



# TOUCHING BASE

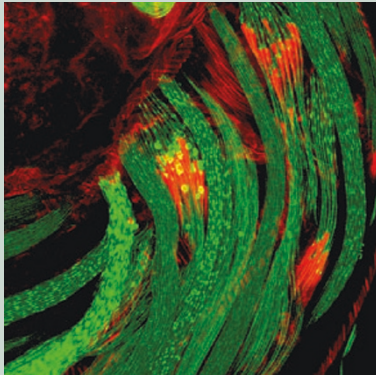
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## Mutant of the Month

This month's MoM has spectacular alleles, but so far no mutants. Still, it would be premature to conclude that the sperm-specific product of the *don juan* (*dj*) gene is entirely without useful function. This photo shows spermiogenic cysts of *D. melanogaster*—Don



Chris Bazinet

Juan protein is tagged with green fluorescent protein, and actin cones are labeled red with rhodamine-phalloidin. Renate Renkawitz-Pohl and colleagues have concluded that *dj* is a nuclear gene encoding a germ cell-specific protein involved in a specialized function of mitochondria. Now *don juan* mutants are being sought urgently to confirm that one such function might be elongating the spermatid or investing it with its own individual membrane. Nor is sex as simple as it seems, evolutionarily. Observing the similarity of mechanism between sperm elongation and intracellular bacterial locomotion, Chris Bazinet (*Bioessays* 26, 558–566; 2004) was led to the hypothesis that gametogenesis itself might be a consequence of the ancient relationships between primordial eukaryotic cell and its rickettsia-like endosymbionts that became the mitochondria. **MA**

## A select band

Niels Tommerup reminds me that a new eleven-member International Standing Committee of Human Cytogenetic Nomenclature needs to be nominated and elected before the 11<sup>th</sup> International Congress of Human Genetics in Brisbane in August 2006 (<http://www.ichg2006.com/>). Nominations with affiliation, address and email should be made to [elin@imbg.ku.dk](mailto:elin@imbg.ku.dk) by February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2006, and ballots should be returned before July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006. For continuity, the chair, Lisa Shaffer, has already been selected and will serve, like the committee, from 2006–2011. These are interesting times for cytogeneticists, with new methodologies and structural variants of the human genome being added in an ever-increasing flood. It is also hoped that the newly expanded committee will better represent the geographic distribution of cytogeneticists worldwide. We applaud anyone prepared to take on the task of integrating cytogenetic landmarks with genome sequence coordinates and HGNC-approved genetic entities to promote communication and understanding among the world's geneticists. We also have a vested interest in getting a handle on the new structural

*Touching Base* written by Myles Axton and Kyle Vogan.

variants (see p. 9 in this issue), so we encourage nominations from users of microscopic and genomic technologies alike. **MA**

## The DNA Files returns to airwaves

*The DNA Files*, a critically acclaimed radio series produced by Soundvision Productions and broadcast on National Public Radio, is scheduled to return to the airwaves in the fall of 2006. The show, hosted by John Hockenberry, explores the interplay between genetics and society, from basic science to the ethical, legal and social implications of the latest advances in the field. The two original series aired in 1998 and 2001. The 2006 series, funded in part by the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy, the National Institutes of Health and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, will cover such topics as toxicogenomics and individual variation, the genetics of neurobiology and ethics beyond the genome. The show's website (<http://www.dnfiles.org/home.html>) also features an interactive page in which readers are presented with various ethical scenarios emerging from modern advances in genetic research. Each decision leads the interactive reader along an engaging trail of follow-up consequences and further ethical dilemmas. The website also hosts an extensive resource page with links to related web content, as well as summaries and complete transcripts from the 1998 and 2001 series, freely available for download as PDFs. **KV**

## The beauty of difference

In medical illustration, a person with a genetic disorder is presented as a set of symptoms, but the rest of his or her life may be under-photographed and otherwise hidden from the public. The consequence of this imbalance is a kind of cumulative culturally demoralizing impression that genetic variation is a terrible doom. The difficulties of living with genetic disease do not need to be culturally exacerbated, so it is welcome to find pioneers using art and science to celebrate genetic diversity as a virtue. Starting with perceptions of albinism in different cultures, the Positive Exposure organization now is collaborating with individuals living with genetic differences internationally. Photographer Rick Guidotti (<http://www.positiveexposure.org>) and codirector Diane McLean, who have led the nonprofit organization for seven years, visit these people wherever they live to generate beautiful portraits and human stories, which they then use to challenge any stigma associated with difference. Anyone who has ever been photographed by someone they love, by a professional photographer or by a paparazzo seeking an unflattering image knows how just how the attitude of the photographer can influence the way the subject appears in the portrait. Judging from the large number of grateful letters the project has received, Positive Exposure is a most welcome boost for the dignity of people who are conspicuous for their difference. **MA**



Rick Guidotti

Students at the Siloe School for the Blind, SA.