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DEGREES OF FOLLY: PART I
by William Bennetta

[On 8 December 1988, the "New York Times" told that the Institute for Creation Research -- the most prominent center of creationist pseudoscience in the United States -- had suffered a setback: The California State Department of Education had barred the ICR from issuing masters' degrees in science.

That news, by itself, might not have seemed remarkable, for the ICR's charlatanry had been widely publicized for several years, and the idea of the ICR's awarding degrees in science was absurd. But the "Times" also told some things that surely WERE remarkable. The ICR already had been approved once by the Department, some seven years earlier, and actually had been passing out degrees. Moreover, the ICR's new application for approval, submitted in 1987, had led to some strange proceedings: The Department had sent a committee of five men to examine the ICR's programs, and three had voted favorably. The application had been denied only after one of the three changed his vote.

How had all this happened?

Here is the first part of an article in which Bill Bennetta, one of BAS's advisors, will answer that question. Bennetta has collected the relevant documents and has interviewed the members of the committee. In this installment, he tells how the committee's visit to the ICR resulted in a misleading report that omitted or distorted anything that might have conveyed the real nature of the ICR, its aims and its programs. Next month, he will recount how two members of the committee later told the real story, and he will describe what occurred after that.]

When California's legislature adopted the Private Postsecondary Education Act of 1977, its statement of legislative intent spoke of "protecting the integrity of degrees and diplomas" issued by private institutions.

The Act sought, among other things, to impose discipline on the operation of unaccredited schools and to inhibit the distribution of bogus degrees by diploma mills. It said that no school in California could award degrees unless the school had been certified by a recognized accreditation agency or had been approved by the superintendent of public instruction -- the chief of the State

Department of Education. To gain the superintendent's approval, the school would have to demonstrate, to a committee of examiners, that its academic resources and programs were comparable to those at accredited schools that offered their same degrees.

In 1981, when the superintendent was Wilson Riles, the Department overtly scorned the legislature's vision: After what was evidently a mock examination that would seem superficially to comply with the Act, it approved the granting of advanced degrees in science and in science education by the Institute for Creation Research (ICR).

The ICR (which then was in El Cajon, but now is in Santee) is the creation of Henry Morris, a fundamentalist preacher and former engineer who poses as an expert in geology, biology, paleontology and various other fields in which he has no detectable credentials. Like Morris himself, the ICR is avidly committed to "creation-science," the fundamentalist enterprise that seeks technical validation for the doctrine that the Holy Bible is an absolutely accurate account of history and an infallible textbook of science.

The functionaries of the ICR spend a lot of their time in devising quasi-scientific "evidences" that will seem to verify the Bible's creation narratives, other biblical episodes, and the fundamentalists' belief that the age of the universe is only 6,000 years -- a figure based on the sum of the lifespans of the patriarchs listed in the Book of Genesis. They spend even more time in purporting to refute evolutionary views of the universe, of Earth, and of living things. (Henry Morris has suggested that the concept of evolution was devised by Satan himself and other "evil spirits," while they were perched atop the Tower of Babel. (1)

At first glance, doing "creation-science" may seem to be a tough job: Isn't it hard to peddle, as scientific, a book that says that beetles have only four feet and that a newborn animal's color pattern is determined by what the parent animals happened to see when they were mating? In fact, the job is easy, because "creation-science" has nothing to do with science; nor is it intended to win the allegiance of scientists or of anybody else who might be tempted to count a beetle's feet or to think about genetics. Instead, it has been concocted for two extra-scientific audiences and two extra-scientific purposes.

The first purpose is to bolster the religious faith and anti-intellectualism of fundamentalists at large, most of whom know nothing of science and very little of what the Bible really says; rather than reading the Bible itself, they rely on preachers' accounts. The biblical beliefs seem scientific to public officials -- who typically know as little as the fundamentalists know about science or about the Bible -- so that such beliefs can be injected into public-school science classrooms.

