

Nobody loves me, everybody hates me, I'm gonna....

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 13 Oct 1998

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Charles Dye — 13 Oct 1998, 17:56

The Spectacled Bear in RNA World:

I do know what Kieran meant about RNA, though: there was a theory around for a while that RNA was the carrier of memory. Back in the 1970's (ish) someone taught planarian worms to run a T-shaped maze, then fed them to other planarian worms, and put those worms into the maze. They appeared to guess which way to turn more often than chance would allow. There naturally followed a lot of stories based on that, often making much of the cannibal belief that you could absorb your enemies' strength and other virtues by eating them. This account is taken from what I recall of the introduction to one such story, so it may not be scientifically or historically accurate, but it reflects the author's understanding, which is what matters here. The experiment seemed to suggest that memory must be carried chemically (cell structures wouldn't survive being ground up and eaten) and RNA was a favorite contender for the role. I believe the theory has gone away now, though.

I've heard about this too. In the original experiment, the second set of worms did a far better job of solving the maze than the first group. However, it turns out that if you *wash* the maze between the first and second sets of worms, the second group does no better than the first -- whether they eat their predecessors or no. So yes, that theory "has gone away."

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