



Selected articles from
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Skeptical Inquirer's Benjamin Radford Coming to Tampa

By [Gary P. Posner](#)

Note: This is a much-abbreviated version of the hardcopy newsletter's article.

Benjamin Radford, a research fellow with the [Committee for Skeptical Inquiry](#) and deputy editor of *Skeptical Inquirer*, will be visiting Tampa in October.

Author of six books and hundreds of articles, and a guest on numerous television programs, Radford will first speak at the University of South Florida in Tampa on Tuesday, October 16, and will meet with members of TBS (and other invitees) the following evening.

An experienced investigator in numerous aspects of the paranormal, Ben has offered to present one of his many exciting talks. We have selected "Reflections on a Decade of Paranormal Investigation," in which he will discuss the nature of "unexplained mysteries" such as ghosts, Bigfoot, crop circles, and psychic powers, emphasizing what science says about the evidence and why there is still debate about these issues. He will draw from case studies over a decade of personal investigations into these and dozens of other topics. And any subjects that Ben fails to satisfy our curiosity about can be covered during the wide-ranging Q&A session afterwards.

This special event will be held on Wednesday, October 17, at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tampa, 11400 Morris Bridge Road, from 7 to 9 p.m. ([see here for map](#)).

Local IIG Affiliate Taking Shape

TBS member Martha Keller, who recently founded the [Pinellas County Skeptics](#), is also working to create an Independent Investigations Group affiliate here in Florida.

To that end, Martha has been in talks with James Underdown, who chairs [the original IIG](#), which is associated with Center For Inquiry—Los Angeles. Additional IIG affiliates are currently located in Atlanta, Colorado, Washington DC, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Alberta, Canada.

As explained on Martha's [IIG Meetup page](#), "The [Florida] IIG is not intended to replace any local skeptical groups, but rather, to be a way for skeptics in the area to become more active in investigations."

All skeptics interested in more information about becoming involved in the local IIG are invited to attend a meeting on Saturday, November 10, at 2:00 p.m., at the Seffner-Mango Branch Library, 410 N. Kingsway Rd., Seffner.

Snippets



A couple in Toms River, New Jersey, is suing their landlord in an effort to get out of their lease, claiming their home is haunted. Allegedly being spooked at night by eerie voices, flickering lights, slammed doors and their bed sheets being tugged by unseen entities, Jose Chinchilla and fiancée Michele Callan moved out after only a week, and enlisted the services of the Shore Paranormal Research Society. But though SPRS has classified the reported activity as "paranormal," its ghostbusters failed to find evidence of a haunting. The landlord's take is that the couple was spooked by the monthly rental fee, and he has filed a countersuit.

(WCBS-TV 2 [New York] website, April 16)

A word of advice: If a buddy approaches you with a financial scheme that sounds too good to be true, and even advertises that it's a "white elephant," stampede in the opposite direction! In an SEC complaint filed in the U.S. District Court in Florida on June 20, Gurudeo "Buddy" Persaud is charged

with having defrauded 14 investors (including family and friends) of over a half-million dollars between 2007 and 2011. The kicker: Quoting from the SEC's complaint, "Persaud failed to disclose he would trade investors' contributions based on lunar cycles and the gravitational pull between Earth and the moon." But even had that lunar-tic of a strategy worked out, his White Elephant Trading Company LLC was a Ponzi operation that, rather than earning his investors the promised risk-free 6-18% annual return, diverted nearly all the funds into his own pockets.

(*Forbes* online, June 22)

And another word of advice: If a buddy approaches you with a free ticket to France, suggesting that you give away all your worldly possessions and accompany him/her to the village of Bugarach for a ride aboard the flying saucer that will save a lucky few ([see last issue's "Snippets"](#)) from oblivion when the world ends on December 21, stampede in the opposite direction! Mayan wall writings recently unearthed in Guatemala include calendars of astronomical events slated to occur well after the year 3500, as revealed in the May 10 issue of the journal *Science*. The National Geographic Society has funded expeditions that led to the discovery of the ruins of Xultun, and within them a small room replete with murals and hieroglyphs depicting events predicted to take place more than a millennia from now. Quips Boston University archaeologist William Saturno, lead author of the study, "So much for the supposed end of the world."