Given their naive audiences, the creation-scientists are free to reject most of 20th-century science and to offer in its place a stew of weird tales and fatuous assertions, spiced with distorted

quotations from legitimate scientific literature. They offer an astronomy in which the asteroids seem to have originated during a battle between good and evil angels, (2) and in which the sun is, and always has been, continuously shrinking. (By extrapolating the shrinkage backward through time, they find that the solar system cannot be billions of years old, as scientists say it to be.) They offer an astrophysics in which the speed of light is adjustable, so that photons from remote galaxies, millions of light-years away, have been able to reach Earth in the mere 6,000 years since the universe began.

They offer a geophysics in which rates of radioactive decay are capricious, so that radiometric dating can indicate that a rock is millions of years old although it really was formed only a few thousand years ago. They offer a geology in which many of Earth's features, including the fossil record of life, were formed during Noah's Flood. And they offer a biology in which organisms occur as immutable, separately created "kinds" -- a term that they have borrowed from the King James version of Genesis and that they cannot define or explain.

To promote the dignification and dissemination of "creation-science," Henry Morris in 1981 set up something that he called the ICR Graduate School. And he promptly sought approval from the Department of Education to award masters' degrees -- not in Bible-study or religion but in geology, biology, "astro/geophysics" and science education.

The Department's record of what ensued is far from complete, but it does retain the names of the people whom the Department picked to evaluate the four degree programs that the ICRGS had proposed. I have checked on those people, and I have found nothing to suggest that they were qualified to assess programs in science or in science education. There is, however, evidence that at least one of them was connected with the ICR or with some of the ICR's leaders.

The result of their efforts was a signal event in the annals of quackery: In June 1981, Wilson Riles gave his Department's endorsement to the ICR and, in effect, lent the prestige of the state of California to the whole nonsensical business of "creation-science" -- talking serpent, shrinking sun, fantastic photons, and all.

Like all approvals granted under the Act of 1977, the ICRGS's approval had a term of three years. If things had proceeded normally, the school would have had to apply again, and would have been examined again, in 1984. But in that year the legislature was amending the Act, so all existing approvals were extended for three years. The ICRGS did not have to re-apply, then, until the end of 1987. Its application, signed by Henry Morris, was submitted on 24 December.

Consider the context in which that new application was received.

During the preceding few years, "creation-science" and the men who purveyed it had been repeatedly exposed and publicly denounced by scientists and jurists alike. One of the most potent analyses had been issued in January 1982 by Judge William Overton, of the U. S. District Court in Little Rock, when he ruled unconstitutional an Arkansas statute that would have authorized the teaching of "creation-science" in that state's public schools.

Overton wrote a highly readable, analytical opinion that considered the nature of science and showed repeatedly that "creation-science" was not science at all: It was biblical religion in disguise. His text described tactics by which specific creation-scientists had distorted science and had misrepresented their own enterprise; and among the people whom he named were Henry Morris and two other preachers who worked at the ICR -- Duane Gish and Richard Bliss. (Bliss, who was and is the ICR's "professor of science education," thus became (as far as I know) the only such professor whose weird writings about science have been excoriated by a federal court.

Creation-science soon suffered further debunking in a number of trenchant books, most of which analyzed specific antics of Morris, Gish and the ICR. These books included Niles Eldredge's "The Monkey Business" (1982), Norman Newell's "Creation and Evolution" (1982), Philip Kitcher's "Abusing Science: The Case Against Creationism" (1983) and Ashley Montagu's "Science and Creationism" (1984).

In 1987 an especially conspicuous blow was dealt to "creation-science" by the Supreme Court, which upheld two lower courts in finding that a Louisiana creationism law -- very similar to the Arkansas statute that Overton had nullified -- was unconstitutional. Again, "creation-science" was found not to be science but to be an anti-scientific religious doctrine. (3)

The Court's ruling preceded, by some six months, the ICRGS's application for renewed approval by California's Department of Education.

