

Anachronistic Danger Sign in 'Alien Autopsy'

The following was provided to the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER by Mr. John R. English.

I am a past director of the International Aerospace Hall of Fame (IAHF), San Diego Air and Space Historical Center. During my time as director, I was involved in the search, selection, and installation of several U.S. and foreign astronauts, as well as other significant aviation-related candidates. Research and photo evaluation were a common chore.

This note is the result of some time spent reviewing the room contents as seen in the "Alien Autopsy" film. I realize that this subject has been scrutinized to death (so to speak), but there is, to the best of my knowledge, one glaring omission from the analyses—the Danger sign on the wall to the left of the telephone.

During the early 1980s I was responsible for re-signing a large industrial facility in southern California to bring the various hazard signs up to OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) requirements for that time. This involved the review and replacement of signs indicating dangerous and hazardous environments in and around the facility.

When I first saw the "Alien Autopsy" film, I felt that the Danger sign looked all too familiar. I decided to research the graphic format of the sign. This involved an archival search with OSHA and an additional search of the ANSI (American National Standard Institute) archives. The results were most interesting: they confirmed what I originally suspected. The graphic format used in the Danger sign was adopted by ANSI in 1967, Ref. ANSI index Z53.1-1967, and approved for OSHA in 1973, with implementation to be achieved by 1983, Ref. OSHA index 1910.145.

All said and done, it is very unlikely that a sign with a graphic design originating in 1967 would be available for use in a 1940s environment or film.

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The Carl Sagan Memorial Service

An atheist's memorial service held in a cathedral? Yes, Carl Sagan's was held February 27 at New York City's Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, the one featuring a statue of God (a bearded Caucasian with His arms outstretched) on the front facade. The former dean, James Parks Morton, referred to "Carl the great atheist," and Sagan's nontheism was also cited by Harry H. Pritchett, the present dean, and Joan Brown Campbell, the general secretary of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. The cathedral was chosen because of Sagan's record of having successfully worked with church leaders on environmental matters.

MIT physicist Philip Morrison, who is confined to an electronic wheelchair, related how at the age of six Sagan had been told that you can always add 1 to a number, and Carl had tested this by laboriously writing all the numbers from 1 to 1,000, stopping only because he had to sleep.

Sagan's curiosity never diminished, for he went on to solve the mysteries of the high temperature of Venus (a massive greenhouse effect), the seasonal changes on Mars (windblown dust), and the reddish haze of Titan (complex organic molecules).

Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould remarked that unlike Sagan, the Brooklyn garment worker's son who

turned his eyes upwards to the skies, he as a boy in Queens had turned his eyes downward to the ground. He added that the two New Yorkers had not known each other until much later. Ending an eloquent summary of how important Sagan had been to the entire scientific community, as well as the world's other peoples, Gould paraphrased Longfellow, saying Sagan had turned the spheres and left no hell below.

Ronald Sagedeev, who had been Mikhail Gorbachev's adviser and director of the USSR's Space Research Institute, called Sagan a citizen of the world, one who was against the false promises of the Star Wars defense, and said "the Cold War was ended because of Carl Sagan and his friends."

Other speakers included Irwin Redlener, a pediatrician-friend who called attention to Carl's passion, humor, and forgiveness. Neil deGrasse Tyson, director of New York City's Hayden Planetarium, told of Sagan's consideration when, as a young black college student, he had first gone to Cornell for an interview (see his comments in the May/June *SI*, p. 56). Frank H. T. Rhodes, who had been President of Cornell University during much of the time Sagan headed Cornell's Laboratory for Planetary Studies, called Carl "a scientist but a humanist at heart," one who was comfortable with philosophy.

One of Carl's daughters, Sasha, described how her father had taught her logic, critical reasoning, and (to the large audience's amusement) the importance of questioning authority. Carl's son Jeremy said that his agnostic father was a warrior for the world, an avid antiracist, an evolutionist rather than a creationist, and one who disapproved of anyone who masked ignorance by using jargon.

Carl's wife, Ann Druyan, secretary of the Federation of American Scientists, told of his and her exuberance at their having included an interstellar message along with the music of Bach, Beethoven, and others in two NASA Voyager spacecraft now beyond the

outer solar system. At a speed of 40,000 miles per hour, the recordings are traveling in space and have a projected "shelf life" of a billion years.

