



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

Volume 6 Number 9

[www.ntskeptics.org](http://www.ntskeptics.org)

September 1992

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## CSICOP Conference next month in dallas

**NTS Hosts First CSICOP Meeting in Texas Dallas** -- The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal will hold their 16th annual convention here next month, with hundreds of scholars, investigators and critical thinkers from around the world in attendance. The North Texas Skeptics will host the 3-day event October 16-18 at the Harvey Hotel D/FW.

During the five scheduled conference sessions, attendees will hear discussion of some of today's most controversial topics in rationalism. The opening session on Friday morning will focus on multicultural approaches to science and some of the misinformation and pseudoscience being touted in American schools under the banner of multiculturalism. Dr. Eugenie Scott, the national director for the National Center for Science Education, will moderate the panel.

World-famous zoologist and author Richard Dawkins will deliver the keynote address Friday night. Dr. Dawkins is professor of zoology at Oxford University and author of *The Blind Watchmaker*, one of the most lucid and convincing explanations of the theory of natural cumulative selection to date.

One of three sessions planned for Saturday is an afternoon session titled "Crashed Saucers," moderated by Philip J. Klass. Klass is a famous UFO investigator and author of several UFO and alien abduction debunking books, and former senior editor of *Aviation Week and Space Technology*. Klass now heads the CSICOP UFO subcommittee.

The session will concentrate on claims made for "The Roswell Crash," which UFO enthusiasts cite as some of the best evidence of extraterrestrial visitors to Earth. Scheduled panelists include Kevin Randle and Donald Schmitt, coauthors of a pro-saucer book about the Roswell incident.

Sunday morning, CSICOP conference attendees can take a guided tour of Dinosaur Valley State Park, led by NTS technical advisor and Paluxy "mantracks" investigator Ron Hastings, Ph.D. Ron will lead visitors to the mantracks in the riverbed, claimed by creationists as proof that dinosaurs lived contemporaneously with humans. The optional \$31.50 bus tour leaves the Harvey at 8:00 AM and returns around 1:00 PM.

### Volunteers Needed

As hosts of the CSICOP conference, the North Texas Skeptics have been asked by CSICOP to provide volunteers to

assist with the conference. In all, about 20 volunteers are needed throughout the 3-day event, working in shifts at various locations around the hotel.

A volunteer schedule has been devised that will allow people to lend a hand for a few hours while not preventing them from enjoying most of the sessions and events. If you can help, even for just a few hours, please call Mike Sullivan at 214/492-8998, 24 hours a day.

With the help of NTS members and supporters, we can show the conference attendees how Texas pride and hard work can make the 1992 CSICOP conference the best ever!

Preregistration for the conference and all related events is strongly recommended. See the CSICOP Conference information page elsewhere in this issue for telephone numbers and contact information, or call CSICOP at (716) 636-1425.

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## Healthy skepticism

**By Tim Gorski, M.D.**

*Editor's note: Dr. Gorski is a practicing physician and chairman of the Greater Dallas/Ft. Worth Council Against Health Fraud as well as an NTS technical advisor. In this monthly column for The Skeptic, Dr. Gorski will provide our readers with information on health quackery and dubious practices in the medical marketplace.*

L-Tryptophan is an essential amino acid and a metabolic precursor to serotonin. Serotonin acts as a chemical messenger, or neurotransmitter, in the central nervous system and appears to affect the sleep/wake state of arousal. Serotonin levels in the brain can be increased by the ingestion of L-tryptophan, and this has been shown to hasten the onset of sleep in humans.

L-tryptophan may also be of some benefit in the treatment of some psychiatric disorders. Taking their cues from these facts, promoters of "nutritional supplements" has pushed L-tryptophan as a safe and "natural" sleep aid and as a general mood enhancer.

But as far back as 1973, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration knew that this amino acid supplement was associated with significant health risks. In 1985, Canada restricted L-tryptophan's availability to that of a prescription drug, while the FDA did nothing about the promotion of the substance in this country.

