



## The Rhoads not taken

In late April, the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) announced that the prestigious Cornelius Rhoads Memorial Award for young cancer researchers would be renamed after reports of its namesake's offensive comments regarding Puerto Ricans in the 1930s resurfaced. The former director of Memorial Hospital in New York had come under fire back in 1931 while working at Presbyterian Hospital in San Juan after a letter describing his prejudices against Puerto Ricans was discovered on his desk. In the letter, Rhoads wrote that he felt that Puerto Ricans were lazy and dirty and should be wiped out. He then boasted that he had personally killed eight patients and injected several others with cancerous cells. Although there is to date no direct evidence that Rhoads actually killed these patients, and an inquiry ordered by then-Puerto Rican Governor James Beverly cleared him of the charges, some note that the bodies of these individuals were never exhumed for a thorough investigation. Although Rhoads came under fire publicly at the time for his comments, his career continued to flourish in the United States, highlighted by his discovery in the late 1940s that mustard gas could be used as an anti-cancer agent. The AACR has suspended the award for this year but will continue to offer it under a new name.

## X2 review

We would be completely remiss if we didn't make some comment on a Hollywood mega-movie chock full of mutant protagonists—especially when we featured X-man Wolverine as our January Mutant of the Month. And we would like to say that this one is not to be missed on the big screen, but unfortunately, Hollywood found a way to infuse mediocrity into a treasured comic book story (I know...hard to believe). Opening with a wonderful shape-shifting blue mutant attacking the White House was a promising start to the sequel to *X-men*, but it was all downhill from there. Even peppering the film with delicious special effects and bodacious actor eye-candy couldn't save the movie from its extended exposition and flat 'can't we all get along' theme. Don't get us wrong, there is plenty to see here, but one can't help but be perplexed by the stale performances, especially by Halle Berry (Storm) and Patrick Stewart (Professor Xavier). Ian McKellen's performance was a highlight in an overly complex cast of characters and a schizophrenic story line. Even the well-crafted shape-shifter character takes on a Jar-Jar Binks-like quality by repeating the Lord's Prayer in a faux German accent. I know what you're thinking—what about the genetics? As it turns out, the mutants only inherit 'the gene' from their father, which is somewhat exciting because it implies that there must be some imprinting action going on here. We prefer to think that the grand phenotypes of the X-men characters are polygenic, but that's probably out of geek envy.

## Mutant of the Month

This month's MoM is *Caenorhabditis elegans lin-14*. This unfortunate nematode is in a group of mutants that Andrew Brown, in his recent book *In the Beginning was the Worm*, describes as "the disgustingly named and depressing to contemplate 'bag of worms'". Looking on the bright side, this particular mutant has taught us a lot about the genetic control of development. The gene *lin-14* is normally downregulated by the microRNA *lin-4*, which binds to a sequence in the 3' UTR of *lin-14*, blocking its translation and allowing the later stages of the worm's development to progress. This particular worm has a gain-of-function mutation in *lin-14*, thanks to a deletion of the *lin-4* binding site. The persistent expression of *lin-14* results in a heterochronic phenotype (altered developmental timing). One consequence of this is the lack of a normal vulva, leading to internal hatching of the eggs. The larvae have nowhere to go and, well, things end badly.

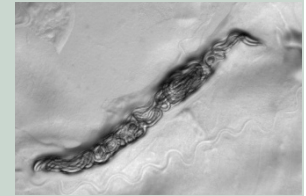


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## They sell no wine before its time

The eruption of Mount Vesuvius in 79 A.D. buried not only the inhabitants of the city of Pompeii, but also its great history of winemaking. Paterno Wines International claims that the Campania region of southern Italy produced "the most critically acclaimed wine in all of the Roman Empire." In 1996, in an attempt to recover some of this winemaking knowledge (and wine), the Italian government asked the wine producer Mastroberardino to resurrect the ancient vineyards. By studying classical literature, archaeology and botany, the varieties of grapes and locations where they grew were identified, as well as the Roman growing methods that were used. All of this was helped along by—you guessed it—DNA testing of sediment liquids, grape remains and vine remnants (Pompeii Park, anyone?). Two varieties were planted, and the first vintage harvested in 1999. About 150 bottles were auctioned recently in Rome, with a case of 6 going for up to \$940.

## Keeping them down on the farm

Last month, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) officially broke ground for its \$500-million campus in northern Virginia to be headed by *Drosophila* geneticist Gerry Rubin. The Janelia Farm Research Campus, named after the 1930s manor house that sits on the 281-acre site, will be completed in 2006 and will house about 300 permanent scientists and support staff. Research at the campus will focus on the application of emerging technologies to biomedical research. "Janelia Farm will be a distinctive collaborative place for chemists, physicists, computer scientists, and engineers to share their expertise and invent new technologies that will reshape biomedical research," according to Tom Cech, HHMI president. Visiting scientists will be able to take advantage of the new technologies available at Janelia Farm for periods ranging from a few weeks to several years. The lead architect is Rafael Viñoly, one of two finalists in the architectural competition to design a plan for the redevelopment of the World Trade Center site in New York City.