



National Capital Area SKEPTICAL EYE

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JURASSIC POOP

On June 11 of this year the long awaited film version of Michael Crichton's 1990 best-seller, Jurassic Park, debuted, in theaters across the country. The result was not only a major hit for director Steven Spielberg, as Jurassic Park became the first movie to make over \$50 million in the first three days, but also a nationwide plunge into dinosaur-mania. Dinosaurs graced the covers of periodicals as diverse as Scientific American and The New Yorker, and everything in between. And as of this writing, Jurassic Park has earned over \$324 million, becoming the third highest grossing film of all time. Now, we at the Skeptical Eye feel it is our turn to jump on the bandwagon, join in the fray, and just generally put our two cents worth in. So, please join us as we catch a little dino-mania ourselves, and cast our "skeptical eye" towards Jurassic Park.



The Dino Genome Project

By Jim Pickel

By now, you must consider yourself warned. Steven Spielberg has forecast the cloning of a dinosaur in "40 years from now," and Michael Crichton has asked us to "be attentive" to the activities of scientists. Meanwhile, feature articles in every magazine and local paper cite responsible scientists who take the opportunity to give introductory lessons in molecular biology and explain why such things cannot be done. But the fun of *Jurassic Park* comes from its reliance on several fascinating new discoveries and techniques from which it extrapolates to additional imaginative, but plausible fiction.

First, where is the science in this sci-fi? Indeed ancient DNAs have been isolated and purified since 1984 (Higuchi, 1984; Paabo, 1989). The record for recovery of the oldest DNA was set last year when the structure of genes from 30-40 Million year old insects was determined by two groups (DeSalle, 1992; Cano, 1992). These insects were found in amber which has remarkable preservative properties. While it may not be feasible to build

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Greetings from Geraci Park

By Elena Watson

Okay, so we can't really clone dinosaurs. And it's unlikely we'll ever be able to clone dinosaurs. And there will never be a real "Jurassic Park." So how about the next best thing: Geraci Park.

Geraci Park?

All right, maybe it's not the next best thing, maybe not even close. But it is a dinosaur park. Its real name is Dinosaur Land, and it is located in Winchester, Virginia, at the intersection of U.S. Routes 522 and 340. The Geraci comes from the park's visionary, Joseph Geraci. According to the *Washington Post* (July 11, 1993) Geraci began his enterprise in 1960 with the "Rebel Corner" gift shop. But in 1962 he saw some concrete dinosaurs while vacationing in Florida. They seemed like just the right enticement for shoppers. At first he only bought a few to put out front, but then he just kept adding to them. There are now 35 in total.

Although Geraci died in 1987, his four daughters continue running the business. As in any good tourist trap, visitors enter through the large gift shop. It costs three

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encourages critical and scientific thinking

serves as an information resource on extraordinary claims

provides extraordinary evidence that skeptics are cool

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Geraci Park, from page 1

dollars to see the wooded park out back. But the first stop is the photo room, inhabited by the Mummy, Frankenstein's monster and a pair of cave people. All have the same, cheap paper-mache look as the dinos. Outside, the park also has a few other non-dinosaur inhabitants; a shark, a king cobra and the ever popular King Kong. There is also an "Epic Battle" between a titanoosaur and a tyrannosaur, in which two models appear to be fighting. That is about the closest one gets to action at Geraci Park. In spite of this, the park has a sort of primitive well-weathered charm about it.

And as far as scientific value goes Dinosaur Land may score somewhat higher than, say, "The Flintstones," but overall its educational value is probably somewhat negligible. However, when one considers truth in advertising, it is hard to criticize any attraction in which the words "Gift Shop" predominate all others on the sign. Dinosaur Land does, in fact, have a very large gift shop. But then, so does *Jurassic Park*. □

Smart dresser.

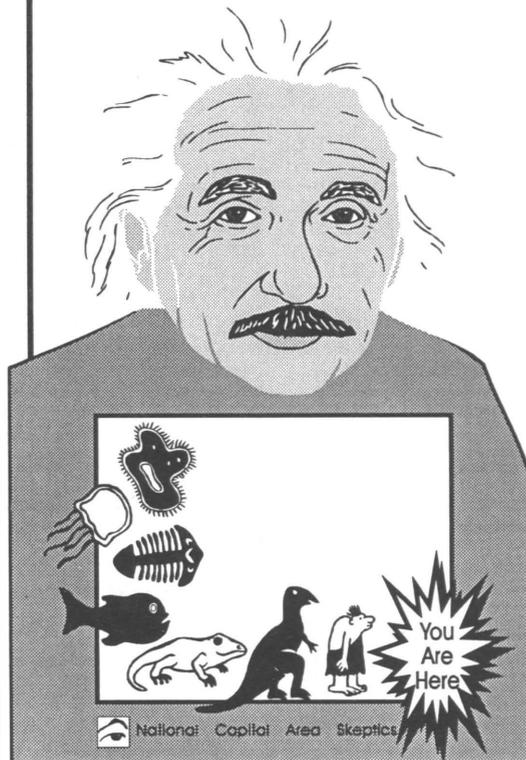
Orders are now being taken for new editions of NCAS shirts. Choose from two designs printed on top quality shirts:

"You Are Here" (shown here)

"I'm so skeptical... I can hardly believe it."

Both designs may be ordered on either sweatshirts (\$25) or t-shirts (\$15), plus S&H. Place your order by October 30 and deduct 10%.

Leave a message on the NCAS line (301-587-3827).





Prez Sez

By Joe Himes

This issue of the *Skeptical Eye* will be reaching you at about the same time that NCAS begins another season of activities. Chip Denman announced in the previous issue that I could have his presidential title if I would write this column for a while (or something like that), but we have no intention of retiring his smiling scoff. Chip was a leader in forming NCAS and continued to shepherd its growth into the vibrant and respected organization that we now all share. This change will give him time to focus on favorite topics in greater depth, to everyone's benefit.

Most of the changes you see will result from the continued evolution of our organization. Consider our monthly programs, for example. The content has been changing, not because there's a shortage of new claims, but because more of those claims seem to be hitting closer to home. You've probably noted examples in recent weeks — in public safety, medical research, education, and other areas — that will affect us all if limited funds are misdirected toward will-o'-the-wisps instead of toward solid solutions. The attempts to detour government money into fuzzy ideas seem limited only by the imaginations of the hawkers. The media and public officials alone do not provide the critical light needed to find the useful ideas among such claims, but we can help, especially if we tap the skills of all our

members. We expect to have more programs about current public topics that would seem to need our kind of attention. I invite your suggestions.

We are also looking for ways to involve more members. Only a too-small fraction of the membership can attend the local presentations. Because we are past the day when information could only be passed among those sitting at the same fire, we need to find the best way to involve the others. This will be especially true as we tackle current issues (or when we must respond quickly to some event) and need all the hands and brains we can muster. Getting involved can be informative, satisfying, and fun; we just need to figure out how best to do it.

So opportunity beckons! I'd like your ideas about current public issues that could use a scientific review, and your suggestions about how to utilize the skills of all our members. Are there members out there, for example, who would really get excited about reviewing the video tape that we make of each presentation and writing a thorough synopsis for the *Eye*? (Fame may await: The *Eye* is sent to quite a few media folks.) See the box on page 23 for addresses.

Note regarding Eldon Byrd

Correction

The previous issue of the *Skeptical Eye* and the June *Shadow of a Doubt* both included a statement concerning the conclusion of the trial of a civil suit brought by "parapsychologist Eldon Byrd" against James Randi. Mr. Byrd informs us that he is not, never was, and is not likely to ever be a parapsychologist. □

Randi Legal Fund Update:

Contributions to the James Randi Fund, formerly run from El Cerrito, California, should now be sent to:

Mr. K. Lewis
142 West 49th Street, Suite 12H
New York City, NY 10019

The fund is still badly needed to assist in covering legal costs incurred by Randi in fighting the suits brought by Uri Geller and others.

Dino Genome, from page 1

a theme park around these discoveries they are exciting breakthroughs. Now ancient DNA structure can be compared to the structure of DNA of modern species to determine the evolutionary relationship between the extinct and the extant. Unpublished claims have been made that DNA has also been isolated from fossilized bone, though the possibility of contamination with DNA from microorganisms must be eliminated. Most recently it has been reported that intact red blood cells were encased in fossilized bone and could be observed microscopically (Morell, 1993). Any, even simple analysis of DNA from ancient sources would be impossible without a technique called the polymerase chain reaction (PCR). This technique synthesizes new DNA strands from as little as one strand of original DNA. It can literally amplify a piece of DNA a million times. So how hard could it be to make a dinosaur?

The difficulty with the study of ancient DNA is that over long periods in less than ideal conditions the strands break. Each of the 46 human chromosomes averages 39 cm long (Lewin, 1983) but is coiled very tightly in each microscopic cell. Wound safely around proteins in a cell's nucleus it is very stable. But when a cell dies, such a long structure, that is only a single molecule wide, is susceptible to damage. An intact single chromosome is around 130,000,000 nucleotide bases long but the longest ancient DNA is only around 250 nucleotides long. Amplifying each of these pieces a million times by PCR makes enough DNA but it does not help order these fragments into a functioning gene. The sequence of nucleotides in the DNA molecule determines the function and control of genes. The human genome project has spurred the development of techniques to rapidly analyzing the sequence of DNA and compare it to other known sequences. The sequence of a piece of DNA can be typed into an everyday computer and its origin determined in seconds. Identities and similarities with other previously determined sequences can also be determined. (Using this analysis it can be shown that the fictitious dinosaur sequence that appears in *Jurassic Park* is actually from a bacterial fragment that is ubiquitous in today's laboratories (Boguski, 1992). Since contamination with these sorts of lab DNAs is one of the hazards of dealing with ancient DNA, Crichton must have included it as a tongue-in-cheek comment on his characters' competence.) If all the fragments could be recovered, individually analyzed and all the overlaps be mapped and the pieces then spliced together (maybe with something other than the transsexual amphibian DNA that was used in *Jurassic Park*) there might be a chromosome. Embryological development is such a complex process that it is poorly understood in even the simplest organisms. It involves not only the DNA of the egg and sperm, but the way in which they have been programmed by the mother and father, as well as, a background of activities

that reside in the egg and are activated at fertilization. Putting a gene into an existing embryo is commonly done but generating a new organism even if all the genes were present is the most far fetched of the fantasies of *Jurassic Park*.

There is some science and there is some fiction, and the mix in *Jurassic Park* makes great entertainment. But, we have been warned by Spielberg and Crichton to watch out for those scientists. After all, if Industrial Light and Magic can use massive computing power to generate these scary images to make a buck, why would scientists not use their resources to the same end? The novel does raise some thought provoking questions. The lack of international cooperation in regulating multinational corporations is indicted. Most poignant though, are the tirades of the Ian Malcolm character. As he questions the preeminent position of scientists to decide what and how to study nature, he is voicing the doubts that many have about the usefulness of science. When do we stop manipulating our environment and food products for increased entertainment, convenience or profitability? What good is research if it finds no cure? How can budgetary decisions be made based on conflicting data?

