

# Tampa Bay Skeptics

## REPORT

VOLUME 5 NO. 2 FALL 1992

### “Holy Spirit” dove on the surgical glove?

by Wesley M. Johnson

Miami, haven of the Caribbean. Miami, the new Ellis Island, where political and economic refugees seek asylum and a better life. These new immigrants, as with the millions who came before them, have quite naturally surrounded themselves with the familiar and comforting things from their homeland. As a result, Miami hosts a vast number of Christian churches and Christian-like cults. Tradition is paramount — religion and things spiritual take a front seat. Such is the setting for my investigation (including interviews with all of the principals) of a claim that the “Holy Spirit,” in the form of a dove, was photographed guiding a cardiac surgeon’s hands as he operated on an exiled Cuban singer (see top center of photo inset).

The date is April 11, 1992. Popular Cuban singer Roberto Torres, age 51, is making an appearance at a party. During his third and most popular number he suffers a heart attack, yet he finishes the song, only then instructing his friends to call 911. An ambulance arrives and takes him to Cedars of Lebanon Hospital. En route, Roberto is calm and aware of everything. He tells the paramedics that he will be OK. He hears them say they are going to lose him.

After three days of recuperation at Cedars, Torres is transferred, at his request and cost, to Kendall Regional Medical Center, where a week earlier his mother-in-law had undergone heart surgery. Cardiovascular surgeon and long-time friend José (Joseph) Lamelas (born in the same town in Cuba) performs cardiac catheterization and discovers blockages requiring a triple bypass, which he then schedules to be done in one month’s time. Torres (who used quite impressive profanity when we were alone during my interview) stops his heavy drinking and smoking, and begins to cut out the traditional heavy Cuban meals. He also begins to read the Christian bible. His wife Marlen is convinced he has changed.

Torres enters Kendall on May 11 to be prepared for the next day’s surgery. He asks hospital Public Relations Director and long-time friend Jesus Angulo (also from the

same Cuban town) to take still pictures and video of the procedure. His reason: “You don’t get a triple bypass every day.” During the operation the flash on Angulo’s camera fails to work properly, resulting in some areas of shadow. Marlen, who is from “a very religious family,” prays all during the operation, “Please God, lead the surgeon.” The surgery goes according to plan and is, in Dr. Lamelas’ words, “normal in every respect.”

Two days post-op, Angulo presents the still photos to Roberto in his hospital room. Also in the room are Roberto’s wife, his brother, his daughter, and Dr. Lamelas. As he looks through the photos, one at a time, Torres stops at one longer than the others and asks, “Does anyone see anything here? What do you see?” Before anyone else has a chance to see the picture, Marlen, sitting in such a position that she can only see it from behind (i.e. through the back of the well-illuminated photo paper), exclaims, “There is a dove there!”

Torres is discharged from the hospital on May 20 and holds a press conference, during which he hands out copies of the “dove” photograph. Dr. Lamelas and Jesus Angulo inform the press that all went well and that Roberto will be singing again soon. A May 22 *Miami Herald* article (“Singer’s ‘Holy Spirit’ story stirs airwaves”) quotes Torres as saying, “Some might even say that the Holy Spirit guided his (Lamelas’) hand.” Angulo and Dr. Lamelas refrain

from engaging in such speculation.

#### THE CLAIM:

Roberto and Marlen Torres believe that a miracle has occurred. Their reasoning: Marlen was praying for God to guide the surgeon’s hands; a photo taken at the most critical point of Roberto’s surgery shows the “Holy Spirit,” clearly recognizable as a dove, on the surgeon’s glove; the camera’s flash failed at this most critical point; there has been a dramatic change in Roberto’s lifestyle.

#### THE ANALYSIS:

Inspection of the negative (by myself, another skeptic, and an independent professional photographer), the 5 x 7” color print, and the videotape reveals the “dove” to be simply a combination of shadows formed due to the doctor’s gown sleeve being bunched up inside his surgical

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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), though TBS is an autonomous local group and is not formally affiliated with CSICOP.

TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" is open to anyone claiming verifiable scientific proof of the reality of ESP, UFOs, dowsing, astrology, or any paranormal phenomenon. Please contact us for complete details.

*TBS Report* is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing for length, clarity, and taste), including opposing points of view. As our budget is very limited, 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

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Editorial Office:

6219 Palma Blvd. #210  
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(813) 867-3533 (Mon-Fri 9-5)

Founder, Editor and Publisher:  
Gary P. Posner

Cartoonist:  
Don Addis

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## CHAIRMAN'S

## ORDER

### A skeptic and a theist — Part II

by Terry A. Smiljanich

My column in the last issue concerning science and religion generated a lot of comments from readers. The comments were perceptive and engage us in a debate that has raged for centuries. Indeed, it currently rages on in the "Skeptics Echo" on the Fidonet computer bulletin board in which TBS now participates (see p. 8 box). Obviously, full justice to this subject cannot be done either in a column or in excerpts from some of the letters (see p. 7), but the topic deserves continued discussion.

"Religion" is a loaded word. To some it conjures up superstition, the paranormal, and belief in supernatural beings. At their source, however, all religions posit answers to basic metaphysical questions. I heartily agree with those readers who argue that religious claims about the material universe, be they weeping icons, faith-healing, visions of saints, etc., should all be treated with skepticism. Skepticism demands that claims about the "real world" be subjected to falsification tests and adequate proofs. This rational approach has given us the advances in knowledge that science has afforded humans.

*Ultimate* philosophical and metaphysical statements, however, are not subject to purely rational resolution. Even skepticism and rationalism are themselves grounded on a trust (a "faith") in their ability to provide true knowledge. I side with those philosophers who contend that all belief systems are based ultimately on a form of faith. As Kant said, "We must believe something from the outset in order to be able to talk of knowledge or science at all."

Let me hasten to add that I am not saying that science and skepticism are just other belief systems entitled to no more weight than Christianity or parapsychology. *No, no, no.* When it comes to an examination of our universe, only falsifiable claims can be accepted as potentially contributing to true knowledge. Only skepticism can keep us from wandering in the wilderness of competing claims about the universe we inhabit.

Belief in the existence of God does not have to mean belief in a supernatural white-haired old man, or in spirits. When I call myself a "theist," I mean that I trust (i.e. have "faith") in the concept of absolute, as opposed to relative, *truth*. True statements aren't true just because we think they are, or because they "work," but are true *a priori*. Our knowledge is imperfect (quantum mechanics demonstrates this on one level), but there is a perfect truth beyond our knowledge. Beauty, for another example, is *not* in the eye of the beholder. Nor is justice simply what we want to make of it. Moral values can be discovered by humans without divine intervention (as Wes Johnson points out in his letter), but they are not culturally relative. If talking about *absolute truth* is New Age thinking, then Immanuel Kant and Martin Gardner join me in new astral planes!

Faith need not be dogmatic. We can never have complete knowledge sufficient to burn someone at the stake for her beliefs. As Steve Allen (fellow skeptic and theist) said, "Both the existence and nonexistence of God seem in some respects preposterous. I accept the *probability* that there is some kind of divine force, however, because that appears to me the least preposterous assumption of the two."

So, for all these reasons, science and religion are not *necessarily* in conflict, and one can be both a skeptic and a theist. Many religious claims (e.g. a young earth, or the power of prayer) are in conflict with science, and we should not shy away from battle merely because they are labeled "religion." Belief in the existence of God, however, is in my opinion perfectly compatible with being a skeptic about worldly claims, and I don't believe I am living in two mental compartments. If I am, then all rationalists and skeptics are likewise doing so.

