



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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## The third eye

By Pat Reeder

It's Thanksgiving weekend as I write this, and I have much to be thankful for: my wonderful wife, my happy house full of noisy but lovable parrots, and of course, the millions and millions of morons in this world who keep me employed as a comedy writer by working overtime to provide me with material like this everyday . . .

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Last month, a jury in Tucson, Arizona, found Robert Joe Moody guilty of killing two women in 1993. They rejected his alibi that cocaine-pushing space aliens took control of his body and forced him to kill the women to prove that aliens exist (no, his lawyer wasn't Johnnie Cochran). Prosecutors intend to ask for the death penalty at a hearing in January, but that shouldn't bother Moody, who says the "extrasensory biological entities" told him that he would survive a lethal injection and be brought back to life, so the aliens could speak through him. He didn't remember any of this until a week after he was arrested, when it suddenly exploded into his head while he was watching *Star Trek: The Next Generation* in jail. Plausible as all this sounds, the jury obstinately refused to believe it and instead accepted the prosecution's claim that Moody is a cokehead who killed the two women for drug money. Perhaps the jury just couldn't figure out why the aliens wanted Moody to steal one woman's credit cards and hock the other's guns. But we should find out the answer to all those questions after the lethal injection. I'll let you know what Moody says at his post-mortem press conference.

Speaking of aliens, that <M>Alien Autopsy special is about to be aired for the THIRD time by Fox, and the effect is getting to be like dunking a tea bag for the third time. I haven't seen it yet, but this time, it supposedly includes some new footage of "crashed saucer debris." Each time they repeat this thing, the producer releases a few snippets of footage he hadn't mentioned before (an unusual practice for someone who claims that he is only interested in getting ALL the information before the public, and not simply in squeezing every last dime out of this suspicious footage).

Speaking of suspicious alien autopsy footage, a recent *X-Files* episode centered around Scully and Mulder investigating a video of an apparent alien autopsy. <M>The X-Files is on the Fox Network, and no sooner had Fox finished running a promo for their third go-round of "Fun With Alien Innards" than <M>The X-Files began, and we saw Scully and Mulder watching their own alien autopsy video, with Mulder commenting on some of the ways in which it looked much

more believable than that fake-looking video they ran on the Fox Network. So not even their own fictional characters are buying it. The next time Fox wants to air a science "documentary," maybe they should borrow some writers and special effects people from <M>The X-Files to make it more realistic.

Speaking of *The X-Files* . . . it's all TRUE! At least, a lot of Americans think so. According to a new poll by Scripps School of Journalism professor Guido Stempel III, 18.9 percent of Americans believe it's "very likely" that the U.S. government knows UFOs are real and is hiding the truth from us, and 30.7 percent said it was "somewhat likely." Not surprisingly, tabloid readers are more likely to believe, while college graduates are less likely to believe. But to the prof's surprise, the people most likely to believe in UFOs are city dwellers, while those least likely to believe are rural folks, who are supposedly being hauled up to flying saucers left and right, like rainbow trout. Prof. Stempel theorizes that rural people are more comfortable with the sky because they see it all the time, while city slickers never see it, and so give UFOs the benefit of the doubt. In other words, the less evidence people have of something, the more likely they are to believe it (see first paragraph: "things I am thankful for"). Or it could just be that city dwellers are more likely to see the Fox Network.



Speaking of rural dwellers, Bigfoot is all over the news again. Ohio State University researchers are using DNA analysis on some hair found in the Pacific Northwest woods by some men who claim to have seen a group of Bigfoots . . . Bigfeet . . . whatever . . . about 100 feet away. The DNA test will determine conclusively whether the hair came from a human or some other known primate (although it probably wouldn't be enough to convince a Los Angeles jury). Frank Poirier, chairman of the Department of Anthropology, offered a lesson in how real science works by stating, "I don't expect anything to happen because I'm pretty skeptical about this. But good science requires some wild goose chases from time to time."

Speaking of Bigfoot, Playboy Playmate Anna Marie Goddard was in the woods with a film crew, shooting some footage for a Playboy TV special, when a panting, hairy-palmed creature (no, not a Playboy subscriber) reportedly ran across the road in front of their car. Someone grabbed a home video camera and got a jerky, fuzzy, dark, fleeting shot of the Sasquatch. Ms. Goddard told Jay Leno that the tape was handed over to a team of "cryptozoologists" (my favorite useless "I'm-here-to-waste-my-parents'-money" college major, until I heard last week about a British language student who's getting a B.A. in Klingon) who determined from its "large appendage" that it was a male (you'd think the Playmate would've figured that out). At least now, we know it's true what they say about men with Big Feet.

