

The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

Volume 11 Number 2

www.ntskeptics.org

February 1997

In this month's issue:

- [I Have Seen the Enemy](#)
- [Election of Officers](#)
- [The Third Eye](#)
- [Living Dinosaurs at MIOS](#)
- [Up a Tree -- Cartoon](#)

I Have Seen the Enemy

by Mike Combs

Rented *The Arrival* last night. Pretty slick flick. Charlie Sheen was occasionally annoying when his husky whispers dipped down below the range of audibility, but his character was respectable, maybe even likable, and certainly worth rooting for. The suspense works, the science was plausible, and the movie has way-cool computer-generated aliens.

For those who haven't seen it yet, the plot is this: The aliens were among us in human form, and (as is always the case in such situations) were covertly trying to take us over. Specifically, they were dumping tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere to speed up the Greenhouse Effect. It was their version of terraforming; an attempt to make the Earth less suitable for us and more to their liking.

"We're not doing anything to you that you're not already doing to yourselves," one of the human-guised aliens sneeringly tells the hero. "All we're doing is accelerating the process. What it will take you a hundred years to do, we will do in ten."

This got me started thinking. Suppose I were a nasty alien from a technologically superior race, and was looking with alarm at this planet populated with homosaps who are breeding like mad and growing more technologically powerful each day. If I had the ability to infiltrate their society and covertly mess with their culture, what would I do to try and keep them in their place (and out of my neighborhood)?

Encouraging the widespread acceptance of addictive drugs would be a good start. Numb those disturbingly well-developed brains with chemicals. A clever strategy would be to redefine their language such that one of their most widespread drugs was not even referred to as a drug but by another word. This despite the fact it annihilates brain cells, lowers sensible inhibitions, destroys internal organs, kills millions on the highways, and wrecks families and careers.

Hey, we're off to a great start. Now we do everything we can to encourage paranoia. If we can get these carbon-based units to believe everything's controlled by a shadowy group, then they can take comfort that whenever they fail, it's not their fault. They can't get ahead because of The Conspiracy. This will be particularly effective with races which have

been treated badly by others in the past and will interfere with their struggle for equality.

Breaking the Earthers' will is all well and good, but specifically I want them to stay out of space. I would obscure the immediate social and economic benefits of space travel and suppress all knowledge of potential future benefits. The last thing I want is those big, ugly bags-of- mostly-water tapping into the energy and resources of space or proliferating in space habitats. I'd start a campaign which asks the question, "Which are we going to spend our money on: space or helping humanity?" as if the two issues weren't intimately connected. I want to keep the Earth Worms planet-bound; forever, if possible.

But I don't just want them to give up on space. I want them to discard science and technology altogether. Knowledge is power, and I don't want them to have any. I would instill in their youth a contempt for science, such that they so torment those who choose a scientific education that few are willing to go that route. The fewer scientists those grubby hairless apes turn out, the better.

I would encourage religious groups to go into the science classroom and give battle over the teaching of basic scientific facts.

This is starting to work, but we're just not getting the message out effectively enough to suit me. I would look at a planet bathed in innumerable TV transmissions and know exactly where my forces needed to come into play. Hollywood, here I come.

I would try to ensure that the entire population watches television instead of reading books. Books can put profound ideas into their misshapen heads, television can only titillate. I would ramp down their attention span until it was insufficient to let them learn anything of worth.

Manipulation of television could further our earlier plan for making science nerdy. Portray scientists as laughable, abnormal social misfits who can certainly cause lots of trouble, but can never participate in the solution. If anything, make them an impediment to saving humanity. This will have the pleasing effect of reducing the risk of real scientists going off and saving humanity. It would be most convenient if the human race would destroy itself and save us the bother, and scientific knowledge is the biggest threat to this scenario.

But it's that rapidly advancing technology which might lead the bipeds-with-the-big-heads to build starships. Portray technology as the cause of the problem, but never the fix. Since in all likelihood it's their large multinational corporations which would develop the technology to build those accursed starships, use television to promote the belief that corporations are the root cause of all evil in their world instead of political avarice, religious and racial intolerance, and mental illness. As long as the dramas are more entertaining than their evening news, maybe the huemons will never learn any better.

My ideal, perfect TV program should really push that "hidden conspiracy" thing. It would have two investigative characters: One who gravitates to the most outlandish, paranormal explanation and is almost invariably right; and one who prefers the most rational, scientific explanation, who is almost invariably wrong. Make the latter a poor advocate of the rationalist point of view. I would make the show so slickly produced and so genuinely entertaining that even those opposed to the philosophy being advocated still feel impelled to watch. Maybe we'll get some converts.