In 1973, Canada reported only 11 cases of eosinophilia-myalgia syndrome (EMS), 10 of which were among victims who purchased the supplement in the United States. EMS is a serious and often fatal disorder linked to L-tryptophan use and, in one case recently, possibly to use of the amino acid supplement lysine. Finally, in 1990, after a 1989 outbreak of EMS in the U.S. in which at least 27 died and some 1500 were affected, the FDA pulled L-tryptophan off of store shelves.

Research is continuing into the nature and exact cause of EMS. Among the candidate chemical culprits being considered are various impurities associated with the preparation of L-tryptophan. One is chemically similar to a contaminant found in cooking oil that in 1981 was responsible for an outbreak of EMS in Spain. But chemical forms of L-tryptophan itself still have not been ruled out as being involved.

The lesson in this story is that, while L-tryptophan is an essential amino acid, it is not normally found in the human diet by itself. It's certainly not ordinarily ingested in the amounts provided by supplements. Monosodium glutamate, or MSG, is also an amino acid, but it's well recognized that the use of this ingredient in cooking can be a problem for many people. Likewise, though the simple sugar glucose is indispensable to metabolism, a diet high in sugars is not a healthy

one for most people.

It's also worth considering that the body normally keeps the circulating levels of most of the constituents of blood within fairly narrow ranges. We know that there can be harmful effects of chronically high or low levels of many of these substances. Higher levels of glucose, as experienced by diabetics, for example, are known to cause damage to vital organs. The hemoglobin (the red pigment in the blood) of diabetics is commonly checked by physicians for the amount of sugar which becomes abnormally attached to it as a way of measuring how high the average glucose level has been.

What harm might there be in having chronically (or intermittently) increased levels of tryptophan in the blood? No one knows. But here, unlike the situation with respect to some other scientific propositions, the null hypothesis is that a substance is unsafe until it is proven safe. Otherwise, consumers become the guinea pigs of supplement promoters.

Just because a little is good doesn't mean that more is better. Therefore, before a drug or "supplement" is promoted as being safe and effective for a given purpose, there should be adequate evidence to support the claims made for it. And the burden of providing such evidence, of course, falls on those who make the claims.

*This information is provided by the D/FW Council Against Health Fraud. We welcome new members and would like especially to suggest that you let your doctor know of the existence and efforts of the Council in combating false, misleading and questionable claims in the areas of health and nutrition. The Council has found that most physicians do not have the time and inclination to look into what they quite rightly consider to be rubbish. But with your help, the Council can provide the resources your doctor needs to advance the cause of skepticism in this important area. For more information, or to report suspected health fraud, please contact the Council at Box 202577, Arlington, TX, 76006, or call metro 214-263-8989.*

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## Fringe Theory of the Month

**#1 In A Continuing Series**

**By Mike Sullivan**

**Guest Columnist: Ralph Dousette**

One of the frequent laments of the persecuted fringe movement is that the "real truth" supporting their pet theories is intentionally suppressed by "the media." To hear them tell it, the reason you'll never see the secret NASA photos of UFO bases on the far side of the moon and why their amazing ion-air-energy free-power turbine engine will never be accepted for a U.S. patent is the same: they are victims of a giant conspiracy by "the media" to cover-up their astounding discoveries.

While not flattering ourselves by thinking that we at The Skeptic are part of "the media," we felt that, in some small way, we can help these poor frustrated folks get their stories out. Toward this effort, we will select and publish one of the more coherent, less hysterical theories we run across each month, space providing. Each will be published without comment or editing of any kind, to the extent of leaving all the obvious misspellings and poor grammar as they occur in the original, those being the little stylistic rough edges that add so much to the fringe cachet.

We start off this month with a submission from one of our own members, Tony Dousette. Tony was a former editor of The Skeptic, but since leaving that post he has apparently found a new calling, as his article will show. Tony applauds our coverage of the Ross Perot/space aliens link (see The Skeptic, June 1992), but claims we've missed an even bigger conspiracy. And we'll note that Tony's submission is curiously lacking the grammatical and spelling errors so typical of "genuine" fringe reportage ... perhaps this is a clue to yet another disinformation campaign ...

