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## Preparedness Expo '99: A Skeptic's field report

By Danny Barnett

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Apologies to Rev. Ivan Stang of the Church of the SubGenius. I couldn't resist using one of your lines from HIGH WEIRDNESS BY MAIL.

GET READY!" screams the front cover of my program guide to Preparedness Expo '99. For those who are unfamiliar with Preparedness Expo, it is a travelling marketplace and seminar "dedicated to educating and preparing people for the future possibilities that lie ahead; economic instabilities, natural disasters, political unrest, threats to our personal freedom, health & well-being." Sounds like a worthwhile effort; after all, who wants to be left helpless in the middle of a hurricane or a massive power blackout – or worse? On top of all that, Y2K is just around the corner, so this year's Preparedness Expo was dedicated to teaching people how to ride out the upcoming computer crisis.

When I walked into the Expo, which was held at the Big Town Expo Hall (about 10 miles east of downtown Dallas) on April 9-11, I found myself surrounded by vendors hawking all sorts of items. Dehydrated food, Israeli gas masks, night vision goggles, windmills, cooking equipment, portable generators, and even Geiger counters were for sale at the Expo. I'll be perfectly honest with you; I think some of that stuff is very useful even if there isn't an emergency. My fondest hope is that anyone who bought these materials will never have to see how well they work in desperate situations.

However, there was a strong current of anti-government militias, conspiracy theories, quack medicine, white supremacist rants, fringe science, and strange prophecies gleaned from Biblical writings that permeated Preparedness Expo '99. In short, it was a skeptic's smorgasbord.

### End-Time Profits and Conspiracies Du Jour

At Preparedness Expo '99, I saw plenty of books, videotapes, and audiocassettes produced by fundamentalist Christian speakers who proclaimed that we were living in "the End Times." Their prophecies ranged from the run-of-the-mill to the bizarre, often echoing the sentiment that there may not be a Preparedness Expo 2000.

One of these prophets, Texe Marrs, was also a keynote speaker at the Expo. Marrs conducted two lectures at the Expo: “Days of Hunger, Days of Chaos – The Coming Great Food Shortages in America” and “Y2K – Hidden Dangers of Martial Law and a Police State.” He has also written extensively on the dangers posed to Christianity by the New Age movement and secretive one-world government cabals; his publications were for sale at his booth.

After I left the Expo, I learned that the Prophecy Club had set up shop there; I’ve been kicking myself for missing their booth. Based in Kansas, the Prophecy Club sells books and videotapes replete with exotic visions and bizarre conspiracy theories. Are there singing flowers in heaven? Did black helicopters blast a dissident’s home in south Dallas? Are NATO airstrikes against the Serbs preparing American troops to confiscate guns from their own good Christian countrymen? Prophecy Club speakers have made all of these claims – and more.

There were so many conspiracy theories represented at the Expo that I cannot do justice to all of them in a short article. There were also plenty of folks ranging from the Militia of Montana to the Republic of Texas (yep, they’re still around) offering materials that outlined exactly who was to blame for our sorry state of affairs. Depending on whom you talk to, the blame rests on the shoulders of the United Nations, the Trilateral Commission, the Bildebergers, the Communists, the Bavarian Illuminati, the Council on Foreign Relations, and/or the Jews.

Fortunately, there were plenty of books available to help people prepare for when one of the conspiracies actually shifted into high gear. One dealer sold books on how to make everything from apple cider to maple syrup to VX nerve gas – one of the deadliest poisons known to mankind. Of course, if chemical weapons aren’t your style, this dealer also sold books on how to manufacture silencers for firearms.

### **Sieg Hei... I Mean, God Bless America!**

Racism was evident at Preparedness Expo ’99 just by looking at some of the book vendors. Anti-Semitic writings such as *The Turner Diaries* and the fraudulent *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* were for sale by various dealers. Some of these writings tried to link racist ideology with other issues such as gun control and national sovereignty; one book available at the Expo even stated that the peace movement “is nothing more than a satanic campaign for one-world government and Godless Jewish utopia of socialism.”<sup>1</sup> Peters, Pete. *Everything You Wanted to Know (and Preachers were Afraid to Tell You) about Gun Control*. LaPorte, CO; Scriptures for America; n.d. Pg. 8.

Why is there still so much animosity towards Jews? To be brief, many fundamentalist Christians subscribe to a theology known as Anglo-Israelism, which teaches that white Europeans are actually descended from ten Israelite tribes (known as the “Ten Lost Tribes”) that were supposedly scattered throughout the Middle East after Babylon sacked Israel in ancient times. One particularly extreme variant of Anglo-Israelism known as Christian Identity also teaches that those whom we refer to as “Jews” today are nothing more than barbaric half-breeds. Many Identity lecturers teach that America is under occupation by a force known as the Zionist Occupational Government, or ZOG for short, and that the Jews secretly own and control everything.

