

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land
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Electronic Version

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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, Kevin Brown; Newsletter Editor, Bob Ladendorf; At-Large Members, Prof. Steve Egger, Wally Hartshorn, and Frank Mazo.

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

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The views expressed in these articles are the views of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of REALL.

From the Editor
-- Bob Ladendorf

As this issue fell into place, it seemed to turn into a special issue on UFOs, with the lead article about a book on panics over UFOs by Martin Kottmeyer (his 10th for The REALL News, by the way) and the U.S. Air Force's admission that the alleged Roswell alien spacecraft was actually a government secret project's spy balloon! David Bloomberg's report on that revelation analyzes the controversy surrounding the announcement.

One of the more startling stories we have ever brought to you is featured in David's "REALLity Check" piece. Reading what happened to accused "witches" in South Africa made my spine tingle, and it demonstrates that we have a long way to go in this world to educate people about the dire consequences of irrationality.

Over the past year-and-a-half, REALL has tried to provide you with information that will help make you understand the complicated issues surrounding pseudoscience and paranormal beliefs, as well as to arm you with dispassionate facts that can counter claims that lack evidence. Now and then, we hear from our readers and others that we may be making a difference. Such a reference is made in a letter to the editor that we are reprinting on the back page.

Again, I hope you enjoy reading our newsletters, discussing issues and listening to speakers at our meetings. If you have any newspaper or magazine clips of interest to REALL, please send them to us at the address on this page. In addition, your comments or suggestions are always welcome.

/s/ Bob Ladendorf
From the Chairman
-- David Bloomberg

Well, I'm in a good mood. We had a good turnout at our meeting, donations covered the cost of the video, people seemed interested in seeing more of those videos, and Patron member Bob Smet has generously volunteered to purchase 6 more videos for REALL!

Also, I've recently heard news that shows REALL can and does make a difference. Two months ago, I wrote in this column about how disappointed I was in the St. Louis Science Center. I visited there and saw that they had several pro-UFO books, which had been debunked soundly, yet no skeptical ones. Well, I was informed recently by Barry Karr, the Executive Director of CSICOP, that he received a letter from the St. Louis Science Center asking for a list of recommendations of skeptical UFO books. The person he later talked to said a customer had complained about the lack of skeptical UFO books. They are now already selling a pamphlet about UFOs written by Phil Klass (I have one copy if you're interested in taking a look at it) and will hopefully be ordering some full-length books. I don't know who out there passed along the word to the Science Center, but thanks!

Along the same vein, I've been contacted recently by several groups about possibly speaking to their organizations about skeptical thinking, false memory syndrome, etc. This is the kind of community activity we hoped for when we founded REALL. If you'd like to get involved, please don't hesitate to give me a call, write me a letter, or talk to me at a meeting!

On a sad note, REALL has lost a friend in the media. Don and Liz, formerly of the WYMG morning show, have been a great help to us since even before REALL existed. Liz left WYMG for the Virgin Islands and, for reasons which we don't know, the station also parted ways with Don. While I can't say that REALL would not have existed without them, I can say that they certainly helped me out. I first became interested in getting a local skeptics group together around the time that a man who claimed he could hypnotize women and make their breasts grow larger was coming to town. He was going to be on the Don & Liz show. I had read about this exact person in electronic versions of the Tampa Bay Skeptics' newsletter, and called Don. We worked out a plan for me to call when the hypnotist was on the air, and spring this information on him. Alas, the hypnotist didn't show, but we talked about it on the air anyway. Later, his wife called the station and was extremely mad about the things we'd said on the air. Since they were all true, however, there was nothing she could do. I wrote up the experience for the Tampa Bay Skeptics. My interest in getting a similar group here in Central Illinois only grew after that.

Later, Liz announced our first meeting, and most meetings after that. She also gave me my first interview for a public-affairs show she did on Sunday mornings, and put my name on a list used by radio personalities across the country, leading to interviews with stations in Minnesota, California, Iowa, and several others. I kept in touch with them, and

often called to comment to or about some of their guests (such as Bill Knell, the UFO cheerleader Bob Ladendorf and I reviewed in the third issue of this newsletter). All in all, they were probably our first and best friends in the media. I wish them both all the best.