(*USA Today*, May 10)

Letter to the Editor

Editor: Let me start by saying that my background is in theoretical physics, though by profession I am a computer programmer and analyst. Considering this background, I tend to regard UFO claims with more care than quite a lot of "open-minded" people. Yes, the unexplained sightings are not swamp gas emissions, or aircraft, or bird formations, but that by itself is no proof they're alien in origin -- for all we know, they may just be ultra-black projects of the Russian and U.S. military.

I came across your website's [article on Richard Hoagland](#), the author of notorious claims on the "Face on Mars" and the book *The Monuments of Mars: A City on the Edge of Forever*. Hoagland does not have the solid, convincing background of physicist [Stanton T. Friedman](#) or any scientists I have been fortunate to meet. Hoagland comes across as someone with a very good ability to express his ideas convincingly -- an eloquent orator, if you will. He has had what I consider unfortunate, odd interactions with Sagan and others, questioning their credibility and work. His "mathematical relationships" have always sounded opportunistically coincidental, so they probably deserve little credit. The "Face" and his claims? Maybe the "Face" is something real, maybe not; maybe someone built that structure, maybe it's just the product of erosion by water and wind.

So when I read your article on Hoagland, I found myself accepting your point of view on this man.

Yes, the details regarding Frank Drake, Carl Sagan and Ralph Greenberg have nothing to do with Hoagland's contention about the "Face" -- just details intended to prove something about Hoagland's character -- but in general I understand your views.

Then I came to the home page of your personal website. You point to an [interview with Philip J. Klass](#). You started it badly by asking him, "How do you account for the virulence of your critics?" -- forgetting all along the virulence of Klass' attacks on some of the UFO "believers." Well, in our universe, sir, an *action* causes a *reaction*, so it should be of no surprise when someone (stupidly) attacks Klass. And then you could have asked him so many *valuable* questions, but you have already chosen your side years ago.

And there is this statement on your home page: "My mind remains open to the unlikely possibility that paranormal phenomena are real after all." So many things said in (or intended to be read from) a simple statement. What "paranormal phenomena"? Are you putting in the same bag stories of ghosts, werewolves, vampires, flying witches and UFOs? Why?

Most importantly, how can you claim to have an open mind when you already proclaim there's an "unlikely possibility" that UFOs (the main subject in your interview of Klass) are "real after all"?

Look at the Challenger tragedy. Remember physicist Richard Feynman's perspective and comments on the matter and his relentless pursuit of the truth. *That* is open-mindedness. Seek the truth, expect no results before you have them, proclaim nothing before you have the truth. What is it that frightens you so much that you need to say you have an open mind to something that is *unlikely to be true*? Open mind and personal opinions/expectations -- before having the results from an honest and scientific inquiry -- do not mix.

True, today's physics does not support the contention that UFOs, traversing cosmic distances in less than a lifetime, are real. But what about in 10 or 100 years from now, with super-string theory fully developed, or even a Unified Theory? There's no way of telling what we may find out in the future.

Are there hoaxes? No doubt. Are there delusional people and delusional accounts? No doubt. But are there "unexplained" sightings or events? Indeed. I'd rather be an open-minded but honest person, who tries hard to understand all sides of the discussion, than a skeptic who refuses to look at things the way a true explorer looks -- expecting nothing, suspecting nothing, proclaiming nothing ahead of the results. I truly hope you are an honest seeker (even though the cliché "I was once a believer and now I am a skeptic" will always cast shadows on you), and not a tool for someone or some ideology. If not, that's life.

--Miguel Margarido
Barcelona, Spain
miguelmargarido_work@yahoo.es

Editor's reply: I'll let our readers judge my interview with Phil Klass for themselves. But as for an "open-minded" approach, scientific inquiry assumes the "null hypothesis," i.e., that the proposed novel phenomenon is nonexistent until the data compel otherwise. And though Stanton Friedman may have a scientific background, his approach toward UFOs is credulous rather than parsimonious.

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