**Footnote:** As for Mr. Mebane's letter, although I haven't read Norman Macbeth's book yet, I know that Stephen Jay Gould is a committed evolutionist, so I can safely assume that he does not praise any "conclusion" that evolution has been disproved. Unlike creationism, evolution is most assuredly falsifiable. "Darwinian" evolution has been modified over the decades, but Darwin's vision lives on.

## Local seers predict Giants' fate

As this publication is being prepared, the ultimate fate of the San Francisco Giants remains unknown — at least to those suffering from a lack of perception (of the extrasensory type). To help alleviate the doubt and confusion regarding whether or not the Giants are coming to town, *St. Petersburg Times* writer Tom Zucco enlisted the aid of some Tampa Bay area residents to, as his August 15 column's subtitle says, "offer a little expert psychic opinion with a decidedly supernatural spin." Some brief excerpts of their predictions and reasons (please refer to the original column for slightly more elaboration):

- **The Rev. Richard Fox**, healer and counselor: *No*  
"The energy is in the wrong place . . . Red means restrictions or limitations [consulting his color cards] . . . It means a lot of talking and no doing."
- **Eileen Hull**, spiritual counselor: *Yes*  
"I see them coming [using color cards like The Rev. Fox], but it's going to take a long time. Possibly April. October will bring balance. It will come to a head by the end of November."
- **Gary Spivey**, WYNF *Ron and Ron Show* psychic: *Yes*  
"I'd put it at 65% coming . . . I had a vision of the mayor of S.F. with a commode stopper in his hand. And then the stopper was turned inside out. He was trying to stop the team from coming, and then it didn't work."
- **Ellen Zuppardo**, numerologist: *Yes and No*  
"The city [St. Pete.] was incorporated on June 3, 1903 . . . Also because St. Pete. is Gemini and Mars is going through Gemini now . . . I see the Giants coming and then leaving. This is being done on a 9-5 vibration . . ."
- **Janet Sciales**, astro-analyst: *Yes*  
"Its sun sign is Gemini. Its moon sign is Scorpio. And its rising sign, its personality, is Virgo . . . It will happen between Aug. 25 and Oct. 11 . . . San Francisco [has] Jupiter in their 12th house — that's the house of their own undoing."
- **Janet Fidanza**, astrological counselor: *Yes*  
"In 1985 . . . I had a vision . . . where the Dome is now. And as soon as they said the Giants might come here, I knew it for sure. I see something coming together on the 23rd of this month [August]."
- **Carolene Hart**, spiritualist: *Yes and No*  
"The team will be coming, but there will be a delay [until] after the November elections. And I'm not sure they're going to stay here more than two years. I don't think we'll be able to support them."

- **Pat Pfromer**, psychic portrait artist: *Yes and No*  
"I get May. That's when it's going to happen. However, I feel the team will go back to California. Somebody from San Diego . . . within three years."
- **Zandra the Psychic**: *Yes*  
"I see them seeping . . . like a leakage. But they should be coming. It's a strong feeling, but it's not happening in a pattern we're used to."
- **Professor Mako**, psychic medium, palmist: *No*  
"I don't think it's going to happen. I hope to God I'm wrong, but that's my feeling through mental telepathy."
- **The Rev. Dorothy Macdonald**, star stones reader: *Yes*  
"They are coming, but there are a lot of tiger's eyes. This means it won't be the way we thought it would be. I feel they'll come, but we'll say, 'We did all that for this?'"

. . . . .

## UFO abduction claim of local "expert" questioned

This past May, CBS aired the miniseries *Intruders*, based on the book by UFO abduction "guru" Budd Hopkins. Not only the national but the local media as well jumped on the hype bandwagon to promote this "event." The *St. Pete. Times* published an article on May 5 that focused on the work of local "colorologist" and UFO lecturer Caryl Dennis. Mingled with her vague, unsubstantiated claims was the announcement of a two-day conference to be hosted by her later that month in Tampa. Desirous of a testable, scientific claim to investigate, but unable to justify paying the \$40 admission fee, I decided to simply give her a call at the number listed in the article.