The application was governed by section 94310.2 in Article 1.5 of the state's education code. Article 1.5 incorporates the Act of 1977 and amendments to it. Section 94310.2 provides that the superintendent of public instruction shall not approve the granting of degrees by an unaccredited institution unless an assessment of each degree program has shown that "The curriculum is consistent in quality with curricula offered by appropriate established accredited institutions" and that "The course for which the degree is granted achieves its professed or claimed academic objective for higher education, with verifiable evidence of academic achievement comparable to that required of graduates of other recognized schools accredited by an appropriate accrediting commission. . . ."

In the processing of the application, decisive roles were played by three officers of the Department. Bill Honig, who succeeded Wilson Riles in 1982, is the current superintendent of Public instruction. Joseph Barankin works directly for Honig, in

Sacramento, as an assistant superintendent and as the director of the Department's Private Postsecondary Education Division (PPED), the branch that handles all applications from postsecondary schools seeking state approval. Roy Steeves works for Barankin, at the Department's Los Angeles office, as an assistant director of the PPED.

In March 1988, Barankin gave the ICRGS case to Steeves. Henry Morris and his associates by then had begun to amend their application to meet the PPED's standard requirements for documentation. They resubmitted it, in final form, on 9 June. During the next few weeks, Steeves recruited the committee that would visit the ICR, examine its programs, and recommend whether approval should be granted. By law, the actual decision about approval would rest wholly with Bill Honig, notwithstanding any finding or recommendation that the committee might report.

The members of the committee were: Robert L. Kovach, professor of geophysics at Stanford; Stuart H. Hurlbert, professor of biology at San Diego State; G. Edwin Miller, vice-president for administration at United States International University (in San Diego); James A. Woodhead, professor of geology at Occidental College; and George F. Howe, professor of biology at The Master's College, a religious school in Newhall.

The committee had no professor of education, even though one of the ICRGS's programs was in "science education" and was aimed chiefly at preparing teachers.

The five men of the committee, along with Steeves (who was their coordinator), visited the ICR on 3, 4 and 5 August. Their report was typed in final form, and was signed by all five and by Steeves, on the 5th. It was spread over ten pages, but it had much blank space and several unfilled sheets; if competently designed, it would have fit onto six.

The text of the report was, in a word, baloney. It continually omitted or obfuscated any information that might have told the real nature or aims of the ICR, the ICR's graduate school or the men on the schools's faculty, and it repeatedly promoted the pretense that the ICR was doing scientific work. For example:

Since the spring of 1985, the ICR has published a quarterly booklet of devotional readings called "Days of Praise". Each issue has had, on its back cover, a some boiler-plate that calls the ICR "A UNIQUE complex of evangelistic, missionary and educational ministries" and lists the "ICR Graduate School of Creationist Science" as one of the "Typical ICR Ministries." Yet the report never told that the ICR itself calls the ICRGS a religious outlet.

On page 2, the report said: "The stated purposes of ICR are twofold: to conduct research (and educational programs) with the goal of validating the theory of creation science and to conduct education programs primarily designed to train science teachers in

elementary and secondary schools. . . . (4) The three master's degrees in science relate to the first stated objective and the degree in science education relates to the other objective."

THAT THROW-AWAY LINE ABOUT "VALIDATING THE THEORY" WAS THE ONLY REFERENCE TO "CREATION-SCIENCE" IN THE ENTIRE REPORT. THERE WAS NOT A WORD ABOUT ITS CONTENT OR ITS SORDID, RICHLY DOCUMENTED HISTORY.

The report absolutely avoided a question that any alert reader must ask: If the "three master's degrees in science" were related to the objective of validating "creation-science," why were the degrees to be awarded in biology and geology and astro/geophysics and not in "creation-science"?