Naturally, this story was covered by *Hard Copy*, in their inimitable overblown style. As the dramatic music, heavy on the booming kettle drums, played, their hyperventilating announcer screeched, "It's the PLAYMATE . . . AAAAAAAND! . . . The PRIMATE!!!!!" I laughed so hard, I fell off my rocking chair. Like the producers of *Hard Copy*, I was completely off my rocker.



And speaking of Playboy Playmates, let's end this column with a few quickies . . .

Reuters reports that a British government investigating committee has dismissed claims that people suffered serious damage, including violent headaches, panic attacks, and mental disorders, after submitting to stage hypnotists. The investigators said the hypnotists' acts might cause tiredness or headaches (you could say the same thing about a lot of ventriloquists' acts), but claims of permanent disabilities by the hypnotists' "victims" (and, I assume, their lawyers) were highly exaggerated. And then, all the investigators began clucking like chickens . . .

ABC's *Prime Time Live* did a good segment on past life regression therapy, showing that it had helped some people overcome phobias, but pointing out that there were no long-term follow-up studies to prove that the effects were permanent, and there is no evidence that the hypnotists are doing anything other than stimulating their patients'

imaginings. The show even pointed out the problem of unlicensed "hypnotherapists" whose "training" consists of a three-hour seminar or a few mail order lessons . . .

This lack of good skilled help has also infected Dionne Warwicke's Psychic Friends Hotline. The moneymen who run the thing are reportedly being denounced by the original psychic who appeared on the infomercials. She claims she discovered, much to her dismay, that some of the phone operators were not "real, certified psychics" (whatever that means), but were just astrologers and tarot card throwers (and, I'd wager, indigents and former time share condo salesmen). I'll leave you to ponder how come, if she's a real, certified psychic, she was surprised to discover this . . .

The Dallas Morning News Religion section ran a surprisingly positive profile of the Church of Freethought, run by Tim Gorski and Mike Sullivan, our very own answers to Robert Tilton and W.V. Grant (they're gonna love me for that one!). I'm glad to see their "church" is doing so well, although it always seemed to me that if atheists couldn't call on God to help them out of a jam or look forward to going to Heaven, then the biggest advantage to being an atheist was that you could sleep in on Sunday mornings . . .

By the time you read this, NBC will have run a made-for-TV movie called *Visitors Of The Night*, in which Markie Post plays a former alien abductee trying to prevent a big-headed, bug-eyed creep from snatching away her teenage daughter (they should've cast Mia Farrow). I haven't seen it yet, but judging from previews, it will be hot out of the Budd Hopkins/Whitley Streiber school, except with some blue spotlights shining through fog, a la Spielberg. And millions of people will watch it. And Bud Hopkins will continue pointing to the "unexplainable" similarity of the details in abduction stories as a reason to believe them (see first paragraph again) . . .

Finally, just for kicks, let's conduct an experiment. I'm going to make up a story right off the top of my head, then see how long it takes before it starts popping up on computer bulletin boards and shows like *Encounters*. Ready? Here goes: "Vince Foster was killed because he knew about the government conspiracy to cover up UFO aliens and planned to reveal it." Please spread this around as much as possible, then let me know if you see it turn up anywhere else. But I must warn you: once it appears on the Fox Network, it's officially "The Truth."

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## Healthy skepticism

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

### Dallas County Medical Society Quacked

Do you suppose it would be difficult for physicians to recognize nutrition nonsense when they see it? Think again. The September Dallas Medical Journal, the monthly magazine of the Dallas County Medical Society (DCMS), carried an outrageous article by Ann A. McNabb entitled "The Case for Food Supplementation." Here she claims that most people "do not know what constitutes a healthy, mixed diet," that most people are deficient in one or more vitamins — actually "malnourished" — that modern agricultural and food processing technologies result in people's diets being "devoid of nutrients," and that (surprise!) just about everyone needs to be taking an array of dietary supplements for "optimal" health. She even tosses in the equally ridiculous claim that trace amounts of herbicides, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers in produce pose a public health threat.

McNabb misrepresents research studies and quotes recognized authorities out of context to support her arguments. In particular, she cites the Health and Nutritional Examination Survey which confirmed the entirely predictable expectation that people's intake of various vitamins fluctuates: sometimes even below the RDA's (Recommended Daily Allowances). But this hardly proves that anyone is "malnourished." Indeed, despite the fact that RDA's have been established for all the vitamins (at levels which far exceed that required to prevent actual vitamin-deficiency states), it is well known that the body doesn't run out of vitamins on a daily basis.

In the case of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, for example, body stores can last for years. Nor are such trifles as variations in the vitamin content of, say, carrots, which McNabb makes much of, cause for concern since the average diet does not contain enough carrots for this to matter. Nutrition quacks like McNabb seem to forget that things like carrots also come from living things which have their own nutritional requirements. One could no more grow a carrot lacking in nutritional value than one could grow a human being lacking in its normal constituents.