This show would go a long way towards encouraging a belief in magic amongst these savages, which certainly works to my advantage. After all, when you enter into the midst of a primitive tribe, you only have to worry about the tribesmen armed with spears. The ones armed with voodoo are at the bottom of your list of worries.

But there would be one show I would hate above all others and would utterly destroy if allowed to.

Star Trek.

Star Trek portrays a positive future in which their disgusting race has quit squabbling amongst themselves and worked together to solve their global problems. Although its science bears little resemblance to reality, and it frequently descends into meaningless technobabble, Star Trek is still dangerous because the characters' scientific knowledge is viewed as an asset, not a liability.

On my ideal, perfect show, I'm able to reinforce weekly the idea that there's no use in investigating the universe. Try as you might, you can never solve the mystery because The Conspiracy won't let you. Each episode ends with the protagonists no closer to the truth than they ever were, only with more befuddling mysteries before them. I'm hoping that with enough seasons of this, Earthlings will eventually decide examining the universe is not even worth bothering. But then here's Roddenberry's evil spawn contradicting my message. Each episode ends with questions answered. Every week, mysteries yield to scientific investigations. The universe is ultimately a knowable place. I don't want the Terran Pigs to find out about that!

Worse, the characters in Star Trek frequently use technology to solve problems and to help people. This is all in direct opposition to the message I'm getting out in every other show on the air. We can't stand for this.

Worst of all, the show provides a concrete vision of a tomorrow where humanity is cruising about the galaxy in starships. That's the absolute last thing we want. Whatever the Earth Scum can visualize, they can eventually create, if they want it badly enough.

But wait, maybe we could infiltrate "Star Trek." Maybe we could arrange for an episode on "Next Generation" where it's revealed that Warp Drive damages space. This would bring the show more into alignment with the theme of my other shows: Technology can only hurt the natural world. Best to suppress it whenever possible.

I could arrange an episode of "Voyager" where a scientist has to surrender her rational view and embrace a backward planet's mysticism in order to save the life of a dear friend. Maybe I can get one of the actors to direct that one; the fans love that.

The best move would be to invent a villainous race of grotesque half-men/half-machines. The message would be clear: Keep technology at arm's length, lest it transform you into a pasty zombie. The last thing I need is for these mildly intelligent monkeys to hit on the idea of putting chips into their brains. The result might be a new, advanced form of intelligence capable of doing things neither man nor machine could accomplish alone. After all, such an intelligence could compete with my form of intelligence.

Hey, The Arrival is right after all. Evil aliens wouldn't do anything to us that we aren't already doing to ourselves. This is news that should cause us great cheer.

"Are you crazy?" you ask. "Isn't this all terrible?"

Not really.

If there really were a more-advanced race of hateful aliens in our midst who wanted us out of the way, we would be screwed. Screwed the same way as the American Indians when Columbus and crew showed up. Screwed the same way as the Aztecs when Cortez and company arrived.

But if we are, after all, only doing it to ourselves, then at least we have a choice.

(Copyright 1996, Mike Combs)

Election of Officers

January 18, 1997, Dallas, Texas

Voting members of The North Texas Skeptics met to elect a new Board of Directors at the annual elections meeting. The following were elected to the Board:

Laura Ainsworth
Danny Barnett

John Blanton
Virginia Vaughn
Joe Voelkering

The newly-elected Board then convened to select officers for the coming year:

President: Joe Voelkering
Vice President: Danny Barnett
Secretary: John Blanton
Treasurer: Mark Meyer
Editors: Laura Ainsworth and Pat Reeder
Associate Editor: Keith Blanton
Web Master: Greg Aicklen
Meeting Coordinator: Virginia Vaughn
Publicist: Laura Ainsworth

Thanks to all who came out to vote and to put their support behind the NTS.
John Blanton, Sec.

The Third Eye

by Pat Reeder

Before we begin sifting through all the usual effluvia, I have an important announcement: Mike Sullivan, having read every word I've written here for the past few years, simply can't take it anymore and is stepping aside as editor of the NTS newsletter in order to procure for himself a life. Naturally, there were thousands of applicants for such a highly paid and prestigious position, but none of them could master the secret handshake. So the co-editorship has fallen by default onto my shoulders and the much more attractive shoulders of my wife, NTS writer/cartoonist Laura Ainsworth. Just think of us as co-eds.

We hope you'll be patient with us as we learn the ropes and try to get the newsletter back on schedule. Naturally, any articles or letters can be submitted through the usual channels, or sent directly to us via e-mail at 71371.375@compuserve.com. All submissions are welcome. In fact, they are more than welcome. Send us an intelligent article that fills at least two pages, and I just might polish your toenails with my lips.