Expecting to hear a recorded message, I was surprised when Ms. Dennis answered the telephone. She was very cordial, even after I stated that I was a skeptic. She launched into a rapid-fire defense of her beliefs about UFOs and abductions — mostly vague statements like those published in the article. My interest, however, was aroused by this very specific claim: "Scientists at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] have studied actual 'implants' taken from abductees."

Alleged "abductees" quite commonly report the implantation of a small electronic-type device into their bodies during their time aboard the "UFO." But I'd never heard of any specific scientists who had actually studied

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### TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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## SNIPPETS

On July 2 the Florida Supreme Court overturned the convictions of Christian Scientists William and Christine Hermanson of Sarasota, who were convicted in 1989 of third-degree murder for withholding medical care from their diabetic daughter (see *TBSR*, Summer '89). "If the Legislature desires to provide for religious accommodation while protecting the children of the state, the Legislature must clearly indicate when a parent's conduct becomes criminal," wrote Justice Ben Overton. Said Iowa's Rita Swan, founder of CHILD (Children's Health Care is a Legal Duty), "If the Legislature did intend to let a 7-year-old child die of diabetes, that's heinous and needs to be changed."

(*Tampa Tribune*, July 3)

Just one day later, a Live Oak, Florida couple was convicted in the death of their 4-year-old child. Guillermo and Luz Hernandez, members of End Time Ministries (based in Lake City), had withheld medical treatment from their daughter, who had cerebral palsy. Her death from pneumonia was deemed by the jury to be the result of felony child abuse.

(*AP via St. Pete. Times*, July 4)

Dr. Nelson Ying, a nuclear physicist at the University of Central Florida in Orlando, claims to have developed a reliable table-top cold fusion process, and demonstrated it at the Orlando Science Center. "We are able to get much more heat than we put in, repeatedly." Ying also said he would soon submit a scientific paper for publication.

(*St. Pete. Times*, June 27)

According to psychiatrist Bruce Greyson, editor of the *Journal of Near Death Experiences*, "We need to have mysteries. The world can be a very frightening place, and a lot of our struggle is with having to control our environment. So I think we need to retreat into fantasy, abandon reality, and think about things that are beyond our knowledge." And psychologist Kenneth Ring, in his newest book on near-death and alien abduction experiences (*The Omega Project*), says, "I don't really understand what happened to these people, but obviously something very important and profound did; at the very least, I am now sure that they are not making this up."

(*Hartford Courant via St. Pete. Times*, June 13)

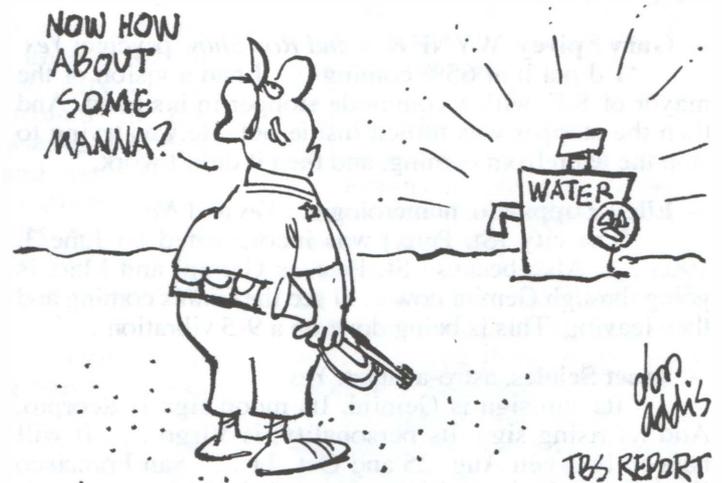
Remember the six U.S. Army intelligence cryptographers who deserted their posts in West Germany to travel to Gulf Breeze, Florida (Snippets, Fall '90)? The story at the time was that they had come to witness the Second Coming of Jesus, who was expected to arrive there via UFO. "How ridiculous can you get?," asks Vance Davis, one of the Gulf Breeze Six. "Why would [Jesus] come in a flying saucer?" Davis has now finally come forward to explain the non-ridiculous reason for their sojourn — several spirits, by way of a Ouija Board, had tipped off the group about the impending 1990 Iran earthquake and the Gulf War. "We were told [to] think

