

THE NUDE MOUSE



Earlier this week, we had the chance to sit down with a member of a growing army of naked bubble mice. In thousands of biology labs around the globe, these lab mice quietly do their part in the pursuit of science and medicine. Called *Nude Mice*, these striking creatures are a result of spontaneous inbreeding, natural genetic freak shows if you will. More importantly, they are bereft of both hair and immunity – things that would normally protect them from the elements of the sky and the cooties of the world. And lucky for us, traits that not only afford some big advantages in the research arena but make for a great interview. The nude mouse we interviewed was just finished with a talk biopsy, so we met in his lab while he worked through his lunch.

I want to shoot straight from the hip here: On having no hair. How is it?
It can get cold sometimes, but generally it doesn't bother me. Besides, most females prefer it that way.

Okay, okay. Then I'll stay on this pattern: On having no immune system. Your thoughts?
Well, I have to say that as bad as it sounds, I love it. I mean - it's who I am. If anything, the part I hate is having to explain what having *no immune system* actually means. If you go into *B cells*, *T cells*, *antibodies* and the like, people just glaze over. It can really kill a conversation.

I'm with you on that.
In the past, I'd talk about being like the bubble boy. Nowadays, I usually just say rent the movie *Fantastic Voyage* – yes, that *Fantastic Voyage*, with Raquel Welch in the tight suit – and watch out for those bad ass white cells eating the spaceship. I tell them that not having an immune system means stuff like not having any of those bad ass white cells.

Sort of After-School Special-ish, no?
Don't judge me, 'kay?

Of course not. How about, Give us your reflections on the media.
You're asking me?

Yep.
The media I can live without. We're fairly private creatures, so the whole publicity thing is not cool. Besides, they almost never get it right. One time, my uncle had a human ear prosthetic grow on his back, and well, Christ, with all the press that ensued, you'd think he was sleeping with Jennifer Anniston. Not only that, but if you picked up a newspaper, you'd see this picture of poor naked Uncle Orv with a huge human ear on his back, and you'd be totally thinking that he could *hear* out of this thing. Which, of course, is not at all true. A shame really – that experiment was pretty elegant in my view.

You're kidding me, right?
Not at all. Engraft a hollow polymer scaffold (shaped like an ear) on Uncle Orv's back, infiltrate it with tissue cells from a burn victim needing an ear prosthetic, and wait for growth. Unky Orv ends up doing good because he has no hair, *and* he also doesn't have the biology to reject the foreign ear tissue. How brilliant is that?

Point taken. Let's move on. On stem cell research. React.
Basically, and to quote a GREAT movie, "bring it on!" Although to be honest, my opinion is pretty biased. They do a lot of bone marrow research on types like me, since having no immune system means I'm great as a clean slate. Just put some stem cells in my spleen and hey, you just might reconstitute my immune system. That's awesome when it happens, because then I can actually leave my bubble for a while. I hate living in a fucking bubble.

On scientists playing God, creationism and intelligent design.
Seriously, do I look like something that is a result of intelligent design? And I don't care much for those creationism types either. Did you know that only humans get to enter the gates of heaven? What's up with that?

I have no problem with that, if you're asking. But let's keep this one-way. On the ethical treatment of animals. Everyone's always bitching about that.
Look, it's really not so bad. I get nice living quarters, and plenty of food. And every once in a while, they bring in a wheel or a bunch of females, sometimes both. Plus, I know I'm doing some good in this world - the experiments they carry out can actually help people. Really, what more could you ask for?

(Written by Benjamin Cohen and David Ng, Artwork by Jane Wang - 2006)