History students, stop me if you’ve heard this one before...

One vendor, CPA Book Publisher, had a fairly extensive collection of anti-Semitic and Identity conspiracy writings, including *The International Jew* by industrialist Henry Ford. They also offered Holocaust revisionism materials to anybody who would buy them. I overheard one of the CPA vendors talk about Identity authors with another visitor as my eyes brushed over titles such as *Land of the ZOG* and *Israel’s Five Trillion Dollar Secret*.

### **Quacks on Parade**

Eric Jameson once remarked that “The inherent psychology of a Quack’s approach to his patient has altered very little since the dim and distant past. All that has changed is his patter.”<sup>2</sup> This was certainly evident at Preparedness Expo ’99, where various vendors were peddling all sorts of alternative medical therapies. The appeal is obvious: if Y2K does a number on civilization and medical aid becomes increasingly scarce, you’re going to have to take responsibility for your own health and well-being, right?

Dr. Len Horowitz was one of the keynote speakers at the Expo; he gave a lecture warning about the dangers posed by vaccines and cautioning people not to let their children get immunized. Another speaker, Mark Metcalf, could be seen

extolling the virtues of colloidal silver, which was being sold by several vendors at the Expo. One of these vendors, Alternative Health Products Inc., stated in the Expo's program guide that colloidal silver is an "all natural anti-bacterial, anti-viral, anti-fungal, and anti-parasitic product which is totally non-toxic" and safe for internal use. I'll speak more about colloidal silver during the May 1999 program of the North Texas Skeptics. It's not pretty.

At another booth, I saw one woman in a massage chair receiving what appeared to be a variation of Therapeutic Touch. Another vendor promoted the use of "clustered water," while two booths were devoted to magnetic therapy. Speakers at the Expo were singing the praises of homeopathy and other dubious sciences. To top it all off, when Ginny Vaughn and I attended the 1997 Expo, Ginny found one vendor who offered "field obstetrical kits" for sale. (Eek!)

What Are You Preparing For?

Would visiting Preparedness Expo '99 actually equip you in the event of an emergency? If you shop smart, you can probably find some useful items that might aid you and your loved ones in demanding situations. However, ask yourself a few pertinent questions before making any purchases, such as the following: Is that medical therapy something your own doctor would support or recommend? Can you find any hard evidence of a conspiracy trying to undermine America's national sovereignty? Does that alternative energy system seem to defy the laws of physics? Why on earth would you want to manufacture or stockpile something as dangerous as VX?

There's a lot of money to be made from Doomsday; it's been done before, and it's happening all over again. My own humble opinion is that when it comes to shopping at Preparedness Expo or any similar convention catering to those who wish to be ready for The End of Civilization as We Know It, remember the old adage: caveat emptor!

## References

1. Peters, Pete. *Everything You Wanted to Know (and Preachers were Afraid to Tell You) about Gun Control*. LaPorte, CO; Scriptures for America; n.d. Pg. 8.
2. Jameson, Eric. *The Natural History of Quackery*. Springfield, IL; Charles C. Thomas; 1961. Pg. 14.

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## The year 2000 humbug

*John Blanton Examines the Y2K Hype*

**By Danny Barnett**

The clock is ticking. With each passing day, the year 2000 approaches – as well as the dreaded Y2K computer bug, which threatens to crash computers all over the world at the start of the 21st century. But has this whole Y2K crisis been blown out of proportion?

John Blanton, secretary to the North Texas Skeptics, spoke at our April meeting on Y2K. He not only thinks that the impact of Y2K has been grossly overstated, but he also says that we don't have to wait until the year 2000 for computers to start glitching; just take a look around you and you'll see that Y2K is already causing problems.

It's important to know what Y2K is before going any further. John, who has worked with computers for decades, explained that four-digit dates are stored in computers using only the last two digits; thus 1956 would be represented as 56. Why is this so? John explained that back in 1972, he was working in an engineering consulting company in Austin on a project for Autotronics regarding gasoline pumps. Programming on a Nova computer for the project, John found out that a 4K block of memory cost a whopping \$2,000. Since then, memory prices have plummeted dramatically, but nobody ever got around to reserving more memory space for dates.

This arrangement is all well and good until you reach the year 2000, which will only be stored in computer memory as 00. The computer cannot look at that 00 and determine if it's supposed to represent 1900 or 2000. This is the Y2K

bug. It is believed that many programs will crash or malfunction on New Year's Day, thanks to Y2K. As a result, John explained that MIS-related purchases and investments have been declining, and some people have been hoarding food and even heading for the hills.