"Sure I'd clone a dinosaur if I could."

—A developmental biologist.

"I don't think they should [clone dinosaurs]."

—J. Mazello, child star of *Jurassic Park*.

These comments are both emotional responses reflecting either the excitement of discovery or the fear of the unknown. Today's decisions on the application of biotechnology are of more consequence than the resurrection of a dinosaur but, too often, are being made on similarly emotional grounds.

References:

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- Higuchi, R., Bowman, B., Freiberger, M., Ryder, O., and Wilson, A. *Nature*, 312: 282 (1984).
- Lewin, B. *Genes*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1984 (p.438).
- Morell, V. *Science*, 261:160 (1993).
- Paabo, S., Higuchi, R., and Wilson, A. *Journal of Biological Chemistry*, 264: 9709 (1989). □

Jim Pickel is a research scientist who is currently manipulating mouse embryo genes for his own unprofitable ends.

The Evolution of Science in Dinosaur Epics: Is Jurassic Park Any Different?

By Randall Lockwood

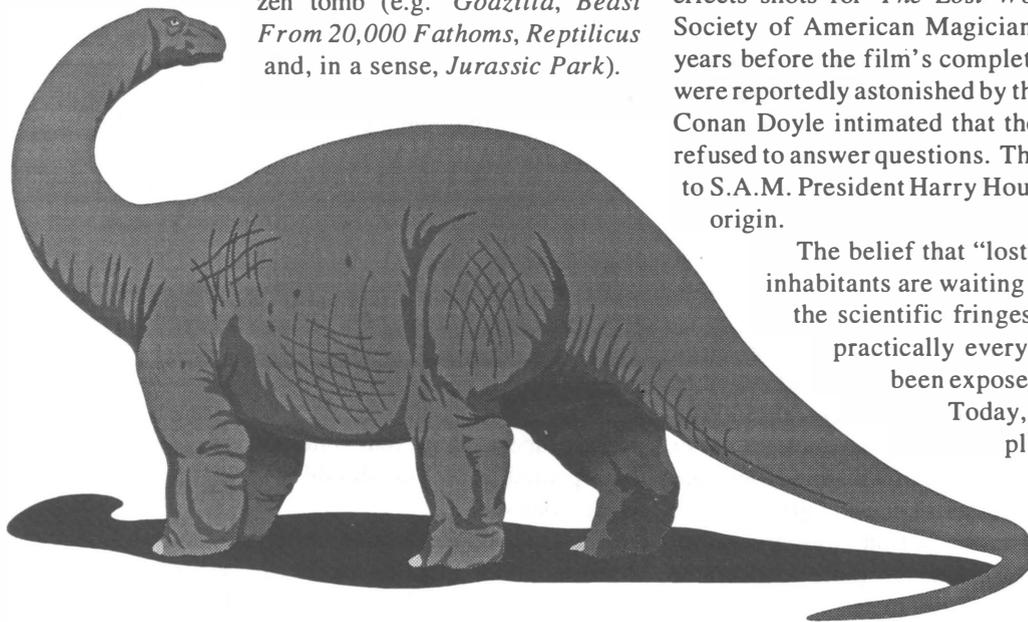
Much of the hype surrounding both the novel and film of *Jurassic Park* has dealt with the Spielberg/Crichton assertion that it is fundamentally *different* from the three dozen or so dinosaur films that came before it (see Filmography - sidebar) in that its premise is scientifically plausible, its depictions of dinosaur form and function are scientifically accurate, and its theme is a serious one which forces us to confront big questions concerning the use and misuse of scientific knowledge.

Jurassic Park's scientific authenticity and plausibility are reviewed elsewhere in this issue. But, at best *Jurassic Park* presents a highly simplified characterization of many elements that are on the fringes of established science, blended with just enough real "hard science" to make it possible to buy the premise, and thus buy the whole bit. It is a masterful blend, mounted with more technical skill and commercial success than any of its predecessors, but is it really any different in its approach to science?

All dinosaur films begin with one of four basic premises:

1. The world is vast and there are many uncharted areas (Africa, the Amazon and the ever-popular uncharted tropical island) where dinosaurs may still survive, waiting to be discovered, hauled back to civilization and made into a Saturday morning cartoon show (e.g. *The Lost World, Valley of Gwangi*).

2. Some dinosaurs aren't really dead, they're just resting, waiting for some powerful force (usually an atomic bomb) to release them from their hibernation or frozen tomb (e.g. *Godzilla, Beast From 20,000 Fathoms, Reptilicus* and, in a sense, *Jurassic Park*).



3. Planets exist (usually Venus) whose climate and topography resemble those of the Age of Dinosaurs, therefore they are likely to also have dinosaurs and cave girls (e.g. *Planet of Storms, Twenty Million Miles to Earth*).

4. People and dinosaurs never coexisted, but what the hell it makes a good story and this is only a movie anyway (e.g. *One Million B.C., Caveman* and just about any film that doesn't fit plots 1, 2 or 3).

Each of the first three views is consistent with some of the scientific thinking, prior to, or at the time those films were made, that allowed the films to appear scientifically plausible. The "lost world" explanation has been the most popular slant of all the "scientific" dinosaur films, turning up regularly in the seventy-year history of the genre. The film of *The Lost World* (1925), based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1912 classic, was a product of the modern Age of Discovery, when intrepid explorers were making forays into "Darkest Africa" and the "Green Hell" of the Amazon. Alfred Smith, a.k.a. "Trader Horn" was writing his accounts of explorations in Africa, including alleged native reports of giant reptiles. A German expedition to the Congo in 1913 recorded native stories of elephant-sized animals with long necks and tails that capsized canoes. In 1919 Captain Leicester Stevens held a London press conference announcing his departure for the Congo to capture dinosaurs. He returned home quietly, and empty-handed.

Still, new species were regularly discovered in these remote places. It had been less than a generation since the first European had seen a gorilla, so the prospect of finding prehistoric or mythical creatures in these remote regions was within the realm of respectable, if not mainstream, scientific belief.

Even skeptical audiences were prepared to believe. Conan Doyle held a screening of preliminary special effects shots for *The Lost World* at a meeting of the Society of American Magicians in June of 1922, three years before the film's completion. Many in attendance were reportedly astonished by the moving dinosaurs. And Conan Doyle intimated that the film was authentic, but refused to answer questions. The next day he wrote a note to S.A.M. President Harry Houdini explaining the film's origin.

The belief that "lost worlds" with prehistoric inhabitants are waiting to be found had moved to the scientific fringes by World War II, when practically every corner of the world had been exposed to the "civilized" world.

Today, although no area of the planet remains unseen (at least by satellites capable of resolving objects the size of a wading *Diplocodus*), the notion that there might

be some place still capable of hiding a dinosaur refuses to become extinct. Dr. Roy Mackal, a University of Chicago biochemist, continues to gain media attention for his expeditions to Africa in search of dinosaurs, chronicled in his 1987 book *A Living Dinosaur?*

Sometimes dinosaur films combine the lost world hypothesis with another fringe-science explanation, like the ever-popular "hollow Earth" theory advanced in 1818 by John Cleves Symmes, who proposed that the North and South Poles held openings to a "warm and rich land, stocked with thrifty vegetables and animals." His proposal for an expedition to this new world was approved by Congress but vetoed by a skeptical President-elect Andrew Jackson. The idea has been kept alive by a variety of cult classics, including Raymond Bernard's 1964 *The Hollow Earth: The Greatest Geographical Discovery in History* and it stands at the core of such dinosaur films as *The Last Dinosaur* and *The Land Unknown*.

The second major theme of the dinosaur genre, the notion of animating inert matter and bringing it to life, is one of the oldest themes of horror, fantasy and science fiction. It can take the form of animating clay (*The Golem*) or the dead (*Frankenstein*, *The Mummy* and many more), bits of living or once-living tissue (*The Thing*, *Reptilicus*, *Re-Animator*) or DNA fragments (*Jurassic Park*). Most dinosaur films built around the idea of reanimation start with the assumption that the dinosaurs have been put in a state of suspended animation, usually by intense cold. Early studies of cryonics, and accounts of fish and other frozen creatures reactivated by thawing provided fodder for many science fiction stories in the 50s and early 60s, as low-temperature surgery and research into the possibility of suspended animation for space-travellers edged from the fringe toward the mainstream of science. Public interest peaked around 1964 with the publication of Robert Ettinger's popular account of cryonics, *The Prospect of Immortality*, followed by the first reported human "cryonic suspension" in 1967.

If intense cold could place living things in suspension, then it was only logical that the intense heat of lightening or an atomic blast could have the reverse effect. In keeping with this archetypal theme, it is interesting to note that much of the imagery of *Jurassic Park* focuses on the cryonic suspension of the dinosaur embryos, and the release of the creatures comes in the midst of the requisite electrical storm. Spielberg knows better than any other director what conventions his audience expects to find, and he does not disappoint us.

The third "scientific" approach to dinosaur films, positing a prehistoric Venus, was a natural extension of early telescopic observations of that planet's cloud-covered surface. Early observers, familiar only with water clouds, deduced a great abundance of water and therefore —swamps. The idea of Venus as a sister to Earth, passing through its own Carboniferous period, was given credence in 1918 by Nobel-prize winning chemist Svante Arrhenius, who contended that the planet was "dripping

wet ...no doubt covered with swamps." Although that notion died quickly among scientists when spectroscopic observations of the 1920s revealed the absence of water, it remained in the public psyche, and in the dinosaur films of the next 50 years (e.g. *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet*).

If *Jurassic Park* represents no new watershed in the application of mainstream science to the genre of the dinosaur film, what about its handling of the ethical issues of science and society? In their promotion of *Jurassic Park*, Spielberg and Crichton suggest they are raising deep moral issues of the responsibility of the scientist. Yet the moralizing is reduced to a few platitudes tossed out in the Jurassic Park visitor center dining room that are no deeper than "it's not nice to fool mother nature." This is the simplistic moral of most of Crichton's filmed works, in which ambitious, greedy or nasty people use state of the art technology to go too far with defense research (*Andromeda Strain*, 1971), robotics (*Westworld*, 1973; *Runaway*, 1984), brain research (*Terminal Man*, 1974) or computer graphics (*Looker*, 1981) —and then they die. Spielberg has sanitized Crichton's novel to the point where even this message is lost. Those with the greatest hubris are spared, but the audience is kept satisfied by allowing a lawyer to be devoured while sitting on a toilet.

Several reviews have contrasted the depth of the issues raised in *Jurassic Park* (as well as the special effects) with the alleged banality of the reigning dinosaur classic *Godzilla*. This dismissal of *Godzilla* is an injustice to writer/director Inoshiro Honda and the big green guy. Although nearly forty years of increasingly juvenile spin-offs have reduced *Godzilla* to a Japanese cultural icon akin to Mickey Mouse, he originally served as a powerful symbol of the horrors of nuclear devastation and the forces of nature unleashed. The documentary-style footage of the thousands left scorched, battered and homeless by the beast's rampage was modelled precisely after newsreels of the aftermath of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *Godzilla* personified (or reptilified) the destruction that human beings could bring on one another; humans who had perhaps not fully confronted the nature of the horror they were prepared to release.

