

Regenesis

Transcript of the last cybercast from Fox-Warner reporter Daniel Lundgren.

Cynthia Ward

LUNDGREN in a hallway bustling with suited men and women: This is Dan Lundgren, Fox-Warner NewsNet, in Paris. I'm at the World Health Organization Conference on Genetic Therapy, where doctors and scientists are expressing alarm at the latest fashion trend. 'A fashion trend?' you might say. Medicine has nothing to do with style: but a medical breakthrough has become just another fashion statement.

Cut to a young woman on-stage, playing electric guitar in front of a thunderous retro-industrial band. Cut to LUNDGREN backstage with the woman: We're speaking with Marie Durand, lead guitarist of Jackhammer. Marie, many people would say you're abusing genetic therapy, desecrating a medical miracle for the sake of *haute couture*.

DURAND: They are fools. It has nothing to do with style.

Her hands rise into sight, gesturing. They seem too large for her slight size.

Fashion is transient. Art is eternal.

Close-up of one hand: The fingers are too long for the palm, and there are too many of them. Six.

I cut off my fingers. I would never do such a thing, except for art.

Cut to a bandaged hand, a stump without

fingers or thumb. Time-lapse video shows five bumps peeping through the bandage, and the bandage bulging along the outside edge of the palm. Then the palm is bare, fingers and thumb growing — growing too long — and a second thumb swelling from once-raw flesh.

DURAND [voice-over]: I cut off my fingers only to become the greatest guitarist in the world.

Cut to a small tailless lizard, sprouting a tail in time-lapse.

LUNDGREN [voice-over]: Once genetic engineers decoded the lizard's ability to regenerate a lost tail, human limb regeneration was no longer a fantasy. But no one realized the uses to which it would be put.

Cut to a beautiful Congolese woman with one brown eye, one green eye and, in the centre of her forehead, one blue eye.

[voice-over] Are we taking regeneration too far?

Cut to LUNDGREN, alone: One thing is clear: genetic therapists are giving plastic surgery a whole new meaning.

Cut to LUNDGREN with an Indian man in a Western suit tailored to reveal a long, supple, black-haired tail: Dr Charaka Ashok is a genetic engineer participating in the WHO Conference. Dr Ashok, many would claim you've made a mockery of your profession by giving yourself a monkey's tail.

ASHOK: They speak from ignorance. I haven't introduced a single gene from another species into my body. My tail is from the human genetic code — from 'junk' DNA. Junk genes are fossils: dormant genes inherited from our prehuman ancestors. Selective activation of the lizard gene and other fossil genes can stimulate the growth of tails, fangs, body fur and other physical features not normally part of the human body.

LUNDGREN: I see. But why would a distinguished scientist grow a tail?

ASHOK: It is a demonstration of truth. How better to manifest the fact of evolution? How better to refute fundamentalists who claim man was created by God? And refutation is more necessary than ever, with so many fundamentalists seeking to impose their ignorance on others. Religious terrorists are murdering genetic engineers and bombing gene-therapy clinics. Fanatics are clashing the world over.

Jump-cuts: screaming protesters; bombed-out buildings; battlefields.

In India, extremist Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are in violent conflict with one another. And an apocalyptic Hindu sect has declared a man the latest avatar of the god Vishnu.

Cut to: long shot of hillside in India crowded with people, surrounding a man in richly coloured traditional clothing. The man is mounted on a white horse. He holds aloft a sword bathed in holographic flames. He has four arms.

ASHOK [voice-over]: According to Hindu belief, the next incarnation of Vishnu will be the tenth — and last. The last avatar, Kalki, heralds the end of the Kali-Yuga, the Iron Age — the end of the world as we know it. The extremists believe Kalki is here and it is their duty to bring the world to an end.

Cut to LUNDGREN and ASHOK.

LUNDGREN: Dr Ashok, I find it hard to believe a mob of poor, ignorant fanatics can destroy the world.

ASHOK: I was in the University of Washington graduate biotech program with Kalki when he was two-armed Sunesh Bannerjee. Kalki is a brilliant virologist and genetic engineer. He has the knowledge and the ability to kill millions.

Cut to LUNDGREN alone: There you have it. Regenerative changes that look like fashion are, in fact, acts of faith. Guitarist Marie Durand believes adding a second thumb to each hand will make her a great artist. Dr Charaka Ashok believes his tail is evidence of the truth of Darwinism. And it seems a brilliant, four-armed scientist may believe himself a god destined to destroy the world. Tomorrow night at 9 p.m. Eastern, we investigate Dr Sunesh 'Kalki' Bannerjee. With Fox-Warner NewsNet, this is Dan Lundgren.

Last private communication from LUNDGREN: Why'd you ignore my e-mails and voice-mails telling you to cancel upload of my WHO report? I told you I'm too sick to move, never mind investigate Kalki. I don't remember drinking any local water, but I must've forgotten to tell somebody to hold the ice for a Coke. I've got dysentery from hell. And India's hotter than hell and I can't get anyone to fix my air conditioning. This is supposed to be a four-star hotel, but I haven't been able to reach a staff member all day. They're not answering the phone, you're not answering the phone — oh. Oh, God, no —

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