Vice President Al Gore noted that he, the believer, and Carl, the nonbeliever, had no problems whatsoever working together on behalf of Earth's environment. The two were instrumental in getting scientific and religious leaders to unite on issues of environmental protection. Carl had shown him that we are not central to the universe and that we must do something significant if "the blue dot" as seen from space is to flourish. Gore was both folksy and eloquent in relating his warm memories of Sagan.

The most eloquent of all, however, was Carl Sagan himself. A taped excerpt of his *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space* resounded with an awesome timbre over the loudspeakers.

—Warren Allen Smith

Warren Allen Smith is an editorial associate of *Free Inquiry* magazine.

Randi Foundation Announces 'Pigasus' Awards

Editor's Note: Each spring, on April 1, James Randi, the irrepressible scourge of psychic flim-flam artists and other pretenders to special knowledge, issues awards to those he decides deserve his special spotlight of attention. This year's "Pigasus" awards were issued by Randi through his new James Randi Educational Foundation. He enthusiastically agreed to share them with SKEPTICAL INQUIRER readers:

On April 1, we awarded the coveted Pigasus prizes in four categories for accomplishments in 1996. The awards were announced via telepathy, the winners were allowed to predict their winning, and the Flying Pig trophies were

sent via psychokinesis. We sent; if they didn't receive, that's probably due to their lack of ability. This year, the awards were as follows:

The award for the scientist who said or did the silliest thing related to the supernatural, paranormal, or occult went to scientist/physicist Ed May, who headed the CIA project which consumed \$20 million of our tax money on "remote viewing," a technique said to bypass time and space to obtain secret information via "gifted psychics" on the CIA payroll. The ten-year project provided no useful or accurate data, and former CIA director Robert Gates implied that pressure from members of Congress drove the CIA's involvement. This failed project was enthusiastically supported by Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.) and Rep. Charlie Rose (D-N.C.).

The award for the funding organization that supported the most useless study of a supernatural, paranormal, or occult claim went to Robert Bigelow, of the Bigelow Tea family. Mr. Bigelow not only gave large sums of money to Harvard University's Professor John Mack and to million-seller author Budd Hopkins on the strength of their "alien abduction" beliefs, but also purchased (for a purported \$230,000) a "haunted ranch" in Utah where UFO attacks and "interdimensional portals" had shown up, in the wake of mysterious "cattle mutilations." Mr. Bigelow lives, perhaps understandably, in a walled-in home in Las Vegas.

The award for the media outlet that reported as fact the most outrageous supernatural, paranormal, or occult claim was divided among the multitude

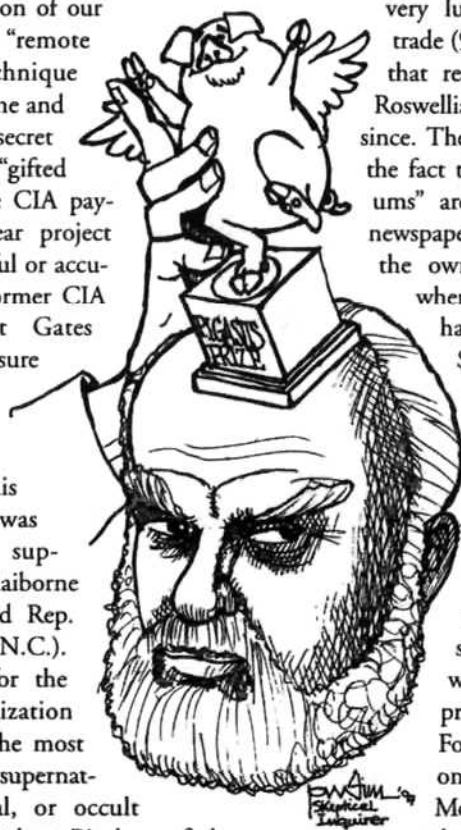
of newspapers, magazines, TV programs, and radio shows that have continued—despite the wealth of contrary evidence—to perpetuate the myth known as the Roswell incident, which claims that an alien spacecraft crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947, and that bodies of the aliens were spirited away by U.S. government agencies. The

