
News and Comment

Readers will note that in this expanded issue considerable space is devoted to four reports addressing the claims of the so-called "Mars effect" on sports champions. The claimed effect has received international attention in recent years. The lead-off report is the first presentation of results of the U.S. test of sports champions. Some familiar with the research have felt that it should have been published earlier, in preliminary form; others, that publication should be withheld till still further testing can be done. We feel it best to place the data, analyses, and different interpretations before the interested reader at this time. Scientists and the public will thus have the most current and complete information on which to assess the issue.—Editor

Amityville hokum: The hoax and the hype

The movie version of *The Amityville Horror* opened last summer to the hype that might be expected for a filmed story of supposedly supernatural events prominently labeled by the publisher as "A True Story." But by the week of the movie's July 27 opening, a lawyer who had figured in the murder case that initiated the story revealed that most of the subsequent events were a hoax, "invented over many bottles of wine." He thus confirmed the suspicions of virtually everyone who had examined the story with even a modicum of skepticism.

It always was difficult to know how seriously anyone took the best-selling book by Jay Anson. But certainly the "true story" claim helped significantly to boost its sales. The newspaper advertising for the movie version did not repeat the claim, but the coming attractions shown in theaters did show a full-screen view of the cover of the Anson book with the huge words "A True Story" impossible to miss.

The "true story" claim was suspect almost from the beginning. Our reviewer, Robert L. Morris (*SI*, Spring/

Summer 1978), found numerous holes in the supposed factual basis of the book and concluded: "Various problems, including inconsistency, exaggeration, and distortion, are abundant, and there is suggestive evidence of fabrication. As it stands, the cover of the book would appear to constitute false advertising and should be handled in the same way as false advertising is handled in analogous cases."

Although Anson later, incredibly, admitted that he himself did not know whether the book was true, the Lutzes, the family whose story was supposedly told in it, maintained the events were real. That claim was flatly contradicted this past summer by lawyer William Weber. Weber had defended Ronald DeFeo, convicted in the 1974 slayings of his family in the house in Amityville, New York, that the Lutzes later bought and temporarily occupied.

Weber said the Lutzes had come to him after the trial and told him they had had supernatural experiences in the house. He was intending to write a book about the trial and told them their experiences might be useful for his book. Numerous tape-recorded sessions with the Lutzes ensued. Weber gave the following version of events in an interview

with the Associated Press distributed on July 26.

"We created this horror story over many bottles of wine that George Lutz was drinking," said Weber. "We were really playing with each other. We were creating something the public would want to hear about."

He said the Lutzes took information he had learned from DeFeo about the house and the murders and put them into their own account about their "experiences." For example, he said, the Lutzes' story about a stench, flies, and gnats coming from a bedroom was based on his information that police reported a stench emanating from a bedroom where a body was found.

Weber said he told Kathy Lutz the murders were supposed to have taken place at 3 A.M. "So Kathy said, 'Well, that's good. I can say I'm awakened by noises at that hour... and I could say I had dreams at that hour of the day about the DeFeo family.'"

Weber said when he showed the couple photos of the murder scene with black fingerprint marks on the floor, "George started talking about slime coming out of the keyholes, the green slime that they used in their book."

Asked why he did not make his allegations earlier, Weber was quoted as saying: "They haven't violated the law. If the public is gullible enough to believe the story, so be it."

Nevertheless, Weber filed a \$2-million lawsuit against the Lutzes, charging breach of contract and fraud. He alleged that they reneged on a deal with him and another writer to do the book Weber had proposed.

In September, testifying in Weber's lawsuit in a Brooklyn federal court, George Lutz admitted netting \$100,000 from the book and another \$100,000 from the film. The suit was settled out of court for undisclosed terms, and a countersuit by the Lutzes against

Weber was dismissed. The judge in the case, Jack B. Weinstein, was quoted as saying, "It appears to me that to a large extent the book is a work of fiction."

In the meantime, the man who had been living in the Amityville house for eight months when the movie's opening renewed interest in the case said the only horrors he had experienced were the hordes of tourists and gawkers who descended on the house. "I have never heard sounds of ghosts, ghouls, or the supernatural," 32-year-old Frank Burch told the *New York Daily News*. "The only sound you can ever hear in this house is a bump when I sometimes fall out of bed."



Ad for the movie "The Amityville Horror."

Likewise, the owners of the house subsequent to the Lutzes, James and Barbara Cromarty, discounted the Lutz-Anson story. Said Barbara Cromarty: "We know everything was a hoax."

None of this fazed American International Pictures. Quite the contrary. It had first worked to help make the book a best-seller, then heavily promoted the

movie. In July, the movie's co-stars went on a publicity tour with the Lutzes. American International spent \$6.2 million on promotion, more than the movie itself cost. The effort at marketing the paranormal paid off handsomely. By the first week of September, the movie had already become the most successful release in the studio's 25-year history.

