



The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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The prince and the frog

A Modern Parable

By John Blanton

Richard Dawkins' distaste for creationists is well known. He is the author of *The Blind Watchmaker* and a number of other books that argue for evolution, all the while speaking ill of creationism. He has posted the following on his Web page concerning an encounter with creationists that has become famous among those who follow the debate on the Internet:

In September 1997, I allowed an Australian film crew into my house in Oxford without realising that their purpose was creationist propaganda. In the course of a suspiciously amateurish interview, they issued a truculent challenge to me to "give an example of a genetic mutation or an evolutionary process which can be seen to increase the information in the genome." It is the kind of question only a creationist would ask in that way, and it was at this point I tumbled to the fact that I had been duped into granting an interview to creationists—a thing I normally don't do, for good reasons. In my anger I refused to discuss the question further, and told them to stop the camera. However, I eventually withdrew my peremptory termination of the interview as a whole. This was solely because they pleaded with me that they had come all the way from Australia specifically in order to interview me. Even if this was a considerable exaggeration, it seemed, on reflection, ungenerous to tear up the legal release form and throw them out. I therefore relented.

<http://www.onthenet.com.au/~stear/dawkinschallenge.htm>



Richard Dawkins

(Photo from his Web site)

From a frog to a prince

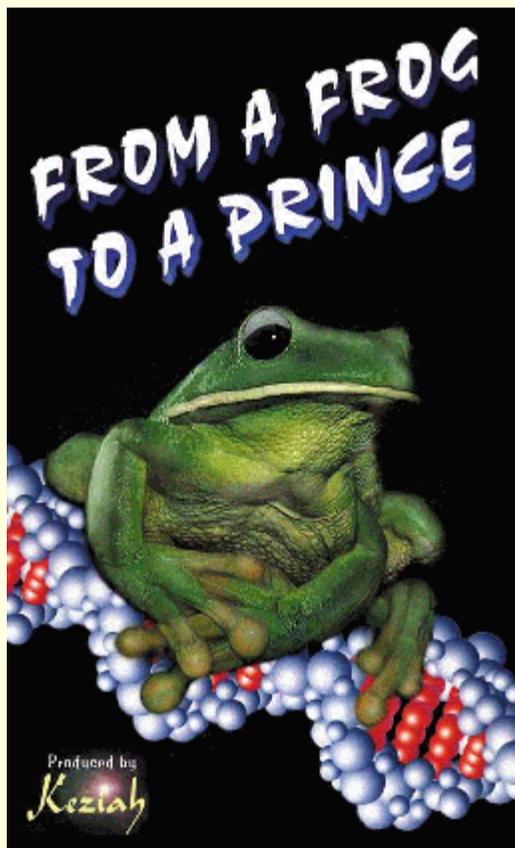


Figure from the AIG Web page below

He goes on to complain that his generosity was amply rewarded when the video was released. The producers depicted him as being completely stumped when asked this *simple* question about information content. They see his protracted silence (19 seconds in the original, 11 in the final video) following the question as proof that mainstream science has no answer for this basic inquiry into the legitimacy of evolution. The creationist Web site, *Answers in Genesis Online*, has a page about it titled *Skeptics Choke on a Frog: was Dawkins caught on the hop?* —

Our new video *From a Frog to a Prince* [see the figure—ed.] is having a beneficial effect. It illustrates the amazing design in living things, and the encyclopedic information stored in the DNA, required as a blueprint for all the designs. It also shows that mutations and natural selection merely remove information, not add information, as particles-to-people evolution requires.

One of its highlights is the stumping of the ardently atheistic evolutionist Richard Dawkins by the simple question: ‘Professor Dawkins, can you give an example of a genetic mutation or an evolutionary process which can be seen to increase the information in the genome?’

If anyone should know any true scientific (i.e. observable and testable) evidence that mutations and natural selection can add information, Dawkins should. However, the video shows that Dawkins was unable to provide any experimental evidence, and gave an ‘answer’ completely unrelated to the question.

<http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/3907.asp>

It would appear that Dawkins has been caught in a game of "stump the professor." It's a thing I have seen often in conversations with creationists. "Oh, yeah. Well if evolution is true, then how do you explain ..." What usually follows

is some arcane scientific issue that defies response except by a specialist in the field. Of course all of this doesn't work on me, because I can just say "I don't know."

Dawkins responds

Actually, in this case the creationists asked the wrong person the wrong question. Although he declined to take the bait during the on-camera interview (giving the creationists their open shot), he has since returned to the issue with a vengeance. His Web page has the title *The "Information Challenge,"* and it explores the issue at length, starting with a description of Claude Shannon's quantitative concept of information and following up by explaining how this relates to *information* contained in genomes.

