

LETTER

The Mother of All Clock Genes?

Dear Editor,

It is my great honor to announce our discovery of what may well be the ultimate clock gene. In the words of Dr. Nikolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky, one of the Chelm Institute's many renowned scientists, "This gene may well be the 'Mother of All Clock Genes.' Because of it, we will soon have a complete understanding of clock mechanisms." The gene was found serendipitously in a bit of sludge dislodged by Dr. M. Pupique, another of the Chelm Institute's top-notch staff, while investigating the ancient clock tower in Bern, Switzerland. Although Pupique was unhurt by his fall, the clock stopped. None of our colleagues from the Omega Multi-Center Institute for Cooperative Research in the 21st Century could explain why the clock stopped, as none of the clock's parts appeared bent or broken. Our own Lobachevsky, however, had the insight to scrape and test the bottom of Pupique's shoe.

The bit of DNA found there reveals that all European clocks are genetically related, and mutation analysis traces the critical gene back to 1291. Gene expression is somewhat sloppy and has a period of 23.14159265 hours, on average. The phase angle of entrainment is also not quite consistent from day to day. This sloppiness, sometimes called the "Quasimodo effect," led to the subsequent selection of the various alleles found in grandfather, mantle, and railroad clocks, as well as of the chromosomal translocations underlying pocket watches, alarm clocks, and wake-up calls.

In a brilliant confirmation, function was restored when the sludge was reapplied by the new trowel-based transposition technique, and the clock moved forward from the phase at which it had been stopped. Though the sludge was widely distributed, the clock stopped only when it was knocked out of a small gear and catchment area, located just behind "*Tempus Fugit*," indicating April 1, 2003. The gene has not yet been named, but "*Tempus*," "*Fugit*," and "*April*" are

under consideration. It is important to remember that this discovery is the result of teamwork: it is the outcome of the dedicated efforts of the many people who have been involved in our comprehensive gene search among the clock towers and pastry shops of Europe. We authors at the Chelm Institute acknowledge and salute their hard work.

As is often the case at the frontiers of science, we had hoped to announce our results in a prestigious high-profile journal as soon as the patent is approved, rather than in this Letter. However, the Timex Cooperative Center for Multi-Program Research in the 21st Century also claims to have found the essential gene last year. Although our gene, the important one, is not an ortholog, paralog, homolog, or any other log of the putative gene cooked up by the Timex people, we felt it prudent to announce our results before they stir up the gullible media. There is inadequate information to judge the significance of their results anyway, especially since so many of them turn out to be artifacts. The real questions are, "How will these findings help us understand and build better clocks, and how will they help the millions and millions of people suffering from dystymia?" Much further work needs to be funded, and we look forward to presenting all of our data at a time and place of our choosing.

Professor Quincy Adams Wagstaff

Director, The Chelm Institute

Director, Omega Multi-Center Institute

for Cooperative Research in the 21st Century

436 Alternate Route

Orange County, CA, 94708, USA

Editor's note: This Letter has been published over the objections of the Editorial Board. Its contents remain unverified. We are even uncertain of the author's identity; it remains possible that the author is really Alan Sokal. Nonetheless, we feel that the Letter's potential impact warrants publication and, like other major journals, will let the scientific process do its work on the question of validity.