

The Newsletter of The North Texas Skeptics

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June 2000

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Web news

by John Blanton

[The Web is one of the least reliable sources of information, but it's free.]

Catholic church could allow new tests on Turin shroud

Reuters news service, quoting the archbishop of Turin, reports the Roman Catholic Church could allow additional tests of the famous artifact. Previously, in 1988, three independent tests determined that the shroud was made from linen cut between 1260 and 1390—about the time it was first presented to the public.

According to the report, "We know it has to be science, and not faith, that has the last word on this mysterious image," Archbishop Severino Poletto told a news conference at the Vatican.

The Vatican does not claim the Shroud is authentic but treasures and venerates it as a powerful reminder of Christ's passion. Pope John Paul said in 1998 after travelling to Turin to pray before the Shroud that scientists should keep seeking answers to its mystery but should keep an open mind.

Remote viewing conference

Fred Sicher (sicher@sirius.com) has posted a notice of interest to RV fans:

The 2nd Annual Remote Viewing Conference is being held at Mesquite, Nevada 5/26-28 and the agenda and speakers may be seen at: <http://www.RVConference.org>

It is of interest that what until the 20th century was an arcane, occult practice has been popularized by the KGB and the CIA to the extent that with 10,000 Web sites and annual conferences, it is now a full-blown industry. As a 9 yr. MC victim, I think anybody who endures 24/7 attack and believes it is all electronic and does not involve heavy-duty remote viewing is dreaming.

I am still wondering about what "MC" means and whether many RV fans actually wasted money on air fare.

Study of premonitions

From Switzerland we have a request for participation in a study:

Within the framework of a skeptic study on Premonition on www.paranormal.ch, I am responsible for building a personality questionnaire on the Web for people who pretend having premonitory visions or dreams. In July 00, this questionnaire will be available for all on our site (and free). With the answers, we will try to find a correlation such as:

" If the subject affirms having premonitory visions (or dreams), it is because he/she has such characteristic, or the vision occurred in such condition ".

Our task is difficult: we need suggestions to draft this questionnaire with relevant questions for these subjects. According to you, the fact that a person says having premonitory visions or dreams, has to do with:

- His or her intellectual or emotional profile?
- Morphological or physiological characteristics of his/her brain?

- External conditions (human relations or material environment): During the vision itself? During the realization of the vision?
- Which kind of questions should we write in this questionnaire?

All your rational or intuitive ideas are welcome. A second study will consist in determining if these premonitions can be described with rational explanations or not. July 2000, an English version of www.paranormal.ch will be available and a statistics of your answers will also be presented. Tell me if you want to be informed.

Web site hits

If you haven't already, check out the new Web site at ntskeptics.org. A hit counter installed in March is reflecting increasing interest from members and others. Since one of the goals of the Web site is to provide an additional public forum for the NTS, we like to monitor the attention it is getting. Next time you log on, give the counter a look and watch it grow day by day. The counter is near the bottom of the main page. Figure 1 shows it one day late in May.

Contacting the North Texas Skeptics

The North Texas Skeptics
P. O. Box 111794
Carrollton, TX 75011-1794
(972) 306-3187 Skeptics Hotline (current information)
 ntskeptics@mindspring.com

666 hits since 24 March 2000.



Image from the Web site at ntskeptics.org

When cousins marry

The Prince of Wales, on the occasion of the Reith Lectures 2000 has provided us with additional insight into the mental processes of royalty. OK, not to be too hard on royalty, we acknowledge the same sympathies from some American politicians and school teachers.
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/static/events/reith_2000/lecture6.stm

As Professor Alan Linton of Bristol University has written "evolution is a manmade theory to explain the origin and continuance of life on this planet without reference to a Creator." It is because of our inability or refusal to accept the existence of a guiding hand that nature has come to be regarded as a system that can be engineered for our own convenience or as a nuisance to be evaded and manipulated, and in which anything that happens can be fixed by technology and human ingenuity. Fritz Schumacher recognised the inherent dangers in this approach when he said that "there are two sciences — the science of manipulation and the science of understanding."

The prince went on to recommend a better balance between intuition and rationality (more intuition). He also called for a closer cooperation between us and nature, a sentiment that's hard to fault.

The tone of the whole speech, however, had more disdain for science than another Brit could stomach. Richard Dawkins has penned a reply with the title "Don't turn your back on science."