about trying to get out of the service [so we could] grow and become what we were supposed to become" — Jesus' helpers in preparing the world for the coming chaos and the Second Coming and Rapture. *Now we understand.*

(*AP via St. Pete. Times*, July 28)

Speaking of the Gulf War, in a recent speech at a Public Service Fellowship luncheon in Washington, Marine Maj. Gen. Charles Krulak claimed that a "mystery well" appeared out of nowhere in the desert, by divine intervention, to supply 100,000 gallons of needed water daily to our troops. Although one of his fellow officers says that the Saudis placed the well, Krulak, who had been "on my knees every day praying for water," suddenly one day happened upon the brightly painted diesel-powered pump along a road traveled many times before by a division of 20,000 troops. "There was no way anyone could have driven down that road [before] and not seen that well and equipment painted in multiple colors."

(*Religious News Service via St. Pete. Times*, Aug. 15)



Despite the indiscriminate killing in what was once Yugoslavia, British tour operators are again advertising their lucrative pilgrimages to Medjugorje, the Bosnian village where the Virgin Mary is claimed to have had conversations with children, and to have at least been seen by thousands of others.

(*St. Pete. Times*, Aug. 15)

A scientific expedition to explore the 24-mile-long, 750-foot-deep Loch Ness commenced on July 13. The purpose of the \$5-million project, employing modern video cameras, was to survey the lake's biology and hydrography, and, just perhaps, document the existence of the fabled Nessie (another jewel of the British tourist trade industry). Alas, no reports of a monster discovery as of press time.

(*Tampa Tribune*, July 5; *St. Pete. Times*, July 13)

["Snippets" are derived and rewritten from the referenced sources. Please send your clippings to the editor.]

“‘Holy Spirit’ dove on the glove?” (con’t. from page 1)

glove. The bunching runs diagonally from the inside (radial/thumb side) of the back of Dr. Lamelas’ right wrist to higher on the outside (ulnar/pinkie side). The largest bunching occurs just above the wrist’s bony ulnar prominence. The video (which I viewed with Mr. and Mrs. Torres and Jesus Angulo) clearly shows folds of cloth under the glove in a typical cloth-folding co-linear pattern, corresponding to the dove’s “head” and “neck.” The “eye” in the still photo appears to be a small spot of blood, although this is not absolutely certain, and could be a poorly lit, slightly recessed end-fold. The flash on Angulo’s camera failed to function on this and on six other shots, rendering the absence of flash at this “critical” stage meaningless.

Dr. Lamelas reported nothing at all unusual during the surgery. I asked him if he had felt or noticed anything even the slightest bit different from other similar operations. Lamelas assured me that it was a “routine operation.” Mr. Torres reported that he remembers nothing from the time his anesthesia was administered until he awakened several hours later. And although Dr. Lamelas agrees that the “dove” photo was taken during the most critical point in the procedure, this critical point lasts several minutes, while the photo captures only an instant in time.

Referring to Roger Tory Peterson’s *A Field Guide to the Birds, Eastern Land and Water Birds*, I find the shape of the “dove’s” head and neck to resemble a nighthawk or whippoorwill much more closely than a dove. The shape also resembles a range of hawks, most notably the harrier and the pigeon hawk, due to the sharply curved “beak.” A dove has a straight bill and a large eye, while the nighthawk and whippoorwill both have a shorter curved bill and smaller eye. All in all, the image looks more like a bird-of-prey than a dove (see inset above).