very lucrative UFO tourist trade (90,000 tourists a year) that resulted has supported Roswellians handsomely ever since. The media have ignored the fact that the "UFO museums" are only collections of newspaper clippings, and that the owner of the property where the aliens are said to

have crashed charges \$15 a head to see the spot, while the town officials have moved the "authentic" site onto land owned by the U.S. Forest Service, due to the uncooperative land owner. And, not one scrap of extraterrestrial wreckage has ever been produced! The U.S. Air Force explanation that once-top-secret Project Mogul was the source of the crashed UFO

debris—balsa wood, mylar foil, and tape—continues to be ignored.

The award for the "psychic" performer who fooled the greatest number of people with the least effort went to "psychic" Sheldon Nidle of Walnut Creek, California, who predicted that the end of the world would come on December 17, 1996, when "millions of space ships" accompanied by angels would arrive along with "the Photon Belt." He assured us that we would have "16 years of light 24 hours a day" after the Photon Belt "hits [our] DNA." When December 17 apparently came and went without the promised events being evident, Sheldon explained that



we naturally were unaware of the fulfillment of his prophecy, since we are now living in a special holographic projection created by the angels, and we've been given another chance to make good. What a relief!

—James Randi

Quebec's Lieutenant-Governor Confers with Dead in Accepting Appointment

William Lyon Mackenzie King was Canada's longest serving prime minister, leading Canada through World War II and shocking Canadians when his posthumously published diaries revealed he regularly talked with the spirits of the departed. Now, the province of Quebec's new lieutenant-governor, Lise Thibault, has made it clear that she shares King's paranormal beliefs, if not his political savvy in keeping quiet about it.

One day after being sworn in, Thibault, the first woman to hold this post, told reporters that she conferred with her ancestors in deciding whether to accept appointment to the viceregal post from Prime Minister Jean Chrétien. According to Thibault, she was able to accept the prime minister's offer in fifteen minutes.

The lieutenant-governor is the Queen's representative in a province. While the position is largely ceremonial, a lieutenant-governor officially has executive power and must sign each bill passed in the legislature in order for it to become law. The lieutenant-governor is also responsible for convening and dissolving parliament.

The *Montreal Gazette* (February 1, 1997) quoted Thibault describing her spiritual round table. "They were my grandparents, they were my father and my mother, they were my friends, they were my aunts, my uncles."

Even former prime minister King

renounced the use of spiritual advice in political decision making after he received a startlingly inaccurate report once from the other side. But then, he only had his mother and his beloved pet dog to confer with.

Thibault did not say whether she would call on her dead relatives in the event of a parliamentary crisis in Quebec, where separatists currently have a majority of seats in the provincial legislature.

—Michael Bonner

Michael Bonner lives in Nepean, Ontario.

Library Journal's 'Best Sci-Tech Books'

Martin Gardner's *The Night Is Large: Collected Essays 1938-1995* (St. Martin's Press, reviewed in *SI*, November/December 1996) has been selected one of 1996's Best Sci-Tech Books by the *Library Journal*. The publication said the collection is "polymath Martin Gardner's best book. . . . One of the premier scientific essayists, Gardner has an impressive and influential body of work. The 47 essays . . . are among his very best and provide an excellent overview to his expansive corpus."

Other books of likely special interest to SKEPTICAL INQUIRER readers were also among the thirty-six selected to the list (*Library Journal*, March 3, 1997): Carl Sagan's *The Demon-Haunted World* ("fitting epitaph to the late, prolific advocate of science"), Richard Dawkins's *Climbing Mount Improbable* ("this elegant work is also one of *LJ*'s 'Best Books of 1996'"), Stephen Jay Gould's *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin*, Anthony Aveni's *Behind the Crystal Ball: Magic, Science, and the Occult from Antiquity Through the New Age*, Daniel Schacter's *Searching for Memory*, Marcia Angell's *Science on Trial: The Clash of Medical Evidence and Law in the Breast*

Implant Case, Donald Johanson and Blake Edgar's *From Lucy to Language*, David L. Goodstein and Judith R. Goodstein's *Feynman's Lost Lecture: The Motions of Planets Around the Sun*, and John Horgan's *The End of Science*. □

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