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COVER: Artist's conception of a gamma-ray laser, or graser, using energy from microscopic fission process. Pulses from an optical laser compress a rod of fissionable material, producing intense neutron densities which stimulate gamma-ray emission from nuclei in the rod. See p. 8. (Illustration: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute)

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A forum on vitamin E

I wrote SCIENCE NEWS a few weeks ago to complain about the recent decision by the National Research Council regarding the medical effectiveness of supplemental doses of vitamin E. I have received a number of letters from persons who support my claims that the conclusion rendered by the NRC against supplemental doses of vitamin E was both hasty and ill-advised. Many agreed with my suggestion that we ought, as scientists, to be wary of making conclusions "about the existence or nonexistence of that which we can neither measure nor locate."

I had been unaware of this forum aspect of SCIENCE NEWS, but the ability of scientists and nonscientists of all types to add to, to argue with, or to exchange existing scientific information in the pages of a major magazine represents a valuable service to all of us.

David Radd
Lawrence, Kansas

When Francis (es?) dances with me

If and when Francis the smiling whale gives birth she will not only be given complete privacy as you state, but she may also have her first name spelled differently.

Your story represents only one example of a common national misunderstanding which makes hundreds of thousands of people like myself hide behind a nickname.

Frank Weidler
Placentia, Calif.

It's fairly obvious why the whale is smiling (SN: 11/24/73, p. 326). Everyone is watching the wrong one. How can a Francis be pregnant?

John W. Monczunski
Assistant Director of Information Services
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Ind.

(And Lassie is really a boy dog. And our neighbors had a cat named Ivan, who bore kittens. The whale is named for the man who caught her.—Ed.)

Readers fired by burning issues

Your article on fire casualties and prevention (SN: 12/1/73, p. 348) discussed carbon monoxide poisoning as an important cause of death in fires. I would like

to point out that many of these lives could be saved by prompt hyperbaric oxygen treatment. Many pressure chamber facilities in this country are underutilized because of lack of awareness of their availability and value.

Firemen and public health officials should acquaint themselves with facilities in their area and use them for treatment of all serious cases of carbon monoxide poisoning.

Kristopher M. Greene, M.D.
Institute for Environmental Medicine
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pa.

In "America burning" you quoted Irving N. Einhorn (SN: 12/1/73, p. 348): "Put a hibachi in a mobile home, and you have problems."

Let us go one step further. Build a home with wood, place carpets on the floors, connect all the rooms with air ducts, light a cigarette, a gas stove, water heater or oil furnace, and you have problems.

We are building fireproof nursing homes and hospitals. When will we reach the point where the average person, especially helpless small children, can live in an environment where a careless smoker or faulty appliance can't choke, burn, or maim people during their quiet dreams. Until this time, we are in the hands of God, firemen, and fire insurance companies.

Using bricks, mortar, and concrete is not only safer and longer lasting, but it will save our forests also.

Laszlo B. Szimonisz, M.D.
Buffalo, N.Y.

Relative to the cover of your December 1, 1973 issue and the title "Science awakens to America's fires," it is rather interesting to note you have utilized a photograph of the controlled experimental fires conducted by S. H. Ingberg of the Fire Research Section of the National Bureau of Standards on June 17, 1928 in Washington, D.C. Thus, it may be true that science awakens to America's fires, however, it should be noted that scientific methods have been utilized in the study of America's fires for many years as indicated by this photograph on your cover.

John L. Bryan
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Fire Protection Curriculum
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