Page 4 said: "We commend the institution for having recruited faculty members who have demonstrated academic and research capabilities." Yet the report did not cite any academic or research achievement by any member of the ICRGS faculty, nor had any such thing been claimed in the ICRGS's application. Indeed, one of the striking features of the application was that its resumes of faculty members FAILED TO SHOW ANY SCIENTIFIC PUBLICATION OR PROJECT.

Page 5 said that the ICR's courses tried "to present a two-model evaluation addressed to the origin of life." There was nothing to tell what that meant. There was no explanation that the "two-model" system is the doctrine saying that every person must embrace either godless, pernicious, evolutionary science or fundamentalist Christianity. (No other religions merit consideration; this is why, conveniently, the number of models is only two.) There was no explanation that "two-model" nonsense had been soundly discredited and that Judge Overton had called it "a contrived dualism which has no scientific factual basis or legitimate educational purpose."

The report was baloney through and through. Was it intended for a reader who knew nothing about the ICR and would rely on the report for all his information? If so, it would thoroughly mislead him. Was it intended for a reader who already knew much about the ICR? If so, it could only lead him to conclude that it had been composed by six rubes who had not done their homework and had been fully fooled by the ICR -- or that it had been composed by the ICR's own public-relations specialist.

The report did include some comments that were critical of the ICR, but they were uniformly cryptic and incomprehensible. They mentioned for example, course titles that "did not accurately define course content"; courses that were "unstructured, with variable instructor contact time and inadequate or lacking classical textbooks"; "a great need to strengthen laboratory instruction and improve lab facilities"; and a failure to make an even presentation of "conventional interpretations of scientific evidence." But they never cited examples or told what they really were talking about, and so they never told what really was going on at the ICR.

The report ended with a one-sentence paragraph: "The committee recommends to the superintendent by a vote of 3 to 2 that full institutional approval be granted."

The superintendent, Bill Honig, was not misled. And professors Hurlbert and Woodhead, the two committee members who had voted against approval, soon submitted documents that furnished Honig with real information -- not only about the ICR but also about the fatuous proceedings of the committee itself.

End of Part I

NOTES:

1. See chapter 3 of his book "The Troubled Waters of Evolution (second edition; 1982).
2. See Henry Morris's book "The Remarkable Birth of Planet Earth" (1972).
3. For a detailed account of the Louisiana case, see my two-part piece in the July/August and September/October 1988 issues of "Terra", the bimonthly of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County.
4. Notice how the report adopted creationist lingo in falsely suggesting that the creationists have a "theory."

FACE TALKS BACK

by Roger Keeling

[The following article is in rebuttal to John Hewitt's October "BASIS" piece on the Face on Mars. Roger Keeling is the coordinator on the Board of Directors of the Mars Project.]

John Hewitt's article (Oct. 1988) is a facade of calm and measured reason, but of science, there is precious little . . . and that mostly in the form of notes caged from Michael Carr's book, "The Surface of Mars".

Hewitt begins his attack with appeals to nameless authority, a scientific sin he commits repeatedly. He says, "Most scientists state flatly that there is 'absolutely no evidence' for Hoagland's et al. claims."

Most scientists? How does Hewitt know that "most scientists" have dismissed this? Has he done a survey to show that 51% of scientists have informed themselves about the matter, much less dismissed the anomalies as entirely natural?

If such all-embracing opinion does exist in the scientific

community, why have scientists like Dr. David Webb (a member of the President's Commission on Space), Dr. John Brandenburg, Dr. Brian O'Leary, Dr. Randolph Pozos, author Eric Burgess (co-founder of the British Interplanetary Society), and others supported further investigation? Why have NASA people like Chris McKay and Thomas Paine -- while carefully indicating their own skepticism -- publicly defended the Cydonia anomalies as of increasing interest to NASA?

Hewitt doesn't qualify his use of "authority"; he simply waves it like a sword. And that is absurd.

Nor is this an isolated slip. A bit later he says: "To professional planetologists, who specialize in interpreting the geomorphology of alien landscapes, there is nothing artificial whatsoever about the face. . . ."