—Kendrick Frazier

Science and creationism at Iowa State University

When classes opened at Iowa State University in the fall of 1979, a seminar course called "Critical Judgment" was nowhere on the schedule. It had been canceled abruptly—the latest event in a continuing controversy at the university concerning science, paranormal claims, and religious fundamentalism.

The critical-judgment seminar had been conceived in late 1977 by John W. Patterson, professor of materials science and engineering at ISU, after Patterson had openly challenged the pro-paranormal teachings of David A. Weltha, an associate professor of family environment at the university. The issue received statewide and national publicity (*SI*, Spring/Summer 1978).

Patterson's intentions in offering the seminar were to extol the virtues of critical judgment by applying it to several aspects of modern life—not just to Weltha's notions of human auras, reincarnation, astral projection, and ESP. It included discussions on creation vs. evolution, for example, because a seminar series on scientific creationism had been completed a year or so earlier in the same Seminar '70s program. The scientific-creationism seminar had been taught by three ISU professors, including D. R. Boylan, dean of engineering at the university.

Normally, seminars in the S-70s program are conducted for three quar-

ters, not necessarily consecutively. Patterson gave the critical-judgment seminar first in the spring quarter of 1978 and again in the winter 1978-79 quarter. It was proposed for fall 1979. This would have been its third and final offering, in accordance with the usual practice.

Patterson, however, received a phone call from the coordinator of the seminar program in late March saying that the fall course proposal had been rejected and that Boylan had written a memo to the Seminar '70s Committee encouraging the rejection.

Patterson says the cancellation was for "unprecedented reasons" and not because of any lack of student or instructor interest. He says the administrative committee ruled on "newly contrived" grounds, namely, that topics too closely involved with religious beliefs should no longer be allowed in the seminars. "Of course," Patterson points out, "many other religion-related seminars had previously qualified in the same program, including the one that promoted creationist views on origins and strongly opposed the evolutionary viewpoint."

"From the facts I have at hand—and I fear a great deal has been kept from me—it appears that the critical-judgment seminar was terminated largely because of religious pressure. Among other things," says Patterson, "I had questioned certain fundamentalist biblical interpretations. I had passed out some alternative interpretations of the Bible with a request that the students criticize these alternative interpretations."

This, says Patterson, prompted one student, Ron Lee, who was not enrolled in the seminar but who attended the creation vs. evolution portion, to complain to Boylan, the head of Patterson's college. Even though the S-70s program was not connected with the engineering college, Boylan, says

Patterson, wrote a memo that apparently persuaded the S-70s committee members to terminate Patterson's critical-judgment seminar.

Patterson went to considerable effort to document that Lee was the only student who had complained about the seminar, in contrast to Boylan's claim that his memo was on behalf of the students in the class. Patterson sent course evaluation forms to all attendees, explaining his desire to check Boylan's allegation. The only one who answered that he had complained to Boylan was Lee. Only one of the evaluations volunteered was neutral; all the rest were highly favorable. Some of the students wrote lengthy supportive statements.

All this occurred at a time when Iowa and ISU were steeped in considerable controversy concerning the fundamentalists, both locally and nationwide. Serious questions had been raised about the ISU Bible-study groups and about legislation that was being considered in the Iowa Senate to require that creationism be taught *as science* in the Iowa public school system. "Significantly," says Patterson, "Ron Lee and Dean Boylan had both received widespread visibility in the press because of their very active and outspoken support of the creationist teaching bill and because both were known to be deeply committed to fundamentalist Christian tenets."

Patterson says he does not question the integrity of Lee or Boylan or the sincerity of their beliefs. "Nevertheless, I think they have been overwhelmed by an ominous but very questionable superstitious system and, despite the intensity of their commitment, those outside that belief should be alerted. Alerted, that is, to the extent to which such superstitious beliefs can color and indeed distort one's views as well as one's professional judgment."

Patterson has recorded these

events and his concerns in a document he has entitled "The Victory of Religious Fundamentalists over Science and Critical Judgment at Iowa State University." In it he summarizes his complaint about the creationists. "The creationists have grossly distorted many facets of science to the public and have leveled ill-conceived attacks against anthropology, astronomy, biology, geology, paleontology, radiation physics, and thermodynamics, among other sciences. However, they are notoriously intolerant of any and all serious scrutiny. . . . They are quite content to observe while the 'other guy's ox is being gored' . . . But when the same scrutiny is applied to their dogma some rather different forces come into play and the rules of the game change dramatically, so that the most effective (if not appropriate) political machinery can be brought to bear.