# The Uncle of All Conspiracies

By **R. A. Dousette**

*The Skeptic's* June issue includes a fascinating article on Ross Perot's alien connections. It scoops *Weekly World News* and other similar publications by exposing one more heinous conspiracy in action. All NTS members can take pride in the fact that *The Skeptic* has dropped, even if only for one issue, the negativism so characteristic of its past. NTS has finally contributed something positive to the paranormal debate now raging in the higher realms of the paranormal intelligentsia.

Commendable though it may be, *The Skeptic* and the supermarket tabloids seem to have joined with Oliver Stone in a fatal conceit. If the conspiracies are as wide-spread and as powerful as alleged, how are these revelations able to succeed? Surely the FBI, the CIA and the Trilateral Commission combined with Perot-backing aliens should be able to stop the movie, the tabloids and *The Skeptic*. Either there's no conspiracy, or these revelations are but distractions used to divert the public's attention from a far greater conspiracy.

I believe in a far greater conspiracy, and will share it with you -- provided that the damned Trilateral Commissioners don't intercept my mail and thereby keep you from the truth. If they don't stop me, you will discover that our world has been shaped, manipulated and distorted by a man of incredible evil. He is more malevolent than Professor Moriarty, more seditious than Dr. Fu Manchu and more infamous than Jiang Qing (widow of Chairman Mao and bandit leader of the notorious Gang of Four). I refer to none other than that beloved American icon, Walt Disney.

Why Uncle Walt? His smiling visage is a perfect cover for a mastermind who has attacked the very foundations of Western Civilization. The movie *Bambi* is an excellent example among many of the Disney conspiracy at work. For the first time in human history, we live in a world populated by those who have seen this flick at a young and impressionable age.

## **P.C. Cartoon**

Before this and similar movies, nature was an excellent place to shoot something for lunch. After the screening of this movie, untold numbers of innocent children have been exposed to a radically different image. As a consequence of this mind control, nature became in the public imagination a land of happy, singing vegetarians whose joy is endless until interrupted by the depredations of man.

*Bambi* comes from a dysfunctional family. He grows up in the woods without a male presence and, even though his father does make a couple of appearances, his parentage is questionable.

His mother suffers from an Attention Deficit Syndrome that is very likely a consequence of a chemical imbalance aggravated by a lack of a comprehensive program of National Health Insurance. She wanders carelessly into a clearing where (presumably) male, (presumably) heterosexual hunters brutally slaughter her.

*Bambi* becomes homeless as a result of this macho power trip. He grows up alone and matures into an adult who follows his father's destructive and exploitative lifestyle.

This and similar movies have had a far-reaching consequence. Paradigms have not only shifted, they have quaked and traveled great distances. The conclusion seems to me to be inescapable. A world without Disney would never have suffered the wretched excesses of environmentalism, feminism, vegetarianism and gun control advocacy; Murphy Brown would have a husband; and Doogie Howser would still be a virgin. Teddy Kennedy might even be a Republican and sober to boot, although one should avoid carrying these speculations to wild conclusions.

Have the malign puppet-masters of world events allowed you to read this far? If so, just ask yourself: What better cover for a conspiracy than to publish it in order to discredit it?

Well, it's only my opinion. It explains a lot, though, so it must be true. I like it. If you pick up your paper some morning

and discover that Dan Quayle is gunning for Bambi, please remember that you read it here first!

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## The third eye

By Pat Reeder

There is something about summer ... perhaps the hot sun beating down on unprotected brains ... that really brings out the looniness in people. And no, I'm not referring to the two major political conventions. Not specifically, anyway. No, even when I limit myself purely to the field of occult wackiness, I still find that I have more stories than I can possibly cover in just one column. So no in-depth commentary or overriding theme this month ... let's get straight to the news!