Please note that our next meeting will be on a Tuesday, September 27. This was the only day we could get a room at the library. This meeting will feature a presentation by Robert McGrath on the recent announcement that the most famous Loch Ness photo is a hoax. If time permits, he will also discuss the current state of cryptozoology, including information from the recent International Society of Cryptozoology meeting (which was held in Bloomington, IL). McGrath is a frequent contributor to The REALL News, and his first presentation, on an analysis of that very photo of "Nessie" was well-attended and enjoyed all around. If you were there, you know that you don't want to miss him; if you weren't, take my word for it!

/s/ David Bloomberg
The Panicky Guy
by Martin Kottmeyer

[A review of Jerry Kroth's *Omens and Oracles: Collective Psychology in the Nuclear Age*. Praeger, 1992.]

Jerry Kroth is a psychohistorian who believes that dreams foretell the future. He grants that parapsychologists have not proven the reality of literal precognitive dreams, but he thinks the case for a class of symbolic "oracular dreams" is more secure. Such dreams provide a vague architecture in which the future might be revealed, but inexactly and metaphorically. He also argues that news events should be treated as dreams with some big events being the equivalent of big dreams. Their numinous character distinguish oracular function.

The book offers psychological commentaries on the Jonestown mass suicide, the breakdown of Russia, our involvement in southeast Asia and the politics of Israel, and ends with a section on how the Reagan era brought about an implosion of the American collective ego that portends "danger and foreboding" as we approach the millennium. As he did say that this is a vague process up front, it would probably be unfair to criticize the nonspecificity of this concluding prediction. You have got to wonder if it is worth the time and effort invested in the analytic effort given the meager outcome.

I became interested in this book because a reviewer at the *Journal of Psychohistory* praised a chapter in it on "The Oracle of Orson Welles" as brilliant. The story of the Panic Broadcast has been frequently retold in the UFO literature, usually as a reason for why the government refrains from admitting the reality of the alien presence. Thousands of people were spooked on Halloween of 1938 when Orson Welles retold the classic H.G. Wells story *War of the Worlds* in the forum of realistic radio news stories. The fright and flight constituted a sociological phenomenon that amazed many people.

For Kroth, the Panic Broadcast is a numinous big dream that symbolically portended the beginning of the Second World War 10 months later with Germany's invasion of Poland on Sept. 1, 1939. The invaders of Mars link up to this event via ancient collective symbols to the Teutonic war-gods of Tiw and Thor and Hitler. For example, the broadcast Martians fire heat rays; Tiw fires lightning bolts. Hitler's SS wore lightning emblems and used the strategy of the blitzkrieg (lightning war). The Martians are described as bear-like; the bear is sacred to Thor. Thor is linked to the swastika and iron cross and thus to the Third Reich. Mars is red, and so is the Nazi flag. Halloween and the program's Mercury Theatre name also have mythological significances which alerted people on the unconscious level that they were receiving a warning of the Holocaust to come, a dress rehearsal for the real panic that was unfolding in Europe. That Orson Welles shares a similar name with H.G. Wells is deemed meaningful. Just as Orson Welles' broadcast preceded World War II, the original H.G. Wells preceded and predicted World War I.

Kroth admits there are pitfalls to such interpretations and expresses the hope that he is wrong. Major appearances of *War of the Worlds* preceded the first two world wars, and in October 1988, *War of the Worlds* put in another appearance, this time as a prime-time television series. The unspoken corollary is that a third world war might be in the offing.

I've necessarily omitted a lot of details, but it should give you a flavor of the style. Psychological theorizing admittedly

obliges loose chains of association sometimes, but I found this unusually airy and reckless because of what you must overlook for this analysis to make sense.

