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Georgia Skeptics is a non-profit local group which shares a common philosophy with the national organization CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), and seeks to promote critical thinking and scientific inquiry as the most reliable means to gather knowledge of the world and universe. Like CSICOP, Georgia Skeptics encourages the investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view, and helps disseminate the results of such inquiries.

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Joining the Georgia Skeptics organization is encouraged because membership dues help us to disseminate the results of skeptical inquiries to the public and to hold educational events. Yearly dues are \$17.50 for individual memberships, \$21.00 for families, and \$12.50 for full time students.

PHENOMICON 1991: A RECIPE FOR WEIRDNESS

By Anson Kennedy, Georgia Skeptics

Take five parts UFO believers,
five parts alien abduction believers,
five parts conspiracy theory believers, and
two and a half parts skeptics.

Mix thoroughly (but wait to add the skeptics last).

Let concoction sit for two and a half days.

What do you get? It's hard to say, but whatever it was occurred over one weekend last November. Its organizers called it "PhenomiCon."

The UFO believers included William ("call me Bill") Milton Cooper. Cooper's main interest seemed to be getting as many people as possible to pay an extra twenty bucks for "private" seminars. Don Ware, a regional director of MUFON (Mutual UFO Network) who has investigated the Gulf Breeze UFO sightings in Florida, spoke on "UFOs and Human-Alien Interaction." His talk covered thousands of years of human-alien relations. Caryl Dennis, an "expert" on UFOs and "colorology" (the science (!) of color), spoke on the United States government's involvement with UFOs this century.

These were just a few of the "UFOlogists" in attendance. In addition to UFOs, they all had one other thing in common -- the dealer room. You could buy (for no small chunk of change) tapes of Cooper's lectures on UFOs, the government UFO cover-up, and even Cooper's own version of "The Men Who Killed Kennedy" (I'll save you the trouble: Kennedy's limo driver did it). Need more? You could step over to Dennis's table and get all sorts of colorology stuff (mainly colored filters at elevated prices).

The abduction believers' camp consisted of Robin Quayle giving case histories and interviewing (alleged) abductees. Right along with Ms. Quayle was Mark Jaeger lecturing on Zecharia Sitchin's ancient astronaut theories (he does Von Daniken one better). Again, if you had the cash, you could get the "real" story in the dealer's room.

The convention had an on-going conspiracy role playing game as well as several conspiracy lectures, the most popular of which was the one author Robert Anton Wilson and hemp proponent Joe Jonno gave on the Skull and Bones. This is Yale's secret society (George Bush was a member) which has been linked to various world-takeover conspiracy theories. We think they had a table in the dealer's room, but they would never admit it.

On a lighter conspiracy note, one of the Georgia Skeptics members got somewhat red-faced after being taken in during a discussion on "Atomic Radio," billed as "the communications technology suppressed by the government since the late '40s." It was actually part of the role playing game; all in attendance were "killed" by nefarious agents just as he was showing that Atomic Radio violated the laws of physics. Fortunately, he

was the only "casualty" the skeptics suffered at the convention.

Almost as an afterthought, to liven things with controversy, the skeptics were invited. The Georgia Skeptics sponsored the participation of Robert Sheaffer (a CSICOP fellow and author of *The UFO Verdict*). Sheaffer debated Robert Anton Wilson (coauthor of the *Illuminatus!* trilogy) over certain disparaging comments Wilson made against Sheaffer and skeptics in general in his book *The New Inquisition*. Wilson neatly slithered out from various points Sheaffer brought up by proclaiming that parts of his writings were never meant to be taken seriously (it is up to the reader to guess which parts, and not make "uncritical inferences") and that he abuses and insults persons of all viewpoints equally. When Sheaffer brought a round of applause by noting that Wilson apparently "advocates every possible position in hopes that one of them might work," Wilson replied, "Yeah."

One of the points Wilson was unable to evade was made after someone in the audience addressed him as "Doctor." Sheaffer was quick to ask just where Wilson got his Ph.D. and what his thesis was. At this point Wilson visibly squirmed and mumbled something about the "psychology of perception" and "Hawthorne University." Sheaffer then pointed out that the university had a disconnected telephone, was unaccredited, and was noted for having professors who were almost exclusively graduates of the school (which reminded several skeptics of the Institute for Creation Research). Also in the debate, apparently for comic relief and also as an afterthought, was the founder of the "Church of the Sub-Genius," Ivan Stang.

Sheaffer's later talk on his book *The UFO Verdict* was very well received. Larry Johnson (of the Georgia Skeptics) spoke on crop circles to a lively crowd. Bill Cooper stuck his head in the door, made a disgusted gesture, and left. It's nice to know the believers have such open minds! The Georgia Skeptics also hosted a panel discussion, which suffered greatly due to the fact that no one knew we were there and the *Skull and Bones* talk was scheduled opposite.

One final note on Sheaffer vs. Wilson. Both Sheaffer and Wilson ate dinner (at separate tables) at a restaurant in the hotel after their debate. On several occasions, convention participants would come up to Sheaffer and ask to sit down and talk with him. They passed by Wilson without a second glance. The readers can draw their own conclusions.

Surprisingly enough, unlike oil and water, these widely different viewpoints mixed well over the weekend. Given the fact that this was the first-ever PhenomiCon, we can overlook the scheduling faux pas (rooms switched at the last minute, few skeptics' events announced ahead of time, etc.) and have good expectations for the second annual convention.

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF PHENOMICON

by Larry F. Johnson, Georgia Skeptics

The impression of PhenomiCon that will stick with me the longest is when I

wandered into the last ten minutes of a presentation entitled something like "Geneology of the Gods". There was a slide with a tree-chart depicting, as you might imagine, the geneology of a number of oddly named deities. I can't recall any of the actual names, except that the geneology ended with Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec god. The ancestor gods had names that sounded like something out of H.P Lovecraft's stories. From the small amount of his spiel I heard, the speaker seemed to be a follower of Zecharia Sitchin, who is a guru of the "ancient astronaut" folks. These folks believe that the development of human civilization was helped along by advanced extraterrestrials who periodically showed us primitive earthlings how to do neat stuff like build pyramids.