[Http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4020558,00.html](http://www.guardianunlimited.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4020558,00.html)

Your Royal Highness,

Your Reith lecture saddened me. I have deep sympathy for your aims, and admiration for your sincerity. But your hostility to science will not serve those aims; and your embracing of an ill-assorted jumble of mutually contradictory alternatives will lose you the respect that I think you deserve. I forget who it was who remarked: "Of course we must be open-minded, but not so open-minded that our brains drop out."

His Royal Highness had praised "natural agriculture" at great length in his speech, and Professor Dawkins went on to remind him of a few realities:

Next, Sir, I think you may have an exaggerated idea of the natural ness of 'traditional' or 'organic' agriculture. Agriculture has always been unnatural. Our species began to depart from our natural hunter-gatherer lifestyle as recently as 10,000 years ago — too short to measure on the evolutionary time scale.

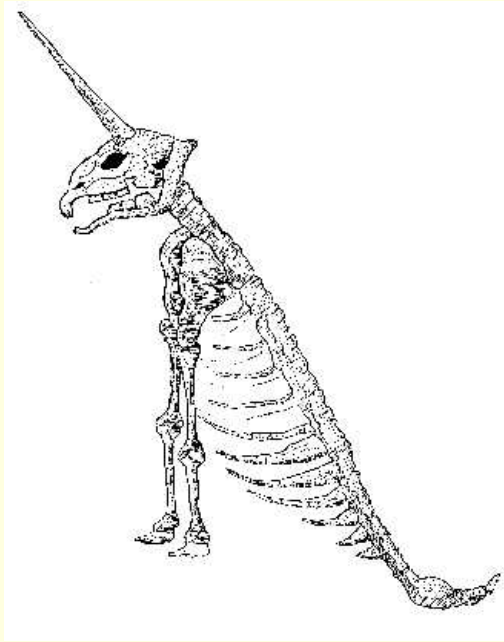
More on free energy

Eric Krieg has picked up on our recent article in *The North Texas Skeptic* on Joe Newman's and other free energy fans. Eric maintains a skeptical Web site with a section devoted to "free energy" and Joe Newman. Apparently there is a lot more to Joe Newman than free energy. Here is a URL for those who want to follow the issue: ¹

<http://www.phact.org/e/skeptic/newman.htm>

Cliff Pickover's Internet Encyclopedia of Hoaxes

Here is a fun one. Check out <http://www.pickover.com/hoax.html>. Here are some samples:



The P.T. Barnum unicorn skeleton hoax [from Cliff Pickover's Internet Encyclopedia of Hoaxes]

- Unicorn skeleton from Otto von Guericke's *Protogaea* (1663). The skeleton was pieced together from mammoth and possibly rhinoceros remains. Notice that the unicorn skeleton has no hind legs.
- Primitive Tasaday People. In 1976, stone-age people were discovered in the Philippines. *National Geographic* ran a cover story, but it turned out to be a hoax. The people were posed and coached as cave dwellers.
- Fairy Hoax. In 1917, two English schoolgirls created a hoax that fooled learned men for years, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes. The girls took the world by storm when they showed photos of themselves with fairies dancing in Cottingley Glen, England.

The travails of alternative medicine

If you think alternative medicine is just quackery wrapped up in new age double speak, then you need to read "What Is 714X?" by William H. Moore, Jr., Esq, HMD.

<http://www.wellweb.com/altern/cancer/714/mooreart.htm>

Mr. Moore will relieve you of your doubts.

714X is a Homeopathic medication developed by Gaston Naessens, a French and Canadian Biologist who, in the process of the development of the medication from his epochal discovery of the Somatid, perhaps without realizing it at the time, reinvented the Homeopathic principal from the standpoint of sub-genetic biology.

Mr. Moore goes on to remind us that the "Allopathic" and "Rationalist" scientific traditions of modern medicine ignore the concepts of "vibrational" and "energetic" medicine. This is because modern medicine was developed through autopsies on corpses, and these bodies were devoid of the life force (which is energetic and not chemical).

The beginning of unraveling that mystery was in the mid 20th Century when another German physician, Rheinhold Voll, discovered that the Oriental Chi, coursing through the body in the acupuncture meridians, was profoundly influenced by Homeopathic medication, and discovered the principle that Homoeopathic medicines do not act chemically at all, but by influencing energies in the body, and that with proper instrumentation, some aspects of these energies can be measured electronically.

This discovery and its understanding was only possible after the physicists had begun to venture beyond 19th Century Newtonian physics and to develop the Quantum Physics which was made possible by an understanding of the behavior of sub-atomic particles which are pure changes of energy.

