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MINICOSM
SCIENCE & DISCOVERY IN BRIEF

- **ALARM BELL:** An early warning system in the brain that helps avoid repeating mistakes has been identified by scientists. The alarm mechanism is triggered in just a tenth of a second and responds before there is any conscious consideration of the blunder. It will remind a footballer of a formidable opponent or warn a woman to avoid a certain type of man, say researchers at Exeter University.
- **MAD CURE:** The cause of mad cow disease and treatment for Alzheimer's disease may be one and the same, research shows. Although abnormal prion proteins have been blamed for vCJD, the normal strain can help prevent changes in the brain that cause debilitating Alzheimer's, which affects 400,000 people in Britain. Leeds University researcher Prof Nigel Hooper said more tests could help produce anti-Alzheimer's drugs.
- **FISHY TALE:** Piranhas may not deserve their reputation as ferocious man-eaters, research shows. They swim in large shoals not to hunt down victims but to protect themselves, a team from St Andrews University in Scotland found. The Amazonian fish – used in one James Bond film by evil mastermind Blofeld to kill his enemies – are in reality scavenging omnivores constantly under attack from larger predators.