Make that, "To SOME professional planetologists," and the statement would be entirely true. Nor is he yet done with this mode of argument. Later, attempting to smear the reputation of Dr. Mark Carlotto, he says, "Most scientists remain unimpressed by Carlotto's effort."

In reality Hewitt hasn't the slightest idea what "most scientists" think. He supports his "most scientists" nonsense by quoting one scientist, ignoring how Carlotto's article passed peer review prior to publication -- a peer review that was **ESPECIALLY RIGOROUS** precisely because of the subject matter's controversial nature. And he fails to note -- perhaps does not know -- that Dr. Carlotto is nationally recognized as one of the leading experts in the field of image enhancement and interpretation. Not only does Dr. Carlotto have impeccable academic credentials, but he currently heads a team of scientists who provide critically-vital interpretations of satellite imaging to the government.

In any case, this absurd leitmotif of commanding readers to believe in a unanimity of opinion among professionals is at best intellectual sloppiness.

Argument #2: Hewitt says, "The face does not live up to even the most basic claims of its promoters. It does not follow the profile of a face, human or prehuman." He expends much verbiage trying to convince readers of this. He says the Face has but one principal face-like feature -- "a single shadow which gives the illusion of an eye socket in the late afternoon light."

Hewitt's argument is very innovative; before now, what common ground critics and proponents occupied was agreement that the Face does bear an uncanny resemblance to a face. Personally, I think critics and proponents **STILL** have this common ground; pardon my pun, but the images themselves create a *prima facie* case against Hewitt's argument.

Indeed, judge for yourself. Here is frame 35A72.

In it, MOST people see more than the suggestion of an eye socket; they see a nearly perfect eye-socket shape. Most see the precisely-aligned teeth. Most see the Face framed by a helmet or representation of hair. Most see the symmetrical criss-cross pattern of lines above the forehead. Most see a reasonable bi-symmetry to the overall structure. And most see how the shadow precisely follows the same line you see on a human head when starkly illuminated from about the 10 o'clock position. Most see how the shadow starts in the left temple, moves to the bridge of the nose, angles sharply around the nose, bisects the mouth, then angles sharply again into the throat area.

Now we arrive at Hewitt's heavy artillery: his definitive disproof of our thesis. Indeed, based on this argument, Hewitt asserts "In classic pseudoscientific fashion, the Face-on-Mars promoters are making selective use of the data available to them, and have drawn conclusions unsupported by the data they HAVE used. They failed to obtain all relevant data initially, and they have ignored overwhelming evidence contrary to their claims."

In fact, it is Hewitt's argument that crumbles upon examination.

All Cydonia researchers to our knowledge rely primarily upon two images when considering the Face: frames 35A72 and 70A13 (35A72 was the 72nd shot by the A orbiter on its 35th day in orbit around Mars; 70A13 was the 13th shot taken on the 70th day). These images were taken at approximately 1,500 kilometers (about 900 miles) above the planet, both in late afternoon light. Four other known images contain the Face: 673B54, 673B56, 753A33 and 753A34. Hewitt notes that these were acquired by Mr. Norman Sperling simply by writing to the National Space Science Data Center, but that "Hoagland and company" were "presumably . . . unaware of" two of these (673B54 and 753A34).

Hewitt describes Carlotto's image enhancement efforts and work to simulate morning light on the Face. Then Hewitt says, "A lower resolution image containing the face shows the area illuminated by REAL morning light, but Carlotto dismisses the frame as having insufficient resolution for his purpose. A second, lower resolution frame (673B56) has mid-afternoon light," also rejected for analysis.

After quoting one scientist who dismisses Carlotto's work, and adding his own amateurish disparagement, Hewitt returns to these two frames: "Frames 673B56 and 753A33 (mentioned by Carlotto) both contain information at odds with the assertions. In the morning light of 753A33, our favorite mesa lacks any impression of facial features. The 'eye socket' becomes a broad, shallow hollow; and the base appears as an asymmetrical erosional polygon like its neighbors. It's easy to see why these images get little attention.