"I submit, then," Patterson says in conclusion, "that committed religious believers in general, and creationists in particular, are the enemies of higher education and of science because they cannot seek an honest, critical inquiry into nature and they cannot support conclusions solely on the basis of scientific evidence and reasoning. Instead, they are compelled to weigh how well the conclusion in question will jibe with their religious dogmas.

"But having said all that, I would be opposed to any effort whatever to have such individuals silenced or their freedom of expression undermined. Instead, they must be drawn into open and highly visible confrontation with capable scientists who will candidly expose them and their views for what they really are. It is only in this way that the richness of the scientific or critical approach can be contrasted to the poverty of dogmatism and anti-intellectualism."

There was what Patterson calls a "happy upturn" to these events in Sep-

tember. The president of Iowa State University, in his annual convocation address, told the faculty he was "increasingly aware, increasingly troubled" about maintaining the university's integrity.

President W. Robert Parks, without mentioning the creationist movement by name, lamented that a university's nature makes its integrity prey to "the true believers in absolutes, who would use the university to promote their absolutist versions of truth." He was referring to those students who have insisted that professors and disciplines alter course content to include the students' absolutist views, which "have no credible basis in the scientific facts of that discipline." Parks said the university's scientists "have a right and an obligation" to respond to groups that claim "a monopoly on the absolute truth."

Patterson says Parks's expression of concern about the creationists' tactics helped "relieve the sense of frustration, cynicism, and almost resignation that had been building in the faculty—myself included." But it was far too early, he said, to consider the affair to have had "a happy ending." He cautioned: "Things at this stage are still changing or developing and there is still so much that has yet to be settled."

—Kendrick Frazier

Levitation for a fee in New Zealand

The lucrative levitation-claim business has made its way to New Zealand. While nobody has produced any documented evidence of a lift-off, several people have shown it to be a rip-off. Fortunately, a New Zealand consumer-protection organization, the Consumers' Institute, in Wellington, has investigated the claims and warns consumers about the absence of any support for them. In a recent issue of its



Consumers' Institute, Wellington, N.Z.

Levitation? No, merely Victoria University student Joy Stephens lofting herself with the help of a trampoline. Photo was used by Consumers' Institute in Wellington to show how easy it is to fake "levitation" photographs.

publication, *Consumer*, the institute described its efforts to obtain documentation of the claim of the Association for the Age of Enlightenment, Inc. (A.O.E.), that it can teach people to levitate and fly, for a substantial fee.

"We want to see someone do it—but are having extreme difficulty in getting a simple demonstration," says the Consumers' Institute report. "We asked four A.O.E. officials, including the senior man in New Zealand, Mr. A. G. Davy, to stage a simple demonstration of levitation for us. All four affirmed that they could levitate or at least achieve the first 'hopping' stage, but all flatly refused to give us the simple practical demonstration we wanted."

"The issue is really quite simple. All we want is to see someone in the lotus position rise 500 mm or more off the ground, without jumping and not aided by any visible means."

The institute described the case of a paraplegic widow, Mrs. Shirley Koszti, who has been confined to a wheelchair for 20 years. She found the claims that the International Meditation Society, a service of A.O.E., could teach one to levitate and fly attractive. She saw it as a way to help alleviate her confinement.

Mrs. Koszti paid \$2,100, believing at the time that the full cost of the eight-week course would be \$2,520. Once thoroughly involved, the lessons were extended and the weekly charge increased. Her total bill would now likely exceed \$5,000. Her one goal was to learn to levitate and fly. But she told the institute that during her preparation course she saw no hope of achieving this aim and, in fact, no evidence (other than hearsay) that anyone had learned to fly this way. She left the program after having been relieved of \$2,100. She later wrote to the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of the A.O.E., complaining that she had been "ripped off." She never received a reply. The Consumers' Institute shows a photo of Mrs. Koszti still firmly wheelchair-bound.

In the course of its investigation, the Consumers' Institute contacted the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER and CSICOP-member James Randi. Its report quotes key portions of Randi's article "'Levitation' for Fun and Profit" (*Zetetic*, Fall/Winter 1977) and quotes a letter from Randi saying, "The TM levitation claim is total codswollop, undemonstrated and unproven." (See, also, Randi's letter in our Spring 1979 issue.)

The Consumers' Institute makes clear it does not quibble with the possible beneficial aspects of meditation, nor the spiritual goals of the Transcendental Meditation people. But it warns the public against the levitation-for-a-fee racket. "We will not accept the...claims about levitation, invisibility, supernormal strength, etc., until someone shows us, by practical

demonstration, that the claims can be substantiated. Unless the Association for the Age of Enlightenment supplies satisfactory proof of its claims for supernormal abilities, we believe the police should investigate whether the Age of Enlightenment is taking money under false pretenses."

