

SCIENCE'S COMPASS

But his own cinematic contributions attest that while films do not reflect reality, they do reflect our psychic aspirations and terrors and that, in doing so, they should not be devalued or ignored, any more than they should be presented as literally true. Any art form that has people of Crichton's caliber working in it should be taken a lot more seriously than he himself seems inclined to take it.

M. Z. Ribalow

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References

1. M. Z. Ribalow, *The Sciences* (November/December 1998), pp. 26–31.

Rammal Medal Selection

Certain passages of Michael Balter's article "Physics prize falls foul of Middle East politics" (News of the Week, 5 Mar., p. 1422) might lead the reader to believe that French authorities possibly exerted influence on the deliberations of the prize jury responsible for the awarding of the 1998 Rammal Medal for physics.

I would like to clarify that no intervention was made by the services of the Embassy of France in Beirut to sway, in any way, the decisions of the French Physical Society and the Ecole Normale Supérieure Foundation, the institutions responsible for

the adjudication of the Rammal Medal. As the spokesperson of the French Foreign Ministry announced as early as 8 March 1999, these organizations acted autonomously in both the nomination and the determination of conditions for ratification of this year's medal recipient.

The French Embassy in Beirut's role in the controversy was limited to reporting on the adverse reaction in Lebanon to the nomination of an Israeli for the prize, in response to inquiries that it had received on the subject. The Embassy of France did not participate in either the nomination or the review of the 1998 Rammal Medal candidates.

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Response

I reported that the scientific attaché of the French embassy in Beirut contacted the president of the Rammal Medal jury to complain that the jury's decision to award the medal to an Israeli was causing strains in Franco-Lebanese relations. This is supported by e-

mail exchanges made available to *Science* and interviews with officials involved. The attaché told me that he acted in a "personal capacity." The French Physical Society (SFP) was still considering the jury's decision at that point, but as I also reported, SFP officials themselves are divided on whether outside pressure, including the views of embassy officials, had any influence on their decision not to award the prize.

—Michael Balter

Mitochondrial Recombination?

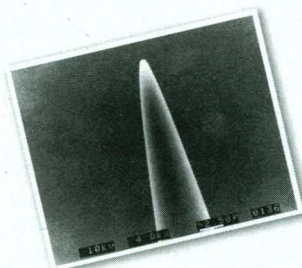
In her article "Can mitochondrial clocks keep time?" (News Focus, 5 Mar., p. 1435), Evelyn Strauss discusses a paper by Adam Eyre-Walker *et al.* (1) questioning the strict maternal inheritance of human mitochondria. Given that the large body of vertebrate phylogeny (as well as population studies using mitochondrial genetic information) rests on the assumption that the vertebrate mitochondria are clonal in their mode of inheritance, evidence of recombination between maternally and paternally derived mitochondria would seri-

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