As much fun as the whole event was, I can't say that I felt like I fit into the festivities very well. I've enjoyed science fiction all my life, and have been very determined not to be judgemental about all the lifestyle, clothing, and jargon trends and fads that people go through (particularly those in their teens and early twenties). However, I felt as though I were a forty year old wandering into a "be-in" in 1968 wearing a crew cut and dressed in a tux. Somewhat out of place.

One panel discussion I thoroughly enjoyed, however, was entitled something like "The Future of Humanity". Several guys who were evidently involved with the small press network led a discussion on the environment, the prospects for space exploration, and other speculative stuff. It had almost none of the paranormal, pseudo-scientific nonsense most of the panels contained. A lot of the speculation was half-baked, but at least it seemed to have some footing in reality, unlike the majority of the stuff at the conference.

By Becky Long

It was hard for me to consider the Sheaffer/Wilson panel a "debate" due to Wilson's total lack of seriousness, which was compounded by the participation of Ivan Stang. Rather than responding logically to the salient points raised by Sheaffer, Wilson disavowed many of his previously espoused philosophies and scoffingly proclaimed that he had never intended to be taken seriously. He attempted to throw each point back on the questioner as supposed evidence of a personal problem or deficient reading and critical thinking skills. When confronted with a few examples of the many inaccuracies and outright fabrications in his writings, Wilson belittled Sheaffer for falling for literary traps which he had intentionally planted to teach the unwary reader to be "skeptical."

As an example, in *The New Inquisition*, Wilson stated that Robert Sheaffer brought to his mind the "Right Man syndrome", a personality type that is unable to admit he is wrong, is prone to violence, and fights "as dirty as possible." Wilson then chided Sheaffer during the debate for concluding that he had been diagnosed by Wilson as a "Right Man" - merely because he brought the term to Wilson's mind and the pathology of this so-called syndrome was discussed at length in the same paragraph as himself. Sheaffer, he claimed, was guilty of having made an "uncritical inference".

Why should skeptics concern ourselves with PhenomiCon's Guest of Honor if he claims he doesn't intend to be taken seriously? Because many thousands of people do take him extremely seriously, and he has amassed quite a cult

following among the credulous. This is reflected by the critics' praise of his books, examples of which appeared in the program pamphlet for PhenomiCon, and by the impressive statistics on his book sales. His books, in fact, are frequently found in the non-fiction section of bookstores, and non-fiction is exactly what many readers assume them to be.

Wilson implements a philosophy that Truth is unimportant if a book is entertaining and sells well. It doesn't matter a bit that the benefits are unjustifiably reaped at someone else's expense. Regarding Wilson's criticisms of Sheaffer and his book *The UFO Verdict*, a fellow skeptic wrote, "Robert Anton Wilson sees nothing wrong in implying that a particular person is violent, fascist-minded, a wife-beater, and certain to the point of psychosis about his beliefs - on the basis of the title of a book." And Wilson freely admits he has not even read the book!

I highly recommend Sheaffer's outstanding review of Wilson's *The New Inquisition*, titled "Guerrilla Ontology and Factoids in Action", which was published in the Fall 1990 issue of *Skeptical Inquirer*.

Unfortunately, Wilson is not the only new-age author employing these odious tactics. As an example, both *Skeptical Inquirer* and Ted Schultz's *The Fringes of Reason* have published an investigation by Ron Amundson of "The Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon". Originally reported by Lyall Watson as if it were well-documented scientific fact, the Hundredth Monkey collective consciousness claim was contradicted by the very references which Watson cited. In response to Amundson's debunking of his spud-dunking monkey theory, Watson then stated that he had never intended the tale to be taken as more than a metaphor, and that the references he cited were never intended to be references in the usual sense, only "tools". Gotcha! Watson ridiculed Amundson and other skeptics for their narrow-mindedness.

Following the Sheaffer vs. Wilson faceoff, Robert Sheaffer, Rick Moen (Vice-chair of Bay Area Skeptics and the "West Coast Branch" of Georgia Skeptics), and I were approached by a very conciliatory Robert Anton Wilson. Wilson was most pleasant, and indicated that he no longer intended to attack skeptics since he had attacked them enough and now would be moving on to other targets. Borrowing Wilson's own tactic for a moment, let me say that when I think of Wilson, the title of Sheaffer's book *Resentment Against Achievement* comes to my mind. I sensed during our conversation with him that Wilson's skeptic bashing stemmed at least in part from the fact that he would love to have the status of being a CSICOP fellow, with a degree from a legitimate university, and the respect of genuine intellectuals (including Sheaffer himself).

Both Sheaffer and Wilson later participated in a panel discussion which was the culmination of the conference and featured all the key speakers. Wilson pointedly tried to align himself with Sheaffer in debating the UFOlogists and conspiracy buffs, whom he went out of his way to irritate and definitely succeeded in doing so. Sheaffer later remarked that the audience probably thought Wilson had joined the Big Coverup!

During the concluding panel discussion, I found myself abetting the Sheaffer-Wilson coverup team after an (authentic!) "abductee" was introduced from the audience. She appeared to be somewhat of a celebrity among the local

UFO crowd, and her status as an abductee was considered by the believers to have imparted special wisdom and insight, amounting to counselling credentials. She not only claimed to have been abducted by aliens, but stated that in October 1973 a blue-portholed UFO descended to within a few feet of her apartment building roof, and she and 150 other people had pushed it away with brooms. Naturally, the government conspiracy had dismissed the sighting as a weather balloon.

Coincidentally, I personally remembered the local UFO scare of October 1973, incited to a great extent by outrageous end-of-the-world predictions associated with comet Kohoutek. Up to the point where the UFO descended upon her apartment, the abductee's story closely matched the events which I recalled. Late one afternoon an unnaturally bright object was observed in the sky from both Atlanta and Athens, Georgia. Thousands of people observed the object, which began to gradually change color from silver to orange-red as it got closer to sunset. All this created quite a panic, and a crowd descended upon the University of Georgia Physics and Astronomy Department, where I was employed as a student research assistant. The identity of the UFO was soon revealed through a government news release, and confirmed by myself and my colleagues through direct observation, as - yes, you guessed it - a weather balloon.

How do I explain what the abductee (and supposedly 150 other individuals) claims she saw that day? The abductee had prefaced her spiel with the statement, "As we all know, everyone is entitled to their own reality." I believe her statement answers this question perfectly.

