Cascade of errors ended space mission, inquiry finds

An official inquiry has blamed a computer-programming error for the loss of the Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft in November 2006.

In June 2006, new instructions sent to the spacecraft about what to do in certain special contingencies were mistakenly stored in the wrong memory address. Five months later, this led to a problem with the spacecraft's solar arrays. In responding to the problem, the spacecraft repositioned itself in such a way that one of its batteries overheated, while at the same time its main communication antenna turned away from Earth. The combination proved fatal.

The inquiry concludes that the spacecraft team had followed approved procedures, but that these weren't up to the task; equivalent procedures for other missions are being reviewed. The board also noted that cuts in budget and staff over the spacecraft's ten-year stint in orbit increased the risk that such things might happen.

Questions raised over 'cloned wolf' paper

The journal *Cloning and Stem Cells* has removed a paper announcing the cloning of wolves from its website (M. K. Kim *et al. Cloning and Stem Cells* 9, 130–137; 2007) pending the outcome of an investigation by Seoul National University.

The article, published in March, is the work of the same team at Seoul National University that was the first to clone dogs. The team had been led by Woo Suk Hwang, who is infamous for fraud in his reports of cloned human embryos, but its work to create the first cloned dog, Snuppy, was independently verified as authentic.

But is it a clone?

LEE JIN-MAN/AP

Following statements from the researchers that the paper needed corrections, a Seoul National University investigative committee was set up to test DNA samples from the cloned wolves, the wolf from which they were cloned, and the dogs that acted as surrogate mothers. Young Kuk, a physicist at the university who is leading the investigation, refused to comment on its progress. Byeong Chun Lee, who now leads the cloning group, is on trial for embezzlement charges related to the Hwang case.

US visa proves elusive for Iraqi researcher

An Iraqi researcher involved in a controversial study of post-invasion mortality rates has failed to get a visa to travel to the United States.

Riyadh Lafta of Al-Mustansiriya University in Baghdad was the sole Iraqi author on a paper published last October in *The Lancet* that claimed that between 390,000 and 940,000 people had died as a result of the invasion (see *Nature* 443, 728–729; 2006).

Last July, Lafta applied for a visa to travel to the University of Washington in Seattle, where researchers are planning a project on cancer and birth defects in Iraqi children. This March, the US Department of State said that it had offered Lafta a visa in October but had not received a reply and that the application had now expired. Lafta says he regularly checks the e-mail address the state department used and never received the message. He has now received a visa for Canada and will meet the Seattle researchers there.

Launch of physics journals boosts open-access club

Open-access publisher BioMed Central is launching three new physics journals under the sister brand-name PhysMath Central. They will sit alongside the company's portfolio of 176 biomedical titles.

The flagship title, *PMC Physics A*, will have as its editor-in-chief Ken Peach, director of the University of Oxford's John Adams Institute of Accelerator Science and chair of the scientific-policy committee at CERN, the European particle-physics laboratory near Geneva. It will focus on high-energy and nuclear physics, cosmology, gravity and astroparticle physics.

PMC Physics B will publish research on quantum physics and superconductivity, whereas *PMC Physics C* will cover biological and interdisciplinary physics. PhysMath Central plans to launch another four journals this year.

Venter reorganization closes genomics institute

The institution that produced the first complete genome sequence of a free-living organism has officially ceased to exist. Last week, the J. Craig Venter Institute (JCVI) in Rockville, Maryland, announced that 15 years after it was founded The Institute for Genomic Research — popularly known as TIGR — would be dissolved into the larger Venter Institute.

"We have long been leaders in genomics, and with our newly organized institute, I am certain we are poised to continue to blaze new trails in this field," said Venter, who is president and chairman of the JCVI, in a press release on 11 April. The newly reorganized, 500-staff institute will include research groups on plant genomics and microbial genomics, on which much of TIGR's work focused.

Claire Fraser-Liggett, Venter's ex-wife and the president and director of TIGR, will leave to found the new Institute of Genome Sciences at the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore.

P. G. TUTHILL

Red square at night

No Kremlin, no St Basil's, no Lenin's tomb: the centre of attention in the spectacular nebula that has been dubbed 'Red Square' is just a star called MWC 922. But it is possible that the square will, eventually, boast a mausoleum of its own, as that star may be headed towards death by supernova.

The diagonal lines caught in this image, which uses infrared as well as visible wavelengths, mark the edges of two cones of hot gas expanding from the star in a peculiarly even way. They have been captured through the use of adaptive optics at the Mount Palomar Observatory in California.