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Lymphocytes in lampreys?

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The adaptive immune system seems to have burst onto the evolutionary scene in a mere 50 million years, starting ~500 million years ago. Finding intermediate stages has proven difficult. In the June 20 [Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences](#) Shintani *et al.* find that the lamprey, a jawless vertebrate reported to lack an adaptive immune system, expresses a member of the Spi family of lymphoid transcription factors (*Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA* 2000, **97**:7417-7422). Expression is limited to the ovary (inexplicably) and cells in the gut epithelium that morphologically resemble lymphocytes.

References

1. 'Big Bang' emergence of the combinatorial immune system.
2. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, [<http://www.pnas.org/>]