Well, with that pleasant image lodged firmly in our heads, let's go at the news! So many stories have accumulated since my last column, I'm just going to take the past two month's worth, break them into newsnuggets, and lob them at you in easy-to-digest categories. Let's begin our with those current media darlings...

SPACE ALIENS!

Thanks to the success of Independence Day, The X-Files and their countless imitators (yes, cloning is finally an everyday reality, at least in Hollywood), aliens are getting more work than Gene Hackman. Already ubiquitous in movies and TV, they are now invading video games, such as the new "Redneck Rampage." In this high-tech time- and brain- waster, two dimwitted Arkansas hillbillies named Bubba and Leonard battle aliens with crowbars and dynamite to get their beloved pig Bessie back after she is "abducted." Hey, it beats reading.

For those aliens who don't find Bessie sexually appealing, there are many attractive alternatives. According to "UFO expert" Dr. Terry Johnson of Los Angeles (naturally), aliens regularly abduct such sexy celebrities as John Travolta, Jamie Lee Curtis and John Lithgow and Kate Mulgrew (naturally) for zero-gravity sex orgies. Madonna and Arnold Schwarzenegger are the favorite sex partners of the aliens, and they allegedly help entice other human abductees to join in the space swingin'. Those aliens are shrewd. If anyone can popularize having sex with slimy creatures from the Planet Zontar, Madonna's the gal.

And where do the aliens go to rest and recuperate after their exhausting carnal romps? According to "paranormal expert" Shelby Cummings of the British Institute of Paranormal Preservation, they hate Disneyland and Las Vegas because the lights interfere with their saucer electronics, and like all intelligent lifeforms, they love Paris but hate the French because they're so snotty (Frenchmen don't care if you came all the way from Mars; if you're not French, they'll spit in your coffee). This leaves the Grand Canyon as their favorite vacation spot. Cummings says the aliens like the scenery, and there are plenty of nooks and crannies in which to hide. I might add that there are also plenty of burros to abduct and have sex with.

For all three of the above stories, I am indebted to my pals at the great Wireless Flash news service, who happily interview "newsmakers" even Dan Rather wouldn't want to be in the same room with. But aliens were also turning up in the mainstream press, albeit under more embarrassing circumstances. For instance, last month, the Associated Press reported that thousands of Israelis gathered on a beach in Tel Aviv after self-proclaimed psychic Helinor Harar predicted that UFOs would land in Israel. Harar shouted her prophecies to the crowd as the theme from X-Files played on loud speakers, and then, a light appeared in the sky! And what do you think it was?!

That's right: It was a jetliner. The crowd grumbled and dispersed, and Harar boldly claimed that she simply got the date wrong and the aliens would really land on Valentine's Day. I prefer to think that at last, there's a race of beings somewhere in the universe that has no interest in invading Israel.

January was also a rough month for "true" alien tales on TV. The Skeptical Inquirer gave its annual "Snuffed Candle Award" for the person doing the most to spread scientific illiteracy to Dan Aykroyd for his ludicrous syndicated show Psi Factor: The (Really Well-) Hidden Truth. Aykroyd's show was also singled out by a scientific watchdog group called the Council for Media Integrity, headed by Steve Allen. Entertainment Tonight actually ran a pretty good report on their anti-B.S. campaign, featuring Scientific American editor John Rennie explaining that TV is a business, it follows the money, and "The money is in them there aliens." Fox's Alien Autopsy special was also cited, along with other shows that networks present as documentaries, even though they know themselves that they aren't true. Asked to comment, Aykroyd said his show had compiled so much evidence, these scientists would have to back off when they saw it. And I'm sure they will be seeing it. Any decade now.

PSYCHICS AND THE SUPERNATURAL!

Reuters reports that a Welshman who believes in all of Nostradamus' prophecies is putting his money where his misguided beliefs are. The 16th century French astrologer predicted that in 1999, "she who has been cast out will return again." The Welshman thinks that can only mean one thing: Margaret Thatcher will once again become British Prime Minister (or Hillary Rodham Clinton will be pardoned). So he found a bookmaker who took a 100 pound bet at 250-to-1 odds that Thatcher will return. If so, he'll win 25,000 pounds (\$41,520). If not, he can sell all his Nostradamus books to some other sucker and make his 100 pounds back.

Of course, the biggest news in psychic circles in January was the death of Jeane Dixon from a heart attack, which I understand she never saw coming. The stories about her passing recounted her astounding prediction of the J.F.K. assassination, made even more astounding through 30 years of post-assassination embellishment of the details. At least the A.P. obit did mention that some of her prophecies (and by "some," I mean, of course, "most") did not come true, such as that Russia would land the first man on the moon, or that World War III would break out in 1959.