If you're waiting for Y2K to hit computers worldwide, stop waiting. John told the audience, "If this is going to be a problem with your system, it's already here. Computers don't just work in the past; they work in the future as well." Y2K-related glitches have already been reported worldwide. A computer-controlled warehouse in England is one of the first casualties; when canned tomatoes were received into the warehouse with an expiration date of 2000, the computer interpreted the date as 1900 and rejected the shipment. Boeing Aircraft has had a similar problem in trying to procure spare parts for their airplanes. Both incidents, however, are only minor inconveniences.

What about military systems? John explained that the United States does have one system that will suffer the effects of Y2K. The CHALS-X system network was originally developed by IBM Federal Systems to locate enemy transmitters; John worked on it a while back. The CHALS-X network's remote stations keep in touch with each other through computer-controlled radio signals. Because the CHALS-X computers are not Y2K-compliant, the system will fail for a few seconds after midnight on January 1, 2000 – but only for a few seconds. (If it's any consolation, CHALS-X cannot calculate distances across the 180° meridian, where longitudes change from +180° to -180°.)

If you're still worried about computer glitches as a result of Y2K, John stated that people have been screwing up computers for years before anyone even coined the phrase "Y2K." He placed the blame on really bad software, incredibly bad customer service, fraud, embezzlement, and sabotage. John asked, "How many of you have run Windows for more than a few days without having to reboot the system?" Don't feel bad; even Bill Gates had to reboot a Windows 95 machine during a big press conference.

As if all this weren't enough; Y2K isn't the only major glitch on the horizon. There's the 9/9/99 glitch, which should kick in on September 9, 1999. Programmers often used this date in the 1980's as an expiration date for archived data that wasn't supposed to have an expiration date. In addition, if you use a UNIX-based system, be prepared for the Y2038 Bug. UNIX keeps the date and time as the number of seconds that have elapsed since 12:00am, January 1, 1970. It keeps this count in a 32-digit signed integer, which will provide for an accurate count until January 19, 2038, when the number of seconds tallied will finally overflow.

With all this information at hand, who does John think is going to benefit the most from Y2K? Lawyers. At least 78 lawsuits related to Y2K have already been filed; Lloyds of London predicts that claims could surpass \$1 trillion worldwide. Produce Palace, a gourmet grocery store based in Warren, Michigan, may have filed the first Y2K lawsuit. Back in 1995, their computer system crashed when customers used credit cards with expiration dates ending in "00." Produce Palace placed 200 service calls to the firm that made their system, but got no response. (This ties in with John's comment on bad customer service.) Produce Palace eventually won a settlement of \$260,000.

Finally, John offered these practical suggestions for riding out Y2K:

- DON'T PANIC.
- If you invest, consider steering clear of companies that are slow to upgrade their systems.
- Check your bills and payments – just to be safe.
- Finally, don't add to the problem. John's advice: "Friends don't let friends write bad software."

All of us at the North Texas Skeptics thank John Blanton for his lecture, and we hope to hear more from him soon. In the meantime, if you would like to learn more about Y2K, John recommends the following Web sites:

[Http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/](http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/)

[rsandler/Y2KFAQ.htm](http://rsandler/Y2KFAQ.htm)

<http://unix.cc.wmich.edu/rea/Y2K/FAQ.html>

<http://www.comlinks.com/mag/faq.htm>

[http://www.pprcorp.com/y2k/y2kfaq\\_m98.html](http://www.pprcorp.com/y2k/y2kfaq_m98.html)

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## POST-RATIONAL

*The PQ Test*

by **Jimmy Reynolds**

Are you a conspiracy buff? Find out with our exclusive, self scoring PQ (Paranoia Quotient) test.

Directions: It's simple. Each of the ten questions has four possible answers. Select the answer that you think is closest to the truth, then see the scoring guide at the end of the test. This is not a scientific test. Scientists don't know everything anyway.

1. What is the government really hiding at Area 51?
  - A. Secret new aircraft and related technology
  - B. An illegal toxic waste dump.
  - C. UFOs and captured aliens.
  - D. The Russian submarine from Hunt for Red October.
  
2. Who really operates the mysterious black helicopters?
  - A. The U.S. Army. Dark green paint looks black against a bright sky, especially to sleepy-eyed Art Bell fans.
  - B. Some rich guys playing a practical joke with their corporate JetRanger.
  - C. The sinister Shadow Government's secret force of UN monitors.
  - D. "I seen one of 'em out between Idalou and Post. What would a helicopter be doin' way out there? They gottabe UFOs in disguise."
  
