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Letters

Letter of the law

In "A periodic table for molecules" (SN: 2/7/87, p.87), D. I. Mendeleev's periodic law is misstated. In 1869 Mendeleev put forward his periodic law, which stated, "The properties of the elements are a periodic dependence upon their atomic weights." His "law" was based upon chemical properties, in contrast to the work of Lothar Meyer's published later the same year, which was based more on physical properties.

In 1914 Henry Moseley published "the modern periodic law." His "law" is, "The properties of the chemical elements are a periodic function of atomic number."

Alfred E. Hoberman
Chairman, Department of Chemistry/
Physics/Geoscience
Lock Haven University of Pennsylvania
Lock Haven, Pa.

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Cover: Did Australian Aborigines use astronomical lore in their religion and culture? They won't tell outsiders, but this stone with the sun-like symbol in the middle establishes an azimuth that looks toward the equinox sunrise. This kind of alignment is typical of the works of other prescientific peoples, who *did* use astronomical lore in such ways. (Photo: W.C. Straka.)

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Boning up

"Osteoporosis: Most answers yet to come" (SN: 2/21/87, p.116) is lacking one important detail: The effect of bone loss can be minimized if there is more of it to start with. To that goal it is suggested that girls should force-feed calcium and direct its deposition with adequate vitamins A and D in combination with weight-bearing exercise during the growth years.

Rick Mondale
Elkton, Va.

Math and the military

"Military funding: Does it add up?" (SN: 1/31/87, p. 71) missed what I thought was the main event of the meeting in this regard. The business meeting of the American Mathematical Society placed two motions on the agenda of its next meeting, but also dissolved

into a committee of the whole and recommended the passage of the motions to the next meeting. This is a much more significant event than some hypothetical mail ballot.

Michael Shub
IBM Thomas J. Watson Research Center
Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

I want to commend Ivars Peterson for his lucid, informative and balanced summary of the current debate among mathematicians concerning defense funding.

Hyman Bass
Columbia University
New York, N.Y.

Address communications to
Editor, Science News,
1719 N Street, N.W.
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MARCH 14, 1987

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