



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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## The Third Eye

**News and Commentary from the Weird World of the Media**  
by Pat Reeder

I use up a lot of ink in this column pointing out the stupid and irresponsible programming of television networks ... but not this month. No, I am not here to carp and moan this month, but rather to bring you Good News! Hallelujah! Brethren and Cistern, I am here to tell YOO that I believe in miracles! Kielbasa Desoto Boola-Boola! (that's speaking in tongues, in case you're ignernt). Yea, I have SEEN the power of television UNLEASHED in the cause of RIGHTEOUSNESS!!! Can I get an Amen? Thank you.

I hope you'll join me in sending a great, big pat on the back to Diane Sawyer, Ole Anthony, and everyone else who had any part whatsoever in the unmasking of Robert Tilton, Larry Lea and W.V. Grant on ABC-TV's PrimeTime Live. By now, you've no doubt heard most of the charges and counter charges, so I won't bother to recap them all here. But there are a few sidelights you might have missed, and they certainly deserve attention.

For example, there's the controversy over ABC's use of hidden cameras and false identities to obtain damning (literally, I hope) information on these televangelists' operations. Tilton, particularly, has railed about this since day one. As nearly as I can tell, his complaint is that it proves ABC is just as big a liar as he is ... an interesting defense for a man of God.

Normally, I have serious reservations about the use of hidden cameras without the consent of the person being filmed, but in this case, there simply seemed to be no other way to uncover the truth. These televangelists have built such a thick wall of secrecy around their operations that they left no other method except espionage.

Consider the alternatives. The government could step in to investigate, as it would any other con artist or pyramid scheme. But because these men hide behind the Bible, our rubber-spined representatives refuse even to question them, for fear of alienating the voters in their congregations. The official excuse is the separation of church and state. But come on! Any reasonably intelligent person should have no trouble telling the difference between these pompadoured telethon hosts and a minister of a legitimate church. It's like being asked to distinguish between a hippo and a hedgehog.

Another alternative for truthseekers is to request an interview with Robert Tilton ... ask him the tough questions outright

and request copies of his financial records. Ask [Dallas Morning News columnist] Steve Blow about the effectiveness of that method. Or better yet, try it yourself. Go to Word of Faith, tell the guards you're a reporter with a few questions for Robert Tilton, then sit back and wait to be escorted off the property by the Farmer's Branch police. Better bring an umbrella, they'll probably feel an urgent need to turn on the sprinklers while you're waiting.

A third alternative was brought up a few months ago when Ole Anthony addressed NTS on the subject of Robert Tilton. He suggested we tape Tilton's show, Success 'N' Life, and monitor it, looking for specific, provable instances of fraudulent claims. Unfortunately (I can't believe I'm about to type the next six words!), Tilton is too smart for that. He may come across as Don Knotts doing a Steve Martin impression, but he is smart enough to maintain iron-fisted control over every second of videotape that leaves his production suite. Chances are you won't find anything incriminating on any tape that Tilton allowed to be released. [See the October, 1991 issue of *The Skeptic* for a possible exception in which Tilton claimed to have cured a man of AIDS through his TV set. -- Ed.]

No, as was suggested at that NTS meeting, the only way to catch any of these guys with their guard down is to film them when they don't know they're being filmed. Inside Edition did it to Tilton himself, and PrimeTime Live did it to his minions. Is it underhanded and dishonest? Is it illegal? I'll leave the first question to philosophers, and the second to judges. All I know is, it's hardly less ethical than using God's name to solicit money for orphans, then spending the donations on yachts, mansions and German luxury cars. Couldn't they at least squander their supporters' money on American cars?

So what's happened since the story broke? W.V. Grant claimed that his miraculous method of making someone's leg grow longer is not, as ABC pointed out, a simple optical illusion involving the wiggling of the sucker's shoe. In order to prove the veracity of his claim, he repeated the miracle the Sunday after the broadcast ... and it looked suspiciously as if he was wiggling the sucker's shoe. Grant seems relatively unfazed; he's still doing his leg-stretching bit every weekend at his church. I just wonder why he only stretches one leg per customer. How about making both legs grow at once, so Dallas can finally have a winning basketball team?