In *Godzilla*, the monster is eventually destroyed by the scientist Serizawa, who has developed a powerful weapon that destroys all flesh without harming man-made objects (presaging the development of the neutron bomb). Serizawa hides from the world, rather than have his discovery turned into a new weapon, but he is persuaded to use it against *Godzilla* when even nuclear weapons fail. In a chilling undersea scene he does so, destroying *Godzilla*, himself, and the secrets of his ultimate weapon in the desperate hope that none of this destruction can ever be repeated. Now *that* should inspire some reflection on ethics and science!

Jurassic Park's other underlying moral, that man is foolish to think that raw nature can be contained, turns up even in Gertie the Dinosaur's disobedience of her off-

screen “trainer” and is powerfully portrayed in *The Lost World*, *King Kong*, *Gorgo*, *Twenty Million Miles to Earth*, and other films more thematically complex than *Jurassic Park*.

So, *Jurassic Park*'s scientific moralizing is juvenile, even by schlock dinosaur film standards, and its science is as full of holes as prehistoric DNA and farther from the mainstream than that in many of its easily dismissed predecessors. Why then, has *JP* been successfully positioned as a “scientific” ripping yarn and achieved its enormous success? The mass appeal of the fringe science in *Jurassic Park* is the same as that of much of fringe science in general. It strikes a responsive chord with what we would like to be true, and provides a rational shred that allows us to believe it might be true without seeing ourselves as foolish. We would love to believe that the world is sufficiently vast and unexplored enough that a prehistoric world is just waiting to be found. We are excited by the prospect that Earth has a young “sister planet,” still in a state unspoiled by human technology. We yearn for the possibility that the dead are merely resting, waiting for the appropriate application of technology to reawaken them. This is the stuff of dreams and nightmares, and Crichton and Spielberg are among the most accomplished masters of tapping in and making them seem to come true.

Further Reading

Nugent, Rory. *Drums Along the Congo: On the Trail of the Mokele-Mbembe, the Last Living Dinosaur*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1993.
 Shapiro, Marc. *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Screen*. New York: Image Publishing, 1992. □

Editor's note: Entertainment Weekly reports that a Godzilla remake may be in the works.

Sure the dinosaurs in *Jurassic Park* look great. But, are they really Jurassic? After all, dinosaurs lived during all three periods of the Mesozoic Era; the Triassic, the Jurassic and the Cretaceous. Here's how the movie dinos score:

Tyrannosaurus Rex -- Late Cretaceous

Brachiosaur -- Late Jurassic

Gallimimus -- Late Cretaceous

Velociraptor -- Late Cretaceous

Dilophosaur -- Early Jurassic

Triceratops -- Late Cretaceous

A Dinosaur Filmography

Compiled By Randall Lockwood

(* denotes those with some pretense to scientific authenticity; vc indicates available on videocassette.)

Gertie (1914) - Winsor McCay's classic, introducing the world's first cartoon star in the form of a lovable dinosaur.

The Dinosaur and the Missing Link (1915) - Willis O'Brien's first commercial film using stop-motion animation clay dinosaurs. Film was sold to Edison for \$525.

Gertie on Tour (1918) - Predates *Jurassic Park* by 75 years in its combination of live actors and an animated apatosaurus.

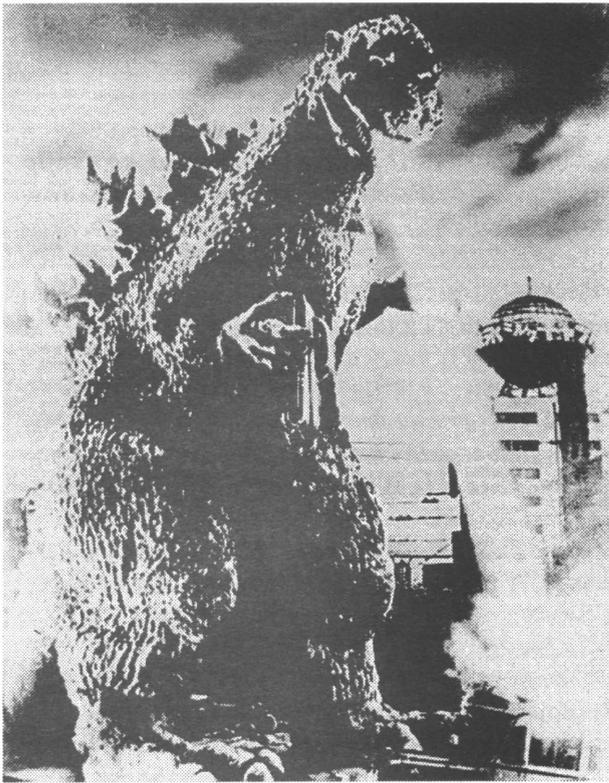
* *The Lost World* (1925) - The first full length film to use stop motion animation (by Willis O'Brien and young apprentice Ray Harryhausen), based on Conan Doyle's classic of prehistoric creatures in the Amazon. vc

* *King Kong* (1933) - Leftover “Lost World” footage embellishes the mood of Skull Island and new O'Brien animation gives Kong a few sparring partners. vc

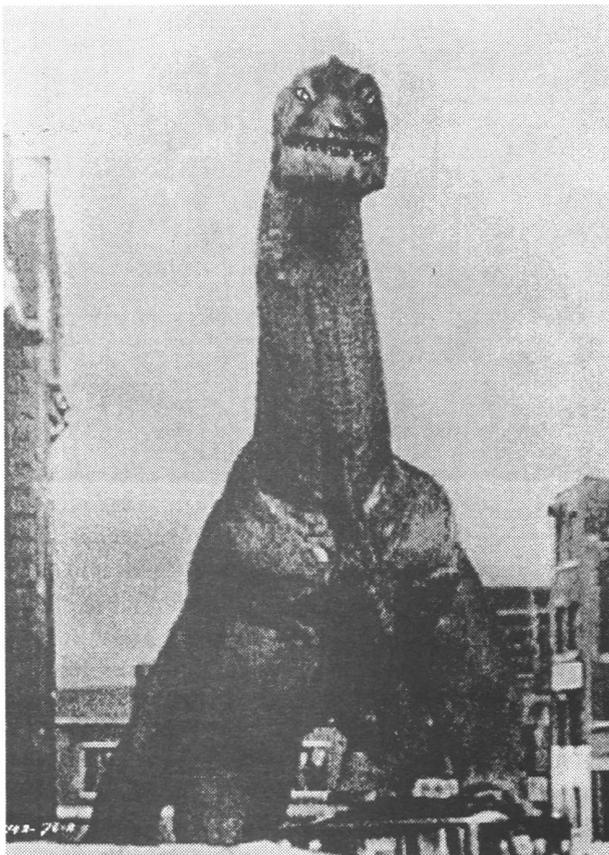


* *Fantasia* (1940) - In this Disney classic we see huge reptiles roam the earth to the tune of “The Rite of Spring,” only to die gasping as a drought turns their world into a desert. vc

One Million B.C. (1940) - Hal Roach (“Little Rascals”) directed epic (with some assist from D.W. Griffith)



Radioactive Rampage: Godzilla (above) and Giant Behemoth (below).



chronicling rival cave person clans. Original source of most of the footage of lizards with fins glued on that appears in nearly every other dino film and space opera for the next 40 years. vc

Unknown Island (1948) - Scientists on strange tropical island find people on stilts in bad dinosaur suits. vc

Two Lost Worlds (1950) - Shipwrecked crew on uncharted island encounters outtakes from *One Million B.C.* vc

Lost Continent (1951) - Rocket scientists (?) discover dinos and native girls on tropical island, which then blows up. Features both Cesar Romeo and green-tinted stop-motion dino footage. vc

Untamed Women (1952) - Air Force flyers on remote island meet Druid women and stock dinosaur footage from *One Million B.C.* vc

Robot Monster (1953) - Actor in gorilla suit with space helmet destroys all but one family on Earth, who then do battle with him and the lizards from *One Million B.C.* Originally in 3-D. vc

* *Beast From 20,000 Fathoms* (1953) - Frozen arctic stop-motion Ray Harryhausen dino is awakened by nuclear testing and attacks New York amusement pier. From Ray Bradbury's "The Fog Horn." vc

The Beast of Hollow Mountain (1953) - Cowboys vs. dinos in Mexico. The first color dinosaur film.

King Dinosaur (1955) - Encounters with dinos on a new planet invading the galaxy. Dinosaurs portrayed by rear projection lizards, one of which is unbelievably described as a T-Rex.

* *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (1956) - The "King" of the giant reptile movies, with a surprisingly profound plot despite the rubber monster suit. vc

* *Twenty Million Miles to Earth* (1957). Dinosaur egg carried by returning Venus probe hatches in Italy. Good Ray Harryhausen effects depict the creature running amok in Rome.

The Land Unknown (1957) - Navy helicopter crew finds prehistoric jungle valley after crashing in Antarctica. Dinosaurs vary between man-in-suit, okay model, and pterodactyl-on-a-rope.

The Giant Behemoth (1959) Radioactive dinosaur (by Willis O'Brien) attacks London, over-turning cars and burning the skin off of screaming people.

Dinosaurus! (1960) - Comedy tribulations of cave-man and two dinosaurs accidentally unearthed on tropical island who must deal with city life. vc

The Lost World (1960) - Irwin (Mr. Disaster) Allen's Cinemascope remake of the classic, using iguanas and other made-up lizards much less effectively than the animated creatures of the original.

Gorgo (1961) - Baby dinosaur in a London circus is rescued by his mom. Sort of like *Beowulf* with a happy ending for dinos. vc

Valley of the Dragons (1961) - Spacemen return to prehistoric earth finding dinos, cave people and true love. Loosely based on Jules Verne's *Off On a Comet*.

Reptilicus (1962) - The tail of a prehistoric monster regenerates into a full-sized creature in Denmark. Dino portrayed by cheesy slime spitting puppet.

Planet of Storms (1962) - A reasonably good Russian epic about dinosaurs on Venus that suffered the indignity of being chopped up and spliced in with Basil Rathbone footage to produce *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (1965) and then spliced up by Peter Bogdanovich (under a pseudonym) with footage of Mamie Van Doren to make *Voyage to the Planet of the Prehistoric Women* (1968).

One Million Years B.C. (1966) - Hammer Film's remake of 1940 epic introducing Raquel Welch and the Frederick's of Bedrock clothing collection. Uses some lizards with fins and many Ray Harryhausen creatures to terrorize the warring blondes vs. brunettes cave clans.

* *The Valley of Gwangi* (1969) - The discovery of a living Eohippus (prehistoric horse) in remote Mexico leads to finding other prehistoric beasts for cowboys to lasso. This is the film Willis O'Brien wanted to make himself, finally done by Ray Harryhausen. Features some good Harryhausen animation effects.

