

# Tampa Bay Skeptics

## REPORT

VOLUME 3 NO. 1 SUMMER 1990

### New hoax allegations flying in Gulf Breeze UFO case

As we go to press, new charges and counter-charges abound regarding Ed Walters' close-range 1987-88 UFO photos, and his book, The Gulf Breeze Sightings. Gulf Breeze, a small Florida panhandle community, has received international media attention as a result of its reported UFO visitations over the past several years.

The *Pensacola News Journal* broke the story, in its June 10 page 1 headline article, that a UFO model has been discovered under insulation in the attic of Walters' former home. On June 19, as reported by UPI, Gulf Breeze attorney Tom Smith, under oath, held a news conference in Pensacola to disclose that his son had been told by Walters more than two years ago of his intention to profit from a UFO hoax. Said Smith, "We don't know what anyone else has seen, but we do know that what Ed disclosed early on was a fabrication."

The model, made of foam plates and drafting paper, was used by the *News Journal* to produce photographs that, according to reporter Craig Myers, "Walters acknowledged...look very similar" to his own. In a June 20 radio interview with Chuck Harder, Walters postulated that the model must have been planted by a debunker while the house was for sale. He said that the drawings on the drafting paper were of a house that he was designing in September, 1989, long after his UFO photographs were taken, which he said proves that the model was not used in any alleged hoax on his part. He further charged that the drafting paper used had been stolen from his trash.

Walters, a building contractor who served 18 months in prison in the 1960s for forgery and auto theft, received a \$200,000 advance from William Morrow & Co. for his book. Philip Klass, Chairman of CSICOP's UFO Subcommittee, has reported that Walters "shared \$20,000 of this with Navy physicist Dr. Bruce S. Maccabee for writing a chapter in which he reports finding no evidence of a hoax." Maccabee is a long-time UFO enthusiast, and head the Fund for UFO Research. Walters also reportedly has been offered \$450,000 by ABC Television for the rights to a miniseries.

That Walters' photographs (and his tales of encounters with the aliens) constitute a hoax has long been alleged not only by UFO skeptics, but by many pro-Ufologists, and suspected by the town's Mayor and its Chief of Police.

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#### Merrell vs. Renier Update:

#### **Merrell suing Renier for improper collection activities following her bankruptcy court victory**

Orlando "psychic" Noreen Renier, who described herself as a professional "homicide detective" during a May 22 "Joan Rivers Show" appearance, is being sued in the 9th Judicial Circuit Court in Orlando by Tennessee skeptic John Merrell for alleged improper collection activities following the conclusion of their earlier protracted litigation. Merrell informs *TBS Report* at press time that in addition to asking for standard damages, he will be seeking punitive damages and recovery of court and attorney fees. Further details will be available in our next issue.

As reported in previous issues of *TBS Report*, Renier sued

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#### **Position Statement of TBS Executive Council on Noreen Renier and "psychic power"**

The Executive Council of the Tampa Bay Skeptics wishes to take this opportunity to clarify the position of TBS as regards claims of paranormal power by Noreen Renier, or by anyone else.

As far as TBS is aware, there has never been a convincing demonstration of paranormal power by anyone, anywhere, at any time, despite the claims of those who purport to possess such abilities. CSICOP, the international skeptical committee, is similarly unaware of any verifiable evidence of the existence of any paranormal phenomena. Well-designed controlled, scientific studies, which eliminate the possibility of cheating or self-delusion, have yet to provide the proof. The fact that people portray themselves as psychics, or astrologers, and develop a loyal following, does not constitute evidence that such abilities are genuine (other than the ability to please).

Noreen Renier is of particular interest to TBS for several reasons. First, she is perhaps the most famous Florida "psychic", having been featured on national television programs and in national magazines (including *U.S. News & World Report*). Second, by virtue of her successful libel suit against John Merrell, some may have incorrectly inferred that her "psychic power" has been vindicated in the courtroom. Third, the lawsuit being filed

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**TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS**  
Statement of Purpose  
and "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc. is a non-profit educational and scientific organization devoted to the critical examination of paranormal and fringe-science claims, and the dissemination of factual information about such claims to interested parties throughout the Tampa Bay area and environs. TBS does not reject claims on a *priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective and critical inquiry. We share the philosophy of the international Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), although we are an autonomous group with no formal ties to CSICOP.

TBS is presently sponsoring a "\$1,000 Challenge" for anyone able to provide TBS with verifiable evidence of the existence of any paranormal phenomenon. Details are available upon request.