The original H.G. Wells story was not formulated as a prediction, but was conceived as a fictional turnabout of a prior holocaust: England's decimation of the Tasmanians in the last century. Just as the Tasmanians were wiped out because of British technological superiority, the British are wiped out because Martians were technologically advanced. Kroth, in a footnote, identifies the Martians in the radio broadcast as projections from the American shadow-self. The Martians, however, are unchanged from the original story, which was written by an Englishman. Wells was clearly under the sway of the rhetoric of degeneration concepts which flourished in London after 1885 because of fears of the burgeoning underclass then oppressing the city.

The numinous power of the Panic Broadcast would seem inextricably bound to pre-World War II American mental complexes by Kroth's argument, but similar War of the Worlds broadcasts were done in the Orson Welles' style in 1944 Santiago, Chile, and 1949 Quito, Ecuador, and they produced panics even worse than the original. Panic is not driven by subtle forces. Neil J. Smelser has convincingly argued in *Theory of Collective Behavior* that the two ingredients needed for a panic are a believable threat of death and an awareness that a means of escape will soon be blocked off. Welles' broadcast was describing people dying by asphyxiation with poison gases and provided position reports of the rapidly advancing menace. Escape was possible, but one had to act fast. Contrary to UFO lore, and implicitly Kroth, the mere announcement of aliens, even aliens tailored to the specifications of our subconscious, should not create a panic if Smelser's argument is as sound as it seems.

My favorite part, though, is Kroth's seeing the October 1988 TV series as an oracle of war. It was far less numinous than the 1954 George Pal movie version of *War of the Worlds* which inspired it. The Pal version did not presage a war. The series had mediocre ratings and was cancelled after a year or so. What is astounding, however, is that you must overlook a certain numinous event that happened one year and one month later. The Berlin Wall toppled and the Cold War ended As oracles go, this is not my idea of brilliance.

[Martin Kottmeyer is a frequent contributor to *The REALL News*.]
The Biggest UFO Conspiracy
by David Bloomberg

This just in: The Air Force has admitted that the object which crashed in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947 was not, I repeat, not just a lowly weather balloon. They now admit that it was, in fact, a super-secret different type of balloon.

The Air Force report said that the wreckage found at Roswell was part of "Project Mogul," a secret program to develop balloons which would carry equipment to monitor Soviet nuclear weapons. Well-known UFO skeptic Philip J. Klass revealed this as the probable cause several months ago in his *Skeptics UFO Newsletter*.

The Air Force decided to finally "come clean" because New Mexico Rep. Steven Schiff asked the General Accounting Office to figure out what happened so many years ago in Roswell. Rather than wait for the GAO report, the Air Force issued their own. Yes, this means that several different agencies are spending our tax dollars to determine if they have been hiding aliens from us. The GAO report has not yet been completed.

Of course, this report leads directly to charges of continuing cover-up from the pro-crashed-saucer side. Don Berliner of the Fund for UFO Research (FUFOR) was quoted by *USA Today* as saying, the report was "pathetic" and that he "expected they'd blame Project Mogul." (9/9) FUFOR recently published a report which does, in fact, blame Project Mogul for a portion of the wreckage. Klass describes the report as very comprehensive, but notes that the author, Karl Pflock, cannot resist the temptation to believe in crashed saucers. Thus, while he does conclude that the debris from the crash is from Project Mogul, he also speculates that some of the debris is from an alien craft which either crashed into the Project Mogul balloon or had to take drastic action to avoid the balloon, thus meeting an untimely end on the ground instead. The evidence for this is completely based on anecdotal stories told by several people. The Air Force pointed out that many of the people who continue to promote the alien stories are making money from it. Also, several researchers have found huge discrepancies, even among the stories told by the same people!

So why is Roswell such a big deal? Mainly because of the timing. It occurred during a surge of interest in UFOs, and, at the same time, deep in the Cold War. The U.S. government was extremely concerned with our nuclear capabilities, and even more so with what would happen with the U.S.S.R.'s nuclear program. When the crash occurred, the first press release indicated that the Air Force had, indeed, captured an alien spaceship (apparently, some brilliant P.R. person decided that it would be better to claim "aliens" than to reveal anything about this Top Secret project). When this claim was almost immediately retracted, it became a part of what would be called the greatest UFO cover-up in history.

