

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land (REALL) is a non-profit educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe- science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL not not reject paranormal claims on a priori grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Membership information is provided elsewhere in this newsletter.

Board of Directors: Chairman, David Bloomberg; Assistant Chairman, Prof. Ron Larkin; Secretary-Treasurer, Wally Hartshorn; Newsletter Editor, Bob Ladendorf; At-Large Members, Prof. Steve Egger, Frank Mazo, and Kevin Brown.

Editorial Board: Bob Ladendorf (Newsletter Editor), David Bloomberg (electronic version editor), (one vacancy).

REALL

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From the Chairman

-- David Bloomberg

Our first Champaign-Urbana presentation was a success! I'd like to thank, first and foremost, Ranse Traxler for making the trip and giving a great talk! I'd also like to thank Ron Larkin and George Kieffer for taking the lead in getting everything organized for Ranse's presentation. Great job!

For those who couldn't make it, there were approximately 25 people there (very good, considering there were only two

weeks 'til finals!), including a mix of students and professors in education and various sciences. Discussion got lively at the end of the lecture, during Q&A, when several creationists started arguing that evolution is "just a theory." Several interested "undecideds" stuck around after the overall Q&A to talk to a few of us about the overall evolution/creation debate, and I think they were interested in learning more about the subject.

Ranse has also asked me to let everybody know that he is willing to "go on the road" with his presentation. If you have a group who you think would be interested in his talk, he "has slides, will travel." Just contact him at P.O. Box 462, O'Fallon, IL 62269-0462.

In other news, this month's meeting will be on May 16 (Lincoln Library, 7:00). We will be having our annual elections, but don't let that scare you away! We will also be featuring a videotape of the Frontline program which investigated Facilitated Communications. I think a lot of our members will find it very interesting!

Also, remember folks that we still have the 20% discount available on Prometheus Books! We only need a few more books to send it in, so hurry up and get your order to us ASAP!

/s/ David Bloomberg
Spawn of Inseminoid
by Martin Kottmeyer

"Her memory swirled back. She found herself lying naked on a brilliantly glowing rectangular table. Her limbs were slightly spread to the side and she was motionless. Paralyzed. Her next memory is of her knees bent upwards and her legs are slowly being parted. A face becomes visible in front of her. Its shape is unambiguously alien; a humanoid possessing huge eyes, a vestigial nose, and no ears or hair. It is staring into her eyes and she is powerless to look away or flee. Terror is rising in her. The alien says nothing. A clear tube is placed at the entrance to her womb. There is fluid in the tube with little round things, presumably embryos or soft eggs floating down it. She wakes screaming and the doctor is there to try to calm her. He remarks on her deep trauma and inspects a bruise on her arm. In the aftermath of these memories, she repeatedly relives the experience and the horrific image of the alien even though she has been sedated. When she looks in the mirror later she discovers a second mark on her forehead beneath her hair. Combined with dramatic changes in her behavior, it is obvious evidence of a mind control operation."

This story of alien abduction will undoubtedly sound very familiar to most UFO buffs. The staring alien and the embryo implantation should lead some to guess it is post-Communion and post-Intruders, a case from the late Eighties or early Nineties.

In truth, this account is a description of a segment of the 1980 British film *Inseminoid* (released in the U.S. under the title *Horror Planet*). It is little known and can't be found in some film catalogs.

Phil Hardy, science fiction film historian, considers this film a failure because of vapid, one-dimensional characters and an absence of narrative clarity. Horror film historian Kim Newman singles it out as one of the best of a group of *Alien* rip-offs. Its hectic lunacy reminded him of kids rushing around with plastic bags over their heads playing spaceman. The influence of *Alien* more involves the look of the film than the plot. Subsequent to the impregnation scene the film is an almost formulaic killfest, a rip-off of dozens of slasher flicks.