Believers in reincarnation can take heart in knowing that Ms Dixon will live to inaccurately prophecy again. But like any profitable franchise (Classic Coke, Lay's Potato Chips), the concept of reincarnation has become a bit tired, and to keep up consumer interest, new variations must be wrung on the old theme. Just as we now have Diet Cherry Coke and Fat-Free Barbecue chips, so we also now have "pre-incarnation," as defined by Sarah Hinze in her new book, *Coming From The Light*. "Pre-incarnation" is when a child visits its future parents before it is born, perhaps to make sure they have Super Nintendo. Hinze claims that each of her nine kids made a pre-birth visit to her, and her daughters used to play with their little brother all the time before he was born. So apparently, this sort of thing runs in the family.

If "pre-incarnation" doesn't appeal to you, here's yet another new twist: "Future life progression." You say you've recovered memories of the same old past lives so many times, your hypnosis sessions are starting to feel like reruns of Wagon Train? (which is probably where you got the memories in the first place?) Well, Dr. Bruce Goldberg,

"reincarnation expert" and author of the new book *Soul Healing*, will put you under and give you a glimpse of what you'll be in your next life! For instance, TV talk show host Jerry Springer discovered that 100 years from now, he will be a farmer on the moon. Gee, can't we get him up there any sooner than that?

GOD'S MIRACLES AND WONDERS!

There's news from the world of religion, above and beyond Robert Tilton winning the argument that churches are not community property. All around us are signs that we are living in the Last Days, and I don't just mean the fact that Beverly Hills Ninja hit number one at the box office. Consider the following...

Miracle #1: Police in Clearwater, Florida, formed a "Miracle Management Task Force" to control the 450,000 visitors (so far) who have descended on the town to stare at the side of a glass office building because the sun reflecting off of chemical residue on the panes looks like the Virgin Mary. At least one fire was started by a votive candle, and the worshippers could not be dissuaded by assurances that the building contained no virgins whatsoever...

Miracle #2: Crowds are also jamming the Bongo Java coffee house in Nashville to see a flaky cinnamon bun that bears a miraculous resemblance to Mother Teresa (but then, don't they all?). The nun-in-a-bun has been coated with varnish and put under glass (just like the donuts at my local bakery), and the coffee shop is doing a brisk business in T-shirts and a video called "Miracle Bun." No, it's not an exercise video...

Miracle #3: Cardinal John O'Connor, the Roman Catholic Bishop of New York, now in his 70s, has suddenly resolved to stop commenting publicly on things he knows nothing about. I presume this means there will be no more lectures about birth control...

Miracle #4: The county commissioners in Kingsville, Texas, voted unanimously to adopt a local man's suggestion that they replace "Hello" with "Heaven-o" as the official phone greeting. People offended by "hello" could simply say "hi," but I suppose that would offend the country drug enforcement officer...

Miracle #5: Even though Madalyn Murray O'Hair, her son and granddaughter vanished in 1995, it turns out that regular charges have been made and paid off on the granddaughter's American Express Card and on Madalyn's account at Lord & Taylor (or as she prefers to call it, "& Taylor"). It is ironic that the world's most prominent atheist has proven not only that there is life after death, but also that there is debt after death.

However, lest you think God is suddenly on a roll, Satan, too, has scored his share of victories. For instance, a recent poll found that only 34 percent of priests in the Church of England could name all Ten Commandments from memory. Only the two dealing with adultery and coveting thy neighbor's wife were remembered by a majority of the priests. It sounds as if Prince Charles will make a dandy head of the Church of England.

Also giving a black eye to Christianity last month was the Blessed Victory Church in Manassas, Virginia, which was forced to move out of its building after the neighbors complained that their gospel music was too loud and annoying. The neighbors were the Exposed Temptations Tattoo Shop and Bubba's Cycle Shack, which couldn't hear its Harleys over the hymns.

And in Brazil, evangelist Neide Maria Begalli reportedly became so upset at her heathen husband's "nasty habits" of sneaking cigarettes and drinking on weekends that she cut off his penis with a kitchen knife while he slept. The penis was reattached, and Maria ended up in a psychiatric ward, where she presumably had to explain why his habits are nastier than hers.

MEDICAL MIRACLES!