The battle against medical orthodoxy has been long and grim, Moore reminds us, and many heroes of the movement have been mocked and persecuted mercilessly by the jackbooted thugs of the establishment. Moore didn't actually use the term "jackbooted thugs," but I thought I would get some more mileage of it while it's currently in vogue.

I am not too sure why the name Andrew Weil doesn't come up in the discussion. If you are not familiar with Andrew Weil, then you need to check out his Web site at —

<http://www.drweilselfhealing.com/>.

The Weekly World News

I will finish up with this. We don't get the WWN here, but the Brits share it with us on the Internet at <http://www.weeklyworldnews.com/stories/>.

Here is a typical headline:

UFO BLASTS RUSSIAN JET OUT OF THE SKY!

MOSCOW — A saucer-shaped UFO blasted a MiG-29 out of the sky with a laser ray on April 8 in one of the most terrifying close encounters ever!



Russian fighter meets its match [from the WWN Web site]

The story details how the Russian Captain Duryev had his fighter plane shot out of the sky as he approached the UFO to investigate. Using its obviously superior technical superiority, the flying saucer quickly evaded further attempts to intercept it.

"Aside from that, we have nothing to go on. Like most UFO encounters, we have a mystery that cannot be solved," according to a Russian spokesman quoted in the story.

References

- 1. See "Free energy" in the March 2000 issue of *The North Texas Skeptic*.

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What's new

by Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/index.html>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

"Vitamin O": company agrees to pay \$375,000 to settle.

You will recall that WN first exposed the scam 18 months ago, after a full page ad appeared in *USA Today* (WN 27 Nov 98). Rose Creek Health Products was marketing ordinary salt water as a dietary supplement for \$10 per ounce, with claims of significant health benefits. If oxygen could be absorbed by the gastrointestinal tract, which it can't, you would need to drink two liters each second to supply your minimum daily requirement. That's usually called drowning. In addition to consumer redress, the company is barred from claiming that research has demonstrated health benefits. Meanwhile, Beverly Sassoon & Co. picked up the scam, selling salt water as BiOxygen at \$17.50 per ounce (WN 7 Apr 00).

Nuclear phobia: risk at LBL is put into perspective.

The increase in radiation exposure at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory due to tritium led the Alameda County Board of Education to call for a moratorium on field trips to the Lawrence Hall of Science (WN 28 Apr 00). The lab calculated the increase to be equivalent to living at an altitude 30 feet higher. My guess, however, is that many people near the lab, rather than being reassured by this calculation, will instead begin sleeping in their basements.

Alternative science: Congress briefed on intelligent design.

Darwin took a pounding on Wednesday when The Discovery Institute (<http://www.csrc.org>) brought its top guns to Capitol Hill to brief members and their staffs on the need for "Intelligent Design" in public school science curricula as an alternative to Darwinian evolution. They portray ID as the scientific middle ground between biblical literalists and Darwinists. The controversy, however, is not a debate between scientists. Brown biologist Ken Miller, an outspoken critic of the ID movement, asks, "How many papers on intelligent design have been published in the peer reviewed scientific literature?" The answer, Miller says, "is none." Next week: Who in Congress is supporting the ID movement?

Intelligent design: you and me baby ain't nothin' but mammals.

In last week's Capitol Hill bashing of Darwinism (WN 12 May 00), Nancy Pearcey, a writer for Charles Colson, spelled out what this debate is really about: Darwinism would replace religion with a new science-based cosmic myth. In fact, in "The Sacred Depths of Nature," biologist Ursula Goodenough points out that a science-based myth has deep religious potential. But Pearcey contends it undercuts morality. To make her point, she quoted the lyrics of a popular song by the Bloodhound Gang: "You and me baby ain't nothin' but mammals, so let's do it like they do it on the Discovery Channel." So much for the pretense that this debate is over the science. House sponsors of the briefing included Roscoe Bartlett (R-MD), Charles Canady (R-FL), Sheila Jackson-Lee (D- TX), Thomas Petri (R-WI), Joseph Pitts (R-PA), Mark Souder (R- IN), and Charles Stenholm (D-TX). Sen. Sam Brownback (R-KS) was on hand to introduce several of the speakers.

THE AMERICAN PHYSICAL SOCIETY (Note: Opinions are the author's and are not necessarily shared by the APS, but they should be.)

