



TOUCHING BASE

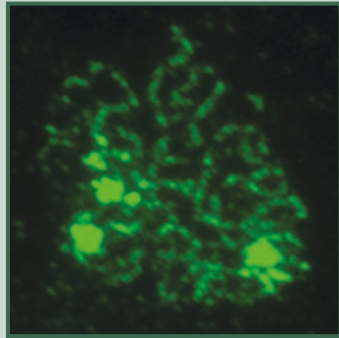
QUESTIONS? THOUGHTS? IDEAS?
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Mutant of the Month

Ord—shown here in fluorescent green on the meiotic bivalents of fruit fly oocytes—has received an inordinate amount of attention in comparison with other kinds of glue that come without mutations. It is a most attractive protein needed for the cohesion of sister chromatids of meiotic chromosomes.



Radhika S. Khelani & Sharon E. Bickel

The first *orientation disrupter* mutations of *D. melanogaster* were found in Larry Sandler's lab and were first reported to disrupt meiotic recombination and segregation in 1976 by James Mason. Terry Orr-Weaver and colleagues isolated the gene and thereby demonstrated the importance of sister cohesion in chiasma maintenance. Using *ord* mutations, Sharon Bickel and colleagues then developed the first animal model for the dramatic increase in nondisjunction that occurs in human mothers in their fourth decade of life (see also pp 1303, 1351). Sisters stick together, but their relationship is often far from ordinary. Like many interactions between sisters, some *ord* mutations exhibit negative complementation, in which particular alleles poison the activity of another. Such genetic quirks are often an indication of a close homotypic protein-protein interaction. **MA**

Mus-ic

At the scent of a female, male mice break into song, according to Timothy Holy and Zhongsheng Guo (*PLoS Biol.* 3, e386; 2005). This puts them in the company of birds, whales and bats for the sophistication and social use of their patterns of vocalization. Several types of ultrasonic syllable as well as patterns of regularly timed sequences of these syllables could be identified on sonograms. These are readily appreciated by human ears in the frequency-shifted recordings that accompany the paper. Their strangely poignant experimental setup—in which a male mouse serenades a urine-soaked cotton ball—should enable genetic research on speech and song production. Socially experienced mice often sang consistently patterned songs, and the authors speculate that like immature birds, they might learn from a tutor. It will be interesting to see how many of the musical genres of the wild mouse are represented in inbred lab strains. **MA**

Touching Base written by Myles Axton, Emily Niemitz and Alan Packer.

A call for biobanking

An educational session at the October 2005 meeting of the American Society of Human Genetics, held in Salt Lake City, Utah, was devoted to the need for and potential uses of biobanking in genetics. Speaking at the session, Francis Collins highlighted the fact that as geneticists investigate the genetic basis of common diseases, the issue of gene-environment interactions becomes a pressing concern. Biobanks used for large-scale population-based cohort studies will be an important resource with which to tackle this problem. The session made a convincing case for the need for initiatives to create biobanking resources, although it also highlighted the many challenges to implementation, including technical, ethical, legal and social issues. **EN**

FabHapMap

"In the mid-1960s, George Harrison, Paul McCartney, John Lennon, and Ringo Starr were often found together. If you looked for Harrison, there was a high likelihood, but not complete certainty, that you would find the other members of the Beatles."

—Bette Phimister (*N. Engl. J. Med.* 353, 1766–1768; 2005).

Save those lab notebooks

If you thought all those images of ethidium bromide-stained agarose gels showing restriction digests were not even worth the paper they're printed on, think again. A company called DNA 11 (<http://www.dna11.com>) is offering to "create abstract art from a sample of your DNA." All you have to do is send them saliva. They will process it, digitally enhance the image of the gel and then make a large print using "an advanced Giclee printing technique." "Each custom art piece is as original as you are," claims the ad copy (except for the lanes containing molecular weight markers, that is). The price? A cool \$390, which seems a small price to pay to join "many of North America's trendiest restaurants and lounges" who already have DNA up on the wall. The company's founders have also created images for ABSOLUT Vodka, using DNA extracted from the various fruits used in ABSOLUT products. One wonders, however: don't all of these bands look alike? **AP**

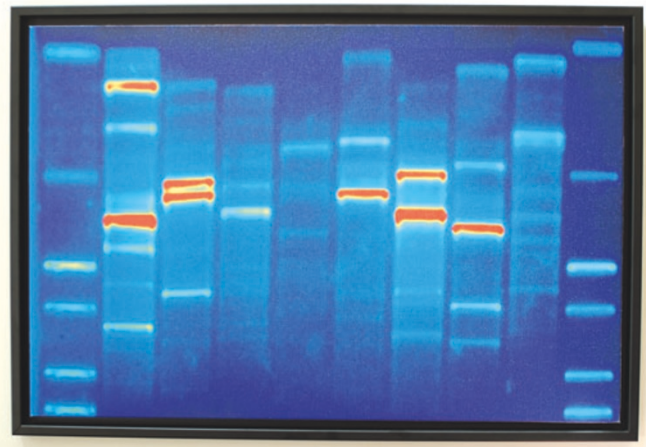


Image from DNA 11