Inseminoid presents a conundrum for those who believe in the reality of alien abduction accounts. It shouldn't exist. Read David Jacobs' *Secret Life* (1992). According to this book, science fiction movies have never portrayed aliens that were uncommunicative or that refused to discuss their origins, missions, or methods. "Nor have any shown aliens collecting eggs and sperm from their human victims with the intent of producing hybrid offspring." *Inseminoid* comes close enough since *Secret Life* also describes embryo implantation accounts. His more general claim that "none has been released with themes or events similar to abduction accounts" is refuted in a dozen ways by *Inseminoid*.

Let's limit ourselves to motifs that *Inseminoid* shares with just the abduction cases in Jacobs' own book: nakedness, paralysis, examination table (high tech -- nonwooden; plasticlike or metallic), staring/eye contact, parting the legs, insemination, little round things, huge eyes, human-like face, human-like body with two arms and two legs and an

upright stance, a business-like or clinical manner (unaggressive and unrushed), no communication, doorway amnesia, reliving the terror and imagery.

Jacobs' unawareness of *Inseminoid* allows him to deny there are any possible science fiction cultural sources for abductees to draw upon for the experiences they report. While this is now clearly proven false, there is a rather obvious rejoinder he can legitimately offer. So what? Few people ever saw this film. It isn't credible that all his abductees are drawing on forgotten memories of this film. More, the context of the scene is unfavorable for recurrent borrowing since it does not involve a saucer visitation but happens in the tomb-like complex of an extinct race on a frigid, distant world in a binary star system.

All true, but direct lineal descent isn't the only possibility. *Inseminoid* after all did not spring from a vacuum but was a product of the human imagination and culture. The similarities could reflect a type of convergent evolution involving common ancestry, common processes, and adaptations to similar environments or selection pressures. How might this work with the cluster of similarities shared by *Inseminoid* and *Secret Life*?

Paralysis is a constant of nightmares, and they are a resource for horror writers. Abductees often have nightmares. Faces, often grotesque and felt as alien, are also a recurrent feature of nightmares (see Peter McKellar's *Abnormal Psychology*, 1989, p. 92.). Large eyes are a recurrent feature of horror imagery with deep psychological roots (see my article "Eye-yi-yi" in *Magonia*, November 1991).

Communion's best-seller status cultivated a cultural environment seeded with material borrowed from the genre of horror he worked in and from which *Inseminoid* was a part. This favored the recurrence of the staring eyes and scary forms of sex. Emotionless aliens have a long history, and we need only mention the status of *Invasion of the Body-Snatchers* as but the most widely known source of influence.

Procreation is a common concern found in fictional aliens. A screenwriter back in 1925 did a rewrite of H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* involving abduction for the creation of an earthling-Martian hybrid, but it was never filmed. The film tradition relevant here includes *Devil Girl from Mars* (1955), *The Mysterians* (1957), *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958), *The Outer Limits*' "The Children of Spider County" (1964), *Frankenstein Meets the Space Monster* (1965), *Mars Needs Women* (1966), *Night Caller from Outer Space* (1966), *Star Trek*'s "The Menagerie" (1966), *God Told Me To* (1976), and *The Stranger Within* (1979). The most critically praised work was *Village of the Damned* (1960), and it involved the impregnation of a whole village of women who subsequently give birth to hybrid offspring. The actual act of insemination is not visualized and one would not expect it to be given the more modest sensibilities of that time. The graphic nature of *Inseminoid*, *Intruders*, and *Secret Life* share in the coarser aesthetics of more recent times.

The hairless humanoid is virtually stereotypical and outnumbers creative and exotic variants by a wide margin. The high-tech table conforms to our expectations of the futuristic quality of alien possessions. The suggestion of mind control is similarly futuristic and preceded by a long tradition in films, TV, comics, and SF literature.

The embryos being visualized as "little round things" is not mandatory since we could imagine implantation of a larger, more fetal appearing hybrid, but it doesn't buck the odds for both creations to choose the simpler or smaller form.