Although PhenomiCon was great fun, and I enjoyed meeting and talking to the variety of interesting people present, I found myself weary after two days of bombardment with newage buzz-talk about people's rights to select their own reality, to write whatever they please without regard for the truth (and the social benefits of doing so), and their obligation to treat all claims (no matter how ridiculous) as equally valid. In the immortal words of Anson Kennedy, "It was fun, but I wouldn't want to live there." I would, however, like to go again next year.

DECEPTIONS, ANCIENT AND MODERN

By Hugh H. Trotti, Georgia Skeptics

The Hodag

Daniel Cohen's book The Encyclopedia of Monsters, (New York: Dorset Press, 1989), contains an account of an interesting animal named the "hodag" (pp. 240-242). This creature had no joints in its legs, and had a habit of sleeping with its body leaning against a tree; if it ever lay down it could never et up again, as its jointless legs prevented its rising. It could be captured by cutting part way through its "sleeping tree", so that when it leaned there for its night's rest the tree would give way and cause it to fall and become helpless. The habitat of this unlikely creature was Wisconsin swampland. Cohen traces the odd jointless legs to an account of

an herbivorous creature in the works of the ancient Roman author Pliny. In more recent times, one hodag was apparently manufactured through the expedient of putting a cowhide sprinkled with spikes on top of a dog, and displaying the result in a cage for the curious to view.

We can take Cohen's account of the origin of the "jointless legs" to another possible origin. His account of Wisconsin's "hodag" may demonstrate that people in Wisconsin in the early 20th century had a good classical education - for there is an account in Julius Caesar's Gallic War that gives an almost identical description (Random House "Modern Library" ed., 1957, Book VI, No. 27, p. 141). The odd creature mentioned there is the "elk" which inhabited the vast and mysterious Hercynian forest, which woodlands stretched from the Atlantic shores of Europe to the steppes of what is now Russia. Caesar's account goes on:

"Hunters who track them to their haunts loosen the roots of the trees or cut through them . . . and when the elk lean against them, . . . their weight brings the weakened trunk down and they collapse with it." - (ibid.)

(We might mention here that the creature Americans name the "moose" is named the "elk" in Europe.) An ancient woodsman or hunter once told a "tall tale" that was believed and incorporated by the old authors in their works. Such an amusing "joke-tale" seems harmless enough, but there are other deceptions that may have played important roles in history.

Alexander the Great Deceived?

There were only a few oracles in the ancient classical world that had major reputations. One of these was one located at Siwah oasis in Libya. It predicted the future from a location in the interior, quite a few days' travel through difficult desert conditions. It was consulted by Alexander the Great after his seizure of Egypt, and before his campaigns into the interior of the Persian Empire - into Mesopotamia and Persia, and even then even further.

The exact nature of what was conveyed to Alexander at the Siwah Oracle is unknown, since part of his interview was in private. It is thought that he asked if all his father's murderers had been punished, and it is believed that he was told which deities to offer sacrifices to in the future. It is known that he was greeted as divine - but, since he had assumed the role of Egypt's pharaoh, that was not a surprising thing; as pharaoh he was entitled to such status and title. Past those few surmises, nothing is known of what he was told in his interview, though he had written his mother that he had learned something important that he would tell her when next they met; (they never did meet; he died before ever seeing Macedonia again).

Some scholars have thought that the Siwah Oracle pronouncements were given by the movements of a carried boat or statue, the movements of the item carried by priests being interpreted to mean different things - perhaps of a "yes" or "no" variety. But there were also buildings at this site of prognostication.

What is interesting in this matter of the Siwah Oracle is the nature of the building used by the oracle. Some years ago, the magazine *Archaeology* ran a short article on the ruins of the site. In the oasis where it was located, there was a building with a false wall, containing a passage allowing a priest of the oracle to walk along secretly behind a room wall. It is thought that such a person could give mysterious utterances, perhaps through a chink in the wall, or perhaps behind a statue. Such a "god's voice" would assuredly impress visitors deeply. Did such an event happen to Alexander? Was he encouraged to proceed in his career and promised success after success with never any failure? In any event, he did go on to "discover" India and many strange lands and peoples, and his campaigns did affect history. (Incidentally, it is possible that Alexander himself performed a deception in the official accounts of his Battle of the (river) Granicus. Peter Green, in his book *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.*, (University of California Press, 1991, pp. 508-511), proposed that Alexander was initially rebuffed at the Granicus river and had the account written in such a way that no initial failure took place. (Green's view has the virtue of explaining a fact that scholars have found puzzling: the odd nature of the Persian riverbank defense, using cavalry instead of infantry. It would also give a good motive for his treatment of the Greek mercenary infantry serving with the Persian force - and if the infantry had in fact repulsed his initial headlong charge, killing many of his friends, and had forced him to cross the river at a different place, this could explain why his cavalry was met only by the Persian cavalry. The infantry would likely not be able to move quickly enough to Alexander's new crossing-point.) In the Asia Minor beginning of his campaigns against Persia, the image of invincibility would be helpful, in the attitude of local towns as well as in troop morale.

The Blockage at the Straits of Gibraltar

The Straights of Gibraltar (or, to the ancients, the "Pillars of Hercules"), were closed to shipping. The "mud flats" remaining from the sinking of "Atlantis" blocked any access to the Atlantic, keeping the dwellers round the Mediterranean in ignorance of Europe's western coast, not to mention Scandinavia, England, and Ireland. This rumor, or ancient "well-known fact" was false, of course. But the Phoenicians, and perhaps the Carthaginians later, would have reinforced it and made the attempt to pass out into the ocean appear even more difficult. For a long time they possessed a monopoly of trade-routes, which they kept secret. Whereas a possible deception at the Siwah Oracle may have led to the early European discovery of lands as far away as India, the story of the "silted up mouth" of the Mediterranean Sea facing the Atlantic Ocean would have discouraged discovery. It is ironic that there really may have been a difficulty in passing through the Straits - especially for early ships that were either rowed or sailed: there is a current that enters the Mediterranean that works against ships attempting to exit. (The ancient Phoenicians may have surmounted the difficulty of the current by using a deep "sea anchor" to catch a deeper current flowing in the opposite direction.) The attitude of science is that of sharing data with everyone, with evidence available and widespread in an open manner. But it is noteworthy that deceptions and secrecy have been practices by serious businessmen as well as by charlatans, mountebanks, and quacks of various types.