Larry Lea announced that he was sorry if he had hurt or offended anyone, and said he was going off the air for awhile, taking a sabbatical to reflect and pray. There may be hope for him yet. Tilton, true to form, called ABC and Diane Sawyer tools of Satan. Then he called his lawyer, J.C. Joyce, a highly-paid legal pit bull who represents a number of televangelists. Joyce immediately declared the program's producers to be liars and all their information counterfeit. He said he would sue them for slander and libel! Of course, a few days after his charges made headlines, he quietly dropped his threat to sue. It's one thing to accuse someone of lying, it's quite another to prove it in court. Joyce did argue his case, though ... he held a "trial" of Robert Tilton during a service at Word Of Faith, letting the congregation be the jury. The verdict? Why, a resounding "Not Guilty!" That's good enough for me! Still, I can't help wondering if the decision would have been quite so lopsided if the trial had also included a prosecutor.

As we go to press, Tilton has angered postal workers by suggesting that they stole, then threw away all those prayer requests found in the Tulsa dumpsters. They didn't do it in the past ... but who could blame them if they did in the future? A number of prayer requests also turned up in a Tulsa recycling center. Joyce said these must be letters that Tilton has "already prayed over." Let's see ... the letters are opened at a bank in Tulsa ... Tilton says he prays over all of them in his "prayer closet" in Dallas ... which means he must be shipping them all the way back to Tulsa, just to dump them in the recycling bin! Say what you will about the guy: at least he's a really committed environmentalist.

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Ever since last summer, I've been telling you about the total disregard for fact that Oliver Stone displayed during the filming of JFK. During the week of the film's premiere, a few other minor periodicals (*Time*, *Newsweek*, etc.) finally followed *The Skeptic's* lead and covered the same territory.

Oliver Stone apparently doesn't know what to make of the attacks on his technically well-made but factually off-the-wall movie. He's starting to look a bit shell-shocked. On a recent edition of ABC's *NightLine*, an interview with Stone live from Dallas followed a five-minute filmed report covering just a few of the glaring omissions and outright lies of which JFK is guilty. The segment ended with one reporter noting that Stone is now accusing journalists who criticize his

film of being part of some "larger conspiracy" to suppress "the Truth" ... but that "Oliver Stone wouldn't know the truth if he fell in it."

Stone seemed taken aback by the filmed report (surprising, considering the flurry of similar attacks he'd already sustained that week). For the most part, he brushed the charges aside and refused to discuss them. The following week, in an op-ed piece in the Dallas Morning News, Stone declared that history is too important to be left to journalists, and that artists have the right to interpret history. Okay, but what is his definition of "interpretation"? If you make a movie in which Lincoln arrives at Ford's Theater in Hans Solo's star cruiser, you're not interpreting history, you're just propagating a fantasy.

Stone claims that the film is meant to stimulate further seeking of the truth about the Kennedy assassination. But he hasn't explained how you can stimulate a higher regard for the truth by telling people lies. Perhaps he believes that lies can be justified if they bring about a greater good ... which is exactly what he's criticizing the government for doing by allegedly conspiring against John Kennedy. In fact, that's the exact same philosophy he violently attacked in *Platoon*, *Salvador*, and *Born On The Fourth Of July*. The ads for *JFK* are right: we really are through the looking glass here.

The danger is that the young people he wants to inspire to seek the truth, the ones who were born after the Kennedy assassination, may accept his wildly distorted version of events as real history. How many of them will now be able to believe that Jim Garrison, Stone's crusading hero (played by dreamy hunk Kevin Costner) actually built his wacky case against Clay Shaw through bribing and blackmailing of witnesses and that he was considered a lunatic not only by his own team of prosecutors but even by other conspiracy theorists?

Newsweek reports that the producers of *JFK* have even prepared a "study guide" for the film, to be used in schools! Does it mention that one of Garrison's key witnesses believed the FBI was trying to replace his children with look-alike robots? The book by Jim Garrison that inspired the movie is also back in stores in a snazzy new paperback edition. And the Dallas Morning News, interviewing people in line at the film, quoted one young man as saying he hoped to learn "what we haven't been able to read." This is like hoping to learn about the American West by sitting through *Blazing Saddles*.

*JFK* is a tremendous technical and cinematic achievement. But on the one-to-four scale of historical accuracy, I give it a "Lone Assassin."

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### **And now, some quick news items from the Associated Press ...**

On the subject of mentally deranged ministers, the owners of Recycle Records in Colorado Springs, Colorado, found a treasure in their used record bin. A teenager was forced by his mom to get rid of his autographed copy of an album of sermons by the late Rev. Jim Jones, of Guyana massacre fame. The kid sold them the album for a dollar, and they resold it to a collector for \$200. No word on whether the collector was the curator of the Kool-Aid Museum.