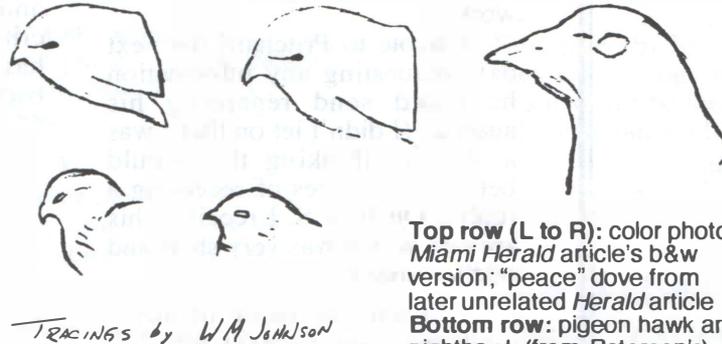
A further evaluation from a biblical viewpoint would suggest that there may be some confusion of symbolism and reality in this matter. It is generally agreed that the concept of the “dove” as symbolic of the “Holy Spirit” originated when John the Baptist, Jesus’ cousin, baptized Jesus. Descriptions of the event were written by Mark, Matthew and Luke. Here are the relevant passages from the *Holy Bible - New Revised Standard Version*:

Mark 1:10 — “he saw . . . the Spirit descending like a dove on him”

Matthew 3:16 — “and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him”

Luke 3:22 — “and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove”

But exactly how closely did the “Holy Spirit” resemble a dove? Wings? Feathers? Bill? Slowly circling?



Cooing? What kind of dove? What color? We will never know. We can only conclude that whatever it was, it was *not* a dove. For if it had been a dove, an animal well known to all at the time, the writers would have written something like “and a dove descended and alighted on Jesus.” Marlen Torres’ remark was, “There is a dove there!” She had viewed the print from the *back* and concluded *immediately* that the shape was that of a dove, this despite the fact that viewed from the back, some of the detail is lost (the amount lost being highly dependent on the available light). Mrs. Torres, admittedly a “very religious” woman, was predisposed to see in the image a religious sym-bol corresponding to her own deeply held beliefs.

Roberto Torres, facing triple coronary bypass surgery, became aware of his own mortality. It is not surprising for a person under such circumstances to turn to the so-called “spiritual realm” (e.g. to begin reading the Bible) when one’s life is on the line. Someone once said, “There are no atheists in foxholes.” Human beings seem to expect or need there to be someone looking out for them — what philosopher Paul Kurtz has termed the “Transcendental Temptation.” Mr. Torres has also stopped smoking and drinking, and has started on a better diet. These changes, taken together after a life of indulgence, would impress anyone, though they do not constitute evidence of a supernatural event. And his liberal use of profanity leads me to suspect that his new-found behavior may not last for long.

#### CONCLUSION:

The facts and analysis lead inescapably to the conclusion that the image in the photo was produced by a combination of light and shadow, random layering and bunching of cloth under a surgical glove, and possibly a spot of blood. The seeing of a “dove” in the rubber and cloth is similar to seeing shapes in clouds or the “face” on Mars. Marlen Torres saw the shape and provided the religious interpretation. One certainly need not invoke the supernatural to account for a balky flash unit (ask any photographer!). There is nothing remarkable or supernatural evident in Mr. Torres’ behavior. There may be the illusion of a bird-of-prey in one of the photographs, but no “Holy Spirit.” Kurtz’s “Transcendental Temptation” is alive and well.

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#### TBS Executive Council Election Results

With no additional nominations having been made in writing or on the floor, the current slate of TBS officers was reelected to another year’s term at our July meeting.

### TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS CONSULTANTS

The Rev. W. Thomas Leckrone  
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Richard P. Manny, Pharm.D., R.Ph.  
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USF Biology Dept.  
Tampa

Joan Straumanis, Ph.D.  
Prof. of Philosophy, Rollins College  
Winter Park  
(temporarily on leave at the Department  
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Paschal N. Strong, Ph.D.  
USF Psychology Dept.  
Tampa

Jerry L. Touchton  
Physics teacher  
Brandon

Wise B. Webb, Ph.D.  
UF Psychology Dept.  
Gainesville

#### Other skeptical sources on the paranormal:

##### • *The Skeptical Inquirer* •

Flagship journal of  
CSICOP / Box 703 / Buffalo, NY 14226

##### • *Free Inquiry* •

An internat'l secular humanist magazine  
Box 664 / Buffalo, NY 14226

##### • *Prometheus Books* •

50-page catalogue  
700 E. Amherst St. / Buffalo, NY 14215

##### • *CompuServe Skeptics Teleconference* •

A monthly computer forum  
3550 Watermelon Rd. #29-A  
Northport, AL 35476

### "UFO claim" (cont. from page 3)

such allegedly alien material.

Before I could get a name, however, Ms. Dennis had to leave for an appointment, and we hung up. But I decided to follow-up on this claim, and wrote a short letter to Philip Klass, the well-known UFO skeptic, asking if he could supply the names of any such MIT scientists. He replied by phone to tell me that, yes, a Dr. David Pritchard had allegedly done such work.

I wrote to Pritchard the next day, requesting any information he could send regarding his analysis (I didn't let on that I was a skeptic, thinking this would better my chances of receiving a reply). On June 8, I received his answer, which was very short and oddly worded:

"I am not aware of any alleged alien implant which bears any similarity to the device mentioned in the Intruders miniseries. All tests of structure and composition of alleged [implants] have yielded results which are consistent with earthly origin (either natural or man-made fiber)."

A subsequent letter to Dr. Pritchard asking him to elaborate has never been answered.

So although Ms. Dennis was correct in that *alleged* alien implants have been studied, it turns out that they have been determined to be of *earthly* origin. I wasn't surprised — Klass had told me that although Pritchard had conducted his research "two or three years ago," he had never, to the best of Klass' knowledge, published his findings. According to Klass, Pritchard is not exactly an unbiased, objective researcher of UFOs — he is closely associated with Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs (another UFO abduction "guru"). This was borne out by Pritchard's letterhead which read, "Abduction Study Conference," and which listed both Hopkins' and Jacobs' names.

I've subsequently written to Caryl Dennis a few times, hoping

for a response to my findings. She did reply once, but made no reference to this particular matter. In her letter she listed two "sources" to which I could write for information in order to "help [my] search for the 'truth.'" Both sources turned out to be heavily involved with the pro-UFO camp.

So, once again, like so many other instances we've read and heard about dealing with the wild-sounding claims of UFOlogists and other pseudoscientists, a critical inquiry into such a claim has yielded no good evidence to back it up.

—Greg Simpson

### TBS in the media

TBS astronomy consultant Jack Robinson and founder Gary Posner were interviewed for Sean Ledig's July 25 *Tampa Tribune* article, "Religious groups see flying saucers in a spiritual light."

Robinson noted that although "most scientists think that life must exist elsewhere in the universe . . . I don't think that [the UFO believers] appreciate the difficulties in interstellar travel, which would discourage other races from [visiting] us."

In response to questions about the believers' assertions that the aliens exist on a "higher vibrational plane," Posner pointed out that such claims are "non-testable from a scientific viewpoint and are just a matter of [religious] faith," and as such they are not within the purview of TBS.

Posner was also interviewed by *St. Pete. Times* writer Tom Zucco for his "Are they coming?" column of August 15 about the possible move by the S.F. Giants (see p. 3). Zucco had requested Posner's input in order to provide some "balance," but given the column's lighthearted style, and the disparate visions of the seers, any more "balance" would have appeared out of place. TBS is perfectly content to have been relegated to the "cutting room floor" on this occasion.