Thus deception, while we know its adverse effects upon the health of its duped victims, has had perceptible historical effects in various directions of an unlikely or unexpected nature. Human progress has been affected, and the store of knowledge and belief has generally been affected by deceptions, hoaxes; and, perhaps, even by jokes.

Hugh Trotti is a member of the Board of Directors of Georgia Skeptics. He is the author of the book *Beasts and Battles: Fact in Legend and History?* (Rivercross Publishing, 1990), and the article "Unmasking Nostradamus", which appeared in the Fall 1991 issue of *The Skeptical Inquirer* (originally published in *The Georgia Skeptic*).

THIRTY DAYS TO AN OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE:

A TRAVELERS DIARY

PART TWO

Reported by Anson Kennedy

Part One Recap

In Part One of this series, we saw the first two weeks of a month-long journey into the Unknown by one of the Georgia Skeptics. As we noted, this unfortunate member was found comatose at the conclusion of his experiences. All attempts at reviving him having failed. The question still remaining unanswered is: How did his comatose condition come to be? Nothing in the first half of his journey has foreshadowed his ultimate fate. He maintained a highly skeptical attitude throughout his experiences.

We can only hope the answer lies in the remainder of his diary reproduced here...

Week Three: "Gaining Altitude"

"Week Three exercises will help you to induce OBEs in a greater variety of circumstances...Finally, we will instruct you in one of the more stimulating facets of our program: erotic out-of-body experiences, including OBE sex [Day 20 here I come!]."

The book then asks me think about what an OBE should be like. "Is it possible that you have had an OBE without even realizing it [Nah.]? If, after all you've gone through, you still harbor the popular notion that OBEs necessarily involve such fanciful elements as silver cords, astral bodies [Uh-oh. Now if I get stuck, how will I click my astral heels together and say, "There's no place like home..."?], discarnate entities, or other planes of existence, you may be missing the real thing [Nope. I had a -Coke just the other day.].

"In other words, your expectations should be realistic and not exaggerated [I don't think I'm holding any unreasonable expectations on having an OBE. I don't expect anything.]...you will be more likely to have these experiences if you simply let them flow." I am NOT to impose "interpretations from mystical belief systems, the occult, or anecdotal reports [NOW they tell me.]" Finally, I am told "you may find your own OBEs...totally unique and new."

Day 15: "Nocturnal Flights"

Day 15 taught me to induce OBEs while falling asleep. So I am writing this on the morning of Day 16.

"Begin by visiting a...public exhibit that elicits strong sensations and positive emotions. The site you select may be familiar, but it should not be someplace you have used for any other Free Flight exercises [I KNEW I shoulda gone to the Braves game!]." Anyway, after spending several hours "immersed" in my chosen environment, I then returned home.

Just before going to bed (as I'm "nodding off"), my instructions told me to "casually give yourself permission to have an OBE sometime during the night. You may, for example, repeat the following sentence in your mind: 'I'll allow myself to have an out-of-body experience.'"

The book goes on to say, "This technique may lead to many different types of spontaneous OBEs...you may find yourself having a vivid dream that gradually or suddenly transforms itself into an OBE [I did have a dream last night. I dreamt that I was trying to have an OBE but never made it.]. If you're prone to lucid dreaming, in which you're aware of having a dream while the dream progresses [I have had lucid dreams in the past; maybe this is the way to an OBE!], you may also try a variation of this exercise by giving yourself permission to have an OBE during the course of one of these dreams [But not last night...]."

I was also told that, once I have become adept at having Nocturnal Flights, I should have one every night. I don't know if I have that much energy.

My final instruction was to read Day 16's instructions before falling asleep, as they must be performed first thing in the morning.

Day 16: "No Place Like Home"
(and you probably thought I was joking!)

I am to practice this the morning after Day 15, while I'm still in bed.

"When you begin to notice yourself waking up, continue lying in bed with your eyes closed and don't move...As you're waking up, take a few moments to feel your bed beneath you; notice the morning sounds and the smells of the surrounding room [Uh-oh! Morning breath!]...Take a deep breath [Yech!] and open your eyes."

The next part of the exercise tell me to find a different place to sleep, such as a sofa or the kitchen floor [I wouldn't even eat off the floor here, much less sleep on it]. "Then, just as you find yourself on the verge of falling asleep or waking up in this unusual place, imagine that you're lying half awake in your own familiar bed, experiencing all the familiar sensations you associate with being there."

I am told I can practice this exercise anytime I find myself falling asleep or waking up in a strange environment. "If you're on the road a lot [Many's the time I catch myself napping behind the wheel on long highway trips]...this is a particularly good exercise to practice in the course of your travels. Just remember, 'There's no place like home,' as Dorothy would say." Wait a minute! "No place like home" to INDUCE an OBE? You mean I've been doing it backwards for the past two weeks?

"Imagining yourself falling asleep or waking up in a different environment can be a powerful method for inducing OBEs."

Day 17: "The Sound of Music"
(or The Hills are Alive!)

"...For many people, listening to an emotionally stirring musical composition may be the closest they've come to an out-of-body experience [which is why I like Madonna]...

"For the purpose of inducing OBEs, we recommend powerful, inspiring, uplifting classical compositions such as Handel's Messiah, Beethoven's Missa_Solemnis, Mozart's Masonic Funereal Music [I KNEW it! It's all part of the plot of the Knights Templar! (I hope this isn't too obscure)] or Grand Mass in C, Vivaldi's Gloria, Brahms' Requiem, or Bach's Fugue in G for Organ [What? No Madonna? No Like a Virgin? What kind of classical music are they talking about here?]. Our own tastes in this matter lean aw-ay from most of the so-called 'New Age' music, which we consider more suitable for inducing sleep than OBEs [This book is pretty good for inducing sleep, too...]. We also discourage the use of hard rock music, which many people would find too emotionally aggressive to help them sustain a relaxed and reflective state [So I guess this means no Twisted Sister tonight]."

Today's goal: "To explore the ways these factors [Different kinds of music] influence the quality of your inner experience [I thought it was supposed to be an OUTER experience]."