Information theory is something that caught the creationists' fancy some time ago, and they have been trying to make points with it since. A tenet of evolution is that modern, complex organisms, such as us, descended from some fairly crude ancestors. At one time there was an organism that would pass for a bacterium, and we are its direct descendents. So, here's the problem. Where did all the information come from to run the sequence of operations that started with this bacterium and finally produced a critter that could drink beer and ride a horse?

As mentioned in the AIG Web page, the creationists contend that mutation and natural selection can only remove information. In this they are wrong, but it takes more than a few sound bites to tell the story. So I will try. Those who have studied biology can skip the next.

Information and natural selection

Mutations do add information, though most of it is useless or worse. If you're an antelope a mutation might change the way you process lactic acid, making you tire after a short run. That's not good. However, a different mutation could enable your cousin in the antelope herd to run a little faster and farther. Good for him.

All these mutations feed into the antelope gene pool, sort of scrambling the odds for survival. Creationists will likely buy into this argument, but they will tell you that this scrambling is not beneficial to the collective species, because most of the injected information is useless—even wrong if the intent is to win the race with the cheetahs. The result should be a herd that is collectively less able to survive.

That's where natural selection comes in. Natural selection removes data (information?) from the gene pool.

To understand how elimination of data can increase the real information content of messages, consider the tale of the general's messengers. Two messengers come trotting in from the front. Each hands the general a piece of paper. On one is written the message, "The enemy is attacking from the north." The other message says, "The enemy is retreating." The general is confused. One of the messages is obviously worthless, and he has no good basis for making a battle decision.

Enter the third messenger. He does not carry anything in his hand. He approaches the general and takes the two pieces of paper. He examines them both and tears up one, giving the other back to the general. He leaves without saying a word, but he has left the general with valuable information. The general now makes his battle decision.

Natural selection is like that. It takes messages that, for example, make an antelope run slowly, and it throws them away. By this mechanism useless/harmful information winds up in the belly of a cheetah. Only the valuable stuff remains, and that was Darwin's contribution to science—a contribution that would have won him the Nobel prize had there been one at the time.

The creationists press on

It's not likely the creationists will ever buy the whole explanation of evolution by mutation and natural selection, so Dawkins was correct in supposing it was fruitless to try to explain it on camera. My own experience is that all

creationists will always reject the argument for natural selection. While the Young Earth Creationists (YECs) will argue that the Earth is about 10,000 years old, the Old Earth Creationists (OECs) will agree that the Earth is billions of years old. While some OECs have even conceded common ancestry of all life, they still object to the creation of our species by naturalistic processes. The idea that we are an accident of nature is repugnant to all creationists, and that's why they don't like Dawkins *a lot*.

The AIG Web page makes an interesting point about the creationist movement—at least a significant segment of it. The fact that they consider this score over Dawkins such a major coup speaks of the level to which the argument can go. Ask a scientist a pointed question, and he says "Excuse me?" You've won a victory for creationism. It's as though science is some great game of tag.

Anyone doing serious science is not going to be encouraged to enter this mud fight, and it's seldom that any do. Dawkins is one of the few scientists to take the trouble to engage the creationists head on, and he suffers their attempts to heap indignities on him.

However, few believe Dawkins actually "suffers" from these attacks. The creationists' attacks on mainstream science bring the real issues out for exposure to public scrutiny. In this case, a serious person might ask, "Is this they best they can do? Where's the 'creation science?' Where's the real evidence?"

The world wonders.

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Will America burn?

A Skeptical Look at the Prophecies of Dumitru Duduman

By Danny Barnett (dannybarnett@yahoo.com)

As the year 2000 is slowly drawing closer, we're starting to see more and more prophecies foretelling war, economic chaos, and widespread destruction. One person responsible for some of these predictions is prophet/faith healer Dumitru Duduman, a native of Romania who preached to gatherings across America about the coming troubles our nation would endure because of its sin and corruption. For reasons that will soon become obvious, Duduman's prophetic utterances bear a close look from a skeptical perspective.

Much of the information presented in this article originally appeared on a leaflet that I printed a while back. This tract (also titled "Will America Burn?") was distributed at Preparedness Expo '99 when it stopped in Dallas earlier this year. I left a stack of these leaflets on a table where everyone could place business advertisements, religious tracts, and meeting announcements.

It was interesting to see some of the responses this tract generated. Some people simply grabbed it along with a handful of other flyers for later perusal. Others actually looked at it for a moment or two before tucking it away with their other materials. However, I observed one woman who picked up the tract, looked at it, and then tossed it down in what appeared to be disgust. She then moved down the table, hesitated, came back to the leaflet and dropped it in her bag.