Several months later, in September, W. R. Dyer, of the Consumers' Institute, said that despite its challenge, "Nobody has offered to give us visual proof of levitation. We received several letters from people who said they could 'hop.' "

—K.F.

Put a little bounce in your life

Summer 1979 at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst was billed as an elevating experience. Three thousand students enrolled in a 40-day course in Transcendental Meditation. The highlight, intensive instruction in levitation, was available only to a third of the enrollees—those who could afford the \$3,000 fee. Others had to make do with simpler techniques costing \$800 to \$1,000. "Tuition" went to the World Government of the Age of Enlightenment, not to the university, which simply rented its facilities to the TM crew of approximately 100 instructors. Before expenses, \$3 to \$5 million was reaped by the TM people—at least indirectly using the name of the university as well as its facilities.

Nonenrollees were not allowed to witness the levitation sessions conducted behind heavily guarded doors and whitewashed windows, but at the end of the day, pale, exhausted-looking people could be seen pouring out of the levitation centers carrying pillows under their arms. The *Amherst Bulletin* reports that initiates spent their time hopping frantically. A TM spokesman says that hopping is a necessary stage

preceding levitation—it allows “mind-body coordination that will give you the desire to fly. Hopping is the fulfillment of that desire.” As “energy manifests itself” inside the student, a peak of enlightenment is reached and levitation will come naturally. Levitation is not guaranteed, but “a high percent” of students will achieve it—if not during the course, shortly thereafter, according to TM spokesmen. As one instructor noted, \$3,000 is a small consideration compared with what a student gets in return.

The teaching of precognition and psychic knowledge of the past were integral parts of the program. Only 1,000 of the enrollees levitate daily, according to spokesmen; but all practice scientifically proven meditation techniques, TM officials claimed.

Weekly press conferences noted the achievements of the sessions in bringing about positive changes in the world. “Good things” were noted each Monday as a result of group meditation. They included the overthrow of Anastasio Somoza and Jimmy Carter’s cabinet shake-up (General Somoza, Joseph Califano, Andy Young, and others might demur, but—). Asked about “bad things,” TM spokesmen averred that only good events were the result of the mass meditation, although their official press agents were more cautious.

Conference organizers disavowed any religious overtones to their movement, which is dedicated to the teachings of Hindu monk Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. TM is moving rapidly to offer courses, based on the Maharishi’s teachings as a “perfect” guru, in high schools in a number of states and is working to shed its “hippie” image; monks and teachers no longer are obligated to wear holy robes, because it has become their “pleasure” to dress in civvies. Clearly, only an ethnocentric cynic would see a six-week training program

such as this as a religious exercise dedicated to delusion, paranormal belief, and multi-million-dollar commercialism, subsidized at least indirectly by state facilities and use of the university name and prestige to dubious ends.

Yet for some reason a grouch posted a banner opposite one of the campus training centers that read, “Remember Jonestown!”

According to the *Amherst Bulletin*, TM spokesman Jeff Evans derided this derision. “The official statement is that it’s not a cult, it’s not a religion. If you investigate it thoroughly you’ll see that it’s not that at all . . . but, I guess if you asked the people who were in Jonestown they would have said they weren’t in a cult either.” Resident monks and Perfect Masters also scoffed at the idea that TM was part of a cult or religion.

Meanwhile, levitation remained too serious a business to be observed by nonbelievers who had not paid their \$3,000 fee.

—John R. Cole

John R. Cole is an anthropologist at the University of Massachusetts.

Crippled UFO? The case of the phantom spacecraft

“Crippled UFO Orbiting Earth,” announced the *National Enquirer’s* banner front-page headline last July 17. Perhaps it was timed to help commemorate the tenth anniversary of the first Apollo moon-landing. With that event and the fall of Skylab fresh in everyone’s mind, outer space seemed a bit closer—not much farther away than the grocery counters around the nation where this weekly tabloid is sold.

According to the *Enquirer’s* Los Angeles stringer, Henry Gris, top Russian scientists had identified fragments of a derelict alien spaceship thousands of miles out in space. The discovery,

Gris continued, had been independently verified by American space experts.

As might be expected with such claims, however, professional satellite trackers were quick to deny the existence of such objects. The Public Information Office at NORAD (North American Air Defense Command) in Colorado Springs claimed to have no record of the alleged satellites: "Anything of that size at that altitude would have been spotted by our radar and optical nets years ago," asserted Air Force Tech. Sgt. Michael Bergman. "There's nothing there fitting such a description."

Optical tracking groups, such as the former Moonwatch team at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory in Cambridge, Massachusetts, also had no data to support the existence of such objects, even though they would have been clearly visible to the naked eye. The United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Use of Outer Space, which maintains a registry on all satellites, had no entry that would correspond to any of the claimed objects. Thus there was international agreement: the objects did not seem to exist. (The *Enquirer's* staff had evidently not bothered to check with any of these agencies whose job it was to keep track of satellites—or if any check was made, the negative results were not included in the article.)