*TBS Report* is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing), including opposing points of view. As we are non-profit, **stamped, self-addressed return envelopes would be appreciated with all correspondence.**

Views expressed in articles and letters are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Tampa Bay Skeptics.

**TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS**  
**REPORT**

Editorial Office:  
6219 Palma Blvd. #210  
St. Petersburg, FL 33715  
(813) 867-3533 (Mon-Fri 9-5)

Editor and Publisher:  
Gary P. Posner

Cartoonist:  
Don Addis

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## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

Terry A. Smiljanich

QUESTION: What does it mean if you find three lawyers buried up to their necks in concrete?

ANSWER: Someone ran out of concrete.

As a lawyer, I've heard a lot of lawyer jokes, most of which evidence an underlying distrust of the profession. The problem, however, is not with lawyers. Rather, our society has become the most litigious in the world, using the legal forum as the place to redress all grievances, disagreements, and even inconveniences. We sue at the drop of a hat, and there's always a lawyer available, for a fee, to satisfy our every whim.

What does this have to do with the Tampa Bay Skeptics? Everything, it seems. In our brief existence, we've already received letters talking about "defamation that could damage my [Chuck Harder's] reputation." Defamation is a tort (a civil wrong), specifically the malicious publication of false information exposing a person to hatred, ridicule or contempt, or injuring a person in his occupation.

Mr. Harder's letter to the editor (p. 3) accuses TBS founder Gary Posner of being "a dangerous person who knowingly or unknowingly is engaging in defamation of the work and character of others." This accusation both saddens and angers me. I thought we had a rollicking good debate going about UFOs, man-made objects on Mars, and the evidence for extraterrestrials. Instead, I find that we are accused of being "snotty", "taking potshots", making a "fool" out of honest hard-working people, and making "defamatory remarks that could damage" Mr. Harder's reputation.

What is it with all of this hyperbole? Why the legal accusations? The debate is not about Chuck Harder's or Richard Hoagland's or anyone else's moral decency, or their right to champion their favorite causes. Good grief, we're just asking tough questions, and suspending belief in claims such as extraterrestrial visitation pending hard proof. And what has happened to our questions? Are they being debated? Or have they been lost amid the glare of accusations of tortious conduct? Given the costs of legal defense (a subject with which I am intimately familiar), any such accusation can cast a chill over legitimate debate. Even James Randi and CSICOP have had to defend themselves against claims of defamation by paranormal proponents.

We, as an organization, stand accused by Mr. Harder of being "armchair skeptics" and "amateurs". Skepticism is an approach to knowledge. We don't summarily dismiss claims of UFOs or paranormal powers. We just say, "Prove it!" I guess we do ask some of our questions from an armchair, but so what? Einstein cracked open the universe from his armchair, so it can be a formidable piece of furniture. Amateurs? Yes, we admit that we don't make our livings asking skeptical questions of those making paranormal claims (some of whom make their livings so doing). Are we a scientific organization? Yes, in the sense that we have adopted the "scientific method" as our standard operating procedure for determining fact from speculation. And some of us hold scientific degrees, and are experienced in structuring controlled experiments. It's not "amateur night" when we

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## Chuck Harder Revisited

*Editor's note: We had planned to utilize this space to critique the Spring issue of Chuck Harder's For the People magazine, as it contains more pro-UFO articles, as well as a lengthy one about what Harder has often referred to as "suppressed cancer cures". However, we have had a change of plans. Some of our readers may suspect what sorts of events led to our publication of the "Addendum" to our last issue. Harder's letters to me are now notated that he wishes that their contents not even be disclosed to anyone, much less be quoted for publication. One such letter, sent by certified mail, was accompanied in the same envelope by the following "Letter to the Editor", dated May 13, which he explicitly requested that we do publish. Although somewhat tamer than its companion piece, it nevertheless, in my opinion, is illustrative of Harder's attitudes toward critical thinking and the right of the press to publish skeptical commentary dealing with controversial claims of people in the public domain. My response follows on page 7.*

Dear Dr. Posner,

Your May 8 letter to me advises that you are going to "Review" our latest magazine, and also the Richard Hoagland presentation to NASA that was taped at the NASA Lewis Research Center, Cleveland, Ohio on 3/20/90. And by the way, NASA invited him after their own internal investigation of the photos gave his mission sufficient credibility to ask him in the front door to present the program to 4,000 NASA scientists and employees. Hardly a laughing matter. Nobody laughed or issued snotty remarks except one Dr. Gary Posner.