In a courtroom in Dover, Delaware, a defense attorney objected to a juror who claimed to be a professional psychic. The woman's name was "Dorothy Uwanawich." The attorney demanded to know if the woman had powers that could influence other jurors. She should have said "yes" ... maybe the attorney would have put her on his payroll.

Well, so much for the power of positive thinking: after a decade of trying to lower the crime rate in Washington, DC., through collective meditation, the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi has dropped the effort. Apparently, all those mantras were no more effective at making Washington's crime rate go down than they were at making would-be levitators go up. The Maharishi suggests that if you want to avoid crime, you should only go to Washington "during office hours." Of course, in Washington, all the real thievery takes place during office hours ... in offices.

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Let's wrap up with two pieces of happy holiday news. I'm thrilled to report that CBS-TV's outrageously irresponsible Secrets of the Unknown is not destined to be a series ... at least not yet. My source was incorrect, and it was just a one-time special. Let's hope it stays that way. And finally, a local psychic who shall remain nameless had a ten-second ad running on KLIF in December for a "holiday sale on finding missing persons." Well, I hope that whoever you wanted to find under the tree in stockings was there on Christmas morning ... and that it didn't cost you too much.

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## Scientologists Attempt to Squelch Reader's Digest

By Mike Sullivan

The Church of Scientology International has filed at least seven injunctions in European courts in an attempt to stop Reader's Digest from reprinting a Time magazine exposé on the cult. Reader's Digest reprinted Richard Behar's Time (May 6, 1991) cover story on the cult in their October 1991 US edition and in several international editions.

Reader's Digest is the most widely-read publication in the world, with over 100 million readers monthly. Reader's Digest produces native-language editions in more than a dozen countries around the world. The Digest's public-relations director Craig Lowder told Magazine Week News, an industry trade publication, that they planned to carry the Behar story despite the Church's action. Lowder also said that Digest editors had re-checked Behar's original story and had obtained independent sources for each fact. Time was the subject of the Church's \$3-million counter-advertising media campaign following the Behar story last year, carried out in a series of full-page, full-color ads and a glossy color insert in USA Today.

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## Garbage In, Garbage Out

By Mike Sullivan

### A VERY INCOMPLETE ROUNDUP OF COMPUTER-BASED CLAPTRAP

Working in the microcomputer industry as I do, and having an office in the computer version of Disneyland, the Infomart in Dallas, I have many opportunities to sample the best and worst of today's amazing information technology offerings.

With just a modest investment in PC hardware and a little curiosity, you can find a vast spectrum of information and summon it to your desktop via a device called a modem. A modem connects your PC to the telephone network, and from there, the world is just a few keystrokes away.

In the 12 years I've been using a computer and modem to reach out, the number and diversity of local, national and international computer services has exploded. By conservative estimates, there are over 50,000 private bulletin-board systems (BBS) in the US alone, and thousands more internationally. Over 5 million computers can access one or more of the huge international computer networks, such as Internet, Tymnet or Telenet. The two big US-based consumer information networks, Prodigy and CompuServe, claim over 1.5 million users combined.

Along with all the fantastic benefits of this wonderful technology, I've found a small but rapidly growing selection of crackpot, pseudoscience, New Age and miscellaneous goofball computer message networks and services. Although it's impossible for anyone to stay current on even a small portion of this niche of computerdom, I offer the following tiny sample of what I've stumbled across in the past few months.

Echomail: Most large local BBSs are part of a international party-line network called Echomail. Using an Echomail system, you can leave a message on a BBS system near you, and in a few days your message will literally circle the globe via a series of short-haul message transfer "echoes" to other Echomail systems that talk to each other in the middle of the night. People in other parts of the world can read and even reply to your message, and you and everyone else on the network can read it, all without making a single long-distance call.

The anonymity and protection inherent in posting computer messages seems to make people say things to total strangers that they might never say to someone in person or on the phone. Safely shielded behind their keyboard, message posters often develop a boldness uncommon in other forms of communication.