Not only does this report only add, for some, to those claims of a cover-up, but it seems that almost any report which did not reveal alien involvement would be rejected as well. When the GAO began their investigation, I asked several people who believe that alien involvement is being covered up what they would do if the report came out contrary to their beliefs. Several said straight out that they would not believe it. While I admire their honesty, I deplore their methodology.

Some involved in UFOlogy have adopted the following as one of their mottos:

"Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence."

When they refuse to accept anything other than their preconceived notions, their motto might as well be:

"Absence of evidence is evidence of conspiracy."

REALLity Check
by David Bloomberg
Witch Burnings

While we have often termed some of the accusations involving repressed memories of childhood abuse as "witch hunts," referring, of course, to what we think of as a historical comparison, in some parts of the world it is actually a current event.

Specifically, the new government of South Africa is having to deal with this phenomena, with over 70 witch-hunt related deaths this year (Chicago Tribune, 7/24). Belief in witchcraft is apparently pervasive, and the "justice" involved is to burn those thought guilty. One governmental official, trying to stop the burnings, is quoted as explaining, "We are finding it very difficult even to convince well-educated African people."

As in historical witch hunts, the accusations start small, but soon rise to a mass hysteria, where whole families are burned to death for non-existent crimes. Generally, the starting point is what the local people think of as a mysterious event: a middle-aged man dies, a boy disappears, etc. A witch-seeker is hired, who tells the instigators of the hunt to drink a potion and yell out whatever name comes to mind; that person is the witch. In some cases, "justice" comes without even a witch-seeker. In one village, a lightning bolt struck and killed five women tending their crops. However, two women with them survived. The only possible explanation is that they were witches, so they were forced to drink gasoline and burned alive.

The new South African government has assigned a task force which we can only hope will put an end to these murders. However, with a belief like this running so deep, it will be a difficult task.

DCFS and Satanic Scares

The Illinois Times (actually, the same author who wrote about REALL, me, and my FMS talk a couple months back) published an article (8/25) relating to false memories and satanic cults. But, it wasn't quite one of the standard stories we're used to now. Apparently a worker for the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is suing because she was pulled off of a child abuse investigation. Margaret Wright accused a man in 1989 of satanically abusing his two children. However, no evidence could be found to support these allegations. In fact, the state police used videotapes of her therapy sessions and found that she and others had coerced the children and used leading questions. Thankfully, DCFS reacted rationally, and took Wright off the case when she became insubordinate, according to the article.

It turns out that Wright actually was trained by the same "expert" who trained the therapist involved in the Illinois Times article appearing as the lead story when the story about REALL also appeared (written by Matt Keenan -- see Vol. 2, #7 of The REALL News) What a coincidence. This recent story also mentions that the "expert," Pamala Klein, was the subject of several exposés saying that, according to the Times, she "coerces patients into believing they were satanically abused."

According to the article, Wright believes that there is a vast network of satanists preying on children all over the U.S. According to some of the evidence in the case, Springfield is claimed to be a "secret center" of such activity, with a former candidate for governor, among others, as one of the participants. I would not at all be surprised if the author of the Illinois Times article is now added to the list, as this seems to be standard operating procedure. If somebody questions the validity of this huge satanic conspiracy, they must be one of them. I guess that makes me one, too. Ah, well.

Letters, Oh We Sent Letters...

The past couple months have seen a good share of REALL letters in the Illinois Times. First, REALL patron member Bob Smet sent in a letter (7/21) pointing out a number of flaws in an earlier letter sent by Polly Poskin. Poskin's letter had been about the Times article of a woman who had supposedly been abused by her family, who were supposedly part of a ring of Satanists. The most blatant flaw was that Poskin complained that the author didn't contact the daughter or the therapist. However, the article stated quite clearly that the daughter and therapist disappeared! In addition, Ms. Poskin made it sound like she thinks the justice system should be changed when she said of the parents, "their pain does not prove their innocence." As we have seen in too many of these cases, the accusation removes the presumption of innocence in the eyes of many.