Here you go again from the comfort of your armchair taking potshots at people who have honestly and sincerely worked very hard. In the case of Mr. Hoagland, his credentials on the subject (former Director of the Hayden Planetarium, former advisor to CBS, ex-NASA) are unquestioned by NASA and others. He has been working on the Mars photos along with Dr. Mark J. Carlotto (TASC) for years. Then you look at the NASA videotape that I sent you as a gesture of kindness and good faith and you quickly attempt to make a fool of the man and call him a PSEUDOSCIENTIST. Just who do you think you are? How much knowledge do you have on that subject, or is it amateur night - again!

I understand that you work as an M.D. at a clinic by day, and this is your hobby. That's fine. But when you cloak your speculations on a letterhead and issue a supposed "Scientific Newsletter" and then put the media on your mailing list, you are then setting yourself up as an "EXPERT" who is defaming others. Sorry for beating

the horse again, but your letter to the St. Petersburg Times that quoted DAVE BARRY as an expert to discredit Ed Walters was an example where you quoted as serious, the writings of a noted newspaper satirist who did a very funny article on Gulf Breeze. You fell for it hook, line and sinker. While you find it "Tiresome" to hear about it, I am very tired of the energy that I have had to expend to stop the flow of your unfounded negative speculation and defamatory remarks that could damage my reputation.

Until your phone bill is as big as mine and you spend time sending out FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT REQUESTS, etc. and you call sources prior to printing your speculations, you remain a dangerous person who knowingly or unknowingly is engaging in defamation of the work and character of others.

Thus on the "NASA ALERT PRESENTATION - WAS THERE LIFE ON MARS", I suggest you contact Joyce E. Bergstrom at NASA. I have photocopied her business card attached.

Your letter to me also overlooks the fact that your skeptical organization was listed as promised. Eastman Kodak who sells a UFO tape was also listed. Why not buy a copy and then pick it apart. I'm sure Kodak and NASA would be thrilled to get your snotty letters.

And about the show with Phil Klass. SUN RADIO NETWORK is still having very serious technical problems. I was down there last week to assist them in finding engineering help. Hopefully they will resolve the phone and technical situation and we can then schedule a show. Such a program would be of great interest to all and we would wish to publicize the event to the other media. Thus some lead time will be needed after SUN gets their problems fixed. They have just ordered a new master console and phone system for on-the-air. Until that is in I cannot do any of the other shows that I have planned with several guests interacting with callers.

We will also publicize the event to our list of short-wave listener magazines as our show is now carried on the one million watt (ERP) beam of WWCW world-wide radio. The show is tape-delayed by them and broadcast at 8-10 PM Eastern time weeknights on 7.520 MHZ. Letters are already coming in from around the world. The Phil Klass show would be a great event to do as there would be an interest overseas also. I look forward to doing the show as soon as possible.

Sincerely,  
Chuck Harder

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### TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

CHAIRMAN: Terry A. Smiljanich, J.D., St. Petersburg (Blasingame, Forizs & Smiljanich, P.A.)  
 VICE-CHAIR: Miles W. Hardy, Ph.D. (Professor of Psychology, University of South Florida, Tampa)  
 SEC/TREAS: Gary P. Posner, M.D., St. Petersburg (Free Inquiry Faith-healing Investigation Project; CSICOP UFO Subcommittee)  
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 AT LARGE: Vincent E. Parr, Ph.D. (Clinical psychologist, Temple Terrace)  
 BOARD OF DIRECTORS: Gary P. Posner, Terry A. Smiljanich, Paschal N. Strong (USF Dept. of Psychology, Tampa)

## "Young Earth" Creationist Claims

by Jerry Touchton

The Institute for Creation Research, headed by Henry Morris and based in San Diego, is quite adamant that the earth is young - certainly no more than about 10,000 years old. The book Scientific Creationism, edited by Morris, contains some silly arguments attacking established scientific techniques for dating the earth.

The discussion of radioactive dating is laughable to anyone well-versed in the subject. For example, consider the following statement: "Not even uranium dating is capable of experimental verification, since no one could actually watch uranium decaying for millions of years to see what happens." This "if I didn't see it, it didn't happen" attitude is a relentless theme in the book. There are plenty of books in the library which discuss the various radioactive dating methods (see ref. 1 for a simplified treatment, or ref. 2 for a thorough discussion).