McNabb concludes by urging physicians to work with the “certified clinical nutritionist” such as herself. Yet the “CCN” designation is not a recognized educational degree (unlike the R.D.s which reputable organizations rely on) or credential. In some cases it may reflect no appropriate training whatsoever while in others it denotes association with groups that regularly promote and make recommendations based on unsubstantiated claims.

Indeed, the Dallas organization that McNabb cites as a source of further information (and which claims to certify CCNs) recently hosted a gathering which included the likes of Jonathan Wright, whose offices were raided and closed by the FDA. The “Suggested Reading” and “References” listed are no better than the pathetic piece itself, and include magazine articles from the lay press, two titles from the infamously quackery-oriented Rodale Press, and C. Hoffer's ridiculous Orthomolecular Medicine for Physicians.

The DCMS has been made embarrassingly aware of its blunder and is expected to try to make amends. Whether this will take the form of a retraction and apology, which would be most reasonable under the circumstances, or a mere rebuttal, remains to be seen. But regardless of future developments, this article will long be enthusiastically touted by promoters of nutrition nonsense as “proof” of the mainstream acceptance of their ideas.

### **Congressman Comes To Aid Of Quack**

According to an Associated Press story appearing in the Dallas Morning News in September, Republican Congressman Joe Barton is demanding an investigation into what he says has been the “malicious prosecution” of the notorious Dr. Stanislaw Burzynski. Burzynski is the Houston-area promoter of his very own theory of cancer causation which involves what he calls “anti-neoplastons.”

After coming to the United States in 1970 and publishing his still-unsubstantiated ideas in 1976, he began to treat cancer patients with “anti-neoplastons” which were extracts of human urine. Since that time, “anti-neoplastons” have been synthesized in the laboratory and turn out to be small amide molecules, the chief one of which (phenylacetylaminopiperidine-2,6 dione) is insoluble in water. Burzynski has countered that this last doesn't matter because steroid hormones are insoluble as well.

But steroid hormones also have their own binding proteins in the blood, by which they are transported throughout the body.

“Anti-neoplastons” have been thoroughly debunked in the pages of the Journal of the American Medical Association [267:2924-8, 1992]. And in the twenty years since Burzynski first floated his fanciful ideas, and despite cancer's receiving no small portion of biomedical research attention, no body of evidence and no consensus of sympathetic scientific opinion has been found in support of “anti-neoplastons.” Yet Dr. Burzynski is still peddling his miraculous cancer cure, despite the continuing efforts of both state and federal authorities to shut down his operation. Congressman Joe Barton, for his part, appears not to have any idea of the sordid business to which he has now lent his good reputation.

*This information is provided by the Dallas/Fort Worth Council Against Health Fraud. For further information, or to report instances of suspected quackery and health fraud, please contact the Council's President, Tim Gorski, M.D., at (817) 792-2000 or write P.O. Box. 202577, Arlington, TX 76006.*

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## **Skeptical Cogitations**

*Here are some thoughts for you to ponder. Skeptical Cogitations is assembled for our benefit by Joe Voelkering.*

"We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when [adults] are afraid of the light."  
— Plato

"The most convincing level of evidence required by our legal system is 'proof beyond a reasonable doubt,' not proof beyond ALL doubt. Rational skeptics use virtually the same standard as the Supreme Court -- but they don't completely close their files on the matter."  
— Jay von Gliker

"[I]f we look at the harm wrought in this world by two separate attitudes of mind: (a) an ever-ready sense of absolute certitude, and (b) an open-minded, scientifically sound recognition of high degrees of probability, we see that the latter has done very little harm indeed, whereas the former has led to countless wars . . . mass-slaughters . . . brawls . . . fights . . . and tragedy of many kinds."  
— Steve Allen

"Any physical theory is always provisional, in the sense that it is only a hypothesis; you can never [totally] prove it. No matter how many times the results of experiments agree with some theory, you can never be [absolutely] sure the results [of additional tests] will not contradict the theory. . . . Each time new experiments are observed to agree with the predictions the theory survives, and our confidence in it is increased; but if ever a new observation is found to disagree, we have to abandon or modify the theory."  
— Stephen Hawking

". . . Both the existence and non existence of God seem in some respects preposterous. [In constructing this study] I accept the probability [of there being a Deity as] the least preposterous assumption of the two.

". . . If He exists, then it is He who implanted in my brain the capacity to reason, and I would be foolish indeed were I not to scrutinize any and all evidence that comes before me. It is proper to do so [for safety reasons], and . . . it is equally as sensible to take care lest one be harmed by false intellectual or spiritual nourishment.

"Science deals [with nature], the only reality of which we have any certain knowledge. . . . Those fundamentalist[s] . . . who speak contemptuously of science . . . reveal an astonishing insensitivity to the very world they tell us God created. Granting, then, our prior assumption of a Creator, anyone who criticizes real science is in a direct sense criticizing God."

— Steve Allen

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