When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth (1970) - Typhoon takes four people to lost world where Jim Danforth's stop-motion dinos and Playboy playmates run around. Hammer's second foray into the past. vc

The Land that Time Forgot (1975) - World War I submarine crew finds undiscovered island with dinosaurs and Germans. Island blows up. Based on the Edgar Rice Burrough's 1918 novel. vc

The People that Time Forgot (1977) - Crew returns to above mentioned island (which wasn't quite dead yet) to have more adventures. Sequel based on Burrough's 1919 sequel. vc

* *The Last Dinosaur* (1977) - Japanese made for TV movie in which Richard Boone enters lost prehistoric world under polar ice (?) to hunt a T-rex (played by a borrowed Godzilla suit). vc

The Day Time Ended (1980) (aka *Time Warp*, 1978) - Inept mishmash about a family swept into alternate worlds, with some dinosaurs around to provide "plot." vc

Caveman (1981) - Silly troop of cave people, including Ringo Starr, Shelley Long and Barbara Bach, encounter silly, well-animated, Jim Danforth dinos. vc

* *Baby, Secret of the Lost Legend* (1985) - Disney paleontologists in Africa reunite cute animatronic dino with his mom. Inspired by cryptozoologist Roy Mackal's search for the "mokele-mbembe." vc

Super Mario Brothers (1993) - Film version of the video game with battles in a humanoid/dinosaur-run world.

* *Carnosaur* (1993) - Roger Corman's attempt to scoop *Jurassic Park*, by two weeks, with similar tale of genetic dino making. Also features the creative casting of Diane Ladd (Laura Dern's mom) as the obsessed scientist. Coming to a video store near you, if not already there.

* *Jurassic Park* (1993) - Enough said. □



Before his stock footage career took off, this dino impersonator co-starred in *One Million B.C.*

Dinosaurs and humans, together! Whether it is as faithful companions, or bitter rivals, the image of dinosaurs and humans interacting is a powerful one. It pervades our popular culture, and is at the heart of the appeal of Jurassic Park. But most of us realize that dinosaurs became extinct some 65 million years ago.

The Flintstones and One Million B.C. were not documentaries. In the following article NCAS member Mike Epstein examines the creationist claim that dinos and humans once walked together side by side in Glen Rose, Texas.

Creationist Missteps - The Paluxy River Footprints

By Mike Epstein

“Look at the behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox. What strength he has in his loins, what power in the muscles of his belly! His tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are close-knit. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like rods of iron.”

—Job 40:15-18 (NIV)

“Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope? . . . Who dares open the doors of his mouth, ringed about with his fearsome teeth? . . . His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn. Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds.”

—Job 41:1;14;18-20 (NIV)



Here, in the words of the Bible, lie the roots of the creationist belief that humans and dinosaurs co-existed throughout the history of the earth; an earth only a few thousand years old. To understand this, you must understand that young earth creationists accept the biblical creation as infallible. The six days of creation were 24 hour days, and Noah's flood was a worldwide catastrophe. Creation science consists of seeking evidence that is consistent with this view, and trying to debunk conflicting evidence. Large beasts such as leviathans and behemoths are mentioned in the Bible. Man existed since the creation of the earth. Irrefutable evidence of dinosaur existence has been found. Therefore, the only logical and consistent explanation is that man and dinosaur co-existed.

So it was not surprising that Clifford L. Burdick's 1950 article (in *Signs of the Times*, a Seventh-Day Adventist publication) about the occurrence of giant human footprints in the same strata as dinosaur tracks found near Glen Rose, Texas, was picked up and published in *The Genesis Flood* (1961). Written by John C. Witcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris, this was one of the books that led to the modern young earth creationist movement. The significance of the find was that the King James Bible (Genesis 6:4) reports giants to have lived on the Earth at the time of Noah. According to *Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy* (1989), these dinosaur tracks were originally found in the 1930s by Roland T. Bird, a paleontologist from the American Museum of Natural History in New York. He later dismissed the large human footprints as clever carvings. Locals not only had excavated tracks to sell but also carved fake tracks in pieces of limestone. Nevertheless, the forged footprints were held as irrefutable proof of the falseness of the evolutionary assumption that dinosaurs became extinct millions of

years prior to the appearance of man. A flood of anti-evolution publications and a film, *Footprints in Stone*, followed shortly.

However, soon the facade began to crumble. A careful investigation by Berney Neufeld that was published in 1975 in *Origins*

One of many actual dinosaur footprints which are preserved in the riverbed at Paluxy, Texas. Viewing varies with the rising and falling of the river.

Photos by Chip Denman

A depression in the stone of the Paluxy riverbed which has been interpreted by some as proof that humans and dinosaurs walked the earth—or at least Texas—together. Water from the river was used to wet the rock in the "track" to make it easier to see.

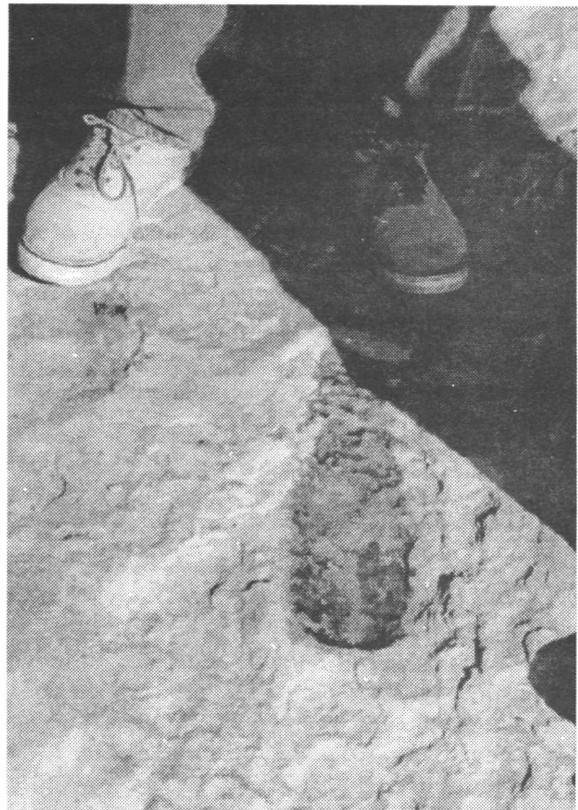
(another Seventh-Day Adventist journal) demonstrated that genuine dinosaur tracks from the Paluxy river showed compaction beneath the footprint and that "human" tracks, which appeared to be carved, did not. He warned creationists that "the Glen Rose region of the Paluxy River does not provide good evidence for the past existence of giant men. Nor does it provide evidence for the co-existence of such men and the giant dinosaurs."

Work by other scientists finally led to the withdrawal of the film *Footprints in Stone* from distribution. This work included the examination of a second type of "human" tracks: long, narrow, ambiguous three-toed fossilized imprints. A close investigation revealed that these footprints neither exhibited any anatomical features of the human foot nor evidence of the biomechanics of human locomotion, and are actually the weathered tracks of small bipedal dinosaurs (Feder, 1990). Then in 1986, a feature article appeared in the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) publication *Acts and Facts*, authored by John M. Morris, the son of the founder of the ICR. The article stated "it would now be improper for creationists to continue to use the Paluxy data as evidence against evolution."

However, others are still convinced of the genuineness of the dinosaur and human tracks. Dr. Carl Baugh (lecturer, Paleoanthropology) presented the Glen Rose footprints as evidence for human and dinosaur cohabitation in the May 15, 1992 CBS television show "Ancient Secrets of the Bible." Previously Baugh had bought land in the Glen Rose area and built a small structure, Creation Evidences Museum, in which he still displays "fifty-seven humanoid footprints [found] in the same strata as the thunderlizards." (Kirby, 1992). But according to Eve (1991), "Baugh claims a Ph.D. in anthropology from the College of Advanced Education in Irving, Texas . . . a Bible college located on the grounds of the Sherwood Park Baptist Church in an old house. It has no library or research facilities. Other creationists, such as those at the ICR, are distressed by Baugh's lack of scientific credentials . . . and he is regarded in the movement as something of an embarrassment." So much for the remnants of belief in the Paluxy River Footprints.

The American Scientific Affiliation (an alliance of Christians in the sciences) sums up the debacle quite well: "This example . . . provides a glimpse of how science works. Perhaps reviewing past mistakes . . . will help students become more open-minded, whatever position they—or their parents—take on human evolution."

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Author's Footnote: *The Skeptical Eye* is certainly not the place to examine creationist religious thought in detail, nor to argue theological points. Almost all scientists and theologians agree that the young earth creationist position is weak from the standpoint of biblical scholarship, historical accuracy, and modern science. There are hundreds of books on the creation versus evolution theme and I recommend two that present the sociology as well as the science: *The Creationist Movement in Modern America* (1991) and *The Creationists: The Evolution of Scientific Creationism* (1992).

But those who dismiss the young earth creationism of groups like the ICR as harmless and misguided, should consider the following. I was present, along with almost 10,000 others, on October 9-10, 1992, as the traveling road show of the Institute for Creation Research came to Rockville, Md. I listened when Ken Ham asserted that America as a nation is dying and that we are now in the greatest war in history, evolution versus creationism. The next day, Dr. Tim LaHaye, president of Family Life Ministries and founder of Christian Heritage College, stressed the danger in evolutionist beliefs. He asserted that evolution can be traced back to Lucifer, who believed that he had evolved and not been created. LaHaye further said that the evolutionary doctrine prepares man to destroy man through amorality.

This presentation has been repeated to large and enthusiastic crowds in Ohio, Georgia, California, and many other locations. Creationist conferences have been held in Russia and Turkey, with the latter being sponsored

by Muslim educators in cooperation with the ICR. More than 250 radio stations around the world are now broadcasting the ICR's 15-minute radio program, "Science, Scripture, and Salvation."

References:

Much of the information presented comes from *Teaching Science in a Climate of Controversy*, a booklet produced by the ASA's Committee for Integrity in Science Education (P.O. Box 668, Ipswich, MA 01938-9980) that attempts to make a balanced assessment of the evolution versus creationism dispute. Other references used in preparing this article were:

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Dig It

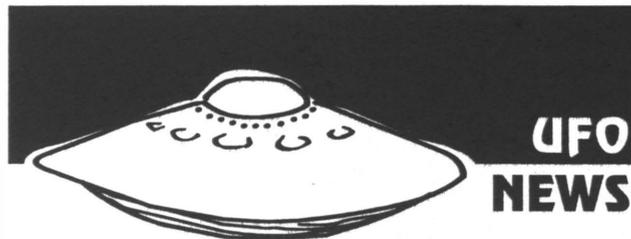
Haven't gotten your fill of dino dirt? Take heart—there are fossils in the Washington area, even off of Capitol Hill. A number of sites in nearby Maryland and Virginia offer a chance to start your own archeological reclamation project. Just don't expect to find many signs of the big bruisers of Jurassic Park.

According to the Department of Natural Resources, Maryland Geological Survey, bits of Cretaceous-period dinosaur teeth and bone have been found within the Baltimore-Washington corridor. In addition, the sandstone in a now-abandoned quarry in Frederick County yielded fossil footprints from the Triassic epoch. No other dinosaur traces have come to light in the state, but fossils representing other critters—especially marine invertebrates—are easily found. Mastodons and mammoths—much more recent vintage than the dinosaurs—are represented by tooth fragments. And a cave near Cumberland yielded a rich find of ice-age mammals.

