Bet You Missed It-PubMed and Walmart

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Bet You Missed It

Press Clippings — In the News — Carefully Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

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Why Is This Section B News?
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Renegade programmers at AOL created a tiny computer program called Gnutella that lets you share files—especially music—over the Net. AOL shut it down, but it was too late. And now all intellectual property may be up for grabs. Gnutella operates the opposite of the Web. There is no central server that can be shut down. Gnutella is a “distributed or peer-to-peer system” that requires unplugging every machine hooked to it. This would be like trying to stop every phone conversation in the world. Which means it’s unstoppable. Ian Clark and other programmers in London have spent 18 months creating FreeNet as an alternative to the Web. Their manifesto is found at http://freenet.sourceforge.net. A version of this called Napster was developed to trade music in MP3 format. Napster buffs are now swapping full-length movies and copies of Microsoft Word. See — Thomas Weber, “Maverick Programmers Prepare to Unleash Anarchy on the Web,” The Wall Street Journal, March 27, 2000, p.B1.

High Grant Anxiety
by Pamela M. Rose (Univ. at Buffalo, State Univ. of NY)

Processors and writers of academic department grant applications get a helping hand from GrantSlam software, by Cayuse Inc. (Portland, OR, 503-297-2108, www.cayuse.com). NIH grant submissions requiring PHS forms 398 and 1250 are simplified once the user enters initial grant data. The software keeps templates and separate files for biographical data available for use whenever required, and integrates with Microsoft Word and Corel WordPerfect. Some limitations include no spell checker, an inability to copy or paste formatted text, unique keystroke combinations for special characters, and an inability to handle graphic material. Compatible with Windows 3.1 and later, Pentium recommended, Mac users must emulate Windows with the bundled CrossOver Virtual PC. See — J. Bruce McCallum, “e-Grants?,” Techsight Software — Compass section, in Science, p. 453, Jan. 21, 2000.

Splitting Up the Gene Pie
by Pamela M. Rose (Univ. at Buffalo, State Univ. of NY)

deCODE, the company given exclusive rights to run Iceland’s database of the country’s medical records (see the BYM 2 abstract in the December 1999-January 2000 ATG, p.71), has some competition. A small biotech start-up is teaming up with several scientists (who fiercely oppose the national database) to work with small groups of volunteer patients to gather what they say is still valuable data. To date, only about 5% of Icelanders have asked to have their data excluded from deCODE, whose CEO is not worried about the competition. “For me, it’s a relief to have another company, so I’m not accused of monopolizing,” says Kari Stefansson, see — Martin Enserink, “Start-Up Claims Piece of Iceland’s Gene Pie,” in Science, p.951, Feb. 11, 2000.

Winner Take All
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)

Barrons and the Times are all saying Amazon is doomed. It is, after all, losing tons of money. Or so goes the accepted wisdom. But in fact, Amazon has lost only about $60 million. And it has a tight inventory control plus all the hard assets of the companies it’s bought. Bookseller Walmart spent $4 billion last year alone building new stores and paving parking lots. Amazon is planning on giant regional distribution centers that will cost $580 million total when it finishes in 2001. Of course the author doesn’t note that Walmart sells a whole bunch of other stuff in its stores. See — James Surowiecki, “The Financial Page; Have Amazon’s Critics Misread the Books?”, The New Yorker, April 10, 2000, p.38.

An Animal By Any Other Name
by Pamela M. Rose (Univ. at Buffalo, State Univ. of NY)

With the newly revised 4th edition of the International Code of Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN), the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature has given “individual scientists a lot more authority to sidestep priority,” and relaxed rules for the Latin spellings of names. Researchers may also publish new names on CD’s (but not on the Web or in electronic journals), not just in print journals, as long as at least five “identical and durable copies” are put in libraries and accessible to the public. Although this opens the door to establishing official species lists, no agreement exists on standards as yet. See — Elizabeth Pennisi, “Zoology Naming Rules Eased,” in Science, p.26, Jan. 7, 2000.

PubMed Rival
by Pamela M. Rose (Univ. at Buffalo, State Univ. of NY)

Research articles from the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) December 21, 1999 issue and the full contents of the Molecular Biology of the Cell (MBC) Nov. 1, 1999 issue are now fully accessible online. The NIH’s controversial project to provide free fulltext life science articles through the Web is up and running (www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov) albeit with a few minor bumps to be smoothed before eight more journals are added this Spring. Meanwhile, a separate preprint project, the Santa Fe Convention, a way of coding e-print databases so search engines can scan scattered archives all at once, is forging ahead (www.openarchives.org).


A Thief’s Shopping List
by Pamela M. Rose (Univ. at Buffalo, State Univ. of NY)

Someone is collecting rare 16th and 17th century books in an unusual manner. Experts suspect that some of the 23 rare books heisted from the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg over the last 2 years were “stolen to order.” In particular one of the stolen items was one of 107 known copies of Copernicus’ De revolutionibus. Interpol is helping track the thefts which occurred from vaults that only library employees could access.