One of the more amusing arguments in the book responds to the question, "What about light coming from stars millions of light-years away; doesn't that prove the universe is millions of years old?" The creationist answer: the light waves "were energized even before the heavenly bodies themselves". Starlight without the stars! And once again, responding to the question, "Why does the earth give the appearance of being so old?", their answer: "The universe had an 'appearance of age' right from the start." The world was born old! (I myself have a theory that the universe was created ten minutes ago - everything was created old, dead people were created in their graves, and all of our memories of the past were created in our heads. I think it has big-screen potential...)

Another neat argument is that, if you start with Adam and Eve 4000 years ago and apply exponential growth, you get the present population, with an average population growth rate of 0.5%. This model is funny because it depends on exactly equal production of boys and girls; this is especially crucial at the top of the pyramid, and any deviation in the first few generations is fatal to the model. It also completely ignores controlling factors of growth rates, like the size of the food supply, and climatic changes. Modern estimates of population growth rates in prehistoric times are based upon estimates of such real-world conditions, and it is clear that there must have been long periods during which growth rates were zero. (Myself, I worry about those early generations, with all that genetic inbreeding, and I wish creationists would set up a foundation to study this. They could get a grant...)

One of the goofiest arguments of the ICR has to do with the earth's geomagnetic history. The earth's magnetic field has been decaying; extrapolating the current rate back 1 million years yields an unbelievably large field strength back then, so the earth can't be that

old. Ref. 2 deals with this argument well. There is clear evidence that such a backward extrapolation (whether linear or exponential) is simply unjustified. There is overwhelming evidence, in fact, that the magnetic field has *reversed* itself many times in the past. This is not obscure knowledge; it can be found in many general books on geology - see ref. 4 as a good example.

It is fun to chase down creationist quotes of well-known scientists, which seem to support creationist positions. Very often, one or two sentences are taken out of context in an effort to make them seem to agree with the creationist position. However, a full reading of the reference will show that the author comes to a totally opposite conclusion based on all the evidence. This sort of selective censorship is clearly illustrated in ref. 2. Stephen J. Gould, the noted Harvard paleontologist, has been a target; he is known to be critical of certain aspects of the popular evolutionary model, and some creationists have quoted his criticisms as if to say that he rejects evolution. This has been one of the problems with the general public - the tendency to interpret scholarly disagreement and debate as a negative sign. When scientists *stop* arguing, that's when you need to start worrying.

I believe the position of many creationists is a very basic one: Because the truth is revealed to us by God, we cannot possibly be wrong; therefore, our methods cannot be wrong. That is a very old idea, and is just as dangerous in America as it is in Iran. The reason creationists take to the political process is that their record in the scientific arena is such a miserable failure. This is a democracy, and people are free to agitate for whatever they want. Creationists have the right to request that we bypass the rules of scientific inquiry and legislate science in the classroom. But we have the right and responsibility to say "No".

I believe it is cowardly to let our courts decide these issues along church-state lines. It is true that the creationism laws are unconstitutional. But I believe we should oppose them for the same reason we would oppose a law requiring students to conjugate verbs backwards on Thursdays - that is, because such laws are stupid. We cannot always depend upon the Constitution to protect us from dumb laws. We ought to be able to do that ourselves.

### References:

- (1) The History of Physics, by Isaac Asimov (Walker and Company, New York, 1984) - See Chapter 38.
- (2) Journal of Geological Education, Vol. 30, No. 1, January, 1982 This issue is devoted to examining creationist geology. Contact the National Association of Geology Teachers, 1041 New Hampshire St., Lawrence, KS 66044.
- (3) Scientific Creationism, edited by Henry Morris et al. (Creation Life Publishers, 1974)
- (4) The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Earth Sciences (Crown Publishers/Cambridge University, N.Y., 1981) - See Part 2, Chapter 7.



(*TBS Position Statement* continued from page 1)

against her by John Merrell will bring their ongoing legal battle into a Florida venue, with Renier in the role of defendant rather than plaintiff.

The fourth reason for our special interest in Renier relates to her response to our invitation for testing. She called us on March 15, in part to thank us for printing excerpts from her Press Release, and to deny Terry Smiljanich's report in our last issue that she had claimed to be an "adjunct professor" at Rollins College (she says she said "adjunct instructor"). She further informed us that she has no interest in being tested "by a doctor and an attorney" (referring to Posner and Smiljanich), as she is "working on too many police cases and with too many scientists to have the time...I'll let the scientists do it." The following is from Smiljanich's Feb. 27 letter to her:

This letter is in response to your request (during our telecon of Feb. 5) that TBS submit to you a proposal for a test of your ability to perform "psychometry". Later that evening at our TBS meeting, we watched your appearance on "Incredible Sunday", in which you performed "psychometry" on police officers' keys and rings, which were sealed in envelopes. It is therefore obvious that, in preparing our test, it is not necessary that we allow you to either see or touch the actual objects - only the containers that the objects are in.