Nowhere is this phenomena more apparent than in the fringe discussions on Echomail, where literally anything goes and no topic is too outrageous to sustain conversation. Quite often, I felt as if I were reading the script of a cross between The Gong Show and Can You Top This? Pseudoscience is alive and very, very healthy on the Echomail network. There are separate discussion areas for the Occult, Astrology, Tarot, and Reincarnation. UFOs are given special treatment on Echomail, with discrete sub-sections for Abduction Experiences, Sightings, Roswell Incident, and more.

The number of messages being sent on this network is huge. In one week, there were over 600 new messages posted on the UFO conference alone. It takes a high-speed modem, lots of patience and plenty of Visine to sift through even a fraction of the chatter on this one tiny area of the Echomail system.

I found the Echomail UFO conference to be the computer version of a small-town coffee shop. There are the always-present "regulars," permanently bolted to the stools at the end of the counter, posting dozens of messages daily to no one in particular. There are the various cliques of patrons, each maintaining a sustained conversation on the kooky topic-du-jour. And there is the affable discussion "moderator," acting much the part of the cafe owner, listening in on the conversations at a dozen different booths and making mostly lame attempts at humor whenever possible.

Outsiders like me are treated coolly, to say the least. After lurking on the network for awhile without posting a message or announcing my presence, I felt compelled to pose a question challenging one of the incredible claims made by another user as a statement of fact.

I soon became the target of dozens of mildly hostile messages, or "flames" as BBS hackers call such missives. I was challenged to prove that the event in question didn't happen, I was named as a member of the "media conspiracy," and I was castigated for "ignoring the overwhelming body of hard evidence" supporting UFO studies. In short, I found it nearly impossible to carry on a reasoned discussion in the UFO cafe of Echomail.

Internet: Internet is the vast global network originally set up by the US military that now connects major computer installations all over the world. Most government and military contractors and major educational institutions are on the Internet, which transmits hundreds of thousands of messages per day.

I sampled the Internet discussion on UFOs for about a month before I turned it off. It only took about a week for me to determine that the Internet UFO gang spends a good deal of its time bickering with one another or re-hashing alleged events from 40 years ago.

Everyone on the net, it seemed, had their own pet theory to explain some bizarre tale, or knew a guy who talked to a guy who thinks he really saw something. If the Internet UFO discussion area were the only source of information you had on the topic of UFOs, the messages you'd read each day would quickly convince you of all of the following:

1. Every government official in every country in the world is engaged in a massive cover-up of the real truth behind the UFO phenomenon.
2. Every television, radio and print reporter on the planet is also engaged in a massive cover-up of the real truth behind the UFO phenomenon. Presumably, this indictment would include UFO writers as well.
3. Plenty of hard physical evidence exists to prove beyond any doubt that we are regularly being visited by intelligent beings from other parts of the universe. The only problem is, the evidence is being kept in an impenetrable top-secret military hideaway by the government. See #1 above.
4. Serious, careful research is still being conducted by UFO experts on the alleged crash of an interstellar station

wagon near Roswell, New Mexico over 35 years ago.

5. Those same studious researchers are "almost ready" to come forward with the blockbuster proof about UFOs that will stun the world. Unfortunately for mankind, they're being harassed, confounded and suppressed by #1 and #2 above.

As you can probably tell, the Internet discussions became tiresome very quickly. CompuServe: I have been a CompuServe member since before it was called CompuServe. When I first dialed in back in 1978 it was called Micronet, and H & R Block, whose mainframe computers were used to run the system during the slow evening hours, had no idea it would grow to the worldwide information utility it is today.

CompuServe boasts a huge diversity of special-interest areas, which they call forums. Of the 400 or so forums on the system, a few hold special interest for skeptics.

One is the Issues Forum, where discussions range from JFK assassination conspiracy theories to how to rid your house of ghosts. Another is the Religion Forum, where fairly intelligent chatter about various belief systems is maintained.

One of the newest forums on the service is called the New Age forum. CompuServe created this forum in hopes of having a single area where all breeds of the fringe community can chit-chat without bothering those of us who have some regard for science and reason.

The topic areas on the New Age forum read like an index to cover stories from Weekly World News: ESP/Mind Powers, Astrology/Tarot, New Age Sciences (an oxymoron if ever there was one!), Magik/Shamanism, Pagan/Wicca, and the omnipresent UFOlogy/Contacts. I wonder how the self-proclaimed "serious UFO researchers" like being grouped in with folks who use Ouija boards.