That maddeningly fickle space alien (see last month's column) has changed his political affiliation again! First he met with President Bush, then Ross Perot ... and now, according to the *Weekly World News*, he's thrown his support to Bill Clinton! He's harder to keep up with than a CBS News poll! The August 11 issue of the tabloid featured one of their patented doctored photos, showing Clinton shaking hands with the alien, and a headline reading, "Space visitor tells Democrats how to rebuild U.S. economy!" Well, that explains where the "New Covenant" came from, anyway, and why it's subtitled "To Serve Man."

The story inside treats President Bush's jokes about the alien story as confirmation, as if by mentioning it at all, however mockingly, he was validating it. Remember that warning I issued last month, in which I specifically labeled the parts of the column that were jokes? Maybe Bush needs to do the same thing at press conferences. Clinton later joked about the alien story himself (he said he promised the alien he would "keep the space station open"), so expect to see this hailed as "confirmation" on a future cover of the *WWN*.

Now, there is one more thing about this alien that I hesitate to mention in a family newsletter ... and maybe it's just because he's standing next to Bill Clinton, who has suffered from, let us say, "unfortunate connotations" ... but take a close look at the alien in that photo. Doesn't he look remarkably like a 6-foot tall male sex organ? Maybe it's only natural, because that's what you'd have to be to believe anything you see in the *Weekly World News*.

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Those who mourn the decline of paganism, yet are too afraid of earthquakes and riots to move to L.A., should consider relocating to The Netherlands. Ten publicity-shy Dutchmen, known collectively as the Cargo Foundation, are spending \$545,000 to build a 100-foot steel framed figure of a man with his arms raised, which will be stuffed with 20,000 loaves of bread, towed into the North Sea, and sunk.

Go on back and read that again, if you like. I'll wait for you ...

See, you read it right! They call this project the "National Gift To The Sea," a way of paying back the ocean for supplying them with fish, fill dirt, colorful little seashells, and lots and lots of waves to stare vacantly at. Supporters paid \$7 per loaf to raise the money for the soggy offering to King Neptune, and the wheat for the bread was grown on land reclaimed from the sea ... which not only makes the karmic cycle complete, but also makes it a big waste of time to have bothered to reclaim the land from the sea in the first place.

As you might expect, this sacrificial doughnut dunk has its detractors. The government and local environmentalists are outraged; a Greenpeace spokesman called it "the most mindless, primitive act imaginable ... pure pollution." And church leaders not only denounce it as paganism, but as a criminal waste of food that could be used to feed the poor. Personally, I'm all for it ... in fact, I predict that the sea gods will be so grateful for the gift, that for awhile at least, fishermen will be

catching fish that are already stuffed with bread crumbs! That is, unless the government can manage to sink the project before its organizers can sink it. I'll keep you posted ...

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The latest expedition to find the Loch Ness Monster has yielded just enough results to be tantalizing, but as usual, no firm evidence. A submarine using sonar reported tracking an unexplained object on the bottom of the lake for two minutes before losing contact ... but it could've been anything from Nessie to Ted Kennedy's car. One week later, someone shot some video of something on top of the water; the video aired on Inside Edition. There was definitely something out there, but it was much too far away to identify. It might've been a log, or a seal or sea lion ... but it looked to me like a man stuffed full of bread crumbs, looking for The Netherlands.

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Most tips on the location of Iraqi weapons sites are passed along to U.N. inspectors from U-2 spy plane overflights. But last month, when pressed by a reporter, embarrassed chief inspector Rolf Ekeus admitted that he had gotten at least one tip from a psychic. Ekeus said, "I think there was a card-reader or astrologer who contacted the commission and rang us. That is absolutely correct." However, Ekeus denied that the tip was used. He said, "We get many tips every week. I don't think she sent this tip to the information assessment unit." No wonder we can't find those Iraqi nukes ... we could have "used The Force," and instead, we're just using the Air Force!