"Hoagland and company fail to mention two ADDITIONAL frames of Cydonia containing the face, 673B54 and 753A34. Presumably they

are unaware of their existence. . . . The images of the face are small, perhaps 50 or 60 pixels (compared to over 400 pixels in the higher resolution views) -- but they are good enough to show all sorts of features on the other side. A broad, bright slope, hidden in the shadows of 35A72 and 70A13, rises toward two peaks along an ascending, ragged ridge. **THE FRAMES DON'T SHOW ANYTHING THAT BEARS THE SLIGHTEST RESEMBLANCE TO A FACE!"** [Original emphasis].

Well. This seems devastating, does it not. Ah, these Cydonia quacks have fudged the data -- and they are incompetent, to boot, having missed some of that data in the first place.

Hewitt's argument is false.

First, note that he says that the two images found by Mr. Sperling (and not previously mentioned by Carlotto) provide important new data.

Not true. The two frames procured by Sperling are **PAIRS** of the two mentioned by Carlotto. 673B54 (Sperling) was taken all of 1.6 seconds before 673B56 (Carlotto), while 753A33 (Carlotto) was taken 0.8 seconds before 753A34 (Sperling).

THEY ARE ESSENTIALLY THE SAME IMAGES. If, as Hewitt claims, Frame 753A34 disproves the existence of the Face, then 753A33 does so just as effectively. Likewise for 653B54 and B56.

Secondly, Hewitt makes much of the fact that Mr. Sperling procured all four images simply by writing to the NSSDC, implying that we've been sloppy in our research. In fact, **IT WAS MEMBERS OF THE ORIGINAL MARS INVESTIGATION TEAM WHO FIRST UNCOVERED THESE IMAGES** in the early 1980s. The team presented them at the 1982 Case For Mars Conference in Boulder, Colorado. And all four are mentioned in "The Face on Mars" by Dr. Randolph Pozos. Hewitt apparently neglected to look this up prior to impugning the professional competence of the investigators.

But finally we come the the most important point: do these four images, especially the morning light 753A series, disprove the existence of the Face? Decide for yourself:

1) The Face occupies an area approximately 1.28 x 1.6 kilometers (0.75 x 1.0 miles) in size. Hewitt says 1.0 x 1.5 miles.

2) The two images normally used -- frames 35A72 and 70A13 -- were taken from about 1,500 kilometers (about 900 miles). The four low-resolution images were taken from about 33,000 **KILOMETERS** (19,500 miles), or **22 TIMES HIGHER**. Hewitt omits this entirely.

3) Frames 673B54 and B56, like 35A72, were taken near sunset, a fact obvious upon first glance. Hewitt says they are in "mid-afternoon light."

4) Frames 673B54 and 753A34 were not used by Carlotto because both

are extremely noisy, with extensive "salt-and-pepper" errors. Both are far INFERIOR to the virtually identical frames 673B56 and 753A33; Hewitt implies that the photos are SUPERIOR.

5) In 35A72 and 70A13, the image of the Face is represented by about 650 pixels (not 400, as Hewitt says). In frames 673B54, B56, 753A33 and A34, the Face is comprised of about 35 to 40 pixels (not 50 to 60, as Hewitt claims).

6) In 35A72 and 70A13, each pixel covers an area of approximately 50 x 50 meters (2,500 square meters). In the four low resolution images, each pixel covers approximately 207 x 207 meters (42,800 square meters). Hewitt never mentions this.

These are all vital facts, clearly indicating the circumstances of the photos and just how little detail is likely to survive in them. So, what IS shown by the four images Hewitt so triumphantly waves?