On this forum, you and your modem can watch as apparently intelligent, educated people from across the country discuss such things as:

- Which Tarot card deck design is best for romantic divination
- How to select a crystal healing stone to match your skin type
- Tips and hints for viewing the auras of your pets when they're sick
- Which forms of diabetes and cancer can be cured by homeopathy or herbalistic healing
- Which astrology books offer the best system for stock market prediction

... and so on. If you can foot the connect-time bill and you don't go cross-eyed reading all the drivel from your fellow modemers, CompuServe's New Age forum will deliver all of life's answers right to your monitor.

Skeptical: Thankfully, there are a few oases of reason and science scattered across this worldwide electronic wasteland. The Bay Area Skeptics maintain a high-quality, high-speed BBS system in the San Francisco area. System operator Rick Moen does a good job of keeping the talk topical and hooking the system up to outside feeds from some of the international message systems, including some of the fringe networks already mentioned.

The Georgia Skeptics from Atlanta have a section of a larger BBS set aside for discussions of skeptical inquiry. They share part of a BBS system run by the Georgia Astronomical Society, and they also provide links to outside message networks, both fringe and skeptical.

Worldwide, Internet users can join in the Skeptic discussion group. CompuServe users can also obtain a link to Internet via CompuServe Mail.

Local connection: A North Texas Skeptics member has proposed that NTS sponsor a small BBS system in the Metroplex, and he has volunteered to donate the computer hardware and manpower needed to operate the system. NTS would need to pay the cost of the telephone line. Such a system could be used for several purposes:

- Electronic editions of The Skeptic could be kept on-line and available for reference
- A bibliography or resource list could be maintained on-line for research purposes

Members could communicate with each other quickly and informally on the system  
Electronic links could be made with the other skeptical BBS systems to broaden discussions and share information

This idea was discussed at the December NTS social dinner and NTS President John Blanton recommended that the group could pursue such a system providing NTS membership increased enough to cover the costs or until a benefactor could be found.

If you would like more information on how to connect to any of the systems mentioned in this article, or if you have suggestions on how NTS can use computer communications to serve our members, please contact me at any of the addresses listed in the Letters to the Editor column.

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## Purloined Pets Perplex Plano Police

By Mike Sullivan

### CUT-UP KITTIES CLUES IN CULT CRIMES?

It depends on whom you ask.

If you ask Plano resident and self-proclaimed Satanic cult investigator Diane Randolph about the 99 cats reported missing in her town over a nine month period, she'll tell you they are clear evidence of a Satanic cult.

If you ask Plano police detective Mark Box, he'll tell you that those missing cats and the nine mutilated pets found in Plano last year lead him to suspect Satanic cult activities. If you ask Steve Smith of the Texas Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, he'll say that a hundred missing pets in a town the size of Plano is not unusual at all. But let's start at the beginning.

I talked to Diane Randolph after she called NTS President John Blanton to give him her thoughts on some mutilated animals found in Parker county. She was interested in the topic because she's doing some research on Satanic cult activities and the connection to animal mutilations.

We chatted about the dead animals, which later were found to have been mistreated and dumped there by a local rancher. Ms. Randolph soon told me that she had been "working with" the Plano police to help them investigate some cat disappearances that had been happening there. She referred me to Detective Box.

Detective Box is a 25-year police veteran, with 20 of those years spent as an investigator. He's been with the Plano department for eight years, and is assigned to the department's Criminal Intelligence Division.

Detective Box investigates everything from vice cases to gang activities to crimes involving the occult and Satanism. He has attended two special police training seminars on Satanic and occult crimes, he said. Detective Box granted me a half-hour telephone interview for this story.

He says it all started in the spring of 1991, when two Plano residents spotted the cut-up remains of two or possibly three cats in a city park while jogging. At the time, a short-form police report was made of the incident and Detective Box says he didn't pay much attention to the matter.

"In a city of this size, in this country, unfortunately, in this day and age, you're going to have some of that, in any city," Detective Box said. "I figured it was some kid, some teenagers out here dabbling with the occult, or just mean, just being mischievous," he said.

About two months later, just the front half of another mutilated cat was found along a bike trail by a resident, this time with a wooden surveyor's stake driven into the ground. Diane Randolph and Detective Box both said that the stake has Satanic significance. Two weeks after that incident, another mutilated cat was found in a nearby area.

What finally got Detective Box's attention was when a resident who lives in a newly-built area of town reported her cat missing to the police department. The owner's home is surrounded on three sides by open fields, Detective Box said, and the owner was told by the Plano animal control department that they thought a coyote may have gotten the cat.