It is also obvious that if you are indeed able to read the vibrations from the objects, you ought to be able to determine if a hidden ring or key is one of *your own*, or that of a stranger.

I propose that we employ keys and/or rings in our test, and that we use opaque envelopes (or preferably small cardboard jewelry boxes, which we purchased for a previous test and already have a supply of). We would place a key or ring in each of 10 boxes; one of the 10 objects would be *your own*, and the other 9 not. After touching or holding the 10 boxes, you would choose which contained your own object. We would conduct 10 runs of this test, using 10 boxes each time.

If you are able to successfully find your own object 8 times out of 10 (i.e. we would allow a 20% margin of error), you will have accomplished a feat so unlikely by chance alone (approx. 1:10,000,000 odds) that we would enthusiastically endorse the accomplishment as an apparently true psychic feat, award you our \$1,000 prize at a press conference, and submit an article for publication in whatever scientific journal would accept it. As our next newsletter is due out in March, we would like to arrange such a test ASAP, and make it the focus of our next meeting in April, with the local press present. Please contact me promptly with your response.

The TBS Executive Council is of the opinion that any psychic who specializes in "psychometry" (as does Renier), performing readings on objects for individuals as well as for police departments, ought to be able to succeed at a simple test such as that proposed by our Chairman. We are disturbed by her out-of-hand refusal to accept our challenge, but remain available and willing to carry out a controlled test, either this one, or one designed jointly with Renier, should she reconsider. And given her claim on the recent "Joan Rivers Show" that she possesses the ability to see right through one's clothing, any number of fascinating test possibilities now come to mind.

(*CHAIRMAN'S CORNER* continued from page 2)

test a psychic - on that rare occasion when a psychic is confident enough to agree to be tested!

We are not out to "destroy reputations". We do, however, claim the unqualified right to continue to examine claims of extraterrestrials, ESP, and crystal power. We assert the right to focus light on these claims, to subject them to tough questions, and to debate the issues with those who claim proof of these phenomena. If in discussing these issues we upset anyone who doesn't like the questioning, and thinks we're just "snotty amateurs", so be it. In this country, no one's claims are free from criticism, and a group such as ours is entitled to enter the fray with our fair comment on matters affecting the interest of the general public.

We shall continue to carry out our mandate, and not out of malice to anyone. If our criticisms of the evidence, or of the unscientific modus operandi of some proponents, are interpreted as accusations that proponents are "nuts", "crazy", or "idiots", then the point is missed entirely. You can have scientific credentials, yet not abide by the scientific rules of evidence. Or you can be perfectly scientific with your hypothesis, yet simply be wrong. And you can be wrong and not be "crazy". Newton was wrong about gravity, but he wasn't "nuts". Darwin was wrong about genetics, but he wasn't an "idiot".

The debate over UFOs is about the quality of the evidence, not whether or not the proponent is an "idiot" for voicing his or her beliefs. The debate about the "monuments" on Mars is not about Richard Hoagland or his credentials as a museum curator. To question whether he is right or wrong about the photographic evidence is not to question his moral character, intelligence, or dedication to hard work. Mr. Harder's attempt to divert the debate in this direction is wrong-minded.

This column has been an expression of my opinions about these issues. If anyone takes offense at them - too bad. I reserve the right to use whatever logic and reason I possess to question the evidence for man-made objects on Mars, or aliens in cold storage in an Air Force hangar. I may not be a trained scientist, but I do know something about evidence and burden of proof. I also know something about lawyers and lawsuits. As long as proponents of paranormal claims continue to wave around the threat of lawyers, I say, "Bring on the concrete and let's finish the job."