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Y2K Errata

We need to call your attention to the January 2000 issue of *The North Texas Skeptic* for a couple of long-overdue corrections.

On page 1 of the newsletter, the date underneath the title banner was "January 1900" instead of "January 2000." We tried to insure that our newsletter was Y2K compliant, but this one slipped passed us, and we do apologize.

Also, on page 5, Danny Barnett mentioned that "Nation after nation slipped over the International Date Line into the New Year as the Earth continued to revolve," but he failed to remember that the International Date Line does not move. Danny has assumed full responsibility for the blunder and refuses to blame it on Y2K, La Niña, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, or that New Year's Eve party he and Ginny attended.

We are now confident that all bugs have finally been worked out of the newsletter so that we can bring you future articles and reports on paranormal events and critical thinking without fear of further glitches. God night, and good bless us, oneevery.

Sorry.

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Letter to the editor

Who is more Superstitious?

I came here from India a few years ago expecting to find a land where everybody studies general relativity and can derive Maxwell's equations. I expected to find a land without superstition. It turns out this was an illusion based on America's famous technological accomplishments and high standard of living.

My father has reminded me, "The Americans have their own superstitions." He is right about this but he is wrong in assuming that I am defending Americans. All I am trying to do is be rational. Just because I have stayed in the US for a few years does not make me a defender of America's superstitions nor does it stop me from provoking the Indians about theirs

Truth be said, the most technologically advanced country does not hold the most rationally thinking citizens, what with all the psychics, dowsers, UFOlogists, conspiracy theorists, quacks, creationists... The list goes on.

Some people assume that since they live in the US, they are the most forward thinking people on this planet.

Think again.

Prasad Golla
[Reader responses are invited.]

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NTS Paranormal Challenge at \$10,000

by **John Blanton**

OK, it's TEN.

Drat this inflation anyhow. Throughout the 1990s we never received a serious challenge for our \$6000 paranormal challenge. Oh, Bette Epstein, the headlined dowser did offer to have her young daughter take our money with her ability to find buried treasure. For her own part, she was not the least bit interested in our money. And neither was anybody else, for that matter.

I have long suspected the reason was the amount. After all, if you have the psychic ability to find buried treasure, what's another \$6000? Besides, to get it you would have deal with those pesky skeptics. And work under scientifically controlled conditions, whatever that means. And if, Heaven forbid, you should fail their test, those picky skeptics would never let you hear the end of it. Better to just go on some talk shows, put up a friendly Web site, and wait for people to send in their money.

For years magician and noted skeptic James (the Amazing) Randi offered a \$10,000 prize, and for that he received numerous challengers. Business must have trailed off in that department, because Randi has since raised the prize to over a million dollars, underwritten by a number of other skeptics.

Realizing we were languishing in the backwater of skeptics' challenges, we had no recourse but to up the ante. So now it's ten.

The paranormal challenge is underwritten by five interested skeptics and is independent of the North Texas Skeptics charter. A copy of the challenge protocol, along with a list of the underwriters, is posted on our Web site at ntskeptics.org.

The underwriters do not actually have to put up their portion of the prize until there is a serious challenge. We have long asserted that the underwriters' money

is as safe as in any Texas bank. After all, if the bank fails, and the US government is unable to come up with the money to bail it out, then depositors would lose out. The NTS paranormal challenge does not suffer any such risk. To win, a challenger would have to do the impossible.

For our peace of mind we receive constant reassurances from the practitioners of the paranormal. In fact, we received one such just today (June 3) in the mail:

Joe, I have an important message for you — about your future. You must hear the news.

I repeat: this is time sensitive. Especially if you are concerned about love, money or career.

June 21 is rapidly approaching — and I want you to have the news before that date. (you have very little time!)

I implore you, call this FREE number right now! To find out how, call [saving you a phone call here]. (You can call anytime—24 hours a day.)

You must hear your information. In fact, it's so important, I've arranged for you to speak person-to-person with a specially-gifted Master Psychic. So you can learn everything.

Joe, I want you to be helped, right now.

Here is what you MUST do:

[followed by calling instructions, PIN, etc.]

The card was from professional "psychic" Joyce Jillson. It was addressed to former NTS President Joe Voelkering. Since Joe has been dead for over a year I don't feel guilty about reading his mail.

OK, for over a year after his death, CSICOP continued to list Joe as the contact for the NTS. I can forgive that. After all, those guys at CSICOP are not *psychics*!