## LETTERS • READERS' FORUM

Editor: There are several points in this summer's "Chairman's Corner" with which I take serious issue.

"A skeptic and an agnostic" would have been an understandable position to take, but the "several callers" who questioned how Mr. Smiljanich could be both a skeptic and a *theist* were right on target — the two are mutually exclusive. As his column stands, I find no union of the sets "Skeptic" and "Theist." It seems Mr. Smiljanich, like most other people, is subject to mental compartmentalizing and isolation of areas of intellectual consideration — in this case "Skeptic" in one mental box and "Theist" in another, with the two being subject to different levels of scrutiny.

In the context of his column, Mr. Smiljanich's reference to moral values as "deeper, unknowable questions" implies that morals and ethics are exclusively within the purview of religion, and not amenable to scientific methods. I suggest that he read the work of Dr. Laurence Kohlberg on moral development.

And why does Smiljanich's belief that there is "an intrinsic absolute truth to which mankind cannot have complete access" sound like "astral planes" or other such "New Age" gobbledygook? What's next? Divinely inspired skepticism?

Mr. Smiljanich cannot have it both ways. Either he is a skeptic, or he is not.

Wesley M. Johnson, Miami

Editor: Mr. Smiljanich's avowed "skeptical theism" does seem to me oxymoronic. I am myself (on empirical grounds) a skeptical "supernaturalist" — but a "theist"? God, forbid!

But there's another in Mr. Smiljanich's fold — surprisingly enough, it's Martin Gardner! I presume Mr. S. knows Gardner's generally laudable book, *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener*, where he bares this unexpected anomaly to his incredulous readers.

Smiljanich's pious assertion that "evidence can disprove evolution" nettled me. Darwinian evolution *has*

been disproved, in several different ways, but the evolutionists ignore all disproof as cavalierly as does the Church, and for the same reason: its "divines" simply cannot tolerate the notion that the facts can only be explained by intelligent design, so they feel they *must* keep up the pretense that a random process could be responsible. I recommend Norman Macbeth's incisive little book, *Darwin Retried* (handsomely praised by Stephen Jay Gould in the July *Scientific American*), which is compiled entirely from admissions by eminent evolutionists. Robert Wesson's *Beyond Natural Selection*, which sets forth a great deal of evidence, looks to Butlerian evolution as a better alternative, but I can't see how this theory can get over the conspicuous fiasco of Lysenko, who wagered his career on it and lost.

Alexander Mebane, Venice

*The following, from the second page of his four-page review of Darwin on Trial in the July Scientific American, is Gould's supposedly "handsome praise" for Darwin Retried:*

"[Although] a much better book [than *Darwin on Trial*] . . . Macbeth ultimately failed . . . (though he raised some disturbing points along the way) because he used an inappropriate legal criterion . . . [requiring that only] the faintest shadow of doubt . . . be raised against Darwinism. (As science is not a discipline that claims to establish certainty, all [the book's] conclusions would fall by this inappropriate procedure.)"

*Re: Lysenko, our readers are also referred to Martin Gardner's column in the Spring '92 Skeptical Inquirer. —G.P.*

To our readers: Does your doctor or lawyer consult a psychic or astrologer when considering your case? Does your stock broker check his astrological chart before advising you?

People who are taught to believe in ghosts and spirits before they are potty trained (i.e. instructed to believe without reason) cannot be expected to question the validity of psychic power and astrology. People are easy game for the promoters — the 800 and 900 telephone lines will get anyone advice, and half-hour TV commercials

(continued on page 8)

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V5N2



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(Also notify TBS if interested in carpool or shared lodging)

. . . . .

"**Letters • Readers' Forum**" (continued from page 7)

feature prominent personalities introducing psychics who  
have advised royalty and movie stars.

Too bad there is not some way to slow this  
unscientific, deceitful, ridiculous trend. I wish the  
principles of CSICOP, TBS, etc. could reach more people.

C.J. Wenger, Bradenton



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