don addis



**TBS Statement of Income and Expenditures  
for fiscal year 1989 (6/1/89 - 5/31/90)**

I. Beginning balance from previous year	\$ 204.54
II. Income	
A. New memberships/subscriptions	210.00
B. Renewals	830.00
C. Donations	382.00
D. Honorarium for speaking engagement	100.00
E. Sales of back issues	2.50
F. Sales of videotapes of meetings	12.00
G. Sales of T-shirts (incl. P&H rec.)	142.00
	<u>TOTAL</u> \$ 1678.50
III. Expenditures	
A. Newsletters (laserwriter, printing, etc.)	797.15
B. Postage, fax, shipping	241.57
C. Telephone calls	94.25
D. Stationery (letterheads, labels, etc.)	54.97
E. Blank videotapes	5.24
F. T-shirts	196.37
G. Florida Corp. 1990 Annual Report Fee	35.00
	<u>TOTAL</u> \$ 1424.55
IV. Current Financial Assets	
A. Checking account balance	432.74
B. Stamps	4.75
C. Laser print credits	21.00
	<u>TOTAL</u> \$ 458.49
V. Current Liabilities	
	\$ 0.00
VI. Net balance (I + II - III; IV - V) as of 5/31/90	\$ 458.49
VII. Est. cost of printing/ mailing V.3, N.1 in 6/90	\$ 230.00

All financial records are available for inspection  
by anyone with a legitimate need or concern.

Faithfully submitted,  
Gary P. Posner, Treasurer

**Note:** This issue marks the end of our second year of paid subscriptions. Two-thirds of our memberships and subscriptions expire with this issue. **Please renew promptly**, as our finances are tight, and we wish to retain our low \$10 annual fee if at all possible. **Your generous donations are also needed. Thank you!**

\* \* \* \* \*

### God in the CCU?

The July, 1988 issue of the *Southern Medical Journal* contained an article by a San Francisco cardiologist which purported to demonstrate the existence of God. According to Dr. Randolph Byrd, a test group of CCU patients being prayed for by several assigned "born again" Christians had a more positive hospital course than did a comparable group of control patients. Dr. Gary Posner's critique of this study (unfortunately containing a few publisher's errors) appears in the Spring 1990 issue of *Free Inquiry* (corrected copies are available from TBS for a self-addressed stamped envelope).

Also... A briefer version of Posner's "Weeping Icon" investigative report (see Fall '89 *TBS Report*) appears in the "News and Comment" section of the summer *Skeptical Inquirer*.

(\*READERS' FORUM\* continued from page 7)

frog (see *Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall 1985, pp. 14-18), but I did not wish to make any "snotty" remarks.]

One wonders why our visitors, with an entire galaxy to explore, decided to spend months/years erecting a "city" of "pyramids" and the other Cydonia structures, which Hoagland only "discovered" when he hypothesized that perhaps the "face" was meant to be viewed at right angles from the ground (rather than from the front!) as well as from the air. Q: Who would be living on Mars to view the face from the ground, other than the architects themselves?

If the visitors' intent was to attract man's attention to a location on Mars where we could discover (a) that we are not alone in the universe, and (b) that "tetrahedral geometry" is the key to the workings of the universe, they need not have spent months erecting a tetrahedrally mathematically redundant series of grand structures, each of which being miles across. Any species that intelligent, with an entire galaxy to explore, must surely have realized that they could have simply drawn their "tetrahedral" message in advance on a high-tech scratch pad of sorts, left one page in a sturdy container, and erected a simple arrow pointing to the area to which they wished our attention drawn (or, rather than an arrow, a "Homo erectus" face might do just as nicely, perhaps with the container in the mouth, but not an entire "city", etc.).

One wonders why they would have chosen Mars rather than the moon. Or why they spent months erecting a face of dirt/stone whose left side is already "worse for wear" (I think Hoagland used those words), and which could easily have been obliterated beyond recognition by erosion or crater impact prior to discovery. Or why they chose a site riddled with formations almost exactly the same size as the "face" (with many looking only slightly less face-like), where the "real" face could have been missed.

Assuming UFOs to be real [as *Harder does*], and the myriad of sizes/shapes of the crafts and their occupants indicative of a multitude of civilizations currently visiting Earth (implying that contrary to the known laws of physics, interstellar space travel is a breeze), one wonders why our visitors didn't simply decide to return one day when we were ready for their "tetrahedral" message. One also wonders why, if erecting such structures makes any logical sense, some of the myriad of other civilizations haven't done the same.

