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Letters

Extinguish the flame?

"Computers at Work: The Human Factor" (SN: 8/25/84, p. 122) confuses two important but marginally related issues: that of good human-computer interface design, and that of impassioned self-expression on computer networks, or "flaming." The article makes the judgment that flaming is generally undesirable, and is directly related to user frustrations with the computer system.

Only a minor percentage of flamage on such systems has as its subject the system itself. People flame about the weather, the ERA, bad movies, philosophical and technical issues. Flaming takes place even on systems with the most baroque communication protocols and the tightest management controls. Why? Because the ability to communicate practically instantaneously, to a selected community, in a way that avoids the stress of public forums, with

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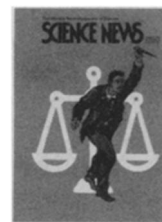
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Cover: In the wake of sensational murder trials, lawmakers, physicians and others have expressed outrage at the misuse of the insanity plea. Yet recent studies have shown that, despite a widespread belief that the criteria for this defense should be tightened, many people believe it is an essential part of the U.S. legal system.



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rapid feedback, is a liberating experience of giddy proportions.

Brenda K. Laurel
Los Altos Hills, Calif.

Correction: David Botstein, cited in "Diagnostic DNA" (SN: 8/18/84, p. 104), is a consultant to Collaborative Research, Inc., of Lexington, Mass., not Integrated Genetics.

Beyond orthodoxy

As a victim of environmental illness I read with interest "Environmentally Induced Illness: Continuing Controversy" (SN: 8/11/84, p. 90).

About four years ago I visited a clinical ecologist, more out of curiosity and a desire to find a treatment that did not depend on drugs or surgery—the standard method of treatment of orthodox medicine—than out of any real expectation of feeling well. I was astonished when a number of long-term symptoms disappeared

in a week or two after I began to follow the recommended diet and to avoid those foods and chemicals I was sensitive to.

It is not surprising that establishment medicine is so reluctant to accept the findings of the clinical ecologists: Clinical ecology is not taught in medical schools; the teachers in medical schools were never taught the principles of clinical ecology. Most of us understand, however dimly, the need for and existence of an extreme, rigid form of conservatism in medicine. Such rigidity is very desirable most of the time but it can also be excessive and blind physicians to new and interesting possibilities that merit serious attention.

The field of clinical ecology has existed and been developing for over 40 years. I applaud this magazine for giving it some space among its pages at long last. But I wish that you had not given the opposition the last word.

Barbara B. Brown
Arcata, Calif.

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