I think one can see from this exercise that alien abduction experiences are not beyond human imagination. In fact it seems quite probable that Jacobs' collection of stories are fundamentally as fictional as *Inseminoid* for there is one more similarity they share. They both require dramatic license to work.

Any alien sophisticated enough to be able to make an earthling carry alien biological tissue without miscarriage is probably going to be able to make the embryo grow in their own bodies or incubation devices. They would probably not be dumb enough to choose humans with their myriad faults as ideal surrogates. Would they risk having the pregnancy terminated? Would aliens actually return an impregnated woman to the hazards of human society rather than keep her under controlled conditions? *Inseminoid* would never take place in real life. Neither would *Secret Life*.

[The following is a sidebar to the above article, also written by M.K.]

Rejects

Look at some abductees and you might conclude aliens have no standards in their selection of breeding stock. However, there is at least one case of an abductee being 'thrown back.' Alfred Burtoo, 77, was fishing on the Basington Canal Bank in the county of Hampshire, England, on August 12, 1983, when he witnessed a saucer landing and two figures waving for him to come inside. They ordered him to stand under a light and turn around. After a few minutes deliberation, they tell him, "You can go, you are too old and too infirm for our purpose."

Cinematic aliens offer a rather severe precursor of this motif. Nyah, Devil Girl from Mars (1955), annihilates a handicapped man as her first act on Earth. Asked later if she knew if the guy was alive, she tersely informs the questioner, "No, he was superfluous, a hopeless specimen." Her opinion of an aging scientist among the contact group wasn't any more tactful: "You are a very poor physical specimen." She reveals her world had experienced a decline in the birth rate since women won the War of the Sexes and so she planned to land in London, paralyze the population, and choose our strongest men to take back with her.

London would not be my first choice for shopping for breeding stock, but it still beats the places "real" aliens have been visiting. For example, if you were going to land in Florida, would you select Gulf Breeze or Fort Lauderdale during Spring Break when thousands of perfect specimens conveniently gather for one-stop shopping?

A Night of Magic and Skepticism with Randi
by Bob Ladendorf

The magician called himself a "cheat, a fake, and a fraud," but with "panache," then further qualified that description by saying it refers to his "entertainment" only. That entertainment was memorable, but his lessons in skeptical and critical thinking lingered in my mind for days to come.

James ("The Amazing") Randi, a magician and a skeptic, skewered popular beliefs, from astrology and faith healing to homeopathy and perpetual motion machines, in his 2 ½-hour talk held on April 8 at the St. Louis Community College at Merrimac. REALL Chairman David Bloomberg and his wife, Sharri, and I drove down that night to see his lecture, called "Search for Chimera."

The white-bearded Randi led off his lecture with style and humor. As he talked into the podium microphone, he greeted late arrivals by asking them to send him an excuse note, quipped to a front-row listener who appeared to be leaving, "It gets better!," and after a few minutes, revealed his first illusion by moving away from the podium microphone to show that it wasn't on and that he was using a radio mike the whole time!

A major point Randi illustrated with the mike was that we can be fooled in our assumptions. However, in gaining knowledge, one would become catatonic if not making assumptions, which can be tested scientifically for falsity.

Randi then launched into a review of some of the world's questionable activities: channelling, astrology, facilitated communications, false memory syndrome, and even perpetual motion machines, which just didn't seem to work when he arrived on the scene. He also discussed the use of purported "expert witnesses" in lawsuits, illustrating that damaging use of expert testimony in the alleged Audi car failures. Further research indicated that it was driver error, not mechanical error, in accidents, but by then Audi has lost its American market. He said that dowsing was not scientific, which was proven through tests. Later on, he tackled homeopathy (diluted medicines) at length, concluding that it "simply doesn't work," and that the German "E" (Earth) rays purported to cause cancer are as unproved as the "N" rays that caused such a flap in France in the early part of this century. He also showed the famous clip on the Johnny Carson Show proving that self-proclaimed faith healer Peter Popoff used a radio mike that his wife used to feed him information about the audience! Randi talked about Popoff and other faith healers and all the money donated to them by people who could ill afford it. What's more, some of these faith healers exposed over the years have been getting back into the business by concentrating on certain ones on their lists of donors.