My position, of course, is the skeptical, scientific one. In the absence of the type of extraordinary proof required to substantiate such an extraordinary (and illogical) claim, such a claim must be rejected as unworthy of acceptance until such time as the proof is provided. Hoagland implies that in 1993, when Mars Observer is expected to return photographs with 50x the resolution of Viking's, the proof will make itself known. This is a perfectly acceptable scientific hypothesis, assuming that Hoagland is willing to concede that if the photographs fail to indicate the presence of anything other than natural geological formations, he will accept that his hypothesis was a house of cards, constructed of nothing more than wishful thinking and exaggeration (for instance, I had difficulty appreciating the perfect "symmetry" that Hoagland talked about). That is, his hypothesis, to be scientific, must be falsifiable.

Is Hoagland willing to let the evidence decide, if the evidence is unfavorable? I'm not so sure, based upon one unsettling statement he made in the tape, to the effect that 'Nothing in Mars Observer can take back what we've found' (the pseudoscientist's "out"?). Is Posner willing to accept Hoagland's "discovery" if Mars Observer returns unambiguous proof of man-made structures? Of course, and I'll be as thrilled as Carl Sagan and the rest of the scientific community, and the world at large, at such an historic discovery. And I'd be the first to recommend Hoagland for a Nobel Prize. But I wonder, if it is true as you claim, that the Russians have "better" photos of the region, why Hoagland hasn't obtained copies for use in his presentations... □

## READERS' FORUM

### Editor's reply to Chuck Harder's "Letter to the Editor" on page 3:

My May 8 letter to Chuck Harder is reprinted below, so that readers may compare it to Harder's characterization.

Since Harder has raised the issue of Richard Hoagland's credentials, I must correct the record. The foreword of Hoagland's book says that he once served as Coordinator of Special Projects and Public Affairs of the Hayden Planetarium, not as Director. It describes Hoagland as "unabashed by his position outside the formal scientific cadre of the space community", his formal science education having consisted of what it terms an "apprenticeship...in the hard sciences", with his career beginning at age 19 as a museum curator. He has been described by Prof. David Morrison as "largely self-educated" (see his review of Hoagland's book in *Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall, 1988, pp.76-80), and by Prof. Jon Muller as "self-educated" (see his comments in *S.I.*, Spring, 1987, pp. 296-7). The following is excerpted from the *S.I.* review by Morrison, formerly an astronomy professor at the University of Hawaii, now head of the Space Science Division at NASA's Ames Research Center:

"[Hoagland] has had an eclectic career, ranging from museum curator to journalist to public relations agent. His vita is filled with such ambiguous titles as "consultant" and "advisor" (to organizations that include NASA and CBS). I first met him...when he appeared in the press corps as a free-lance writer [later representing CNN]...he remained an outsider [from] the professional journalists. He claims credit (with Eric Burgess and Carl Sagan) for devising the Pioneer 10 interstellar message plaque, but for some reason Sagan and Burgess, while crediting each other, always neglect to mention Hoagland's contribution in their versions of the story. Hoagland is also known for a theory that there is life on Jupiter's moon Europa and also for stories about a mysterious 'thing in the ring' supposedly discovered by Voyager at Saturn."

At Harder's suggestion, on May 19 I wrote to Joyce Bergstrom at NASA's Lewis Research Center. She telephoned me on June 5, and was only too happy to clarify the circumstances surrounding Hoagland's presentation there. She explained that her NASA center "brings in speakers on a variety of topics of interest as an employee perk. They can legally charge their time for one hour away from their job to go to the auditorium to listen to a colloquium." 'ALERT' is "just a catchy acronym" for 'Alert Lewis Employees on Relevant Topics', and connotes no special importance to the subject matter. She chuckled at the suggestion that Hoagland's invitation had resulted from 'an internal investigation by NASA giving sufficient

credibility' to his hypothesis, saying: "No, sir. Not at all. Hoagland was invited to the center by our Director as a guest for the day based on an employee's recommendation that he would have an interesting subject." Bergstrom told me that no NASA scientist has ever expressed to her a belief in Hoagland's "monuments on Mars".

As for my own reference to "pseudoscientist", it can be seen in its proper context in the final paragraph of my May 8 letter below.

My letter to the *St. Petersburg Times*, to which Harder also refers, quoted from the April, 1988 *Center For UFO Studies "Special Bulletin"* on the Ed Walters/Gulf Breeze case, which alerted its readers to CUFOS' conclusion that the case is a hoax. Included in the four-page "Bulletin" were three lines containing the following: "Dave Barry, the (Miami Herald) reporter...concluded after his talk with (Walters) that, 'He acts agitated, manic. Not to put too fine a point on it, he acts a little crazy.'" I included this quote in my letter (which was published on 3/9/90), as well as two other quotes unrelated to Barry, properly attributing them all to the CUFOS publication, and making no claim that Barry was an "expert".