The resident didn't believe that was the case, and so she canvassed her neighbors to see if they had seen her cat. Of the six neighbors she contacted, three of them were also missing a cat. "I think it went without saying at that point that something was up. That's more than a coincidence," Detective Box said. "I agreed with her: something out of the ordinary is occurring. I did agree with her that I didn't think it was coyotes that were getting these cats, even though she lives where she lives, and Collin County does have a coyote problem," he said.

Detective Box then checked the police records going back to the beginning of 1991: two cats and eight dogs were reported missing to the Plano police. That was not unusual, Detective Box said, because people generally do not report missing cats to the police department since it is not a police matter.

Detective Box next got permission from his superiors to put a story in the Plano Star-Courier advising residents to call the Plano police if their pet turned up missing. The item ran on September 11, 1991, and Detective Box said that the paper did a good job of keeping the story low-key, so as not to unduly alarm the community. Soon after the story appeared in the paper, two mutilated cats and one mutilated puppy were found behind a business along Central Expressway in Plano. Several other local media outlets picked up the story, and soon Detective Box was swamped with hundreds of calls from all over the Metroplex, all reporting a missing cat, some from as long ago as 1989.

"I had a lot of well-meaning people call in with every kind of theory you can imagine about what was happening to these cats. It ran the gamut from coyotes to laboratories having them picked up to experiment on them, to the MUFON people, the "little green men", so to speak," Detective Box said.

Up to this point, Detective Box had evidence of possibly eight cats and one puppy found mutilated in Plano over a nine month period. He had reports of missing cats, which he narrowed down to less than 100 verified within Plano during the year, and he had people suggesting possible explanations for the disappearing pets. One of the explanations Detective Box listened to came from Plano animal control supervisor Gary Masters, a former Plano police officer. He told Detective Box that in his opinion, the missing cats could be blamed on the coyotes. Mr. Masters still holds that view, and he thinks it is the best explanation for the disappearances.

He works with lost and missing animals everyday, and his department gets approximately 200 cats per month that are picked up or brought in by the citizens. The animal control department makes every effort to contact the owners of those cats whenever possible, Detective Box said. Sadly, most of those cats must be destroyed when those efforts turn out negative and no one claims the animal.

Could it be that the cats reported missing by the citizens resulting from the Star-Courier story are the same cats destroyed by Plano's animal control department every month? No, according to Detective Box. He said that the animals brought to the pound and destroyed are typically not the well-fed, happy house cats reported missing by the citizens, but instead they are the stray and abandoned cats found in every city.

In almost every instance, the cats Detective Box had listed as missing in Plano were cats that never strayed far from the back yard of the owner, and many would only be let outside for a few hours a day. They were simply not the kind of cats that would wander off, he said.

If this is the case, and, as Detective Box believes, a Satanic cult is involved, then someone must literally be stealing these helpless kitties from private properties all over town. Perhaps someone would have seen the crime being committed by now.

But after all the publicity and all the phone calls, no one has called to report seeing anyone steal their cat, or to report

anyone lurking in the backyard of a Plano home attempting to nab a cat, or to report that they have information about who, if anyone, was kidnapping the cats. In fact, Detective Box has no active leads on this case at all. The reports of missing cats have virtually stopped now, more than three months after the newspaper and broadcast outlets covered the story.

Even undercover surveillance of people in Plano that Detective Box said are known to dabble in the occult turned up without any clues to the missing cats. As Detective Box said, "They're not going to do these types of things where people can see them."

Let's look at the statistics that might account for those 99 missing Plano cats. Dallas has just over 1 million residents, and Plano has nearly 130,000. Steve Smith of the Texas Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals guesses that Plano might have more pets per capita than the city of Dallas, owing to the greater ratio of private homes to apartments in Plano.

He says his office gets about 900 missing pet reports per month, mainly cats and dogs, or almost exactly one lost pet per 1,100 population per month. Of those 900, about one-third are reported as returning home after one month. If Plano pets turn up missing and return home at about the same rate as Dallas pets, Plano could expect about 120 missing pet reports per month, and about 40 of those pets might be reunited with their owners.

Plano might also experience more missing pets than Dallas, Smith told me, because of the large undeveloped areas still found in the suburb, where coyotes can kill the hapless house pet that wanders into an open field.