During his talk, he did reflect on his own beginnings in critical thinking. At age 15, he was somehow arrested for exposing the games of street scam artists, and his father had to be called from the golf course, which was not a good thing to have happen, Randi cracked. From that point on, though, Randi said, he vowed to become an investigator and

expose fraud and pseudoscience.

Scattered throughout his lecture, the magician took over and performed some wonderful tricks for the hundred spectators. He successfully guessed what two of five symbols used in psychic testing were hidden by an audience member in a black envelope, and in what sequence; caused time to advance an hour in a minute on someone's watch, then reenacting his trick in a hilarious slow motion sequence; bent a spoon through sleight of hand, which he called the "easy way", rather than through an alleged psychic cause; and maneuvered an audience member to pick the word "oxidize" from a line near a cut he made in a clipping with a scissors, which was then confirmed when he asked the man to reach under his sheet and read a notarized statement in an envelope made weeks before that indicated that the man would pick "oxidize"! (REALL is still debating that one.)

Randi ended his talk by reflecting on the wonder of moon rocks. To think that man travelled in space and returned home with rocks from another world for all to see in museums was wonderful. "That's enough magic for me," he added. Following a lengthy question and answer session, he showed those remaining another Carson clip on how "psychic surgery" is done through sleight of hand tricks using animal parts and illusion techniques, and he then signed autographs for his books, including *The Faith Healers*.

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

Where to begin? Well, there was such a blitz these past few weeks, but here we go.

Witch Hunts

Lawrence Wright has recently authored a book about repressed memories, satanic ritual abuse, and the Ingram family. Because of the skeptical nature, wide publicity of the Ingram case, and the fact that he has won awards for the reporting he did on the case earlier, there have been several mentions of him and the book in the media lately. The Today show on NBC featured an interview with Wright (4/6), and the Chicago Tribune reviewed his book, *Remembering Satan: A Case of Recovered Memory and the Shattering of an American Family* (4/17).

Both the interview and the book review came down squarely on the side of skepticism and Wright in this case of "repressed" memories. Briefly, Ericka Ingram went to a religious retreat at which a visiting minister told her of divine visions of Ericka indicating abuse. Ericka turned around and told counselors that she had been sexually abused by her father, a police officer and clergyman. Out of nowhere, her sister Julie also started making accusations. Their father, Paul, said that he could not remember any such crimes, but convinced himself that his daughters would not lie, so he must be repressing the memory himself. He was pressured into continually thinking about the accusations, praying on them, etc. Eventually, he started to detail the incidents to match those stories given by his daughters and plead guilty.

His daughters' stories became more embellished, accusing other officers of being part of a sex ring which also included satanic ritual abuse, sacrificing babies, etc. There was (and still is) no evidence aside from their statements.

The prosecution hired Dr. Richard Ofshe, a U-C Berkeley social psychology professor. But Ofshe was skeptical and tried an experiment. He told Ingram the details of a crime that nobody ever claimed happened. Ingram went into a prayer trance, as he had been doing when trying to "remember" these events, and confessed to this non-event, describing it in great detail.

With this and other evidence making it clear that no crime had ever occurred, Ingram changed his plea -- too late. He is now appealing his case, but appeals courts have been hesitant to overturn guilty pleas.

In unrelated stories on the false memory syndrome (FMS) front, 60 Minutes did a piece on Roseanne Arnold (4/17) and her claims of abuse by her parents. They interviewed her family, all of whom said no abuse ever occurred, and showed clips of earlier interviews with her from other shows. Among the claims she makes is that she has memories of abuse dating back to when she was six months old.

