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Letters

Metric follies

The new standard for the meter (SN: 10/22/
83, p. 263) is a godsend! The old standards were
so awkward to use that I had almost given up on
science completely.

When the meter was based on a platinum-
iridium bar I went out and bought one. Sure, I
had to mortgage the house in order to pay for it,
but I'm kind of a science buff, and I always strive
for accuracy. I usually use "feet" instead of "me-
ters" though, so I cut my bar into 3 equal parts
with my band saw. I know a meter isn't exactly 3
feet, but what the hell? Science isn't perfect. The
one foot bars were much more useful anyway
for the home carpentry work I was doing.

Then they came out with this krypton-86 light
standard. Have you ever tried to buy a krypton
light? The salesperson down at the local hard-
ware store thought I was some kind of Super-
man nut.

Once I found out about the new standard, I
ran out and got a light beam and a stopwatch.
When Edna wanted to expand her garden I let

This Week

324 Throwing Wide the IR Window

Cover: False-color image of the constellation Orion, produced from data from the Infrared Astronomy Satellite (IRAS), has little in common with its visible-light counterpart (third column, p. 325), and gives a fiery appearance to Orion's sword. Part of the first full survey of the IR sky, the image represents 100-micron emissions as red, 60-micron as green and 12-micron as blue. A huge ring of dust, 200 light-years across, is just above center, while the Orion molecular cloud dominates image's lower half. (Image: NASA)

326 Masculine/feminine behavior: New views

327 How half of Molokai slipped and slid

327 Baby cries: Whispers of future illness?

328 Lasker announces 1983 medical awards

328 Organs needed, but not when sold

328 The sound and fury of Arctic icequakes

Research Notes

329 Earth Sciences

329 Science & Society

Articles

330 Compensating Radiation Victims

332 Zap! You're Disintegrated

Departments

323 Letters

334 Books

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lose the light beam, waited 1/299,792,458th of a second, and Whammo! There it was, exactly one meter. Even Edna was impressed. Unfortunately, I've had terrible insomnia ever since they got this latest standard. You see, I can't sleep with the light on.

J.R. Casey Bralla
Asheboro, N.C.

Illness vs. disease

Wray Herbert's article "Mental illness from psychiatric drugs?" (SN: 10/1/83, p. 214), is a breakthrough of honest confrontation with the brain-damaging effects of the so-called antipsychotic or neuroleptic drugs, commonly called the major tranquilizers. The only confused aspect of the article is the title itself: psychiatric drugs do not cause "mental illness;" they cause *brain disease*, including tardive dyskinesia, organic psychoses, and ultimately, dementia. The distinction is important, for if people are led to believe that the drugs can cause "mental illness," then they may also hope that better drugs might "cure" mental illness,

such as "schizophrenia." ... The drugs damage the brain itself, causing a physical or real disease, which *also* manifests itself in mental symptoms.

Peter Breggin, M.D.
Bethesda, Md.

International insecticide

I am delighted that the University of Georgia scientists have finally caught on to the fact that vapors from the peel of citrus fruit can give insects the vapors, and then some ("An insecticide with a twist," SN: 10/8/83, p. 231).

As an Englishwoman who has traveled extensively in what we call "abroad," I've always carried with me a small bottle of "Oil of Citronella." It's so effective that I still have half of a one-ounce bottle purchased *thirty* years ago. It smells wonderful, and has warded off insects from Mauritius to Scotland, Egypt, and Maine. However, I must admit that it doesn't seem to have any effect on New York cockroaches.

Kathleen N. Daly
New York, N.Y.

NOVEMBER 19, 1983

323