I am supposed to practice alert relaxation (yet again) in an unusual place. "If you're at all nervous about doing this alone, bring a trusted friend who won't mind keeping a distance [No problem there. At this point NO ONE I know wants to get too close...]

As I listen to the music, I am supposed to imagine myself back at home, rising above my chair as the music plays. Yeah, right. And Ed McMahon is gonna give me \$10,000,000.

Day 18: "Jacuzzi in the Sky"
(with diamonds?)

"On Day 18, you'll combine several of the techniques learned in earlier exercises and practice these in a setting especially conducive to the OBE - relaxing aquatic environment of a warm bathtub or Jacuzzi [I KNEW it! The authors are from California!]."

The authors recommend a Jacuzzi over a bathtub "since the temperature may be easily regulated and maintained [Passive tense alert! Passive tense alert!], and the continuous flowing sounds and feelings of the water jets are particularly suited to the Free Flight exercises." I wonder if eating beans in the bathtub is as effective.

Unfortunately, I do not have access to a Jacuzzi. In this case, the book tells me, "Many communities have public facilities in which it is possible, for a nominal fee [plus tip], to rent a private room with a sauna and a Jacuzzi at an hourly rate [plus tip]."

I could probably afford the hourly rate, it's the tip I can't handle (not to mention the health risks...). So I'll resort to a bathtub. When using a bathtub, I am instructed to "just leave the faucet slowly running to keep the water warm and circulating around you."

The book STRESSES that I not perform this exercise alone. Since I am (theoretically) entering a "deep state of relaxation," I could drown. We wouldn't want that to happen, now would we? Then no one would know if I ever really succeed in having an OBE (or I may end up having the ULTIMATE OBE).

Well, I see I am running kind of long tonight, so I'll try to summarize the rest of today's exercise.

I am supposed to relax in the bathtub, play the music I listened to previously, and try to have an OBE. I came out looking like a pickle, but I stayed in my body the whole time.

Day 19: "Memory Lane"

Today's exercise will "help [me] become more adept than ever at conjuring [Their word, not mine] distant locales." I am supposed to think of a familiar place from my past. However, if I "have unresolved feelings about [my] childhood, [the authors] recommend that [I] check with a therapist." One would think that what I've done for the past 18 days would be sufficient recommendation to have my head examined.

Fortunately, I have no such unresolved feelings (that I'm willing to admit). So I imagine for today that I am living and experiencing in my childhood home in J_____ [name withheld], some fifteen years ago.

Well let's see. I just aced a Latin test. The really cute senior in my class just told me she wished I was a senior, too. So we could do stuff

together... Yes, I'm leaving my body... Yes, I'm now wishing (really hard) that I was a senior... What? Oh, darn. The doorbell just brought me back to reality.

Anyway, I almost made it today. And if you believe that, I have some swamp land for sale in south Florida, cheap (really)!

Day 20: "Free Flight Sex"
(or how to pick up the ladies at the astral singles bar)

"On Day 20 you'll learn how to share your out-of-body experiences with a partner. We recommend that this exercise be practiced by two consenting adults who are accustomed to having sex with each other and sleeping together." Well, I'm sorta between relationships right now, so I guess I'll have to go with Plan B. "If your personal situation renders this impossible, however, this exercise may still be carried out with a close platonic friend." Since none of my other friends can read this stuff without f-alling down laughing, I'll have to go with Plan C.

And just what is Plan C? I'm glad you asked. After entering a state of alert relaxation just prior to falling asleep, I'll give myself permission to have an OBE. Then, when I leave my body (no doubt during a period of lucid dreaming), I'll just hop on up to the astral plane (I've got my astral airline ticket, good for one round trip anywhere I can imagine).

As I imagine it, the astral plane has an astral singles bar. I'll just float on in, and "sit" down at the bar. After scoping out the astral chicks, I'll pop on over next to one with a particularly shapely astral form.

"What's your sign?" I'll ask (this line may not work in reality, but on the astral plane, anything can happen...).

She'll smile and bat her astral eyes at me, obviously impressed by my suave and debonair come-on line. Then she'll say, "Shign? SHIGN? I doan' need no shtinkin' shign! Uh, what'sh yoursh?"

At about this point I decide to order an astral Screwdriver. She asks for an astral Boilermaker. I've got a live one (as near as you can get in an OBE, anyway) here.

After five ashtal Shcrewdriversh and five ashtal Poilermakersh, we deshide to float on pack to her blashe. Unfortunately, we get bulled ofer py an ashtal bolisheman and hish bardner.

"May I see your astral license?" he ashksh.

"May I shee your ashtal padge?" I ashk, with a shmirk.

"Padgesh? PADGESH?" he reshbondsh, "We doan' need no shtinkin' padgesh!"

At whish boint we are hauled off to the ashtal hooshegow.

Onshe there, I am incarshered with a larshe Polivian. Thish ish NOT goin' accordin' ta blan.

Later, in the morning, I wake up with one heck of an astral headache. I'll not be trying to relive the night's experiences anytime soon (not even the astral strip search).

Needless to say, Plan C was NOT a total success last night. Day 21: "Erotic Variations"

To those who are following these reports, I felt that, after yesterday, sending astral flowers to my "astral sweetheart" was not appropriate. Although, I DO respect her astral self.

Now, on to Day 21's exercise, reported here WITHOUT comment or EMBELLISHMENT.

"Today you will practice an advanced form of shared OBE exercise."

I am instructed to, prior to beginning the exercise, to "take a candlelight bath or shower together" with my OBE partner (in the flesh, as it were). Then to take several hours "massaging each other all over with warm, scented oil, kissing, touching, and holding each other, and passionately making love." So far, nothing mystical or OBE-ish. And definitely not objectionable.

We (for now the exercise most definitely involves both myself and my partner) are instructed to "pick out some favorite sexual thing to do." Suggestions include tickling with a feather or (clean) paintbrush. The object is to propel ourselves to some level of emotional and physical sensitivity, such that when we break off (as instructed) and go to our separate corners (as it were), our thoughts are naturally drawn to the intense experience we've just shared.

I'm sorry, I cannot go on without providing my personal comments (but without the usual embellishments).

We must then perform the ritual of going to bed (separately), giving ourselves "permission" to have an OBE, etc. As described ad nauseam in previous posts.