It has been suggested to me that this woman finally took the tract so she could show it to her pastor or like-minded believers and warn them about some mean ol' skeptic who was trying to discredit a true latter-day prophet of God. We at the North Texas Skeptics want to make it perfectly clear that we work hard to avoid *a priori* dismissal of unusual claims, including those of Dumitru Duduman. His life story and his prophecies concerning the future of America, however, remain a source of controversy. Let's take a closer look.

From Army Officer to Bible Smuggler

The story of Dumitru Duduman has been published in the 1992 autobiography *Through the Fire Without Burning*; a truncated version later appeared in *35 Prophecies, Dreams, & Visions For America*, produced by the Prophecy Club in 1997. Both describe how Duduman, as a Romanian army officer, once tried to intercept shipments of Bibles being smuggled into Romania over the Black Sea. One day, as he was questioning a missionary who was trying to smuggle Bibles, Duduman was supposedly chastised by a messenger from God. Shaken by the experience, Duduman released the missionary.

After that initial experience, followed soon afterwards by his dismissal from military service, Duduman became a devout Christian and started smuggling Bibles into Romania and Russia with the aid of fellow Christians on both sides of the Romanian border. This occurred during the regime of the brutal Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, who was not known for religious tolerance.

According to Duduman's autobiography, Romanian police eventually arrested him on suspicion of smuggling Bibles; they tortured Duduman for five months in an effort to discover who his accomplices were. The tortures included grueling sessions on an electric chair, where Duduman was electrocuted almost to the point of death in order to get him to talk. He was finally released when the officer in charge of his torture suddenly died from a massive hemorrhage. The autobiography states that the torturer's unexpected demise was a result of divine intervention.

Finally, after four more years of smuggling Bibles, Duduman was exiled to the United States in 1984 along with his family. According to Duduman, that's when his real story began.

"America Will Burn"

The Duduman family reportedly had a hard time settling into California; because of the difficulty in finding anyone that rented to families with small children, Dumitru and his family had to stay in a dirty, unfurnished apartment. One night, as Dumitru contemplated his plight, God sent the angel Gabriel to deliver an apocalyptic message to him. Duduman has claimed that Gabriel showed him California, Florida, and the cities of Las Vegas and New York City, saying that in one day they would all burn. Therefore, it was urgent that Duduman call Americans to call upon God for repentance. According to *Through the Fire Without Burning*, the following exchange then took place:

I said, "How will America burn? America is the most powerful country in the world. Why did you bring us here to burn? Why didn't you at least let us die where ALL the Dudumans have died?"

He said, "Remember this, Dumitru. The Russian spies have discovered where the nuclear warehouses are in America. When the Americas will think that it is peace and safety – from the middle of the country, some of the people will start fighting against the government. The government will be busy with internal problems. Then from the ocean, from Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico,..." (He told me two other countries, but I didn't remember what they were.) "...they will bomb the nuclear warehouses. When they explode, America will burn!"¹

Duduman was given charge by the angel to travel America, exhorting people to stop sinning and to turn their hearts back to God. Gabriel warned Duduman that severe punishment would result if Duduman withheld anything from the public.

Since that time, Duduman has appeared in churches all over America, delivering the warning from God to growing numbers and relaying new visions as he received them. Duduman has also coordinated delivery of Bibles and food to poor Christians in Romania – an activity that increased after Nicolae Ceausescu was overthrown and killed by revolutionaries, when Dumitru could finally visit his homeland again.

The More Things Change...

Duduman eventually reached the attention of Stan Johnson, founder of the Prophecy Club. Based in Topeka, Kansas, the Prophecy Club produces radio and television programs which are broadcast throughout America; speakers who appear on the Prophecy Club often speak about Y2K, black helicopters, spy satellites, end-time visions, and secret codes supposedly found in Biblical writings.

Johnson, apparently convinced that Duduman's visions were truly of divine origin, eventually released a booklet called *35 Prophecies, Dreams, & Visions For America* in which Duduman's visions were reprinted. He also produced videotapes of Duduman's speeches, and I understand that Johnson even had Duduman's "America Will Burn" vision printed in *USA Today* some time ago.

However, certain portions of the "America Will Burn" vision were mysteriously changed in *35 Prophecies*. Contrast the following reading with the earlier excerpt from *Through the Fire Without Burning*.