The Russians, as quoted by Gris, were just as adamant in their positive claims. "We are convinced a crippled spaceship from another planet is circling earth," declared astrophysicist Sergey Bozhich in Moscow. "There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that we are dealing with the remains of a large alien craft," revealed Vladimir Azhazha. "The craft was at least 200 feet in length and up to 100 feet in width," added Aleksandr Kazantsev. "A [rendezvous] mission should be launched.... The benefits for mankind should be stu-

pendous," emphasized Aleksey Zolotov.

However impressive these assertions may sound, Western UFO experts have had experiences with earlier wild and unsubstantiated claims from the same people. Zolotov, well-known



Headlines in U.S., British tabloids.

champion of the "spaceship theory" of the 1908 Tunguska explosion (a theory almost universally rejected by practicing Russian space scientists, who are not quoted in the *National Enquirer*), is also a devotee of body auras and of faith healing. Kazantsev is one of the original "ancient astronaut" proponents, well known for his officially sanctioned attempts to prove "scientifically" that all the biblical concepts of God were actually based on human misinterpretations of visits from alien cosmonauts. Azhazha has claimed that the American moonship Apollo 13 was deliberately zapped by UFOs to prevent its setting off a nuclear bomb on the moon. All three men are also well known for their eagerness to endorse any wild UFO claims. Their credibility among in-

formed observers is not measurably different from zero.

Yet these "crippled UFO" claims are evidently corroborated by a scientific paper written by John P. Bagby in the January 1969 issue of the journal *Icarus*, according to Gris. Well, it's not exactly that simple either, as I found out when I telephoned Bagby at his office at the Hughes aircraft plant in Culver City, near Los Angeles. I asked him about the "crippled UFO" story, and he informed me that he had never been contacted by Gris (it would have been a local call) or by anyone else on the research staff of the *National Enquirer*; in fact, he had not even heard about the story until called by a relative in Chicago.

"There are too many coincidences between the Russian claim and my original paper regarding extrapolations based on unpublished assumptions," Bagby said. "The date of fragmentation and the number of groups and fragments—I doubt that they could have come up with them independently." Bagby agreed with a suggested scenario that Bozhich, the originator of the claim in Moscow, might have come across a copy of the *Icarus* article, or a translation of it, and might simply have repeated the data to Gris, implying it was *his* discovery.

Bagby still believes that the objects *he* reported are real and have been circling the earth since 1955. The absence of any sign of orbital decay suggests to him that the still-hypothetical objects are massive—perhaps mini black holes that could swallow radar beams and thus avoid NORAD's detection. "My work tends to make me discount the spaceship hypothesis," Bagby concluded.

The same "crippled UFO" story also appeared in a British tabloid (*Reveille*, July 29) under the front-page headline "Sensation in Space" ("Top scientist says: It's the discovery of the century—

a damaged alien craft is orbiting the earth"). In response, the weekly *New Scientist* checked with Desmond King-Hele, world-renowned expert on satellite tracking. King-Hele, who works for the Royal Aircraft establishment at Farnborough, denied the existence of such phantom satellites: "If there were objects of the size and distance suggested by the Russians, they would be tracked both by radar and visually," he said. "We have seen no such objects. . . . There are no alien spacecraft knocking around in orbit."

New Scientist also quoted from another report in *Icarus* (vol. 19, 1973, p. 547), by Jean Meeus, which vigorously disputed Bagby's 1969 paper. After demonstrating a total inconsistency of the claimed orbits, orbital motions, and brightness, Meeus scathingly concluded: "Bagby's story on the Earth moonlets thus appears groundless. The objects cited by Bagby do not exist."

The last word belongs to Charles Redmond, a public information specialist at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston. Since Gris's article seemed to imply that NASA has endorsed the theory (it has not, need I say?), people had been calling Redmond's office asking when the inspection and retrieval mission would be launched. "I told them that the mission would have to wait until we worked out the problems of biological quarantine, to avoid any possible contamination with interstellar germs which could be dormant on board the UFO," Redmond recalled with a boyish grin. "Oh my God!" he added, his face drawn in mock alarm. "Do you suppose any of the callers actually believed me?" Time will tell, but it is a safe bet that Redmond's joke will make its way into the folklore of UFOria, where UFOs abound but a sense of humor is nowhere to be found.

—James Oberg

Tabloids and moon "aliens"

Last July, writer and space specialist James Oberg (he works in mission control at the Johnson Space Center in Houston) disseminated a report he had written denouncing the "astronaut-UFO encounter" stories that are so popular in the UFO-fantasy literature.