Since not everyone can be cured of nasty afflictions by letting Neide Maria Begalli lay her hands upon you, we are lucky that medical science continues to march forward. On that topic, the satirical journal *Annals of Improbable Research* recently handed out its annual "Ignobel Prizes" for the dumbest articles published in a scientific journal in 1996. The physics prize went to a study on why buttered toast always falls butter side down. Two Norwegians won the biology prize for "Effect of Ale, Garlic and Soured Cream on the Appetite of Leeches." And Harald Moi of Oslo won the public health Ignobel Prize for a paper called "Transmission of Gonorrhea Through an Inflatable Doll," which showed the importance of always using a condom, even if your girlfriend is made of rubber herself.

But as silly as some doctors can be, it's still better to take their advice than to try to heal thyself, as illustrated by our last two news items. The Australian Medical Journal reports that a Melbourne electrician ended up in the hospital with lead levels three times the safe limit. It seems he tried to quit smoking on the job by chewing electrical cable instead, at the rate of one yard per day for the past ten years. No word on whether he displayed any brain damage, although if he did, he probably already had it when he came up with this idea.

And finally, the Budapest College of Medicine Quarterly reported that a Hungarian bus driver was suing a "naturopathic" doctor who prescribed a paprika enema to cure his constipation. The cure (pardon the expression) backfired, leaving the driver's bottom so burned, he couldn't sit down on the job and so lost a month's wages. The doctor claims it's the patient's fault, because he tried to cure himself more quickly by using twice as much paprika as prescribed. Being Hungarian, he apparently assumed that there was no such thing as too much paprika.

Well, that's all the vital news I have room for this month. Gosh, how have you people survived without me?!

Living Dinosaurs at MIOS

by John Blanton

We sort of lost touch with MIOS (Metroplex Institute of Origin Science) while I was preoccupied with other matters, so on February 4th I dropped in for their monthly meeting. David Bassett was their speaker for the night, and the subject was "Living Dinosaurs." David heads up the science department at the Ovilla Christian School south of Dallas. His talk centered on the idea that (if I may paraphrase) "Evolutionists tell us that dinosaurs have become extinct, but since they existed up into modern times, the evolutionists must be all wet and so is evolution itself."

David Bassett presented a number of cases he said argued for the existence of dinosaurs in recent times. Winged dinosaurs, he said, are evidenced by many instances in literature. He exhibited an illustration of the hilt of Beowulf's sword, which showed a winged serpent-like critter, an obvious reference to a pterodactyl or a pterosaur. Beowulf, who lived from 495 slew Grendel, who was likely a modern dinosaur-like beast. He also cited many references to "flying snakes," which were surely sightings of the same animals. Further, the February 8, 1856 "Illustrated London News" showed a live pterodactyl found in France, and 1886 and 1890 issues of the "Tombstone Epitaph" contained a photo of a pterosaur and told of some local riders who encountered and killed a pterosaur that had an 8-foot long head. Finally, Bassett cited Carl Baugh's reports on pterodactyls in New Guinea last year (see the related story on the Creation Evidences Museum in the September 1996 issue of The Skeptic).

Bassett did express some concern about these flying pterosaur sightings. Creationists have concluded that the dense atmosphere preceding The Flood made it possible for these huge creatures to fly, so how could they have been flying in the 19th century!

The recovery by Japanese fishermen in 1977 of the remains of a plesiosaur is further proof that the supposedly extinct dinosaurs are still among us. Japanese scientists, who are not so hung up on evolution as American scientists, pleaded for the preservation of their find. However, the fishermen could not stand the stench and deep-sixed their catch after taking photos. The Loch Ness Monster is an additional example of a living plesiosaur. In fact, the 35 to 45-degree north latitude is the lake monster's home ground from June through August. They winter in the Indian Ocean.

Additionally, there is the remarkable evidence of living dinosaurs in the Congo region. Although Polaroid photos of these specimens were ruined by the awful climate there, Bassett did have a copy of a copy of an audio tape that was made by a recent expedition. On this tape we could clearly hear the popping sound made by the dinosaurs as they bellowed just a short distance away in the forest. The high atmospheric pressure in this region accounts for the viability of these ancient species. The pressure there is 1.3 to 1.5 times normal atmospheric pressure. This is because of the dense vegetation, which keeps the air quite humid. Of course, water vapor is denser than dry air, David Bassett told the audience.

When he is not contributing to the science education of students at Ovilla Christian School, Bassett works the front desk at Carl Baugh's Creation Evidences Museum near Glen Rose. Check it out. Also, while at the MIOS meeting I took the opportunity to purchase a copy of D. Russell Humphreys' recent book *Starlight and Time*. Humphreys is a legitimate Ph.D. working at Sandia National Laboratories, and his book explains how we can be seeing light from stars and galaxies millions of light years away while the universe is less than ten thousand years old. Watch for a review in a coming issue of *The Skeptic*.