But Joyce Jillson is. Here is today's horoscope from her Web page at <http://www.creators.com/lifestyle/jillson/>:

A year of change is ahead; you want to take on new challenges, and you will, with horizons quickly broadening over the next six weeks. Loved ones show their affection and esteem. September heats up with new romances that quickly escalate to seriousness. Love this year is so lucky in general, singles may marry a Cancer or Leo by 2001. Your lucky numbers are: 2, 49, 1, 3 and 22. [June 3, 2000]

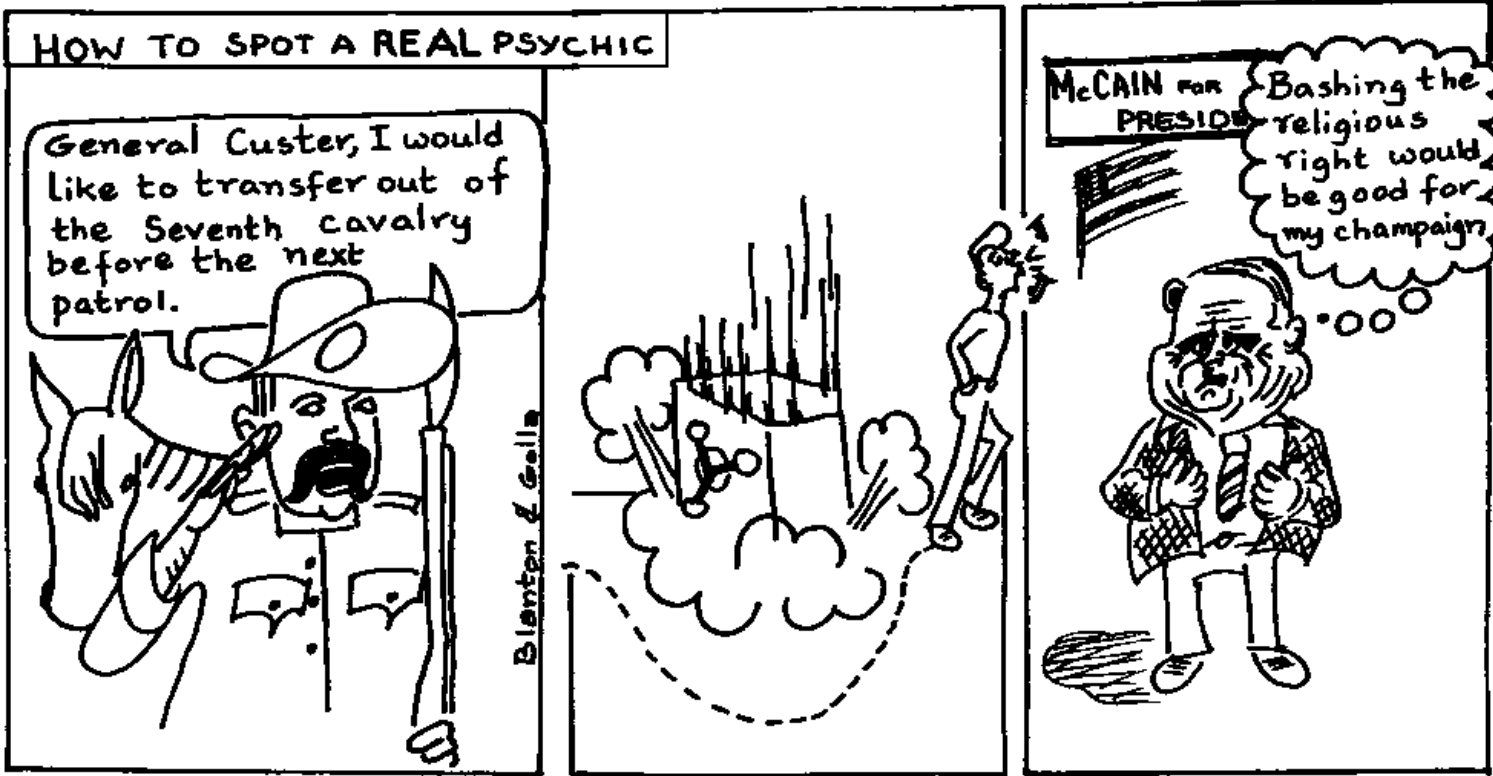
With such as the clueless Ms. Jillson the only threat to our challenge prize, I don't lose any sleep worrying about my part of the prize subscription. Now if I could only stop worrying about the government spending my social security.

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Skeptical ink

By Prasad Golla and John Blanton

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