OK, so what have we got here? We're 21 days into a BRAINWASHING session. Our first step was to establish ground rules, and then a ritual for initiating an OBE. We were then drawn further and further into a process of self-delusion, climaxing (as it were) with a bizarre form of peer pressure. For who among us, once accepting the "reality" of out-of-body experiences, would DARE to admit NOTHING HAPPENED during a shared OBE with a sexual partner? This is the lowest form of manipulation.

I am disgusted. I cannot make anything "funny" out of this today.

Please excuse my editorial.

Week Four: "Flying"

I'm sorry, but I was too angry yesterday to write a Week Three summary.

On to business...

"During Week Four, you will learn the most advanced Free Flight techniques, tapping such potent boosters as sleep deprivation, orgasm [I'll grant THAT is a potent booster...], and shifts in your perception of time...By the time you have reached Day 30, you should be able to custom-design your Free Flight travels, just as some people custom-design their homes, clothes, and cars." I don't know about you, but I haven't seen too many custom-designed cars on the road lately.

The book goes on to discuss "designer" OBEs. I can see it now. I'll start a line of designer OBEs, "OBEs ala J_____ [name withheld]." They'll be available in a number of different price ranges, to accommodate any budget. I may even start a chain of stores, "OBEs 'r' Us." With one of my custom-designed OBEs, you'll be able to "tap a broader range of experience than everyday waking reality...the only limitation to the OBE may be your imagination itself [Therefore, if you have a limited imagination, yo-u cannot expect too much. No deposit, no return]."

Oh, and this week I'll "be able to test the objective reality of [my] OBEs as well. By performing some informal experiments based on work done at Duke University...[I] will be able to explore the notion that some or all aspects of [my] OBE travels are literally real." As real as I can imagine, that is.

I am also cautioned to "keep a balanced perspective." No problem there. Only when I begin to BELIEVE this junk will my perspective become unbalanced. Day 22: "The Night Watch"

"For those who crave particularly intense and prolonged versions of the OBE [And who among us doesn't?], sleep deprivation may be the key. You will start the groundwork for this route to altered consciousness on Day 22."

I am then told to check with my doctor or therapist if I have any doubts about being "psychologically and physically stable to carry out this exercise." Somehow I doubt that anyone who goes through 22 days of this c**p would be psychologically fit.

That said, we proceed.

I must, first thing in the morning, affirm to myself that I will have an OBE sometime in the future. I am confident of this, just as soon as I get to the bathroom. In any case, after my first OBE of the morning, I am instructed to continue through my normal day's activities. No problem.

Then, in the evening when I normally go to bed, I am to sit quietly and listen to the sounds of the night. Cars speed through the stop sign outside my house... Dogs bark at strange noises... Planes drone by overhead... The neighbor's kids decide to have a party in their driveway...

As the night passes, I begin Day 23: "The Morning After." But that's for my next report.

Day 23: "The Morning After"

Today continues "the next phase of the sleep deprivation exercise" I began on Day 22. If I feel alright, I am to continue my exercise for as long today as possible. Otherwise, I should just go ahead and sack out.

I feel OK.

First, I think I'll report a little about what happened through the night, as I remained awake. As time passed, I seemed to get somewhat lightheaded, occasionally seeing spots before my eyes. The book predicted I would have hallucinations which may lead to OBEs.

Well, as I felt the room spin around me in my sleep-deprived state, I began to hallucinate. I imagined myself rising from my chair and getting ready for bed. I imagined myself climbing into my warm, comfortable bed. I hallucinated that I was falling asleep. I had vivid hallucinations of dreams, including at least one lucid dream. It was fantastic. I felt the bed beneath me. Simply amazing. Yet I knew through it all I was sitting in my chair downstairs, wide awake.

The most amazing thing was, when morning came, I emerged from my hallucination refreshed in my upstairs bed and not downstairs where it all began. Not only had I had an apparent OBE, but my body had followed!

I proceeded through the day with no further effects, almost as if I had not stayed awake through the entire night!

Maybe there's something to these OBEs after all.

Day 24: "Orgasmic Flights"

"The exercises for Day 24 are purely sexual" so I am warning the squeamish and those under 21 years of age to just skip this report.

OK, now that all the kiddies have left the room, I'll get on with the business of the day...

Fortunately, the book says I can perform today with or without a partner. Given my miserable experience at the astral singles bar on Day 20, I guess I'll go it alone.

I'm supposed to begin today thinking about sex and orgasm. Well, if I MUST...

[I must be careful, though. When I get appointed to the astral Supreme Court, I don't want some astral bimbo to come up and accuse me of astral improprieties...]

* C E N S O R E D *

...So, after all that, I still haven't been able to get the taste of that astral honey out of my mouth.

Finally, I am told that if I don't achieve "the desired state the first time" to try, try again. I've heard that before.

Day 25: "Time Travel"

In which I am told that OBEs "are not subject to the same spatial or temporal limitations as everyday waking reality." I can, therefore, travel to any point in space, in the past, present or future.

I begin, as usual, with alert relaxation. The book suggests I concentrate on visiting the remote past, such as prehistoric times when dinosaurs roamed the Earth.

As evidence that I am REALLY having an OBE in the past, I am told "you may see things that you didn't consciously expect, such as dinosaurs that appear different than the ways they've been depicted in books and museums." Interestingly enough, I DID see this pink tyrannosaurus rex with purple polka dots. Evidence enough of the reality of my OBE.

I am then told to visit ancient Egypt and the pyramids. Tutankhamen says, "Hey, who's that embalming me?" While Cleopatra says, "My kingdom? My asp!"

Time flies as I speed toward the future...

Now I am on the Moon, three thousand years hence. There IS an alien base on the far side...

Suddenly, I feel a rushing. As if I am being pulled headlong toward some unknown fate...I have returned to the present. Has Clarence Thomas REALLY been confirmed?

Day 26: "Metamorphosis"

"Have you ever wanted to be Cleopatra? Or Lassie? Or an alien from outer space?" So begins Day 26, in which I am encouraged to lose touch with my own identity and pretend I am someone (or something) totally different.

"Once you've found an individual animal with which you feel particularly empathetic [Sheep? SHEEP! How low have I sunk?...]...Compare your own personality traits with the attributes you discern in the animal [Bah, I don't see any similarities]."