"Hardly a UFO magazine, book, or movie goes by without the assertion that astronauts have seen UFOs too," it said. "Yet these stories can all be traced to media frauds, exaggerations, and misunderstandings of ordinary space-flight events. The entire collection of stories is baseless."

The dissemination of the report, under the auspices of the CSICOP's UFO Subcommittee, of which Oberg is a member, was made just before the tenth anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon-landing. Renewed public attention was then being given to the first moon-landing, and it was considered certain that UFO publications and the supermarket tabloids would polish up and again present their fabrications about that event.

Sure enough, in its September 11 issue, the *National Enquirer* fulfilled all expectations. "Aliens on Moon When We Landed," it announced to a waiting world. (Why it missed a chance to reveal this news on the anniversary of the Apollo landing is one of those unfathomable mysteries of nature.)

Oberg simply reissued the news release about his report on such wild claims. "The UFO stories referred to by the weekly tabloid are total hoaxes and fabrications, if that surprises any of you," Oberg wrote in a cover note to his friends and colleagues. "In fact, some very essential data are left out (inadvertently or deliberately is for you to decide): The claims of the Russian professor Azhazha are said to independently corroborate the claims of the Frenchman Chatelain. The truth is that

Azhazha has made no secret of the fact that his account relies entirely on the book by Chatelain and he is only repeating the stories (such as the totally absurd claim that Apollo 13 was carrying an atomic bomb to be detonated on the moon, which is why the UFOs shot it down in self-defense—or the claim that astronaut Michael Collins was so shaken by his space experiences that he became a Roman Catholic monk). But Azhazha's dependence on Chatelain is withheld from the readers of the *Enquirer*, who are meant to receive a different impression—a phony impression.

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ALIENS ON MOON WHEN WE LANDED

"Azhazha and Bozhich are, by the way, two Russian UFO buffs long familiar to Western observers and long ago calibrated as totally unreliable purveyors of the wildest flying-saucer stories they can find or fabricate. Chatelain's own work (*Our Ancestors Came from Outer Space*) is so full of inconsistencies and absurdities that it is easily marked as unreliable. The other 'noted experts' have similarly phony credentials.

"Exposure of these old Apollo-UFO frauds has been in print for some time (*Analog*, November 1976; *Space World*, February 1977; *Search*, Winter 1977; *Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall 1978; *UFOs and Flying Saucers Quarterly*, Spring 1979), including detailed refutations of the various photo forgeries and fantasies by UFO writers and flying-saucer buffs, who apparently have no scruples about smearing our astronauts with dirty allegations of lying. But these unsensational true findings have naturally been ignored by the staff of the *National Enquirer*."

—K.F.

Session with a trance medium

I recently experienced an "in-depth personal consultation" with Ian D. Borts, who, according to his own publicity sheet, is a "trance psychic": "Similar to Edgar Cayce, Ian allows himself, with the aid of his director Steve Kinniburgh, to enter into a trance or sleeping state where communication is made with a group of entities which have been named Speaker."

Ian D. Borts and Stephen R. Kinniburgh form a division of Touchstone Associates, which is based in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Kinniburgh, incidentally, is a fireman in Ottawa, but he is considering making Touchstone his full-time activity, because "I can help more people than I can help by being a fireman."

The session, which took place in an ordinary room at a local Holiday Inn, lasted about an hour and a half and cost \$75. Since I was allowed to bring two friends (no extra charge), I invited a graduate student with expertise in experimental hypnosis and Henry Gordon, a Montreal-based mentalist magician. Gordon and I used phony surnames in case Touchstone Associates had been sophisticated enough to check up on the names of local skeptics. However, we need not have worried about the level of sophistication of Borts and Kinniburgh. Kinniburgh helped Borts enter a "trance" state with some slow counting and a brief prayer for the safety of this "soul" who was "seeking answers." Borts appeared to enter a relaxed state with slow, shallow breathing after about 15 minutes. We were then allowed to ask questions about "people, places and conditions anywhere in the world. Questions answered range from personal, social, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual states, to business and financial conditions as well as investment ideas."

Borts's voice, when it was being

used by Speaker, assumed a peculiar, perhaps British-sounding, accent with many words preceded by a "kch" sound. Answers to questions were disappointingly predictable. Borts/Speaker was very concerned about elimination problems, so far as health is concerned. He recommended Miller's bran two or three times. My 65-year-old mother, contacted in Blackpool, England, by Speaker, had arthritis and lower-back pain; and my father, also 65, had some difficulty hearing (which he does). My mother has never complained about arthritis or lower-back pain, but she has severe chronic bronchial congestion. Speaker did not diagnose this condition. Vitamins B₆ and B₁₂ were mentioned more than once. Henry Gordon was urged to try oil of wintergreen for his bursitis. Gordon was also urged to "look carefully" before entering into a business venture. Mr. Laurence, the graduate student in experimental hypnosis, was told to take his girlfriend to the Institute of Tropical Disease, in Toronto. Speaker was very specifically insistent here. Such specific directives could potentially cost people time and money. However, Touchstone Associates was careful enough to have me sign a document releasing them from any responsibility with regard to medical or other advice.