Almost nothing. Hewitt's assertion that the morning shots "show all sorts of features on the other side" is patently false. As the Mars Project's photographic consultant Daniel Drasin explains, the images simply contain too little information to yield details like "broad, bright slopes" or "ragged ridges." For confirmation, a comparison of high-altitude afternoon shots (673B54 and B56) with the similarly-lighted 35A72 and 70A13 shows little is visible except the overall shape of the mesa and the familiar shadow line. Only the very slightest indication of the right eye socket appears; there are no other details.

These images tell us only that the Face IS basically symmetrical -- what The Mars Project has stated elsewhere.

When Hewitt says, "It is easy to see why these images get little attention," he is impugning the integrity and professional competence of all who are involved in the Mars investigation, most notably Dr. Carlotta. But in "classic pseudoscientific fashion," Hewitt himself DEMONSTRABLY makes selective use of data, draws conclusions not supported by the data, and -- again and again -- fails to obtain all relevant data.

There's much more of this in Hewitt's article, but space limitations keep us from pursuing it. Hewitt's principal arguments are by turns intellectually bankrupt and factually flawed. Through them all we do not hear a love for science so much as a drumbeat of emotionalism.

No one in The Mars Project claims that the evidence so far available can settle the question of the origin of the Martian anomalies. More data is required. But we do contend that many arguments raised against our evidence seem to serve deep-seated emotional motives rather than a search for truth.

We've not been able here to present our fabric of positive arguments for the artificial origin hypothesis. The Face itself is

persuasive. Yet, as we've pointed out elsewhere, other Cydonia features are also intriguing. From a scientific perspective, what is most important is not the Face per se, but the relationships of these landforms to each other and their surroundings. The Mars Project is working with several researchers examining these relational aspects of the anomalies in terms of geomorphology and fractal analysis. Two professional papers are now being readied for peer review.

The Project will continue this research, and continue its role of publicizing the anomalies to the public and scientific community. Most importantly, we will continue laying vital groundwork for public backing of return trips to Mars. In the long run -- even if the anomalies should prove natural in origin -- we will deem significantly increased public interest in space exploration and Mars to be success enough.

1988 PSYCHIC FIZZLES

by Robert Sheaffer

The San Francisco area was not devastated by an earthquake last January. Mikhail Gorbachev did not divorce his wife Raisa. Dinosaur eggs were not hatched, and Fidel Castro was not toppled from power. These were just a few of the many things that had been predicted to occur during 1988 by famous psychics, but failed to happen, as chronicled by the Bay Area Skeptics.

At the end of each year, many well-known psychics issue predictions for the coming year. Twelve months later, they issue another set of predictions, conveniently forgetting those made the year before, which are always nearly 100% wrong. Each year, however, BAS digs up the predictions made the year before, nearly always to the embarrassment of those who made them.

Many of the psychic predictions made are so vague that it is impossible to say if they came true or not: for example, Jeane Dixon's predictions that "October and November will be stress-filled" for Frank Sinatra, or that "Prince Philip should be especially on guard" during the autumn, are difficult to prove true or false. Many other predictions involve things that happen every year, or else are not difficult to guess, such as tornadoes in the Midwest, hurricanes in Florida, or continued terrorist incidents. Many predictions simply state that currently ongoing problems will continue, such as unrest in South Africa, or fighting in Central America.

Other supposed predictions are not really predictions at all, but are actually disclosures of little-known events that are already under way, such as movie productions, business ventures, or celebrity activities. While some predictions did of course come true, especially those that were unspecific, or not at all difficult to guess, not ONE prediction which was both specific AND

surprising came true.

The famous Washington, D.C. psychic Jeane Dixon, who supposedly has a "gift of prophecy," predicted that Jesse Jackson would face a sudden health problem this fall, that Fidel Castro would be overthrown, that Princess Diana would become pregnant, and that Communists would gain a "foothold" on the island of Cyprus.