I am to relive my animal experiences after entering state of alert relaxation.

Yeah, sure.

Day 27: "Extended Perception"

"Because so many of the Free Flight exercises rely on your imagination, you may be wondering if there is any objective reality to your OBEs at all [I have no doubts.]." Today's and tomorrow's exercises allow me to test this with a "series of informal experiments." James Randi, where are you when I need you?

The book then goes on to describe some of Keith Harary, Ph.D.'s experiments in the early '70s. He worked with Robert Morris "and an interdisciplinary team of researchers bent on learning whether OBEs were purely imaginary [Got my vote...] or had some tangible basis in everyday reality." Harary was crucial due to his "ability to induce his own OBEs at will." Nothing like having an objective researcher in cases just like this. Since he could have an OBE (and apparently let the other researchers know it),- he could provide a baseline for comparing what happened during a "real" OBE and (I guess) an "unreal" OBE.

Harary was allegedly able to observe "distant events," and "communicate from a distance" during his OBEs. Communications were proved when Harary's cat dramatically quieted down whenever he visited it during an OBE. Seems proof enough for me.

Enough background, on to today's flim-flammetry!

I am to enlist the aid of a friend. When he finished laughing, he agreed to help. He selected a number of objects (a cheese Danish, a Halloween mask, an alarm clock, a pair of panty hose, and a rubber chicken) I'd never seen before. He put this stuff in a location I knew of, but avoided prior to this "experiment."

The book gives me the following advice: "Of course, your friend might consider what you're asking a bit unusual [Not if he's been following this for the past 26 Days.]. You may, therefore, have to gently convince this person that you're serious and need his or her assistance [Rubber hoses come to mind...]."

I am told I "can enjoy explaining that [I'm] going to induce an OBE, in which [I'll] 'visit' [my] friend's dining room, and that [I'll] later try to tell him or her about what's on the table." I also enjoy sticking needles in my eyes and bamboo shoots under my fingernails.

"Enough, already!" you say, "Cut to the chase!"

So my friend obligingly put these objects in a specified location (what the heck, his dining room table) and I induced an OBE (alert relaxation, et al)...

I hesitate to report what happened next.

When I returned to my body, I wrote down what I saw: a banana, a fedora hat, a toy boat, and a copy of the Columbia Encyclopaedia.

Pretty good, huh?

Day 28: "Extended Communication"

Today's session attempts an experiment in communicating during an OBE. Just as on Day 27, my friend sets up objects I've never seen in a specified location. This time, though, he remains in the area at the appointed hour. He is supposed to record any "unusual thoughts, impressions, feelings, or images" and the time they occur.

Herewith submitted for your approval, my friend's record:

"Here I am, sitting in the dining room on a Friday evening. THAT'S unusual. I just heard a bird outside, but that's not unusual. My general impression here is Mr. OBE is crazy.

[about 20 minutes later]

"It's started to get a bit chilly in here. It may have something to do with the window being open, but then again, maybe not. I'm getting this strange feeling now, as if someone's in the room with me. My arm's getting goosebumps.

[about 20 minutes later]

"He's here! I can feel it! I'm sure I heard a knocking on the table..."

Compelling evidence, were it not for the fact that I dozed off after going into a state of alert relaxation. I never left my body on Day 28.

C'est la vie.

Days 29 and 30: "Free Flight"
(on which I obtain my B.O.O.B.E.)

During the past month, I have been taught "the basic skills required for exploring [my] inner capabilities and for inducing and enjoying OBEs."

I am now to incorporate those exercises which worked best for me into my own personalized Free Flight program. The authors recommend the following:

I begin with the early morning exercises; just as I feel myself awakening, I am to concentrate on visualizing my face floating over me. Then I should focus on a distant place I'd like to visit. When I begin to feel as if I'm really there, I should "explore" the area. Later, after I have returned to my body, I should go through the rest of the day affirming to myself that I am willing to have an OBE. If I want, I can spend the evening "connecting with a special friend on a deeply personal, and possibly- sexual, level." Then, as I am drifting off to sleep, I conclude by once again affirming my willingness to have an OBE.

I am to do this on both Days 29 and 30.

I have now completed my OBE training and obtain my Bachelor of Out-Of-Body

Experiences.

The diary ends here.

It is still unclear just what "went wrong." Partway through the final weeks of his training, our friend expressed obvious disgust with the techniques used by his "training manual" to indoctrinate him. It seems that the end of Week Three was an especially difficult time for him. So much so that he very nearly quit. Perhaps he would have been better off if he had.

We can only speculate at what happened during Days 29 and 30. Apparently, our unfortunate friend followed the advice given for those days a bit too closely. He must have finally succeeded in completely leaving his body, only to have his astral self get lost. Or perhaps he met up with a compatible astral mate at the astral singles bar and is having too good a time to return. We may never know for sure. In any case, he remains comatose and doctors report little chance of recovery.

We appeal to anyone reading this to contact the Georgia Skeptics if you can provide any assistance in returning this errant OBE-er to his body.

Donations in support of his family may be sent to Anson Kennedy, c/o The Georgia Skeptics.

PLANETARY ACTIVATION

Prepare to be activated! A press release from Star-Borne Unlimited, printed in Volume 7, No. 1, Jan/Feb 1992), informs the populace of the "Next Planetary Activation: The Opening of the Doorway of the 11:11 on January 11, 1992." This signifies the time when the Earth and humanity will be given [by WHOM?] the opportunity to enter into a new spiral of consciousness [One might suggest a DOWNWARD spiral]. According to Star-Borne Unlimited, the Doorway of the 11:11 opens on January 11, 1992 and closes on December 31, 2011. In order to open the doorway, a critical mass of 144,000 beings "united in conscious Oneness" worldwide is needed on January 11. The opening of the 11:11 signifies the great adventure which is the fulfillment of our Divine Missions on Planet Earth. It is our graduation from the template of duality enabling us to rise up into true Mastery and Freedom. It is the bridge between two spirals, and the channel for our mass ascension. The old spiral contains the patterning of duality and separation. The new spiral is a patterning of Oneness. The symbol of the 11:11 was pre-encoded into our cellular memory, placed into us, seared into the very fibers and DNA of our beings.