[The angel] said, "The Russian spies have discovered where the most powerful nuclear missiles are in America. It will start with the world calling for "peace, peace." Then there will be an internal revolution in America, started by the Communists. Some of the people will start fighting against the government. The government will be busy with internal problems. Then, from the oceans, Russia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Central America, Mexico, and two other countries which I cannot remember, will attack! The Russians will bombard the nuclear missile silos in America. America will burn."²

When this account of the "America Will Burn" vision is compared with the earlier account in *Through the Fire Without Burning*, it seems that the two don't fit together very well.

In *Through the Fire*, Duduman merely stated that "from the middle of the country, some of the people will start fighting against the government." Who are these people? Communists? Neo-Nazis? The Five Percent Nation? Native Americans trying to establish an independent homeland? Communists were not explicitly credited with starting a revolution in America until *35 Prophecies* was released.

There's more. Duduman stated in his autobiography that the angel told him that Cuba, Nicaragua, and Mexico would attack America. Two other nations were mentioned, but Duduman forgot what they were. In *35 Prophecies*, Russia and Central America are added to the list of hostile nations, and this time it appears that *the angel Gabriel* can't remember the other two countries!

Apparently, Duduman's angel also has an unclear grasp of geography. Central America isn't even a nation, but rather a group of independent nations located in between Mexico and Columbia. Nicaragua happens to be one of those nations.

...The More Things Stay the Same

Naturally, whenever someone makes a prophecy about future events, the question of credibility comes into play. Why should anyone accept Duduman's visions as revelations from God? The Prophecy Club's litmus test for prophets appears to come from Deuteronomy 18:21, in which it is stated that if a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, and the events prophesied do not occur, then the prophet can be ignored. So what about Dumitru Duduman? According to *35 Prophecies*:

The proof that this message is from God: The thirteen prophecies foretold by the angel Gabriel to Dumitru actually came to pass.

They are: **1.** Dumitru would not die. **2.** His enemy would die. **3.** He would not get caught again. **4.** He would carry Bibles for 4 more years. **5.** Be exiled to America. **6.** He was given the year **7.** Month **8.** Day, and **9.** Hour he would be exiled. **10.** Someone would give him a bed. **11.** Someone would pay his rent. **12.** Someone would give him a car, and **13.** A bucket of honey.³

Okay, let's take the last four prophecies. In *Through the Fire Without Burning*, Gabriel made this statement to Duduman after delivering the "America Will Burn" vision:

"As a sign that I have spoken to you, tomorrow before you wake I will send someone to bring you a bed, and at noon I will send you a car and a bucket of honey. After which, I will send someone to pay your rent."⁴

Here's how the Prophecy Club later published the message:

So you know that I truly have been sent by God. [sic] Tomorrow, at 9:00 AM, someone will come to give you a bed. At

10:30 AM someone will come to pay your rent. At noon, someone will bring you a car, and give you a bucket of honey.
5

Both accounts seem consistent on three of these prophecies: the bed, the car, and the bucket of honey. It should be noted that the Prophecy Club version gives a time of 9:00 AM which did not appear in the autobiographical version, but Dumitru could very well have still been in bed by then.

The rent prophecy, however, throws everything else into doubt. The account in *Through the Fire Without Burning* states that the rent payment would come "after noon," while the Prophecy Club account says that payment would come at 10:30.

If you're going to claim that a prophecy comes from God, it is imperative that you get your facts straight – especially if an angel threatens to punish you if you screw up.

Duduman has told of many visions and messages that he reportedly received since that initial visit from the angel who never studied geography and apparently couldn't remember what God told him in the first place. One of these visions was titled "When Will It Happen?" Unveiled by Duduman in 1991, it informs Americans that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and vice versa.

The vision carries a cryptic message at the end. As expressed in *Through the Fire Without Burning*, if the people of America will repent and turn back to God, "they will make it through the second day to the third day." ⁶ In *35 Prophecies*, however, it says that if Americans repent, "they will make it to the 2000 year mark. If they do not, they will not make it to the 2000th year." ⁷

2000th year of what? Was Duduman referring to the year 2000 on the Gregorian calendar or the Julian calendar? Was he referring to 2000 years after the birth of Christ? 2000 years after America achieved its independence? Or was it a reference to the 2000th anniversary of this prophecy? As for the reference to "the second day" and "the third day," I'm afraid I'm still in the dark. Something tells me Bishop James Ussher's timeline for the age of the universe comes into play, but in any case, it would help if Duduman were more specific on the matter.