Clarisa Bernhardt, who claims (without justification) great accuracy in her psychic predictions of earthquakes, predicted that prehistoric dinosaur eggs would be discovered, frozen in the Antarctic ice, and that scientists would successfully incubate and hatch them. She also predicted that Clint Eastwood would this year declare himself a candidate for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1992.

New York psychic Shawn Robbins predicted that Fawn Hall, Donna Rice, and Jessica Hahn would star together in a new TV series based on "Charlie's Angels."

Los Angeles psychic Marie Graciette predicted that Soviet party boss Mikhail Gorbachev would divorce his wife Raisa.

Florida psychic and astrologer Jack Gillen predicted that "A massive earthquake will hit California on or about January 19 -- causing extensive damage and loss of life in the San Francisco area." He also predicted the outbreak of an epidemic of a mysterious skin condition causing black blotches on the arms and legs.

Denver psychic Lou Wright predicted that Dolly Parton would lose so much weight that she would enter the hospital to be treated for anorexia. She also predicted that Princesses Diana and Fergie would BOTH become pregnant, and BOTH give birth to babies on the same day.

Florida psychic Noreen Renier warned the FBI in early June of a forthcoming major political assassination attempt that was supposed to occur in the next two months. In her vision she "saw a person getting shot in the stomach" in "a palace or a castle with high ceilings and arches."

In San Jose, California, psychic Sylvia Brown predicted that the San Francisco '49ers would go "all the way" to the 1988 superbowl, that Senator Robert Dole would beat out George Bush for the Republican presidential nomination, that a terrorist attack at San Francisco International Airport during July would be thwarted, that a vaccine for AIDS and ARC would "absolutely" be found, and that interest rates would go down while oil prices went substantially up (the opposite happened). She predicted that evangelist Jerry Falwell would become involved in a major scandal -- he was not -- but failed to predict the scandal that brought down Jimmy Swaggart. Interestingly, she also failed to predict that she would be accused, in court papers filed by several banks, of fraudulently

obtaining more than \$200,000 in real estate loans.

Based on the continuing failure of the psychics to make accurate predictions over the years, Bay Area Skeptics urges everyone -- including the media -- to exercise some healthy skepticism when psychics and other purveyors of the paranormal make extra-ordinary claims or predictions. Anyone who swallows the psychics claims year after year without checking the record is setting a bad example for youngsters and the public.

It is important to note that no psychic succeeded in predicting the genuinely SURPRISING news stories of 1988: the controversial nomination and election of Indiana Senator Dan Quail as Vice-President; the sudden death of Christina Onassis; the surprising rise of the candidacy of Michael Dukakis, and its equally surprising collapse; the loss of over 50,000 lives in an earthquake in Soviet Armenia; and the prolonged drought in the American farm belt. These major news stories were so unanticipated that someone would have had to be truly psychic to have predicted them! Given the number of self-proclaimed psychics out there, you would expect that at least one so-called psychic would have -- unless, of course, that all such claims of psychic powers are without foundation.

The Bay Area Skeptics is a group of people from all walks of life who support the critical examination of paranormal claims, such as psychic powers, UFOs, astrology, Bigfoot, biorhythms, etc. Similar skeptics' organizations are active in many other areas of the country, including southern California, New York, Colorado, Illinois, Arizona, Texas, and Ohio. The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) is an international Skeptics' organization, made up of many famous writers, scientists, and investigators, such as Martin Gardner, James "The Amazing" Randi, Isaac Asimov, and many others. Similar skeptics' groups have also formed in many foreign countries, including Australia, Canada, France, the United Kingdom, Mexico, and India. All of these groups cooperate in making their findings available to other researchers, and to the public.

[This is the article that Robert released to the press. Newspapers and TV stations have come to rely on this year-end story from BAS. Robert appeared on several Bay Area radio and TV programs during the last week of December with this press release. BAS vice-chair, Yves Barbero, and BAS director Shawn Carlson also put in appearances at year's end talking about the failure of psychics to make good their grandious claims. -- Ed.]

Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

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