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Letters

Shavian foresight

If George Bernard Shaw is still keeping an eye on us, I hope he is pleased with the news about gamma interferon, which may "spur phagocytes to release increased amounts of superoxide anion" and thereby help them "deliver a . . . knockout punch" to microbial invaders, according to "Gamma Interferon Slays Microbial Invaders" (SN: 2/23/91, p.116).

In Shaw's play "The Doctor's Dilemma," published in 1913, the physician Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington pontificates:

"Nature has provided, in the white corpuscles as you call them — in the phagocytes as we call them — a natural means of devouring and destroying all disease germs. There is at bottom only one genuinely scientific treatment for all diseases, and that is to stimulate the phagocytes. Stimulate the phagocytes. Drugs are a delusion. Find the germ of the disease; prepare from it a suitable anti-toxin; inject it three times a day

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Cover: The sea snail *Hermisenda crassicornis* hardly qualifies as a bookworm, but scientists are investigating its learning ability in hopes of deciphering the molecular mechanism of memory. (Photo: Daniel L. Alkon/National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke)

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quarter of an hour before meals; and what is the result? The phagocytes are stimulated; they devour the disease; and the patient recovers — unless, of course, he's too far gone." (from the Penguin edition, 1954)

Robert Mills
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Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

Elephant hunters catch mice

I'm disappointed. I waded through three pages of "Finding Fault" (SN: 2/16/91, p.104), and what do I find?

First a tale of woe: Poor AT&T loses money because of inept programming. Ho hum.

Then David L. Parnas heads three teams who spend three years attempting to find fault with two 10,000-line programs. This is like putting the fox in charge of the chicken coop: An outspoken foe of ever trusting computer programs has a golden opportunity to show how poorly a pair of nuclear-reactor shutdown

programs perform.

And what's the finding? "In the end, despite many minor changes, the two computer programs remained essentially the same as before," states G.J.K. Asmis of Canada's Atomic Energy Control Board.

Well, shucks. Three teams of elephant hunters go on a three-year expedition and manage to kill a few mice. Perhaps the article should instead have been titled "Finding No Fault."

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All letters subject to editing.

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