	Through the Fire Without Burning (1992)	35 Prophecies, Dreams, & Visions For America (1997)
Missionary stopped by Duduman on the Black Sea	Deig (28)	Dave (1)
Duduman imprisoned in small cell situated above a cold river	After being beaten by two colonels (102)	After being detained in a dark, rat-infested cell (3)
Romanian colonel who died while supervising Duduman's interrogation	Colonel Presteniuc (113)	Colonel Prestov (3)
Revolution in America started by Communists in Duduman's "America Will Burn" vision	Not mentioned	Yes (4)
Nations that attack America in Duduman's "America Will Burn" vision	Cuba, Nicaragua, Mexico, two others not remembered by Duduman (144, 161)	Russia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Central America, Mexico, two others not remembered by the angel (4)
God makes Russian-led coalition of nations attack Israel in "America Will Burn" vision	Not mentioned	Yes (4)
Scriptures recommended by Gabriel	Jeremiah 51: 8-15; Revelation 18; Zechariah 14 (145, 162)	Jeremiah 51: 8-15; Revelation 18 (4)
Gabriel's prophecy of rent payment	After noon (145)	"At 10:30 AM" (4)
"The Vision of the Mountain" received by Duduman in June 1989	Received in Wisconsin (165)	Received in Oregon (5)
If America repents and turns back to God, according to Duduman's "When Will It Happen" vision in 1991	"They will make it through the second day to the third day" (170)	"They will make it to the 2000 year mark" (5)

The True Test of a Prophet

Remember that the Prophecy Club claimed that Duduman's prophecies could be trusted because the thirteen prophecies given to him concerning his own life came to pass. Back to the credibility issue once again. Who witnessed the prophecies besides Duduman? Does the Prophecy Club accept Duduman's visions at face value simply because of his say-so, or does he actually have proof to back up his claims?

Skeptics have fairly high standards for prophets to meet. Their prophecies must be clear and specific, leaving little room for misinterpretation. Their prophecies must be verifiable by independent sources, if at all possible. Above all else, however, their prophecies *must come true*.

I'm not saying that Duduman's prophecies have no chance of coming true; that would be a very presumptuous statement on my part. Still, Dumitru Duduman still risks falling into the same category as Jeane Dixon and Charles Taze Russell if his visions fail him. Unfortunately, there are still many inconsistencies in Duduman's life story and visions that must be reconciled, as exhibited in the accompanying table.

In light of the conflicting testimony, the hazy details, and the contradictions that cast doubt upon what are supposedly revelations by the Lord's representatives, it seems that an interview with Duduman would be necessary to clear up all of these discrepancies.

Sadly, however, such an interview can never happen now – after a lengthy illness, Dumitru Duduman died in his native Romania on May 5, 1997.

References

- 1 Duduman, Dumitru. *Through the Fire Without Burning*. 1992; Hand of Help, Inc.; Fullerton, CA. Pp. 143-144.
- 2 Duduman, Dumitru. "The Message." *35 Prophecies, Dreams, & Visions For America*. 1997; Prophecy Club; Topeka, KS. Pg. 4.
- 3 Johnson, Stan (?); *35 Prophecies, Dreams, & Visions For America*; pg. 1.
- 4 Duduman; *Through the Fire Without Burning*; pg. 145.
- 5 Duduman; *35 Prophecies, Dreams, & Visions For America*; pg. 1.
- 6 Duduman; *Through the Fire Without Burning*; pg. 170.
- 7 Duduman; *35 Prophecies, Dreams, & Visions For America*; pg. 5.

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A Medium Tale

The following has been floating around the Net for months. We hope you haven't already seen it. — Ed.

For months, Mrs. Pitzel had been nagging her husband to go with her to the seance parlor of Madame Freda. "Milty, she's a real gypsy, and she brings the voices of the dead from the other world. We all talk to them! Last week I talked with my mother, may she rest in peace. Milty, for twenty dollars you can talk to your zayde who you miss so much!"

Milton Pitzel could not resist her appeal. At the very next seance at Madam Freda's Seance Parlor, Milty sat under the colored light at the green table, holding hands with the person on each side. All were humming, "Oooom, oooom, tonka tooom."

Madame Freda, her eyes lost in trance, was making passes over a crystal ball. "My medium...Vashtri," she called. "Come in. Who is that with you? Who? Mr. Pitzel? Milton Pitzel's Zayde?"

Milty swallowed the lump in his throat and called, "Grampa? Zayde?"

"Ah, Milteleh?" a thin voice quavered.

"Yes! Yes!" cried Milty. "This is your Milty! Zayde, are you happy in the other world?"

"Milteleh, I am in bliss. With your bubbie together, we laugh, we sing. We gaze upon the shining face of the Lord!"

A dozen more questions did Milty ask of his zayde, and each question did his zayde answer, until "So now, Milteleh, I have to go. The angels are calling. Just one more question I can answer. Ask. Ask."

"Zayde," sighed Milty, "when did you learn to speak English?"

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