3. Who really killed JFK?
  - A. Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone.
  - B. A small gang of conspirators
  - C. An international conspiracy involving the CIA, FBI, the Pentagon, the media, the Mafia, [16,235 words deleted], space aliens, Atlantis survivors and the Plainview Flat Earth Society.
  - D. Nobody. He's alive and well and living across from Elvis at Area 51.
  
4. Why do mainstream scientists reject Creationism?
  - A. It's a convoluted pseudo-science with no real scientific merit.
  - B. They think it's a crude attempt to sneak religion into the classroom
  - C. It threatens their prestige and job security interest.
  - D. They've been brainwashed by local witch covens and devil-cults.
  
5. Why did Art Bell announce his sudden retirement last fall?
  - A. It was probably a publicity stunt.
  - B. He had a sudden attack of conscience and rationality.
  - C. Skeptics kept writing him nasty letters.
  - D. The real Men In Black paid him a visit.

6. Why did Bell un-retire just as suddenly?

- A. The wave of free publicity had exhausted itself.
- B. Revenue projections cured him of conscience and rationality.
- C. Psychics promised to protect him from Men In Black and hostile skeptics.
- D. He is a man of vision and courage who will accept any risk to put the Truth before the American people.

7. Who really runs the United States?

- A. Our elected leaders and a horde of civil-service bureaucrats.
- B. Big Business and the Media.
- C. Evil secret societies who manipulate history from behind the scenes.
- D. The aliens at Area 51, with the help of highly paid agents who masquerade as skeptics and scoffers. [the checks are in the mail-JR]

8. Why can't a new Suburban get 150 miles per gallon?

- A. There isn't that much chemical energy in a gallon of gasoline.
- B. The technology would cost more than anyone is willing to pay.
- C. The car companies aren't as smart as the guys who advertise in the back of mechanic's magazines.
- D. Oil companies and car makers have suppressed the magic carburetor that would make it possible.

9. Why has SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) so far failed to locate alien intelligence.

- A. The universe is very large and SETI lacks adequate funds for a faster search.
- B. There may not be any aliens close enough to contact.
- C. They HAVE succeeded and the government is covering it up.
- D. The whole thing is a put-on. Aliens actually run SETI.

10. Why do UFO advocates place such great emphasis on cover-ups and conspiracies?

- A. They have to account for the lack of hard evidence.
- B. The movement attracts people who are pre-disposed to believe in "hidden truths".
- C. Excessive secrecy fuels suspicion and speculation.
- D. There's obviously a cover-up. The proof had to go somewhere.

11. What incentive do the world's governments and scientists have to cover up the reality of alien visitations?

- A. It doesn't matter. It's impossible that every government and almost every reputable astronomer in the world would go along with it for fifty seconds, let alone fifty years.
- B. None. The military and most scientists would love for alien invaders/visitors to show up.
- C. The worldwide shadow government knows that people would panic if they knew the Truth.
- D. The economy would collapse if Earthlings knew about alien stuff like immortality pills, free energy, and big houses for everyone.

Scoring Guide: Give yourself 1 point for each "A" answer, 2 for each "B", 3 for a "C", and 4 for a "D". Find your PQ below:

10-15 points: You're a skeptic, but you may find that hard to believe.

16-29 points: You can be a consumer-unit in the new age of unstructured knowledge. You won't be alone; there's one

born every minute.

30-40 points: Sell your guns and seek professional help.

*Jimmy Reynolds is a science teacher, a licensed aviation mechanic and the father of two grown children. He is a native Texan and lives in Lubbock*

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## ***NEW LOOK AND NAME***

Readers will note a new look to an old friend. Yes, in consideration of the approaching millennium the NTS newsletter is changing.

We decided to change the appearance of the banner for two reasons. 1) The deep black background sometimes caused printing problems. Not all xerographic printers handle this much black easily. 2) We were getting the feel that the white on black was sending a foreboding message to casual observers. Quite frankly, we decided it was time to lighten up.

While we were at it we decided to change the name, as well. The new name, "The North Texas Skeptic," helps to differentiate us from all those other rags out there that call themselves "The Skeptic." At least we are the "North Texas" Skeptic.

So, there you have it. The ruling body of the NTS, the Board of Directors, in their infinite wisdom (and absolute authority) have settled on the new name. That's final. What's not settled yet is the banner style. We had a vote on that and could not agree. So, next month we will present the other choice. Let us know what you think. Not that it will do any good, for after all we are the North Texas Skeptics, not the North Texas Democrats. Of course, the NTS elections are just 9 months away. See you there.

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