In August (8/11), a letter was printed from Maria Mootry, the Coordinator of the Springfield Pure Food Campaign. It attacked the FDA (among others) for allowing milk from cows given bovine growth hormone (BGH) to be sold without warning labels. Some of the claims in her letter made me a teensy bit suspicious, so I did a little research and found them to be almost totally bogus. In response, I sent a letter containing the correct information, which was printed in the following issue (8/18). Look for an article on this subject here in The REALL News in the near future.

Exorcism and the States

The Chicago Tribune reported an AP story (8/17) which tells of a New York state mental hospital billed \$12,000 for an exorcism done on a man who had killed his wife.

Apparently, the hospital allows "conventional spiritual counseling" but didn't know what they were getting themselves into when they took the patient to the United Church of Salvation, a church following a Caribbean religion, which is actually in the pastor's apartment. Once there, the pastor decided that the patient was possessed by demons, so exorcism was naturally the only way to solve this man's problems.

Luckily, however, some semblance of rationality hit when the \$12,000 bill was sent to the hospital, and the sessions were stopped, while only \$500 (apparently the usual rate for "spiritual counseling") was paid.

Speaking of exorcisms, we also had one here in an Illinois correctional facility. According to Toby McDaniel's column (State Journal-Register, 9/9), sources within the Logan Correctional Center say that two prison staff members were aided by civilian volunteers at an exorcism performed on an inmate. Apparently, this took place at a religious study class in August. An investigation is ongoing, but if they get a bill for \$12,000, I'd advise them to call New York. Curran's Coincidence?

As you may remember, a few months ago REALLity Check discussed a trip by State Rep. Mike Curran to a town in Yugoslavia where the Virgin Mary supposedly makes regular appearances. At that time, I pointed out that Mr. Curran should take seriously those of us who ask him for evidence of the supposed miraculous cures he claimed occurred to those at the site.

Well, now Mr. Curran has announced that he will not be seeking re-election. Coincidence? Of course, but we don't have to tell anybody that.

The following letter was sent to the Illinois Times in response to the articles mentioned. However, it was sent after the Times had already printed two rounds of letters. The author gave REALL permission to print it here.

Dear Editor:

Thank you for two excellent articles in the June 30 issue: The 'REALL' Story on Ritual Abuse and Our Daughter Says We're Satanists. Readers might be interested in two recent developments that relate to the issue of "recovered memories" and "satanic abuse."

First, a study commissioned by the Department of Health of the British government to examine cases of alleged satanic abuse reported in April that no evidence was found to support the existence of satanic ritual abuse. A study commissioned by the Dutch government has concluded that accounts of satanic ritual abuse in The Netherlands are ill-founded. These recent European studies support the results of the FBI investigation by Kenneth Lanning.

Second, the American Medical Association issued a report on June 16 that stated:

"The AMA considers recovered memories of childhood sexual abuse to be of uncertain authenticity, which should be subject to external verification. The use of recovered memories is fraught with problems of potential misapplication."

The effort to prevent child sexual abuse is far too serious and important to be undermined by careless or ignorant practices. The Illinois Times has made a significant contribution by reminding people of the problems that can develop when professionals do not critically examine their beliefs and their practice.

Pamela Freyd, Ph.D.
Executive Director
False Memory Syndrome Foundation
Philadelphia, PA

A Nod to Our Patrons

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Letters to the Editor

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

Looking into the Sun -- and other tabloids
Cancer Clusters
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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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Regular membership includes The REALL News and all of the benefits of membership. A subscription to The REALL News, without membership, is available. Full-time students can join at the discounted rate. A patron membership includes all of the benefits of a regular membership, plus a listing in The REALL News and our eternal gratitude (where "eternal" is defined as "one year").

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