Virginia offers similar slim pickings. According to the Virginia Division of Mineral Resources, tracks of reptiles, amphibians, and mammals have been found in rocks dating to the Triassic, as have fossil fish. However, vertebrate fossils are extremely rare. Sharks teeth are the only relatively common find. □

Jurassic Park: Never Extinct

In October Topps Comics is releasing a sequel to Jurassic Park, as a comic book! Entitled *Jurassic Park: Raptor*, the sequel, approved by Steven Spielberg personally, takes place three days after the action of the film. The plot revolves around the suspicion that someone is exporting the fierce raptors to the mainland, old news to anyone who visited K-Mart this summer. (*Virginian-Pilot*, September 22, 1993.)



Maybe it was the heat. Then again, it could have been the humidity. Or perhaps it was the Sci-Fi Channel showing all those reruns of the 1960s UFO paranoia classic, "The Invaders." Whatever the reason, early July was definitely an active time for UFO enthusiasts. First there was the 27th Annual International Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) Symposium, and then, a White House protest by Operation Right to Know, a group convinced that the government is lying to the public about flying saucers.

The MUFON Symposium took place over the weekend of July 2-4, at the Hyatt Richmond. It was attended by nearly 500 people, of whom Mark Blashak, state director for the Virginia chapter, stated, "We've probably got more Ph.D.'s than Virginia Tech." They also had Harvard psychiatrist Dr. John E. Mack, a speaker at the conference. A few years ago Mack, who received a Pulitzer Prize in 1977 for a biography of T.E. Lawrence, began counseling alleged alien abductees. He shared some useful insights into the abduction phenomenon with his audience, such as informing them that sometimes aliens may appear as helicopters, or even animals, like deer (*Virginian-Pilot*, July 4, 1993).

Meanwhile, Walter Andrus Jr., the international director of MUFON, was concerned about both alien abduction and government lying about UFOs to the public. Referring to a growing "body of evidence" Andrus told the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (July 4, 1993) that he suspects that the aliens are abducting people for experiments such as a fertility project. He thinks they may be a dying race, and can reproduce only by artificially inseminating humans. In spite of this rather grotesque scenario, Andrus believes the aliens are benevolent towards us, though they consider us below them on the evolutionary ladder. In light of this sort of speculation, it is not surprising that one woman attending the conference claimed to have recently given birth to her 10th human-alien hybrid child.

"The stories have gotten wilder and wilder," UFO skeptic Philip Klass told the *Virginian-Pilot* (July 4). He also asked if these people really thought so many abductions were going on, "Why don't they do something about it?" Klass was also very aware of how disliked he was at the symposium, admitting, "I am the devil to the UFO believers." Lorraine Gerber, who came to believe she was an abductee after hypnosis, nearly verified that. Klass's vocal skepticism almost caused her physical upset. "To hear him say it's not happening--I don't know how to

explain that kind of confrontation... it not only destroys my entire belief system, but would throw me into almost chaos... People need to have someone acknowledge that something is going on."

The people of Operation Right to Know also would like someone to acknowledge that something is going on. In their case it is President Clinton, who they would like to release 20,000 pages of UFO related documents. These documents would, allegedly, prove not only that UFOs exist, but that they are extraterrestrial craft, and that the government has known about them for a long time (*Associated Press*, July 5, 1993).

So, on the hot afternoon of July 5, about 50 true believers gathered at Lafayette Square for the 2nd Annual Operation Right to Know protest. They marched around in a circle, chanting, "Yo, yo, UFO. People have a right to know," while carrying signs that read "Wake Up--UFOs Are Real," and "Stop the Cosmic Watergate" (*Washington Post*, July 6, 1993).

Members of the group ranged from Natra, a woman claiming to have ridden on hundreds of starships since the age of 6, to Ed Komarek of rural Georgia. Komarek likened Operation Right to Know to the civil rights movement, claiming that they don't want to tell people what to believe, "We just want to get them information." That information also includes the "truth" about the so-called Mars face, a geologic formation on Mars resembling a human face. NASA has explained that it is merely a photographic illusion caused by light and shadow, but many UFO buffs like Komarek insist it is some sort of ancient construct (*Associated Press*, June 27; July 5).

Accompanying the protesters was the Hoboken, New Jersey, rock band, Oola Boosh. They had sent Operation Right to Know a copy of their song "UFO," and as a result were invited to the event. When asked by the *Washington Post* if they believed in UFOs or UFO abductions, one member replied, "there's a strong possibility." To which another responded, "I mean, I grew up with "Star Trek."

President Clinton was not home on the day of the protest, but on his way to Japan for the economic summit. □

"...Whenever I meet someone new, and they learn that I am involved in science fiction, their first question is usually, 'Do you believe in UFO's?' To me, this is insulting."

— Kerry O'Quinn, *Starlog* magazine, July 1993

Cattle Mutilations

In April of this year, the Associated Press reported an outbreak of cattle mutilations in Fyffe, Alabama. The local police reports indicated that the animals were being methodically killed and surgically carved up. The same body parts, sex organs, rectums, and tongues, always appeared to be missing according to the investigating officer, Ted Oliphant. He had investigated 35 such cases since October of 1992.

Previously, in 1989, the small northeastern Alabama town had been the site of a number of publicized UFO sightings. This had led some locals to speculate that the two incidents were related. State agriculture officials, however, blamed the deaths on natural causes, and attacks by small predators. State Agriculture Commissioner S.W. Todd explained that teeth and gouges are hidden when a body decomposes and swells, creating what appears to be a clean cut.

If this entire scenario sounds familiar, it should. An almost identical outbreak of cattle mutilations occurred during the summer and fall of 1974 in parts of Nebraska and South Dakota. This episode was apparently triggered by simultaneous UFO sightings in the area. Later autopsies on the cattle revealed that they had died of natural causes. The alleged "mutilations" were, in fact, the work of small predatory animals. The incident is now recognized as being a case of mild mass hysteria, similar to the windshield pitting episode of Seattle, Washington from the 1950s. A detailed account of the Nebraska and South Dakota outbreak can be read in "Cattle Mutilations: An Episode of Collective Delusion," by James R. Stewart (pp. 288-299, *Paranormal Borderlands of Science*, Prometheus Books, 1981; originally published in *The Skeptical Inquirer*, Spring/Summer 1977, vol.1, no.2.) □

Flying Saucers Over the Arctic

Many people recently witnessed UFOs, hovering and zooming mysteriously near a small nuclear power plant in Bilibino, Chukotka, about 100 miles north of the Arctic Circle in Russia's Far East. One crashed. Although they had never before been seen in that area, suspicions proved to be true that the strange craft were attracted by the nuclear plant. A thorough investigation of the crashed disk revealed that it was an official NCAS UFO, based in Silver Spring, MD.

On a business trip to Bilibino, Joe Himes gave some of the frisbee-like disks to the children of Russians and Chukchi native residents that he had met. Most had never seen "frisbees" before, though they knew the name from television. As in the U.S., adults wanted to take over the game "to show the kids how." The results were about the same as they would be here, too. Himes thinks he probably lost all credibility, however, when he tried to convince several of his Russian colleagues that there is a "frisbee" contest for dogs in Washington each year.

Note: The Official Flying Saucer of the National Capital Area Skeptics is available for a small donation to NCAS. Call the NCAS line at 301-587-3827 if you'd like one of the black recycled plastic discs. □

Tea Leaves and Entrails

...don't help much. But the future is clear for these upcoming NCAS meeting dates:

October 16	Bethesda Library
November 6	Bethesda Library
December 4	Tysons Pimmett Regional Library
January 22	Bethesda Library
February	NCAS workshop weekend
March 26	Bethesda Library

Program topics and speakers are still being considered. Special events—like the ever-popular NCAS Movie Nites—will also be happening from time to time.

Are there events, topics, and/or speakers that you would like to see? Would you like to help plan an event or host a Movie Nite? Let us know! Call Joe Himes (703-703-280-2503, evenings) or leave a message on the NCAS line (301-587-3827) at any time.

Book Review

Bad Science: The Short Life and Weird Times of Cold Fusion. By Gary Taubes. New York: Random House, 1993. 502 pages. \$25.

About five years ago, in laboratories in Utah, the promise of unlimited power seemed to be unleashed. The news was heralded in major scientific publications, like the *Desert News* and the *Wall Street Journal*, and discussed in scholarly press conferences. A simple bottle and sink combination, like the lamp of legend, held the genie of the very energy that causes the sun to shine. All of this now seems long ago, back when Star Wars promised Peace on Earth and cold fusion would at last allow us to enjoy it to the fullest.

This is the period detailed in a marvelous book by Gary Taubes, *Bad Science: The Short Life and Weird Times of Cold Fusion*. The book is a wonderful piece of science journalism, but it is much more. Like no other study so far produced of the episode, *Bad Science* details the process by which the public became aware of the claims of two relatively obscure research groups, claims that would eventually capture the attention of the world. Claims that eventually became the best available example of how not to do science. The central focus of Taubes' book is not so much the science of cold fusion, although he does an excellent job of explaining the physics of normal fusion and of the associated physical processes of electrochemistry. Rather, it is in his placing the whole episode in context that Taubes makes his most valuable contribution.

One of the more interesting, often neglected, points that Taubes exposes is the role played by the science press in promoting and exploiting the cold fusion affair. For instance, there is a real fusion-related phenomenon produced by substituting a muon for an electron in atoms. The effect, the statistically measurable penetration of the electrostatic repulsive barrier of the nucleus by the heavier orbiting negative charge, catapulted physicist Steve Jones to public notice with an article in *Scientific American*. All of the attention has focused on Pons and Fleischmann, mainly because they started it all with the first press conference and news releases, but also because theirs were the most extravagant claims. Taubes illuminates both Jones' role in the developing hoopla and also points out the importance of this popularizing article in making the phenomenon widely known to the public. I recall reading the article at the time, but there were few details of the physics, of course, and some exaggerated claims at the end that I remember ignoring. Taubes points out that the imprimatur provided by this magazine lofted Jones and his collaborators into a sort of celebrity status, especially with granting agencies.

There were many forces at work to promote weird science in the middle years of the last two administrations. Taubes details the funding processes at the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy (DOE) for far-out ideas and places the cold fusion and muon-catalyzed fusion research, funded out of the DOE, in its proper context. He is superb at describing the hype and the science and where the two diverge. And he is also the first I know of to detail how the same bureaucrats who were responsible for funding the muon work were also the ones who enthusiastically promoted cold fusion. Muon-catalyzed fusion is a legitimate field, one that even has its own journal, holds its own conferences, and has numerous review articles describing it. There are actually real results here — meager and technologically unexploitable but real — while there are none in cold fusion!

