

September 1, 1990 (Vol. 6, no. 1)

Dear Colleague:

I read Science when I feel a little low. Unlike other areas of human endeavor, science is still irrepressibly progressive. Each issue of the magazine tells me that we now know a little more. Science also reports news of interest to the educated public, and this too can be uplifting. Consider the following three items, all in vol. 248, 15 June, 1990.

1. On the evening of 13 February 1990, Voyager I left the solar system. As it did so, it looked over its shoulder and took a picture of the sun, the earth, and six other planets. Once more I am struck by the idea that our home is not just Dane county, not even the earth, but the cosmos: anything smaller makes us feel, sooner or later, claustrophobic.

2. The dreaded Soviet missile, SS-20, landed in May on the capital of the United States, as it was probably intended to do, but instead of producing a mushroom cloud, "it triggered a frenzy of photo-taking." This mega-engine of death is here as part of a nuclear missile exchange (!) between the two Superpowers. The SS-20 is now sitting in Washington's National Air and Space Museum, gawked at (no doubt) by children with ice cream dripping down their chin.

3. Roald Sagdeev, head of theoretical studies in Moscow's Institute for Space Physics, has accepted a joint appointment as professor physics at the University of Maryland. One reason for going to Maryland is to work with the Chinese American Chuan Sheng Liu, who is head of physics at Maryland. The other reason is to be close to his wife, who happens to be Susan Eisenhower, Ike's granddaughter.

There you are, two passions are still powerful enough to triumph over the pettiness of nationalism and tribalism--science and love.

For relaxation, I genuinely like to do three things: browse through Science magazine, read the Doonesbury cartoon strip, and contemplate the behavior of very young children. This seems an odd mix. What do they have in common? Answer: universalism--an impersonal evenhandedness. Doonesbury, for instance, satirizes every group, from supporters of NRA to animal rightists. Very young children, for their part, smile or throw tantrums when they feel in the mood. They may not like oat-bran muffin even though they are Americans: they are above (or rather, below) the superstitions of culture.

Best wishes,

*J. Fu*