Cats and dogs running loose are also prone to getting hit by cars and trains, falling down manholes, being killed in fights with other pets, being trapped and killed by animal-hating residents, falling victim to cruel pranks by teenagers, slipping into a river or stream and drowning, or simply wandering off, not to be seen again.

So if statistics have anything to say in this case, it would be that Plano should have more missing cats per capita than the city of Dallas in a given period. Yet during the nine months in question, Detective Box says he had confirmed reports of only 99 missing cats within the city of Plano.

Using the Dallas averages to extrapolate to what Plano could expect, Detective Box might have received reports of over 700 missing pets that never returned home in those nine months. He carefully discarded any reports he did not receive directly from the owner. Also, not every resident may have known about the request for missing cat reports from the Star-Courier story. Even with those exclusions, 99 missing cats over a nine month period would be low, not high for Plano.

As of early December 1991, all Detective Box has for physical evidence is approximately nine mutilated domestic animals found over a nine month period. The reports of 99 missing cats, as sad as they are, do not seem unusual for a city the size of Plano. No eyewitnesses of cult involvement have come forward, and the tips regarding alleged Satanic connection have not led Detective Box anywhere in this case.

What happened to the missing pets in Plano? Detective Box doesn't know. Diane Randolph doesn't know, and Detective Box said that he doesn't recall "working with" her on this case as she told me. But if Steve Smith's figures can be applied to Plano, at least in general, then 99 missing cats in nine months is not out of the ordinary.

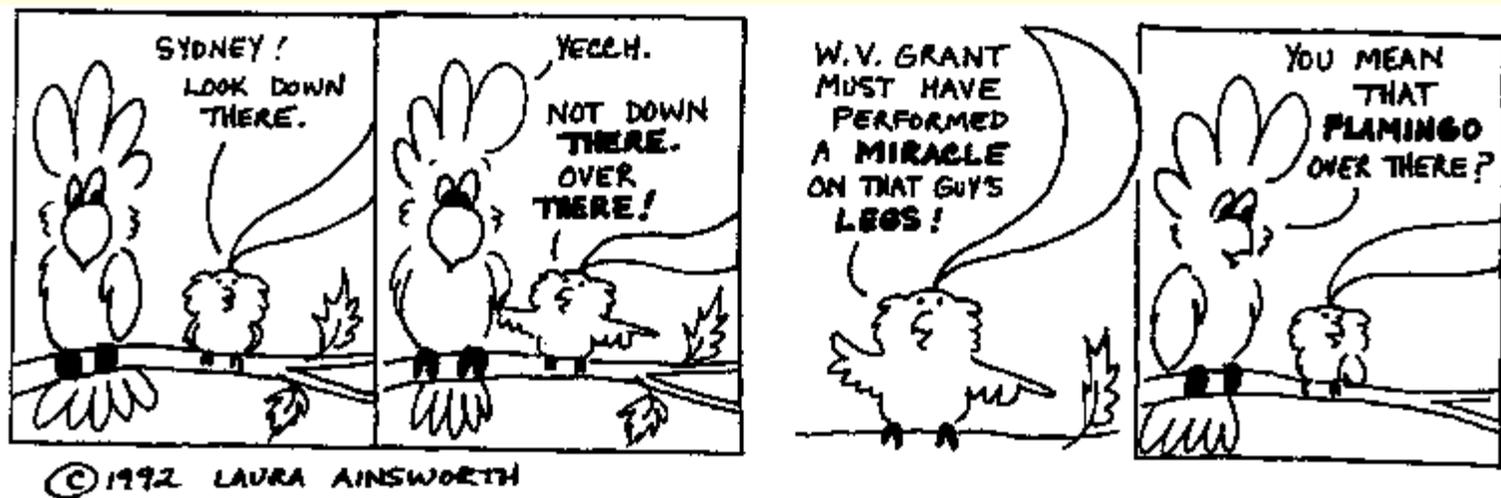
If someone is grabbing pets from the yards of Plano residents, Detective Box would like to find them and arrest them. And if some sick individual is torturing, mutilating and killing those innocent animals, he'd like to find them, too.

"I've got 25 years of police experience. I've been an investigator for 20 of those 25 years. I'm not stupid. I don't have all the answers, but I would stake my career on the fact that something is going on here," Detective Box said. "The bottom line is, I think it's something to do with the occult."

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# Up a tree: a skeptical cartoon

By Laura Ainsworth



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