At one point Henry Gordon asked about his long-departed sister. Taking the bait, Speaker indicated that Gordon's dead sister's spirit was involved in helping deprived children in Belgium. Mr. Gordon never had a sister.

Perhaps the session could have been more compelling to less sophisticated observers, but in general it did not even reach the level of good fortune-telling or cold reading (see R. Hyman, *The Zetetic*, Spring/Summer 1977).

Kinniburgh and Borts told us they can manage five or six sessions a day. These are a minimum of \$75 for the personal consultation to \$175 for a bus-

iness consultation involving "one to five individuals or partners who wish investment ideas and financial forecasts. . . ." In spite of the obvious financial possibilities, Kinniburgh and Borts assured us that they were "not getting rich" and were concerned to help people. I wonder why Kinniburgh doesn't get Borts to tell the Ottawa Fire Department where and when the next fire is going to occur.

—T. Gray

T. Gray is in the Psychology Department at Concordia University in Montreal. He is a member of the Canadian section of the CSICOP.

Magnetic "cures" by mail

An otherwise respectable industry specializing in magnetic tape for audio and video use has decided to enter the profitable world of mail-order with a set of products designed to lure the unknowing victim with hints of surcease from aches, pains, and discomfort. Dr. Abrams with his electronic flummery and Reich with his "orgone" generators set the example for this kind of advertising, and now Madison Avenue has applied new gloss to the techniques.

TDK Electronics Co. of Tokyo has taken ads in airlines magazines offering its "rare earth magnetic necklace" (\$27.95 to \$32.95) and an "ortho-obi" magnetic belt (\$39.95). For that kind of money, one would expect more than a set of tiny bar magnets on a chain. But that's what's being sold—along with preposterous suggestions about medical benefits. It begins with the question, "What have over 3 million people discovered about the amazing effects of this rare earth magnetic necklace?" Then, rather than answering the question, it suggests, "Find out for yourself."

The "Epaule" (French for "shoulder," for some unknown reason used as

the registered trade name of this wonder) is, we are assured, "Japanese Government certified"—though no explanation is offered of that certification—and we are told that the Japanese government "tested and approved" the device. For what? Sharp edges? Radioactivity? We are not told.

"Developed for NASA for use in U.S. space flights, the magnets are made of Rare Earth Cobalt." Now, that's not only fascinating and useless but a great leap forward for technology. A new element—rare earth cobalt—has been created! There is no such animal, though strong magnets have been made of ordinary cobalt/iron alloys for a long time now.

But, we are further assured, TDK is "a \$500 million company." Good. So they are successful. But can they tell the truth about their product? Where are the "amazing effects" and the "remarkable benefits" that will "astonish you"? The "ortho-obi" belt boasts "all the amazing benefits of our necklace, and then some!" and is ten times as strong as the necklace, "with magnetic assembly positioned at your back." So what?

The suggestion is clear that this magnetic claptrap can benefit the wearer in specific ways. No evidence whatsoever is given, and the unwary send in their money with "NASA," "rare earth," "certified," "approved," "amazing," "remarkable," and "mysterious" ringing in their ears. But what it amounts to is summed up in a bit of the Madison Avenue jargon within the ad: "The effects of this necklace are highly individual. You must discover for yourself how the mysterious natural energy in Epaule can benefit you."

The ads are topped with a photo of an elderly couple, full of smiles and with a tennis racket. This is what makes the ad even more cruel and fraudulent. Can three million customers be wrong? Yes.

—James Randi

Cold water on mammoth theory

Quick-frozen bodies of mammoths, discovered in Siberia, are often claimed to be evidence for extraordinary climatic disasters. Certain writers attribute such catastrophes to sudden axis tilts, to encounters with other planets, to the Noachian flood, or to similar bizarre ecological excursions—with the common factor being that “science cannot explain these results.” Tropical flowers are said to be found barely digested in the stomachs, and even in the mouths, of the dead beasts; their meat, when thawed, is fresh enough to eat. Some unrecognized worldwide cataclysm is allegedly required to account for this.

Not so, writes William White in the June 14, 1979, *New Scientist*. “Accounts of the actual degree of preservation evident have been exaggerated,” he claims, pointing out that, although enough tusks have been found to account for 50,000 individual mammoths, fewer than 50 have been found in which any soft tissue at all was preserved; moreover, “of the preserved carcasses only some 10 percent are substantially intact, and even these few show signs of putrefaction that had commenced before freezing became complete.”