Had we proceeded with our original plans to critique Harder's *Spring For the People* magazine in this issue, we would have reported that CSICOP was indeed included in its UFO contact list.

### May 8 letter to Chuck Harder from Gary Posner:

...we do plan, at present, to report upon the contents of your recent magazine, and about the status of your commitment to doing a three-hour UFO program with Phil Klass vs. a UFO proponent. Please inform us as to the status of your plans for said program.

Thanks very much for the Mars tape, which I plan to show at the next TBS meeting this summer. As I understand Hoagland's hypothesis, the "monuments" were built by explorers from another part of the galaxy who reached our solar system some 500,000 years ago, noted *Homo erectus* on Earth, and decided to leave a "message" for us to read when we developed the technology to reach our neighboring planet (clearly the architects were not from a civilization that evolved on Mars, since aside from the Cydonia monuments, made of rock, there are no remnants on Mars of any technological society). [I should have said that no other remnants have been alleged. I could have mentioned the fact that Viking also photographed formations resembling a "happy face" and Kermit the

(continued on page 6)

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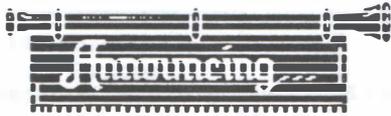
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## Tampa Bay Skeptics Quarterly Membership Meeting

Focus: The "face" and other "monuments" on Mars -  
Video of presentation at NASA by Richard Hoagland

(author of The Monuments of Mars)

Also: Noreen Renier on the "Joan Rivers Show"

SATURDAY, JULY 21 — 11:30 A.M.

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*("Merrell vs. Renier Update" continued from page 1)*

Merrell for libel in 1986 after he accused her of making "fraudulent claims" about her alleged "psychic" abilities. A jury awarded Renier \$25,000, and Merrell's appeal was unsuccessful, as were his recent attempts to discharge the debt through bankruptcy, and to have the original verdict dismissed on the basis of alleged "fraud" and "perjury" on Renier's part (see Winter and Spring issues). Merrell has withdrawn his latest appeal, opting instead to proceed with his lawsuit.

On the May 22 "Joan Rivers Show", Renier displayed a bullet, allegedly from a murder case that she was working on. During a similar 1988 appearance on "Hour Magazine", when asked if the police really "let that evidence go around the country", she stammered, "Uh, no, I don't think so, really. I,I,I, they don't know I have it here." Rivers asked no such skeptical questions about the alleged police evidence, or about the many other "psychic" claims made by Renier on the program.

*("Gulf Breeze UFO case" continued from page 1)*

Reports Myers, "Mayor Ed Gray III...said the model confirms what he has been suspecting all along..." At the news conference, Mayor Gray said, "I will not have this community, which I'm so proud of, a party to a deceitful practice that is reaping financial gain to individuals. It's morally wrong if not legally wrong."

The January 29, 1989 *Tampa Tribune* quoted Gulf Breeze Chief of Police Jerry Brown as saying, "I deal in facts...Why would people call about a prowler and not call about a UFO that's landed in their yard?"

The same *Tribune* article quoted Mark Rodeghier, Scientific Director of the Center for UFO Studies, as saying, "90 percent of serious UFO researchers think Gulf Breeze is a hoax." CUFOS issued a "Special Bulletin" in April, 1988 to alert its readers of its findings. Pro-UFO researchers Robert Boyd and Dr. Willy Smith were ousted from the Mutual UFO Network for making their findings known. Says Boyd (who is also a member of CUFOS), "It is my opinion that full refunds should be made to all purchasers of Ed's book, and a public apology be issued." MUFON's leadership continues to endorse the case.

The *News Journal* article reported that Walters "refused to take a lie detector test but signed a sworn statement denying any knowledge of the model UFO." Critics Klass, Boyd, and Smith "vehemently denied involvement in the model and said they would take lie detector tests and sign sworn statements to that effect."

Walters has pointed out that the model does not *exactly* match the object in his photos. However, Willy Smith has previously reported that at least two models were used by Walters, since after Smith published his early findings of asymmetries in the UFO's vertical axis and windows, Ed's later photographs reveal a more symmetrical object. It probably is true that this particular newly discovered model is *not* the "Gulf Breeze UFO" immortalized in Ed Walters' book.

Gary P. Posner



6219 Palma Boulevard #210  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33715

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