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A corrective on the purchase of Tesla's lab

Toni Feder's report on crowdfunding in the April 2013 issue of PHYSICS TODAY (page 23) was excellent. I thought I should pass along one correction though. While Matthew Inman was certainly pivotal in raising money to help purchase Nikola Tesla's last laboratory, Wardencllyffe, he himself did not purchase the lab. He assisted the Tesla Science Center, which has been working diligently on the project since 1996. I've had the pleasure of working with the board of the organization, and the members are truly dedicated to preserving a piece of science history. You can read more about the project's history at <http://www.teslasciencecenter.org/a-brief-history>.

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Science fiction can spark science interest

I disagree with Moishe Garfinkle's letter (PHYSICS TODAY, April 2013, page 11) about science fiction's effects on the public's appreciation (or lack of it) of real science. I have seen through the eyes of my students and the teachers I have helped train over the years that an interest in science fiction can be a gateway to a broader or deeper interest in science. I got interested in astronomy through reading science fiction as a youngster—as did Carl Sagan and a number of other astronomers. Perhaps Garfinkle has a negative view of science fiction because he knows it only from the movies and TV shows he mentions. Yet written science fiction can be far richer than the thin, barely scientific gruel dished up in many movies.

I keep a website of astronomically reasonable science fiction at <http://www.astrosociety.org/edu/resources/scifiprint.html> and invite readers to sample some of the works featured there. A good number of PhD physicists and astronomers, including Gregory Benford, Alastair Reynolds, and Geoffrey Landis, are writing marvelous stories humanizing and extrapolating from our latest understanding of real science. Through such stories, science can become exciting and inviting, the

very opposite of Garfinkle's "dull and dreary."

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Science and religion, separate pursuits

The letter by Keith Schofield in the August 2012 issue of PHYSICS TODAY (page 12) is a restatement of an old logical fallacy known as the "god of the gaps" argument. The Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides wrote,¹

There is a group of human beings who consider it a grievous thing that causes should be given for any law; what would please them most is that the intellect would not find a meaning for the commandments and prohibitions. What compels them to feel thus is a sickness. . . . For they think that if . . . there is a thing for which the intellect could not find any meaning at all . . . it indubitably derives from God.

For many years I taught a physics course titled From Particles to Galaxies. In it, I dealt with the structure and origin of the universe. Students often brought up the issue of God. I finally wrote a book² based on the course. My main point in that text is that science and religion are totally independent intellectual subjects. It is important, as Maimonides put it, to be a scientist and to find scientific reasons for everything in the world. None of that negates the existence of God.

To believe in God does not necessarily mean a belief that every word in a holy book is true. Religion shows us how to live a moral life. The choice of what we do with our lives is ours.

References

1. M. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, vol. 2, S. Pines, trans., U. Chicago Press, Chicago (1963), p. 289.
2. C. S. Kalman, *How Did We All Begin: Where Is God in All That?*, Nova Science, Hauppauge, NY (2010).

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