However, according to the East Coast Power Point of Kortan and Solinus, in information released through an electronic mail network and kindly provided to Georgia Skeptics by Robert Sheaffer, the activation date is not January 11, 1992. The "Master Number Activation Schedule", which is based on the master number eleven and "the accelerated progression of the activation

and the time span between each increase", does not even include the January 11th date. Rather, the activations began on November 11, 1991 with "The "The Activation of ArchAngel Michael", which included events on Stone Mountain, to be repeated in eleven day cycles through January 27, 1992 ("Throne Energies Activation #5"). Throne Energies Activation #4 ("The Big One") will occur on January 16, 1992. The year 1992 will bring great and massive changes for everyone in this part of the Galaxy.

Mark your calendars now!

THE WONDERGIRL FROM GEORGIA

Jim Lippard, editor of The Arizona Skeptic, provided the following excerpt from Charles Berlitz's new book, World of the Odd and the Awesome, 1991, Fawcett, pp. 118-119:

A thunderstorm in Cedartown, Georgia, kept fourteen-year-old Lulu Hurst and her cousin, Lora, from falling asleep one summer night in 1883. Then the girls noticed strange rappings and popping sounds that seemed too close to be thunder.

Lulu's parents at first thought the odd commotion was related to the severe electrical storm. But the next evening, it was obvious some other phenomenon was involved - their daughter's bed was thumping so strongly they could feel it, and over a dozen witnesses heard wall-shaking noises in Lulu's room. Observers discovered that the sounds seemed to answer questions. One rap apparently meant "yes"; two knocks were "no".

No one realized, however, that whatever was going on had a connection with Lulu until four days later. That's when a visiting relative was thrown across the room after she touched a chair handed to her by Lulu. Four men who grabbed on to the gyrating piece of furniture found themselves in an exhausting wrestling match with an invisible force that finally broke the chair to bits.

Lulu ran screaming and crying from the scene, terrified by her new powers. But within two weeks she was performing baffling feats in front of live audiences.

The first show by "the wonderful Lulu Hurst", as she was dubbed by the newspapers Atlanta Constitution and Rome Bulletin, was in a hall in Cedartown packed with curious spectators. Judges, lawyers, bankers, state politicians, and doctors sat on the stage to watch the small, frail teenager's talents up close.

A solidly built man in the audience volunteered to test the girl's powers. He was given a closed umbrella, which he held with both hands across his chest. Told to keep the umbrella still, he braced his feet. But when Lulu simply touched the palm of her right hand against the umbrella, the object jerked violently from side to side. The man began writhing up and down and ended up flung into the laps of the onstage observers.

For the next two years, Lulu demonstrated her powers as she toured the United States. She appeared before the faculty and students of the Medical College at Charleston, South Carolina, an audience that the Charleston News and Courier called "notable and critical." After watching the small girl toss people around on the stage by simply touching them, the newspaper concluded, "There was not a man in this distinguished and learned array who could explain the mysterious phenomenon."

Nonetheless, twenty scientists from the Smithsonian and National Observatory staffs eventually joined Alexander Graham Bell in studying the teenager. They suspected she possessed some kind of electrical force. But their studies failed to solve the puzzle of the amazing Lulu - and when she married and retired a couple of years later, the source of her powers remained as mysterious as ever.

Anyone interested in collaborating with Jim Lippard and other skeptics on historical research into the subject of Lulu Hurst should contact Becky Long at (404) 493-6857.

(Editors note: A solution to this mystery was subsequently found in Joe Nickell's book, *The Wonderworkers*, from Prometheus Press. It is summarized in the May/June 1192 issue of the Georgia Skeptic newsletter).

RECENT GS ACTIVITIES

In early November, Georgia Skeptics sponsored a visit to Atlanta by Robert Sheaffer, a Fellow of CSICOP and a founding member of CSICOP's UFO subcommittee. He is also a regular columnist for the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and a Board member and former Chair of the Bay Area Skeptics. He is the author of *The UFO Verdict*, *Resentment Against Achievement*, and *The Making of the Messiah*.

On November 1, 1991, Mr. Sheaffer presented a lecture and discussion on *The UFO Verdict* at the Fernbank Science Center. The well-attended and well-received talk examined the UFO question from a skeptical, scientific perspective, using well-known case studies to explain why apparently rational persons frequently mistake objects such as the planet Venus for extraterrestrial craft. Mr. Sheaffer's talk provided an accurate and rational perspective on UFOs, as well as valuable guidance for evaluating the merit of the many claims made almost daily on this highly controversial subject.

On November 2 and 3, 1991, Robert Sheaffer and other members of Georgia Skeptics participated in Phenomicon, an event billed both as "Atlanta's Alternative Convention" and "Atlanta's Most Dangerous Convention."

The regular November meeting of Georgia Skeptics featured a talk by Priscilla Vandecar, of the Council on Battered Women. Ms. Vandecar spoke on the myths and pseudoscience prevalent in today's popular psychology on

battered women. Despite the good intentions of therapists and mediators, there are gaps in information concerning this serious problem, which have resulted in increased danger to women and families. A common misconception is that battered women remain in unhealthy relationships because they receive emotional benefit from the abuse. The fact is, they stay due to multiple and complex situational factors. Ms. Vandecar explained that overt and covert messages from therapists that the woman should change her behavior in order to lessen or stop the man's violent acts are unacceptable. The talk provided an important and fascinating example of the general need for critical examination of misconceptions and rationalizations accepted by society at large, a problem not restricted to the paranormal.

The Georgia Skeptics held a holiday pot-luck dinner on December 15 at the home of Becky Long. The feasting and conversation were supplemented with two videotapes: a news feature on a woman who claims she records paranormal voices on tape (provided by Dale Heatherington) and a sales pitch on magnetic healing devices (provided by Frank and Mary Anne Long).

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

The January meeting of the Georgia Skeptics will be held on Sunday, January 19, 1992, at the Steak and Ale Restaurant on Savoy Dr. in NE Atlanta.

Dr. William Evans, Professor of Communications at the Georgia Institute of Technology, will speak on pseudoscience in the mass media. He will address how the news and media covers pseudoscience, the use of pseudoscience in popular film and television, and how these media portrayals influence public conceptions of pseudoscience.

THE END