Nor is it true that such animals had been native to a subtropical climate that suddenly changed into the Ice Age. According to White, the mammoth “was well adapted to conditions of extreme cold, possessing a 9-cm-thick layer of subcutaneous blubber in addition to the double thickness of pelt.” The beasts died in the same climate they were born in; furthermore, continues White, “in the best-preserved specimens, death was almost exclusively the result of falls, landslides, or drowning,” all of which would have contributed to freak burial and freezing in the permafrost.

White concludes: “Thus, no catastrophic event need be invoked to

explain the extinction of the mammoth, and the preserved specimens demonstrate merely the chance conservation of corpses under special conditions and not the instantaneous demise of the entire community as a result of climatic calamity. Attempts to marshal the few frozen cadavers of this Arctic creature as evidence for precipitate glaciation ought to be given the cold shoulder.”

—James Oberg

Court cases

- A jury in Portland, Oregon, has awarded a young woman \$2 million in damages in a suit in which she claimed the Church of Scientology defrauded her by failing to fulfill promises of improving her life. Julie C. Titchbourne, of Portland, alleged that she suffered emotional distress as a result of her bad experience with the church in 1975-76. On August 15, the jury ruled that the defendants committed fraud.
- A Greenwood, South Carolina, faith healer was sentenced to 12 years in prison after a conviction on several conspiracy charges, including one “to commit assault and battery of a high and aggravated nature” on a newspaper reporter who had investigated him. Leroy Jenkins, 44, pleaded unsuccessfully with the circuit judge for a fine instead of a prison sentence “so I can continue my ministry.” Jenkins said 340,000 families contributed to his crusades and millions of people watched his Sunday telecasts over 37 stations. He was found guilty on May 22 of assaulting Rick Ricks, a reporter for the Anderson, South Carolina, *Independent*, who with a fellow reporter had disclosed certain faith-healing practices of Jenkins’s, in a series of newspaper articles. Jenkins was also found guilty of conspiring to assault a highway patrolman and to burn his house and of conspiracy to burn the house of a creditor.

- A 23-year-old Annapolis, Maryland, woman was charged with assault and battery on two young children in a ritual she said she learned from the movie *The Exorcist*, according to an August 4 article in the *Washington Post*. The mother of the boys told police that, while self-styled exorcist Camille Booth held her in a trance, Booth beat the children with a Bible, cut the buttocks of the 11-month-old boy with a glass, and directed her to throw the children from a third-floor window. The mother refused. Booth was booked on two counts of assault and battery. Said Annapolis police detective Gary Simpson: "I can see where movies and real life have apparently merged."

—K.F.

In brief

- James Oberg traveled to London in October to accept a "1,000-pound award" for winning the scientific-paper competition on UFOs sponsored by Cutty Sark Scotch Whiskey. Oberg won the prize for a specially written 4,000-word essay entitled "The Failure of 'the Science' of UFOlogy." The essay examined the status of UFOlogy and found it severely lacking. The essay's basic point, says Oberg, is that the reason science has been unresponsive to the claims of UFOlogists so far is not that UFO proponents are heretics but that their claims have failed to meet the standards of valid scientific evidence.

Oberg works in mission control at the Johnson Space Center in Houston as a computer specialist for the space shuttle. He is a Fellow of the CSICOP, a member of its UFO Subcommittee, and a frequent contributor of investiga-

tive reports about UFO claims to the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. He also writes the monthly UFO column for *Omni* and free-lance articles on space science. Oberg says he was delighted at winning the award and pleasantly surprised that it went to an essay critical of UFO research. This essay was subsequently published in the October 11 *New Scientist*.

- A symposium entitled "The History and Evolution of the Pseudosciences" was scheduled for January 4, 1980, at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, in San Francisco. Speakers at the symposium, which was arranged by physicist Rolf M. Sinclair, of the National Science Foundation, were to be psychologist Ray Hyman, of the University of Oregon, sociologists William Sims Bainbridge and Rodney Stark, of the University of Washington, astronomer Edwin C. Krupp, of Griffith Observatory, and conjuror-investigator James Randi. In another AAAS symposium, on the frontiers of the natural sciences, on January 6, statistician Persi Diaconis, of Stanford University, was to give a paper entitled "Statistics and ESP."

- James Randi will be interviewed in the April 1980 *Omni*. *Omni* senior editor Scot Morris, the interviewer, says it is the longest interview the magazine has ever published.

- James Randi's book *Flim-Flam*, from which his article on Edgar Cayce in our Fall '79 issue was excerpted, is now scheduled for publication by Crowell in May 1980.

—K.F.