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On August 2, almost 7,000 people, many in wheelchairs or on crutches, gathered around Joseph Januszkiewicz's back yard in Marlboro, New Jersey, waiting for the Virgin Mary. Januszkiewicz, a 54-year-old draftsman, claimed that Mary had been visiting him for 18 months, and had promised to return on that night. The crowd was so huge that police finally had to close the roads to keep any more people out.

At 9:13 P.M., Januszkiewicz looked up in the sky as if something were flying toward him, dropped to his knees, and began having a conversation with an invisible and completely inaudible (to everyone else) Virgin Mary. Later, he claimed that Mary had been accompanied by an invisible and inaudible St. Joseph, who was wearing "a cut-off shirt, short pants, and a wide belt." I guess this finally answers the age-old question, "Is there a dress code in Heaven?"

No word on whether anyone was healed, but I imagine a lot of people went home and took a couple of St. Joseph's Aspirin, perhaps washed down with a Bloody Mary.

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One day in July, Boston Pops conductor and composer John Williams joined a group that was searching for a music-loving ghost, which reportedly haunts rehearsal rooms at the Tanglewood Music Festival in Massachusetts. The ghost has never been seen, but has supposedly touched someone's hair, opened doors and faucets, and rustled around on the second floor of a more-than 140-year-old house on the festival grounds. The ghost also spooked Leonard Bernstein shortly before his death; a witness recalled that "he flew out of that window seat" (Bernstein, not the ghost) ... "He threw his arms toward the sky, saying 'What is it that's here? Who is it?'"

Still, the ghost hunt that Williams joined turned up nothing, and many who have spent time there claim it's just the spooky old house making people nervous and playing tricks on their imaginations. Perhaps it just needs a cheery new coat of paint. Or it might help if someone would knock on John Williams' rehearsal room door and ask him to stop

playing that damn theme from *Jaws*.



And finally ... their current liberal political activism notwithstanding, those space aliens are still going around violating Earthlings' civil rights by snatching them up for endless superficial physical exams. In the past month alone, in stories picked up by the Associated Press, the *Austin American Statesman* profiled a 53-year-old Austin woman (name withheld) who has organized a support group for alien abductees; and the Colorado Springs *Gazette Telegraph* devoted several pages of credulous copy to a national UFO conference at the University of Wyoming at Laramie (offering Ph.Ds in Quantum Physics, Deviant Psychology, and Calf Roping). Both stories feature anecdotes from "abductees," most of whom do not reveal their names for fear of ridicule.

Well, don't worry ... believe it or not, I'm not going to ridicule them. I just feel too much pity for them. Read the following quotes from the story about the Wyoming conference and see if you don't feel the same emotion ...

"Later, at a meeting for relatives and close friends of those reporting experiences with aliens and UFOs, patience is strained when artist Deloris Bedrosky of Pierce City, Mo., interrupts -- for the third time -- the discussion, and begins talking about her UFO experiences.

'I'm an astral traveler, I went to Mars,' she says, her arm stabbing the air. 'They've tried to show me formulas. What do I know? I'm an artist. Anybody gettin' chills on this stuff? Well, I am.'

A woman sitting a few seats away from her shakes her head and murmurs, 'She needs to turn her receiver down.'"

Starting to get the picture? Thinking they could benefit from some medical attention? Well, how about this heartwarming little anecdote? ...

" ... a woman from Tennessee tells how her mother, a deeply religious, psychic woman, used to go out in her yard every day and 'talk to Jesus in an airplane.' Relatives thought her mother was crazy, and had her hospitalized and given shock therapy. The treatment broke her mother's spirit, putting an end to her psychic communing with God. Years later, when she began to have her own UFO and psychic experiences, she grieved because her mother had been misunderstood and stigmatized.

'Mom, a lot of people are talking to Jesus in an airplane now,' she says."

Yes, a lot of people are. I leave you to draw your own conclusions as to the cause of that, while we tiptoe quietly away ...

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## Up a tree: a skeptical cartoon

By Laura Ainsworth



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