

STARPOPS

Instead of sports heroes or toys, children in Central America have a chance to learn a little about astronomy in the mornings as they munch on their sugar-coated grain products. CIENTEC, a Costa Rica-based nonprofit that promotes public interest in science, has teamed up with the food company Alimentos Jack's to put a series of games and vignettes on the back of its cereal boxes, including the history of space exploration and "stellar bingo."



A Strange Transformation

During an epileptic seizure, waves of abnormal electrical activity sweep through the brain. That can create some strange experiences, including hallucinations and feelings of déjà vu. Even stranger is the case of a woman who feels that she has become a man during some seizures.

In a paper in press at *Epilepsy & Behavior*, Burkhard Kasper and colleagues at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany report that the 37-year-old woman's momentary gender transformations include the sense that her voice is deeper and her arms have become hairier. Once, when a female friend was in the room as a seizure came on, the woman told researchers, she had the sense that her friend had become a male as well.

An MRI scan revealed damage to the woman's right amygdala, probably caused by a small tumor, and EEG electrodes recorded abnormal activity in the surrounding right temporal lobe. There's likely no one locus in the brain for sexual identity, but this region does seem to be part of a network important for self-identity, says Orrin Devinsky, a neurologist at New York University. "A lot of these right temporal lobe seizures alter the sense of self and the experience of self in relation to the world."

Divining by Genes

Chinese parents traditionally divined a child's future by putting different objects in front of a 1-year-old baby and watching which one the child reached for. Modern Chinese have found a more scientific-seeming approach. The Chongqing Children's Palace, a school in China's Sichuan region, says it can help children identify their natural talents—and get an edge on their peers—through a simple genetic test.

formance in activities such as art and sports is analyzed by psychologists and cross-referenced with their genetic data. Eager parents then get recommendations for the children's career paths. Not everyone is impressed. The tests are "not likely to have much basis in reality," says geneticist Richard Myers, director of the HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology in Huntsville, Alabama, adding that they could be "more harmful than helpful."

Roman Horse Found in Germany

Archaeologists in Germany have found a life-sized, bronze, Roman horse's head at the bottom of a well. It's the first such find in Germany and may be one of the world's best-preserved Roman bronzes, scientists say.

The sculpture, part of a statue believed to be of the Roman emperor Augustus, was found at Waldgirmes, the remains of a Roman town. The cast-bronze head, 50 centimeters long, is covered in gold leaf and weighs 25 kilograms.

At a press conference in Frankfurt last week, Friedrich Lüth of the German Archaeological Institute said archaeologists found the horse's head while excavating an 11-meter-deep, wood-reinforced well shaft. Tree-ring dating placed the well's construction at about 9 B.C.E.

It appears that the Romans had grand plans for Waldgirmes, which may have been intended as the capital of what they called *Germania Magna*. There are fragments from five statues in the town, and Lüth says the sophisticated craftsmanship of the horse head indicates that it was made in Italy.

Excavations at Waldgirmes, which started in 1993, are convincing archaeologists that the Romans had a more extensive presence in ancient Germany than historians had thought. "The Romans must have felt so safe, they planted a new town in this wild Germanic forest," says Sebastian Sommer, chief archaeologist of Bavaria.

That safety was short-lived. In 9 C.E., German tribesmen vanquished the Roman legions. Lüth believes Waldgirmes was abandoned at about the same time.



Cheek swabs are sent to the Shanghai Biochip Corp., which analyzes 11 different genes from each child for clues to the child's emotional and physical potential. The genes include *DRD4*, a dopamine-related gene that research has linked to traits such as impulsiveness and novelty seeking, and *5-HTT*, which helps regulate serotonin and may be related to anxiety and emotional vulnerability. "All genes have a purpose," says project leader Huang Xinhua, director of health studies at Shanghai Biochip.

After testing, the children attend a week-long summer camp during which their per-