Taubes uses the muon-catalyzed fusion work, rather than polywater, as his doorway into the cold fusion episode. This is actually very effective, because many of the same claims and proponents were involved in the two. Not that he neglects polywater, because as I've mentioned elsewhere (*Skeptical Inquirer*, 1992, vol.16, no.3, p.301-2.) B.V. Derjaguin plays a role in both, but he is more concerned with how this whole affair fits within a research program. The book also outlines the role played by some of the "special interest" funding agencies, especially the Electric Power Research Institute. Both the Brigham Young and University of Utah groups were being funded by EPRI for other projects, as were many of the other labs (like Texas A&M). In fact, these groups were actively encouraged by EPRI to start work on the subject.

There is a very fine discussion of the theoretical arguments that started over possible explanations of the reported phenomena. The most strident claims were made by Peter Hagelstein of MIT, the Star Warrior described so well by William Broad in his book on the work at Lawrence National Labs. Like polywater, the fact that there was any theoretical explanation for the phenomenon at all was very important in spurring the work, but unlike polywater, there were only claims and no hard calculations.

I won't detail all of the history yet again. After all this time, they are too well known and Taubes does a far more complete job than I can in this short review of enumerating labs and reports. But I must say that, when read side by side with Eugene Mallove's book *Fire From Ice*, this book provides refutation of every positive claim listed and describes every experiment in detail. Unfortunately, Taubes does not mention Mallove's book but all of the original literature is cited here so this one omission is inconsequential.

The importance of this book derives from its style. It is a moment-by-moment report of what was happening in many different arenas. For journalistic purposes, Taubes has divided the world up into a comparatively few locations. But he follows the simultaneous developments in them all in order to lay out the evolving climate of the affair. Yes, some of his colors are too bright and his

contrasts too stark when he paints the scene, but there is no created dialogue here and he provides very complete documentation. I was very impressed at the completeness of his references and also at the extensive interviewing he conducted of all of the principals. Moreover, he is very careful to give extensive quotations, something that will make the job easier for any future investigators of the affair.

This book, along with John R. Huizinga's recent book (*Cold Fusion: The Scientific Fiasco of the Century*. University of Rochester Press, 1992.) are the last words on the affair. This is a book to study very carefully, especially if you want to understand the evolution of press reports of scientific and paranormal claims. There is no better single reference, except perhaps *When Prophecy Fails*, that presents so completely the development of a flap and follows its aftermath. This book is a must read. □

—Steve Shore

Science Outreach

This summer marked the fourth year of the Physical Sciences Outreach Program for Girls, a special nine-day program held at the College Park campus of the University of Maryland. Twenty-five middle school students from the Washington area participated in the event, which is geared to introduce girls to physics at an early age. The program organizers hope that targeting the girls before high school will counter the idea that science is exclusively for boys.

The program is taught by four female graduate students who try to make physics fun. Demonstrations use candy instead of coins. All of this is an attempt to get more women in the physical sciences. However, College Park officials have not tracked past participants to see if they continue their education in physics. This makes it difficult to judge the success of the program (*Washington Post*, July 17, 1993). □

"Sightings" Cited

Of all the so-called reality shows on television these days, surely the most bizarre must be the Fox network's "Sightings." The show not only sensationalizes alleged paranormal events beyond belief, but actually solicits reports of such occurrences from the viewing audience. Recently the folks at *TV Guide* (June 12, 1993) broke down, by subject, the average number of calls received per month on the "Sightings" hotline. Here's what they found:

UFO sightings: 1000
Ghost hauntings: 1000
Alien abductions: 300
General wackos: 800

The last category refers to callers whose stories are thought to be drug, alcohol, or psychosis induced, and not the result of paranormal activity. And we thought they didn't have standards.

The next week *TV Guide* had even better news about "Sightings." It seems the show was not listed on the network's fall schedule line up. "Good riddance we say," declared the television weekly, summing up our sentiments exactly. □

Edgar Cayce Update

Virginian-Pilot TV columnist Larry Bonko reported in August that Virginia Beach's favorite psychic friend, Edgar Cayce, is once again going to be spotlighted on national TV. It seems a crew from Greystone Communications of Los Angeles was in town to film a fifteen minute segment on the so-called "Sleeping Prophet" for a syndicated TV show. Filming took place at the Association for Research and Enlightenment in Virginia Beach. The show, "Prophecies and Predictions," is set to air in mid-October. Meanwhile, Cayce remains dead. Bonko, however, credits the late prognosticator with making predictions about "politics, medicine, and finance that came true." He even wishes Cayce were alive today to help him pick out lottery numbers. Yeah, right, Larry, then after you win you can retire to your beach house on Atlantis. □

The obsession for finding secret hidden messages is probably as old as history itself. But, for readers of the Eye, it is important to note that crank literature in particular is full of both hidden conspiracies and treasures, all clearly revealed only to the selected few who can decode the cipher. Whether it is Charles Piazza Smyth and his "Pyramid inch," Marie Bauer Hall and her clues to Bacon's vault, or madman Charles Manson and "Helter Skelter" by the Beatles, the result is the same. The message resides in the eye of the beholder. In the following article, which appeared last year in PC/Computing, Penn Jillette examines an alleged secret message discovered in a computer font.

Reprinted from *PC Computing*, August 1992
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...This translates to "I Heart My Dog's Head."

By Penn Jillette

On the front page of the *New York Post* a few months ago, there was a picture of a computer monitor on which was superimposed 'NYC' = ☹☺♣. The headline was "Program of Hate." Huh?

If you type NYC in a certain clip art font,* you get ☹☺♣. According to the dumb-as-a post *Post* writer Don Broderick, this is "a secret anti-Semitic message apparently urging death to Jews in New York City." I didn't take it out of context. There was no "could be," "might be," "kinda," "maybe," "I think," or "sorta." He states that it is a "secret anti-Semitic message." What a jerk.

Some brain-dead, mouth-breathing computer consultant (remaining nameless is probably the only smart thing this bottom feeder did in his whole wretched life) was installing a program for a client, when he typed NYC while accidentally in a clip-art character set. He got "☹☺♣."

Now there were many ways he could read the random rebus glowing on his client's CRT. My first interpretation would be: "Hey, numbskull, if you're a computer consultant shouldn't you know how to produce letters instead of clip art? Maybe your real aptitude lies in a less high-tech profession, like...oh...let's say...shepherd. (I'm sure there are sheep-accounting software and very computer-literate shepherds, but I'm equally sure that anyone who's ever touched a sheep professionally has a sense of humor. We won't see the headline "Message of Shepherd Hate by Two-Bit Magician in *PC/Computing*" on the front page of the *Sheep Examiner*.)

To me, ☹☺♣ means "Jewish people make really good pesticides." Isn't that a more valid translation than this lamebrain's "message of hate"?

Brian Young, a shameless enough loser to claim to be a friend of the anonymous fool who "discovered" this nonsense says, "There's no way this could be coinci-

dence." The *Post* says, "Young calculated the odds of three letters of the alphabet being combined with 255 symbols and said he found that the odds of obtaining the message were less than one in a trillion."

How does he get "less than one in a trillion?" Beats me. The real odds are 1 in 16,581,375 (255³). You can't even see a trillion from 16 million. And that's only if you think the order of the symbols matters. I think once you're living off the deep end, ☹☺♣, ☺♣☹, and ☺♣☹ all mean the same thing. When order doesn't matter, it comes down to 1 in 2,763,562½. Once you're crazy and know nothing about numbers, the chances of finding something psychotic and hateful in a Scrabble factory explosion hover just around 100 percent.

The real question is, Why would a neo-Nazi hide his/her psychopathic hate messages in ASCII numbers where only Brian and his probably imaginary "friend" could find them? What does that accomplish for the Aryan race? With the only slightly limited freedom of speech in this country, Hitler, Jr., could state his/her sick message outright on "Geraldo"—just like everyone else.

There is so much hate, paranoia, and bad math in this whole thing that I quit. (QUIT, incidentally, comes out ☸☸☸☸. This must mean "A plane carrying Christians must be stopped if it's snowing." The odds of obtaining this message by chance are 1 in 4,228,250,625; so, Brian, ☸☸☸☸ ☸☸ ☸☸☸☸.)

*The software will remain unnamed. The people responsible for this font are good people and in no way anti-Semitic. If someone is whacked enough to think there's a buried hate message, he/she is also stupid enough not to be able to find the original *Post* article. I will not help spread this ugly rumor.

Penn Jillette is more than half of Penn & Teller, neither of whom cares much for fuzzy thinking.



Remote Viewing

Do You Hear What I Hear?

By Lys Ann Shore

People in my former home state of New Mexico are hearing noises--and not just the normal sounds of the high desert, made by frogs, cattle, pickups, low riders, and so on. In a recent article in the *Washington Post* (June 24, 1993, p. A3), staff writer Sue Anne Pressley reports on the so-called "Taos hum." The hum is not audible to everyone; it appears to be a low frequency sound (about 40-80 Hz), near the lower limit of human hearing (about 20 Hz).

According to the *Post* report and a later report by Knight-Ridder News Service (Norfolk *Virginian-Pilot*, July 11, 1993), Taos residents describe the hum variously as resembling a distant tractor engine, the throbbing of power lines, or the idling of a big car engine. When researchers asked the locals to use sound-generating equipment to duplicate the noise they hear, they all produced slightly different sounds that fell between 40 and 80 hertz.

Research into the nature of the disturbance was prompted by the concerns of two Taos residents, Bob and Catania Saltzman. Bothered by the noise, the pair sent a survey letter to their fellow residents, and found that they were far from alone in their perception. The locals then wrote to government officials and spoke up at a town meeting held by their congressional representative, Bill Richardson (D-NM). Richardson took the complaints seriously enough to get a research team organized by the University of New Mexico, Sandia and Los Alamos national laboratories, and the US Air Force Phillips Laboratory. Using a variety of sensors—electromagnetic, seismic, and acoustic—the researchers tried to measure the hum. The acoustic sensors detected nothing.

Whatever the nature of the hum (which evidently is *not* a sound, strictly speaking), current speculation centers on the military establishment as its probable source. Notorious as the site of the World War II atomic bomb project at Los Alamos and the first detonation of an atomic bomb at Trinity Site on White Sands Missile Range, New Mexico has long been home to defense-related projects of many kinds. The Defense Department and the Air Force have denied that any of their projects could be causing the hum; the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence is currently investigating whether any federal site is the source.

So far, it seems that no one has claimed that the mysterious sound is caused by ley lines or a harmonic convergence, but such claims are sure to be made soon if

the sound remains unidentified. Taos, you see, is an artist's colony, New Mexico's closest approach to the hip, the cool, the artsy, and the offbeat. About an hour's drive north of Santa Fe in the lofty and colorful Sangre de Cristo Mountains, Taos is a quaint village next to the equally quaint Native American settlement of Taos Pueblo. With a year-round population of a few thousand, Taos attracts a few *million* tourists each year.

There's no word as to whether the infamous hum that bothers residents is also disturbing the tourists' rest. If it is, the locals would have some incentive for placing a paranormal spin on the phenomenon. The chance to hear the music of the spheres, angels' voices, humming sounds from the Other Side, or whatever, would probably help *boost* tourism.