Also, the (Springfield, IL) State Journal-Register printed an editorial (4/18) in which they applaud the scrutiny under which repressed memory therapy has recently come. Three cheers for them and all of the above news organizations!

Hey, Kids, Psychic Hotlines Don't Work

The Chicago Tribune, "Kidnews" section, ran an ongoing test of the La Toya Jackson Psychic Network. They asked five questions of the "psychic" and reported the answers to kids reading the paper. Unsurprisingly, all five were incorrect (questions ranged from Michael Jordan in baseball to movie and music rankings). I applaud Kidnews for their reporting, but wonder when they will examine astrology, since they always print a weekly astrological column in that same section.

More "Mysteries"

CBS aired Mysteries of the Ancient World (4/28), which dealt with subjects like the Shroud of Turin, Egyptian pyramids, the Bermuda Triangle, and Nostradamus. This was another Sun Pictures production. 'Nuff said. Aliens and Cover-Ups and UFOs, Oh My!

UFOs and alien abductions have gotten a lot of air time lately. There's a new book out on the Roswell "crash" and supposed cover-up, Harvard psychiatrist John Mack has recently written a book on the "experiences" of his patients, and a well-lit object appeared in the sky over Michigan.

All of the above, plus other strangeness, was covered in the CBS news magazine 48 Hours ("Are We Alone?" 4/20). They had five pieces on different aspects of UFOlogy. The first featured Mack and some of his patients, talking about their "recovered memory" of alien abductions. Mack said he just can't find any alternate explanation, other than that it really happened. Well, John, maybe you need to read The REALL News, because we've been reporting on FMS for months now (Mack denies that hypnosis can implant memories of anything significant). Although there were no well-known skeptics, the show interviewed several other psychiatrists, including another at Harvard, who said that hypnosis should not be used to "recover" such memories. In addition, they played back one of the patients' first hypnosis tapes, and he was saying he couldn't tell fantasy from reality. The therapist (not Mack) said it didn't matter and they'd sort it out later. Hmmmmm.....

Other segments featured the authors of the new Roswell book, along with all sorts of new "witnesses" (where did they come from all of a sudden?). There was no skeptical viewpoint whatsoever given, even to the extent of pointing out the conflicting stories of several of the witnesses! Next came Dr. Steven Greer and CSETI (not to be confused with SETI, a true scientific project). These guys were running around a field pointing at every light they saw and just generally acting, well, a bit loopy. Several scientists were interviewed at the end of the story, pointing out that the lights they videotaped looked exactly like airplane lights, and that they were directly in the flight path of a Mexican airport some 50 miles away. How odd.

Carl Sagan was featured in the next portion, along with others in the SETI project (Congress withdrew funding from SETI, but it continues with private donations). This really didn't seem to belong with the rest of the show, other than a few comments from Sagan asking where the hard evidence is for all these crashes and kidnappings and whatever else, but it was pretty well done. The final spot focused on a recent UFO spotted in Michigan. At first, this seemed to be a great sighting, as it was apparently confirmed by radar. But once the excitement died down, it turned out that the radar blip was approximately 25 miles away from the sighting. Whoops. The show mentioned this fact almost as an aside, but it seems to me that it should have gotten a bit more attention. In a related story, though not in this show, MUFON's head, Walt Andrus, went on the Larry King Show soon after the sighting and stated outright that it was an alien craft. Where's the evidence, you may ask. So did a lot of other people, and MUFON's credibility has once again dropped in the eyes of many, especially those in UFOlogy itself.

Also in UFO news, John Mack has recently been the object of a number of articles. The New York Times Magazine had a story on him (3/20) which seemed to be of the "human interest" variety. In other words, the author (who contacted Martin Kottmeyer, but apparently did not use any of the information he sent) took no viewpoint and relied mostly on interviews. This is the type of "reporting" that tells the reader almost nothing.

