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Heavy Neutrino Slips Into World of Fiction

Over the past 2 years a particle known as the 17 kilo-electronvolt (kev) neutrino inspired more than 100 papers and provoked heated debates in the physics community about its existence. But now it appears that this new particle will go down in history alongside the unicorn and other mythical beasts. Last month, physicist Andrew Hime of Los Alamos National Laboratory announced that he had found an experimental glitch that led him on a wild neutrino chase.

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Thousands of times heavier than standard neutrinos, the 17 kev neutrino flies in the face of the "standard model" of physics (*Science*, 29 November 1991, p. 1298). The idea of a 17 kev neutrino dates to 1985, when physicist John Simpson of the University of Guelph in Toronto measured 17 kev of energy missing from the radioactive decay of tritium and surmised that a neutrino was carrying it off. But it wasn't until 1991 that the physics community began to take note, when Hime and physicist Nick Jelly of Oxford also claimed to find a 17 kev neutrino.

But at the American Physical Society's meeting of the division of nuclear physics in Santa Fe last month, Hime confessed that it was an aluminum baffle, rather than a neutrino, that accounted for the missing 17 kev. "Hime's announcement was a real shock to all of us," says physicist Eric Norman of the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory, who published a report last year describing a 17 kev neutrino. Hime failed to return phone calls from *Science*.

While Hime's revelation vindicates many in the physics community whose experiments failed to turn up the heavy neutrino, it does leave them scratching their heads over results from three other teams whose apparatus didn't include such a baffle. "I'm very puzzled by the whole thing," says Simpson. And that at least will leave intact a layer of mystique surrounding the mythical particle.

Biotech Lobby Gets Single-Minded

In recent years, the biotechnology industry has suffered from a sort of schizophrenia, in which established firms and startups have separately pushed their own—and often identical—agendas on Capitol Hill. But a meeting of the minds now appears to be more than just wishful thinking: This week, the two biotech trade associations were expected to announce plans to merge.

Walking down the aisle are the Industrial Biotechnology Association (IBA), which represents 143 biotech firms, including big names such as Biogen and Genentech, and the Association of Biotechnology Companies (ABC), which represents 320 firms that tend to be smaller and younger than IBA's clientele. Biotech boosters are enthusiastic about the merger. "It's a major event in industry," says Steven Mendell, chairman of the board at Berkeley-based Xoma Corp., who sits on the governing boards of both associations. "You want to be able to speak with one voice," he says. "In the past that hasn't always happened."

One industry analyst says that when lobbying Congress, the trade associations have held nearly identical opinions on issues "99.9% of the time." But analysts agree that a united association will have to work harder to achieve a compromise on some issues—earlier this year, for example, the IBA and ABC differed sharply on legislation that would redefine orphan drugs (*Science*, 7 February, p. 681). Executives at IBA and ABC declined to comment on the merger, which sources say is expected to be completed early next year.

Violence Research Probed by HHS, NIH

Last month Louis Sullivan, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), announced that he was forming a panel to examine ways to strengthen the research programs in his proposed "violence initiative." Now NIH officials are setting up their own panel to oversee strictly NIH-sponsored violence research.

Sullivan has hailed the violence initiative—a $50 million effort to coordinate violence research done in several HHS agencies—as a much needed effort to identify social, psychological, and biological factors that lead to violence. But some black politicians and academics have charged that government-sponsored research on biological factors of violence might lead to a program to identify problem black children and give them pacifying drugs (*Science*, 9 October, p. 212).

Franklyn Jenifer

To prove that violence research is "a legitimate and valuable area of inquiry," on 22 October Sullivan announced that he was forming a "blue-ribbon panel" chaired by Franklyn Jenifer, president of Howard University. Jenifer says that the 20-member panel, which plans to meet next week, will examine research plans and make "broad recommendations" on what kinds of research should be done. It will not review grants, he says.

A spokeswoman says that NIH did not intend to create "dueling" panels by creating its own review. But one NIH official expressed concerns to *Science* that the HHS panel consists mainly of African Americans. This, the official says, might send the "wrong message" and lend credence to the "erroneous" belief that violence research is aimed at blacks. NIH officials have tapped Sandy Shamblee, counselor and senior policy adviser to Bernadine Healy, to head up the NIH panel.

Neuroscience Tiff at NIH

Some NIH neuroscientists are becoming unnerved at what they view as a series of rebuffs aimed at them by NIH Director Bernadine Healy. First there was the omission of neuroscience in Healy's strategic plan for NIH. Then, last week, word spread at the Society for Neuroscience meeting in Anaheim that several NIH neuroscientists might be bumped from the new Silvio Conte "Decade of the Brain" building on the NIH campus in order to free up space for a big-name geneticist to head NIH's human genome effort. (University of Michigan's Francis Collins, codiscoverer of the cystic fibrosis gene, is rumored to be the top candidate.)

While acknowledging that landing Collins would be a coup, the neuroscientists assert that they deserve the lab space promised to them 7 years ago. "It doesn't appear Bernadine Healy is very predisposed to [support] neuroscience,"says Forrest Weight, one of three researchers in the National Institute on Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse (NIAAA) in limbo.

Neuroscientists in several other institutes received similar notices to stay put. But Markku Linnoila, scientific director at NIAAA, contends that his institute is "taking by far the brunt of the burden" because it has spent millions of dollars on preparing the three new labs. If the move falls through, "we'll have to make do with the space we have," Linnoila says.

NIH spokesman Tom Flavin calls the neuroscientists' concern "premature." He says that the lab moves have been placed on hold—not canceled—to create a "reserve" of about 7000 square feet of lab space until NIH can determine what kinds of "musical chair-type arrangements" may be worked out. "Ultimately [the neuroscientists] will get what has been promised," he told *Science*. The neuroscientists remain skeptical.