And New Mexico could surely use a tourist boom after the wide media coverage of the "mysterious malady" that caused several deaths among residents of the Navajo reservation in early summer. Once the mysterious illness was identified as a virus spread in the urine of small desert rodents, the media publicized the unhappy fact that plague—yes, *plague*—is also present in New Mexico, which reports a few cases of the disease each year. Interestingly, the Taos hum is not the first case of large-scale, unexplained reports of humming sounds. Reports of a similar hum have been coming from residents of London and Southampton since the 1940s. Another famous example of an unexplained sound is the Yellowstone Lake Whispers that have long been heard in Wyoming. William R. Corliss's *Handbook of Unusual Natural Phenomena* (first published in 1977; reprint, New York: Doubleday/Anchor, 1983) is a goldmine of information on mysterious sounds. In fact, he devotes an entire chapter to "Unusual Natural Sounds," which he classifies into "extraordinary detonations," "hisses and hums," "natural bells, musical notes, and melody," and "infrasound."

According to Corliss, sources of transient hisses and hums include auroras and meteors, storms and earth tremors, winds over mountain ridges, blowing sand, and insects. Hums and hisses that are *not* associated with any obvious physical event, he says, are "more mysterious" and "are generally perceived only where man-made noise is far-removed" (p. 365). Taos would certainly seem to meet the latter qualification.

It appears that some people report being able to "hear" electromagnetic radiation. Corliss reprints part of a 1979 report from *New Scientist* magazine concerning the British reports of unexplained humming: "In 1977 the English *Sunday Mirror* ran a story about someone who claimed to hear a steady and very annoying humming noise. To everyone's surprise, the article elicited some 800 letters from others who heard hums. Amazed by the magnitude of the problem, doctors began examining some of the afflicted. In a few cases, the hum seemed internally generated....Many others, however, heard a 40 Hz. hum modulated at 1.6 kHz., and apparently of external origin.

The hum sufferers were inclined to blame industrial noise, but no obvious sources could be uncovered. The hum investigators have considered sea noise, jet-stream noise, and other natural sources. Whatever the source, most people do not hear it at all. It is possible that a small percentage of the population is abnormally sensitive to sound at 40 Hz" (quoted by Corliss, p. 373).

The British case closely resemble the situation in Taos. In Taos also, not everyone hears the hum. The *Post* quoted one local woman as saying, "I have no idea what they are talking about. Maybe I'm just not one of those sensitive types." Rep. Richardson is another who hasn't heard the hum, though he worries about it because it bothers his constituents. Likewise, although the researchers haven't detected the hum, they aren't dismissing the reports. Joe Mullins, chair of the mechanical engineering department at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, headed the research team. "The people who do hear it, they're certainly sensing and responding to something. I can't say it's imaginary at all," he told the *Post*. The researchers are still considering the possibility of "power line harmonics"—the interference between power lines and other electromagnetic signals—as the source of the hum.

Dare I add, Stay tuned for further developments....□

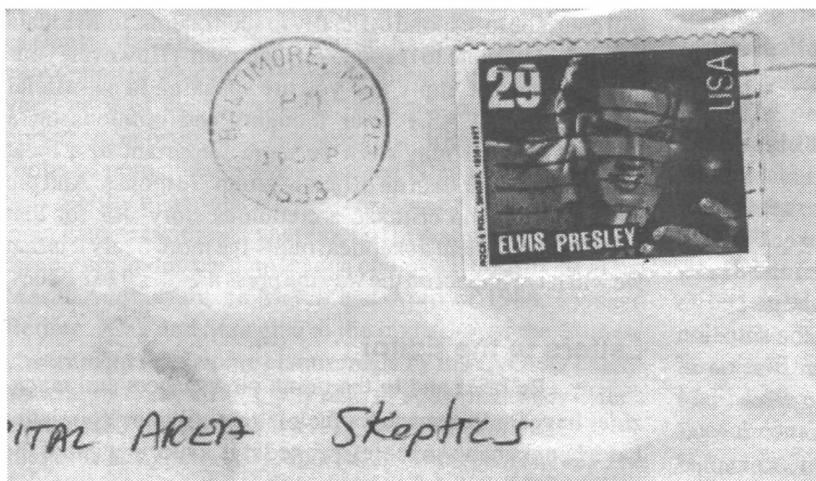
Change the Channel

For those of you who wax nostalgic about the days when the expression New Age was practically synonymous with channeling, we found the following item in the *Virginian Pilot*. Apparently Barbara Bell, a 44 year old quilt maker from California, runs a Barbie channeling service. For \$3 she will summon the spirit of Barbie to give advice. Barbie, by the way, refers to the 11 1/2 inch fashion doll manufactured by Mattel. It is Bell's contention that Barbie is really a "profound person" who has been "forced to be shallow all these years." On the other hand, maybe NCAS member Jamy Ian Swiss was really on to something back when he categorized channeling as "just bad ventriloquism. They speak in funny voices, but their lips move." At least Bell uses a dummy. □

Elvis Still Dead, Tabloid Acknowledges

In June, the always outrageous *Weekly World News* (June 15, 1993) made a surprise move by sporting a cover story about Elvis Presley in which it was actually acknowledged that the singer was dead. This constitutes a radical change in editorial policy, the first since 1988 when a Michigan woman allegedly spotted the King of Rock and Roll at a local Burger King. For the next six years the tabloid insisted that Presley was still alive, having only faked his death back in 1977. This spawned a rash of Elvis sightings all over the country, eagerly promoted by the *Weekly World News*.

Now, in typical tabloid fashion, the June cover story announced that Presley only just recently died, after a secret life of 16 years. And all the past Elvis sightings were recounted. Nowhere was it mentioned that the Post Office wouldn't have been able to issue an Elvis stamp unless it was certain he'd been dead for at least ten years. This allows one to ponder, however, what lies ahead in the headlines of America's sleaziest tabloid. Could it be, perhaps, the ghost of Elvis?





A Skeptic's Response ...Hands-Off Healing at NIH

This feature usually attempts to provide skeptics with brief, logical answers to questions that may arise in conversation. This issue has a different focus—we present responses to a news story that appeared recently, and suggest how skeptics can respond to the media in similar situations.

On September 3, the *Washington Post* published an account (“Hands-Off Healing: NIH Specialists Marvel at Chinese Man’s Technique”) of a remarkable demonstration of the Chinese art of Qi Gong at a public lecture held at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. According to the *Post*, Wang-Pong Cheng punctuated a lecture on the healing powers of Qi Gong (pronounced “chee-gung”) with several karate-like demonstrations which culminated in Cheng appearing “to shatter a rock without actually striking it.” An accompanying photo showed Cheng amidst a cloud of scattering quartzite fragments. A molecular geneticist from the NIH interviewed by the *Post* suggested that some sort of “electrophysiological energy” might be responsible.

Although this seeming manifestation of psychokinetic power provided drama and excitement, this was merely a hook for the real purpose of the event: a sales pitch for a highly unconventional and unproven form of medical treatment. According to the report, several people stood in the front of the NIH auditorium and received treatment from Cheng for various musculoskeletal problems. “Treatment” consisted of Cheng waving his hands near the “patients” without touching them and then following with a light massage. One NIH employee reported that pains in her hip and upper back disappeared and that she felt a “rush of energy” when Cheng touched her.

The newspaper reported that Cheng is employed by a company to seek corporate sponsorship for the promotion of Qi Gong medicine. NCAS has learned that subsequent to the demonstration, Cheng conducted classes for NIH employees who wished to learn more of the art of Qi Gong. It is clear that, although there was no official NIH endorsement, the mere location of the program attracted notice and lent an air of scientific respectability. Currently, the newly created NIH Office of Alternative Medicine has attracted public attention out of proportion to its rather modest budget. It would be unfortunate but not unexpected if this Qi Gong demonstration were to be mistakenly associated in the public’s mind with official public health endeavors.

And what of the miraculous “no-touch” rock breaking? In spite of the impression created by the sensational reporting, there was no mysterious force shooting across the room. Cheng was, in fact, holding the rock when it broke. Furthermore, he apparently tried and failed, put it aside, and a half-hour later caught the audience by surprise when he picked up and cracked the stone. This describes exactly the situation that I would want if I were going to create an illusion of psychokinesis: try and fail so it doesn’t look *too much* like a trick, then wait for an opportunity when the audience doesn’t know what to expect.

How can skeptics respond? NCAS has contacted the *Washington Post* and provided the reporter with background information on tests of Qi Gong conducted in China in 1988 by a group from CSICOP (see the Summer 1988 issue of *Skeptical Inquirer*). Furthermore, NCAS is currently working with the NIH to present a public program at the NIH; this will very likely be scheduled for January and will feature James Randi and York University professor of psychologist James Alcock, both of whom were part of the CSICOP investigations in China.

A letter from James Randi appears on the next page.

Although by now too much time has passed for other letters to the *Post* on this particular story, in the future you may want to send your own private response to credulous reports of extraordinary events. Below we reprint guidelines for effectively responding to such stories.

—Chip Denman

“In Response to Today’s Story...”

By Julie D. Stern and Randy Lockwood

(originally appeared in Skeptical Eye, Vol 2, No. 4, Fall '88)

Many skeptics—ourselves included—frequently complain about how gullible the media can be in parroting the claims of psychics, UFO alien abductees, faith healers, and others without presenting a skeptical counterpoint to these claims. We skeptics often wonder, “What can I do?” in response to a particularly credulous newspaper column, magazine article, or television show.

The answer to this question is “Speak out!” By writing letters to newspaper and magazine editors and radio and television producers and reporters, we can make our skeptical views known and influence the ways other groups and individuals view paranormal claims. While NCAS as a group will continue to respond officially to such claims, individuals should not hesitate to respond on their own. (However, your letter should not imply that you are speaking in an official capacity for NCAS.) Your thoughts and opinions on a particular matter may even be more important to a local newspaper editor than an official “group” response. And the more people who criticize a credulous story—or for that matter, compliment a skeptical one—the more likely it is that we will have impact on the way the press handles these issues.

Letters to the Editor

- Be brief and to the point. Newspapers and magazines have limited space for their letters column. Your letter has a better chance of being printed if it’s succinct and if the main point is in the first paragraph.

- Don't waste space by restating the comments that prompted your letter. A brief line referring to the original story is enough. Save space for your own point of view!

- Respond promptly. Commenting on a month-old story will probably ensure that your letter will wind up in the wastebasket instead of on the editorial page. Write while your thoughts are still fresh and before readers have forgotten the original story.

- Sign your letters. Anonymous letters don't make their way into print.

TV and Radio

- When responding to a locally produced program, write to the station's public affairs director. You may also want to send copies of your letter to the program's producer, writer, and/or reporter. Call the station to find out the names of these people.

- Comment on a network program by writing to the network's audience services department. Again, you may also want to send copies to producers, writers, and/or reporters involved in the show.

- Always indicate which television or radio program you are commenting on, and include the date and time the program aired in your letter.

