

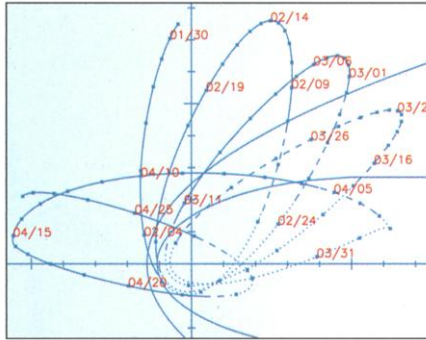
WIND Startles Scientists

Members of the Spacewatch Project, which monitors the ether for possible Earth-threatening objects, found just what they were looking for, and dreading, on 19 February. A telescope on Arizona's Kitt Peak captured a bright streak of light in the night sky: an unidentified automobile-sized object motoring straight toward Earth. An analysis of its path showed that it would pass within 0.0039 astronomical units—or a scant 500,000 km—of the home planet. The Minor Planet Center (MPC) in Cambridge, Massachusetts, promptly named the interloper 2001-D47 and alerted the astronomical community, sending several in-

ternational teams scampering to their telescopes.

Jon Giorgini and Lance Benner, astronomers at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California, decided to run the orbit analysis backward to figure out where the object had come from. It was not a recently arrived asteroid, they found: Rather, it had to have already made several loops around the Earth-moon system.

"At that point, we suspected it was manmade," says Benner. Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer and space history buff at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, pegged



A sample of WIND's complicated orbit, which fooled—and alarmed—some scientists.

it as the WIND satellite, launched in 1994 to study the solar wind. Scientists sling WIND around the moon to place it in different orbits. "It regularly confuses the Near Earth Object people," says McDowell, "but this is the first time it ever got [an MPC] designation."

Tracking Genius Sperm

Ever wonder what happened to the "Nobel sperm bank" and the high-IQ progeny whose existence it aimed to facilitate? *Slate*, the free online magazine started by Microsoft king Bill Gates, did. Now it's combining amateur sociology with a clearinghouse function as it seeks to gather information on the 19-year run of this attempt to smarten up the population.

The Repository for Germinal Choice was started by California tycoon Robert K. Graham in 1980. He initially managed to round up donations from three Nobelists—including transistor inventor and race theorist William Shockley—but later opted for younger and fitter brains such as those to be found on the campuses of the University of California, Berkeley, and the California Institute of Technology. After arranging for the germination of some 229 offspring, the repository closed in 1999, not long after the death of its 90-year-old founder.

Slate's Washington, D.C., editor, David Plotz, is now conducting a "journalistic experiment," trying to round up donors, parents, and children (while observing anonymity) to see what the experience has to tell us as we enter "a new age of eugenics." So far he has been in contact with a half-dozen donors, including a famous 149-IQ "entrepreneur," eight parents, and two over-18 offspring. "The series will continue indefinitely," says Plotz, locating children, putting families in touch with each other, and exploring "how the scientific theory translates into lived human experience" and "the burdens and joys of genetic expectations" (see slate.msn.com).

The series also has tracked down the sperm bank's first director, Paul Smith, who now runs a private high-IQ sperm operation in Nevada. Smith wants to get in touch with Bill Gates. "I don't think much of his operating system," he told Plotz, "but I would like his sperm."

HOT SCIENTISTS, 1999–2000

Rank	Name	Institution	No. of Hot Papers
1.	J. Craig Venter	Celera Genomics	7
2.	David Botstein	Stanford University	6
	Patrick O. Brown	Stanford University (HHMI)	6
	John C. Reed	Burnham Institute	6
	Steven L. Salzberg	Inst. for Genomic Research	6
3.	Michael B. Eisen	UC Berkeley	5
	Eric S. Lander	MIT	5
	Josef M. Penninger	Amgen Inst./U. Toronto	5
	Antonio Lanzavecchia	Basel Inst. Immunology	5
	Claire M. Fraser	Inst. for Genomic Research	5
	Owen White	Inst. for Genomic Research	5
	Tak W. Mak	Amgen Inst./U. Toronto	5
	Andrew Wakeham	Amgen Inst.	5

Genome sequencers get cited a lot these days, with members of both the Celera and public human genome-sequencing teams showing up among the Institute for Scientific Information's list of most highly cited scientists of the past 2 years.

Court Affirms DNA Is All You Need

A DNA profile is all you need to identify a suspected criminal on an arrest warrant, according to a recent California court ruling.

In August 2000, with only days left before the statute of limitations ran out on an unsolved sexual assault, district attorneys in Sacramento County filed a warrant for the arrest of a suspect identified only by a DNA profile obtained from the crime scene. One month later, prosecutors found a match in a DNA data bank of convicted felons; they arrested Paul Robinson, the first suspect to be arrested on such a warrant.

In a 23 February hearing in Sacramento Superior Court, Robinson's attorney argued that the warrant was unconstitutional because it did not identify the suspect by name. But the judge ruled that the warrant was valid, and that prosecutors were therefore not constrained by the statute of limitations. The defense is appealing.

The decision will have little impact on future cases in California, says Sacramento deputy district attorney Laurie Earl: As of 1 January, the state legislature extended the statute of limitations on sexual assault cases in which only DNA evidence is available, putting no limit on the amount of time allowed to find who it belongs to. But district attorneys in other states will be watching the case closely as a precedent for their own John Doe warrants, says Norm Gahn, a Milwaukee prosecutor who in 1994 filed the first John Doe warrant based solely on DNA. The ruling will allow them to "breathe life" into cases that would otherwise be closed because of statutes of limitations, he says.