problem.

But pharmaceutical companies have their own concerns about making drugs available at lower prices in developing countries. The drugs could make their way back to the developed world and be sold at a profit on the black market. And if the drugs are not used properly, companies could get a black eye for not exercising proper precautions in making them available. Expect a lively meeting.

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