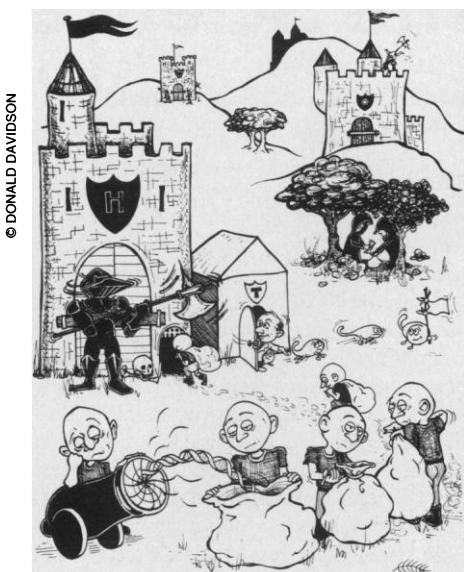


edited by RICHARD STONE



Cold Spring Harbor's Holy Grail

The battle over who should own human gene sequences—private companies or the public—is now being waged in a new arena: cartoonland.

Geneticists attending the "Genome Mapping & Sequencing"

meeting at Cold Spring Harbor last week were treated to an irreverent view of this epic struggle. A cartoon showing the battle in medieval images, drawn by Glasgow physician Donald Davidson, appeared on the program's back cover. Attendees say the castle, emblazoned with an "H," depicts Human Genome Sciences (HGS), a company that has put together a proprietary database of tens of thousands of human gene fragments. The castle's black knight might be HGS CEO William Haseltine—although the visor makes this impossible to verify. Attendees were certain, however, that the "T" on the nearby tent stands for HGS's nonprofit partner TIGR

(The Institute for Genomic Research). At the tent's door, that's apparently TIGR Director Craig Venter shooing gene sequences to freedom—a play on his peace offerings to the academic community, such as sequence data without legal restrictions. Venter appears to be taking the cartoon in good humor. "Very entertaining," he told *Science*.

The program's front cover, not shown, depicts Merck & Co. as a white knight protecting a string of smiling gene fragments diving into a "gene pool" posted "admission free." Merck is bankrolling an effort by Washington University to create a public map of gene fragments. But not everyone is convinced Merck is so gallant. Some attendees pointed out that by funding a public database, Merck undermines rival Smith-Kline Beecham—which funds HGS and also helped fund the Cold Spring Harbor meeting.

House Spat Threatens Space Station Funding

Once upon a time, the House Science Committee had a reputation for being nonpartisan. That balmy tradition ended just 6 months ago, although it may now seem as obsolete as the cuspidors that once graced congressional waiting rooms. The change in decorum was evident last week, when Chair Robert Walker (R-PA) and the senior Democrat, Representative George Brown (D-CA), resorted to snippy press releases to debate space station funding.

The hostility became public on 12 May, when Walker canceled a planned hearing on a bill to fund the station after Brown warned that "key" Democrats on the science committee might not support the measure. The bill would authorize funding for the space station through 2002. (Currently it's renewed annually.) In a press release, Walker vowed to appeal to President Clinton and Vice President Gore "for help in rebuilding the bipartisan coalition in support of a strong science program."

Within hours, Brown fired off his own fax. Walker, he said, had failed to win Budget Committee support for a National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) budget that would keep pace with inflation over the next 5 years—even though Brown says he and Walker had agreed this is what NASA needs. Last year, Brown said he would not support the station if it meant cutting space science programs. Although the Democrat says he remains a station supporter, in the statement Brown says, "The Republican budget calls into question the possibility of achieving any reasonable balance among NASA programs."

As a result of the tiff, the Republicans for now have forsaken plans for multiyear funding authorization. A Republican staffer laments the loss of the collegial relationship between Brown and Walker: "There's been a breakdown" in relations, he says.

Lufthansa Halts Primate Shipments

Bowing to pressure from animal-rights groups, the German airline Lufthansa says it will no longer transport primates, many of which wind up in U.S. labs.

Lufthansa joins British Airways and several other European carriers that have halted primate shipments. Last year Lufthansa transported 5700 monkeys—more

than any other carrier—many of which were sent to U.S. drug companies, says Lufthansa spokesperson Dietrich Seidl.

Animal activists contend that primates are often transported in cruel conditions, and they have sponsored letter-writing campaigns against Lufthansa and other airlines. Although Seidl said that Lufthansa treats its primates "with great care," the air-

line foresaw a sullied image if it continued the shipments. Says one Lufthansa official: "We have no chance against this sort of emotional campaign." The company is not taking a position on the use of animals in research, Seidl added.

Germany's transportation ministry in Bonn is expected to approve Lufthansa's decision later this month.

Gibbons Takes a Principled Stand

With science funding threatened with cutbacks by the Republican Congress (see p. 964), this might seem a good time for the White House to rethink its criteria for selecting the government's \$70 billion investment in research. But Jack Gibbons, the president's science adviser, has apparently decided to stay the course. He is sticking with an intricate scheme for planning activities, leading some officials to wonder if the exercise is out of step with reality.

Last week Gibbons and Alice Rivlin, director of the Office of Management and Budget, sent every Cabinet official and agency head a memo to help plan their 1997 budgets, due in the fall. The internal document, a copy of which was obtained by *Science*, is supposed to ensure that every agency is in step with the White House in planning R&D expenditures. Last year's effort, the first of its kind (*Science*, 3 June 1994,

p. 1395), offered nine principles. This year, Gibbons has reduced the principles to four: research that is peer reviewed, jointly funded, intended for activities that promise a high rate of return to society, and whose product can be measured quantitatively. Not on the list are such principles as fundamental science, international cooperation, and anticipatory R&D, although they appear as elements of specific programs.

In theory, agencies that toe the line stand the best chance of getting more money. In an era of shrinking budgets, however, that's a dubious proposition. As a result, some agency officials say the memo serves little purpose—"We're not going to be doing anything different as a result of the guidance, if that's what you're asking," says one top manager. Gibbons declined to discuss the memo because, says an aide, it's not a public document.