

SPOTTED

# Spotted: Bright idea; IMFAR frenzy

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## WEEK OF MAY 11<sup>TH</sup>

### Bright idea

What if you could **control individual neurons** in a living brain with a flash of blue light? The idea, now known as optogenetics, seemed absurd just a decade ago. Then **Karl Deisseroth** made it happen. A **profile of the 43-year-old Stanford University psychiatrist** in the 18 May issue of *The New Yorker* details his inspiring journey from dreamer to doyen, with adorable quotes from his neuroscientist-wife, Michelle Monje. “It’s like Beatlemania,” Monje says of her husband’s rock star status at neuroscience meetings. “I realized, I’m married to a Beatle. The *nerdy* Beatle.” Deisseroth also created **CLARITY**, a technique that renders postmortem brains transparent to reveal perfectly intact neurons.

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### IMFAR frenzy

The **International Meeting for Autism Research** kicked off yesterday in Salt Lake City, Utah. More than 2,000 autism researchers are there, and so are a lot of the people their work is designed to benefit. One of the attendees is 57-year-old author **John Elder Robison**, who has **Asperger syndrome**. “I am going to the conference in search of knowledge, but I also carry a message,” Robison **wrote in an op-ed** published Tuesday in *New Scientist*. “We want our dollars spent on research that will lead to better lives for those of us who live with autism today.”

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### Author overload

A study examining a tiny piece of the fruit fly genome **made big waves** this week because of its 1,014 authors. Named on the paper, published in the journal *G3: Genes Genomes Genetics*, are more than 900 undergrads who scoured sequences of *Drosophila* DNA for start, stop and splice sites. The students “**do a significantly better job**” than software programs, lead researcher Sarah

Elgin, professor of biology at Washington University in St. Louis, told *Genes to Genomes*. Remarkably, the paper's lengthy list of contributors is nothing compared with those on some physics papers. A **2012 paper on the Higgs boson** has about 3,000 authors.

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## College crash

School isn't easy for people with autism, and the difficulties mount when they **enter college**. A story that appeared Thursday in *Vox* suggests high schools are failing to properly prepare people with autism for post-secondary education. It also highlights **programs aimed at easing the transition**. "A lot of it is helping students acquire adequate interpersonal skills and self-advocacy," says Gerard Hoefling, who works with the **Autism Support Program at Drexel University** in Philadelphia. Even freshmen without autism need a little help in these areas, Hoefling adds. But this need is "more nuanced" for students on the spectrum.

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