However, others have not been so easy on Mack. Psychology Today magazine did an article (March/April) in which they pointed out the unscientific methods used by Mack. Time and the Boston Globe (4/21) published articles discussing the case of a woman who went to Mack with a bogus story, which he bought hook, line, and alien. More

importantly, she exposed a number of what many consider unscientific practices, such as his giving her abduction literature to read before hypnotizing her. His following is still strong, but many within and outside of UFOlogy are realizing that his methods are weak.

Vitamins and Crystals

Eye to Eye with Connie Chung did a story on the claims made by vitamin and supplement manufacturers. In particular, they looked at the industry's fight against the FDA regulations which stop those manufacturers from making claims they can't prove.

The vitamin industry has some heavy-hitters on its side -- several Congressmen and well-known actors. They are trying to take away the FDA's power to regulate the industry. While some of their claims regarding the FDA have merit (that they are often slow to approve claims even though they do have scientific backing), the idea that they should be able to make any claim they want simply does not follow logically.

To show what kind of claims are made, the show sent a reporter and hidden camera into a store. The manager "diagnosed" the reporter by measuring the change in her finger strength relating to the aura of the vitamins, waved a plastic crystal over them to be sure it was correct, etc. A National Center Against Health Fraud (NCAHF) rep. was not amused. While the supplement industry claims they just want people to have the freedom of choice, the NCAHF rep. was on the money when he said, "freedom of choice only works if people are given accurate information."

Letter to the Editor To the Editor

The International Society of Cryptozoology is holding its annual meeting at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois, on Saturday, June 11, 1994. The meeting is free and open to the public and would be of interest to many readers of this newsletter.

The ISC is dedicated to the investigation of cryptozoology, which they define as the study of animals not currently recognized by science. This includes new species, unusually large or small individuals of known species, populations of known species outside known ranges of time or space, and animals described in folklore. ISC embraces an open-minded investigation of these issues and uses techniques of zoology, anthropology, field research and laboratory investigations. Members include academic biologists, professional explorers, and dedicated amateurs. This is a place where people who are sure that Nessie is a real animal and those who are sure she is a myth meet and politely (and enthusiastically) make logical cases for their opinions.

The morning sessions at the June meeting appear to be general surveys of the state of cryptozoology, which would be very interesting to anyone with an interest in natural science. The afternoon sessions are technical papers, which report four particular cases.

I have read ISC publications for several years and attended meetings sponsored by the ISC. The tone is open and friendly, and full of wonder at the unknown and the thrill of exploration. Many of the members have spent years in exotic field expeditions, and the stories never fail to keep my attention. This is a pretty cool group, and they are very open to anyone who wants to get in on the fun. Come if you can.

Robert E. McGrath Member, ISC Urbana, IL

[Note: Mr. McGrath attached information regarding the specifics of the conference. Anybody who is interested can write to us at the P.O. Box.]

A Nod to Our Patrons

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We at REALL encourage letters to the editor about any article or topic covered in The REALL News. We want to make this a forum for all our members. (Letters may be edited if too long. Name, address and phone number must be included with the letter.)

Predictions for Future Issues

Susan Blackmore book review
Looking into the Sun -- and other tabloids
Loch Ness Hoax
The Baby Train

Skeptics Online

If you have a computer and a modem, you owe it to yourself to participate in the skeptic message areas on the computer BBS networks. Here in Springfield, call The Temples of Syrinx at (217) 787-9101. David Bloomberg operates this BBS, which carries the FidoNet SKEPTIC, EVOLUTION and UFO conferences, internationally distributed message areas for discussing topics of interest to skeptics. He is also carrying ParaNet conferences, all dedicated to UFO and paranormal topics. You can also find a wide variety of skeptic, scientific, UFO, evolution/creation, and urban legend text files.

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