- Sponsors can be quite responsive to viewer comments. Note which products are advertised on a show that you want to criticize—or praise—and write to the sponsor. You can find the sponsor's address on the product itself or at the reference section of your library.

cc: NCAS

Finally, send a copy of your letter to NCAS, in care of this newsletter. By publishing your letter, we may be able to motivate others to write! □

An Open Letter from James Randi

I am writing as a citizen who is very much concerned over recent sensational media attention to an event which took place on Thursday, September 2nd, at the Masur Auditorium at the NIH. On that occasion, two conjurers from China gave a show of what they called, "Qi Gong," in which stones, rocks, and tiles were broken by blows from the hand. The two then "treated several people with musculoskeletal complaints" by passing their hands near them.

What was witnessed by those three hundred in the audience was an Asian version of the old-fashioned Medicine Show that used to tour the American West selling quack nostrums to the gullible. The format was the same: minor miracles, bits of jugglery to act as "convincers," followed by a few quick "cures" to sell the medicine. The only thing that was absent was the actual sale of the goods, and that was accomplished by the press.

The fact that the event was not an official function of the NIH is, in effect, only a technicality. The public is already aware of the fact that the NIH has an interest in "alternative healing" techniques, and rightly so. But the accounts that have appeared in the press (Time magazine is an excellent example) describing that interest, have led to a distorted conception of what the NIH involvement actually is, and how valid most of the "alternative" methods really are. To the public, it appears that homeopathy, iridology and other forms of pure quackery have gained NIH attention and are thus worthy of serious attention and acceptance.

I am not without experience of investigating matters of this nature and in particular such claims as those made at the Masur Auditorium. In March and April of 1988, I visited Beijing, Xian and Shanghai at the invitation of the Chinese government to examine claims made by the Qi Gong practitioners. In every case, I was able to show that their claims were based on outright trickery, wishful thinking, simple suggestion, hyperbole or failure to properly observe. The

tradition of such techniques is very strong in China, and is believed in without question.

It has been said that one must be careful not to "throw the baby out with the bath water." I agree, wholeheartedly. However, when one has examined the contents of the bath carefully, has drained it slowly and still finds no baby, I say, throw out the water. The fact that the two Qi Gong practitioners were not seen to have female assistants dressed in net stockings, and there was no brass band in attendance, does not in any way mean that they were not carnival performers. They were. They were doing "stunts," pure and simple, that have been in the repertoire of side-shows for centuries.

For the average reader, the remarks of Dr. Roscoe O. Brady tend to validate the performance that was staged for the NIH. Described in the newspaper article as a "world-famous research physician," Dr. Brady is quoted as saying, "If it really is true, how is it that he concentrates these forces?" With all due respect to Dr. Brady, I must say that his conjecture about "electrophysiological energy" was premature; the conjuror broke the stone by simple trickery. While we know that Dr. Brady was being conservative in his statement, we can be sure that the comment will be taken out of context and repeated in the credulous press as an endorsement.

The performance at NIH was an absurdity that has encouraged the belief of the American public in pseudoscience and quackery. There were no miracles taking place at that show, any more than miracles take place at on stage when David Copperfield performs, though he has the integrity to admit that he is a showman and nothing more.

I and my colleagues are seriously alarmed at this latest assault on rationality and science. Censorship is not, and never will be, my goal; rather, an intelligent presentation of ideas, with careful attention to the opinions of experienced investigators, seems to be called for here. What we've seen is, instead, a "bread and circus" approach.

The Electric Skeptic

*occasional articles about skepticism
on the electronic frontier*

Global Skeptic E-Mail Discussion Group Rescued by NCAS Member

By Gary Stone

If you have an INTERNET electronic mail account (if you don't see the sidebar) you can participate in daily discussions (or just read along whenever you like) with knowledgeable skeptics worldwide. Here are some recent topics: False Memory Syndrome, the 1993 Euroskeptics Conference, alien abduction, UFOs in Italy, Uri Geller, crop circles, Facilitated Communication in Autism, Fermat's Last Theorem, ganzfield experiments, iridology, tip-offs to TV/radio programs for skeptics, The Napolitano case, TM in D.C., messages issued by James Randi's "Geller-Hotline" detailing his "trials", Robert Jahn's PEAR Lab, chiropractic, homeopathy, the Mars face, and the Mars effect.

For several years Norman R. Gall, Dept. of Philosophy, York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada was the manager of an e-mail list that allowed skeptics around the world to relay messages to other subscribers. They used a (then) newfangled system called "LISTSERV," which these days supports hundreds of other topical e-mail groups. Suddenly and inexplicably the SKEPTIC List at York University died sometime in mid-July. A hush settled over hundreds of skeptics' computer terminals around the world; but not for long.

"Well, some of the regulars started mailing each other to figure out what happened after a few days of list death," reports NCAS member Taner Edis, a graduate student in physics at Johns Hopkins University. Soon he successfully reconstructed SKEPTIC on a LISERV system at Johns Hopkins and found himself the owner/operator of the new SKEPTIC List. There are about 250 participants who generate well over 100 messages a week. E-mail commands to LISERV will retrieve not only past messages, but also other resource files, such as an annotated skeptical bibliography Edis is preparing using materials from a few different skeptics groups.

My thanks to Taner, on behalf of all of us skeptics on the electronic frontier!

Getting Started with the SKEPTIC List

To sample the SKEPTIC List without obligation, just send a single e-mail to:

LISTSERV@JHUVH.HCF.JHU.EDU

where all commands are sent. Instructions for sending INTERNET e-mail from your own system may vary;

consult local gurus. Put these commands in the e-mail text starting on the first line:

```
review skeptic
index skeptic
get refcard
```

You will get back three e-mail messages. The first contains a brief description of SKEPTIC, how to subscribe and a list of participants. The second is an index of weekly message logfiles that you can request by sending e-mail with the command

```
get skeptic log_____
```

to the same LISERV address. The third briefly explains how to use other LISERV commands.

To begin receiving messages as they are posted to SKEPTIC send the following e-mail to:

LISTSERV@JHUVH.HCF.JHU.EDU

```
subscribe skeptic your-first-name last-name
```

You can unsubscribe at any time by sending the command:

```
signoff skeptic
```

To send an e-mail for relay to all the other subscribers, address it to:

SKEPTIC@JHUVH.HCF.JHU.EDU.

E-Mail Access to the INTERNET Cheap

If you have a computer (IBM, APPLE, AMIGA, C64, anything!) and a modem, but need an e-mail account, MCI MAIL offers the cheapest deal I know of for high volume INTERNET e-mail: \$35 per year (only about \$3/month!) and no per minute charges. There is no charge for receiving unlimited e-mail messages. Sending e-mail costs only slightly more than other systems. You log in using an 800 number and can read your messages online or download them to your computer. For information call MCI MAIL at (800) 444-MAIL or (202) 833-8484. You don't have to be an MCI phone customer to use MCI MAIL. Of course there are other fun skeptical things to do with an INTERNET e-mail account, but that is another column.

If you need some help with any of this, just e-mail me at **74435.1756@compuserve.com** or call me before 9:00 pm at (301) 470-1530. For assistance using the SKEPTIC List, send e-mail to Taner Edis at:

OWNER-SKEPTIC@JHUVH.HCF.JHU.EDU □

Electronic Directory

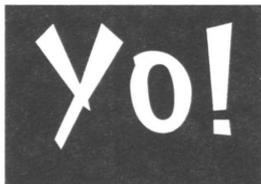
Joe Himes, president 75460.60@compuserve.com
Mike Epstein, v.p./print archives mse@enh.nist.gov
Gary Stone, secretary/AV archives 74435.1756@compuserve.com
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Elena Watson, editor 71730.2267@compuserve.com

Would you like to be included in a future NCAS electronic directory? Send e-mail to Gary Stone.



Check the date printed on the mailing label on this issue. If you are looking into a past-life, then it must be time to renew your membership in NCAS.

In Search of:

NCAS would like to find possible facilities for future events. Can you suggest locations? Rooms of different sizes are sought which could accommodate 75-500. Metro accessibility, parking, audiovisual equipment, and weekend availability are all factors which need to be considered. Please phone Joe Himes at 703-280-2503.

Keep Your Eye Open

Send your articles, letters, and original artwork for future publication in the *Skeptical Eye*. Contributions should be short (500-1000 words maximum, or two to four double-spaced pages) and typed, not handwritten. If you use a computer, please send hard copy along with your floppy disk (5.25" or 3.5", WordPerfect or ASCII). Please be sure to include your name, address, and telephone number. Send all contributions to *Skeptical Eye*, 8006 Valley Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

Time to Renew? Time to Join?

Yes, I want to _____ join NCAS. _____ renew my membership.

Single: ____ @ \$20 Double (2 members at same mailing address) ____ @ \$30 Full-time student* ____ @ \$10

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Make checks payable to
NCAS and mail to:

8006 Valley Street
Silver Spring, MD 20910

*Students: List institution attending _____



The Last Word

First Words

By Elena M. Watson

It is hard to believe that in my two short years of contributing to the NCAS newsletter I have skyrocketed from being a lowly columnist to achieving the exalted position of editor. All without even living in the immediate Capital Area. To what do I owe this meteoric rise to fame? What is the secret to my success at the *Eye*?

If I were not a skeptic, I would most likely attribute this current good fortune to exactly that, good fortune. Perhaps a friendly spirit has smiled upon me. Or maybe I have a guardian angel I didn't know about. Or, is it possible that I was predestined to become the editor of the *Skeptical Eye*, and that this is the sole purpose for my existence on the planet?

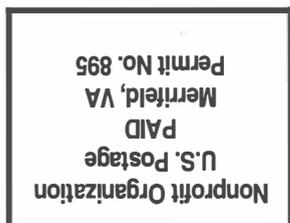
Realistically, I know that it is none of the above. I am only here by the consent of both Lys Ann Shore and Chip Denman, who kindly offered me the position. Neither do I want to kid myself about my qualifications for this task. My somewhat limited ability to produce chatty little prose pales in comparison to Lys Ann's professional editing skills.

In spite of all this, I do have at least one qualification that is essential for being editor of the *Eye*. Time. Yes, as you may recall from my very first column, I am a housewife with too much time on my hands. That hasn't

changed. But, now, instead of sitting around my living room, eating bons-bons, watching Oprah, and reading *The Weekly World News*, I'm sitting at the computer, nagging people via e-mail to get their articles in on time. It's a tough job, but somebody has to do it.

As much as I'd like to, however, I'm not going to make any promises. I will try to get the newsletter back on schedule, but unlike me, most of our contributors actually have lives, and jobs, and all the complications that entails. My hope is that there will be little difference between my editorship of the newsletter and Lys Ann's. Of course, it will still look just as great, thanks to Chip's wonderful layout and design skills. And Lys Ann will still be with us as our new "Remote Viewing" columnist. But, I suppose it is inevitable that some of my own warped personality may somehow slip in to affect the content of the newsletter itself. One aspect of this already is our current *Jurassic Park* focus. In the future Chip and I hope to include more cinematic information in a serialized movie guide for skeptics. I would also like to invite all NCAS members to feel free to submit articles, article suggestions, or even just feedback on what kind of subject matter they would like to see covered in the *Eye* in the future. I promise I'll read whatever you send and consider it. I've got the time.

**Check the mailing label for your membership date ...
a renewal form is on page 23**



National Capital Area Skeptics
8006 Valley Street
Silver Spring, MD 20910

