

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense." — James Randi

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September 2000

Ju-Ju's Fetish Slaves

by Richard Petraitis

West Africa is the birthplace for the belief known as Voudon. This corner of the world is also a bastion for a system of fetish-based magic known as Ju-Ju. These belief systems are both heavily ensconced in sympathetic magic. Webster's dictionary defines sympathetic magic as, "magic based on the belief that one thing or event can affect another at a distance as a consequence of a sympathetic connection between them." Sympathetic magic is the attempt by a practitioner to control, or momentarily override, the forces of nature to achieve certain desired ends. Theoretically, such a practitioner possesses a piece of clothing, hair, nail clippings, or other personal objects for the target, to help influence their actions. Since there is an alleged invisible connection between the personal items and the person, the practitioner can use them to cast a powerful hex or spell on the target.

The Ju-Ju or Voudon practitioner attempts to bend the universe to his will. However, what most believers in sympathetic magic don't realize is that there is really a complete absence of any special powers on the practitioner's part. The magic men have one advantage only: the psychological fear of the believer. There is no empirical evidence for the existence, or the efficacy, of magical powers by any individual. Sadly, millions in West Africa have strong beliefs in the strength of sympathetic magic, which requires belief in a universe of unproven mysterious forces.

As a result of this societal belief in the power of magic, the nations of Ghana, Nigeria, Togo, and Benin have a large population of magical practitioners. West Africa is a haven for them because many Africans have kept alive an ancient world view that still sees the universe as a place populated by ghosts and capricious spirits of every stripe. These Old Age beliefs hold many in the Cradle of Civilization bound by the chains of irrationality. Magical thinking has always had an adverse impact on pre-industrial societies faced with modernization and magical beliefs continue to have pernicious results on the African continent. One tragic consequence of belief in Ju-Ju is the current enslavement of thousands of girls and women as chattel by an extraordinarily influential group of Ju-Ju practitioners. Presently, there are some 29,000 to 35,000 female (fetish)

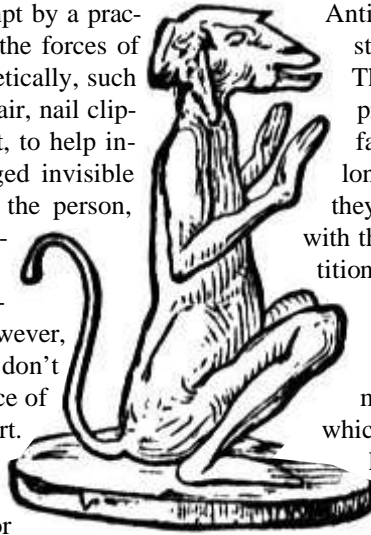
slaves held in captivity by these same West African practitioners. This startling statistic was compiled during a fact-finding mission to West Africa in 1995 by the Anti-Slavery Society (La Society Contre L Esclavage).

These fetish slaves are called Trokosi (which in the Ewe language means "wives of the gods"). By 1998, the government of Ghana prohibited the practice of such slavery, but this traditional belief still prevails in Southeastern Ghana. The

Anti-Slavery Society estimates that 4000 women are still held in bondage within Ghana's borders alone. These poor girls are given at a young age to Ju-Ju practitioners as an offering for sins committed by family members or past transgressions of ancestors long dead. The family members act out of fear that they will be retaliated against if they don't comply with the price of atonement demanded by the Ju-Ju practitioners. Trokosi range in age from four to 80 years old, and they are worked extremely hard, beaten with canes, and sexually abused. These indentured servants are given by their families to these magic men for a period of service of three to five years, at which time they can be repurchased by the family with livestock, money, or whiskey. But knowing a great thing when they have it, the practitioners push the price of freedom so high that it is usually beyond the means of most poor West African families. Trokosi remain slaves for years because of a system of extortion conducted in the name of the supernatural.

This barbaric tradition still exists in the more remote regions of neighboring Togo, Benin, and even Southwestern Nigeria. The Anti-Slavery Society, with International Needs of Ghana, have succeeded in buying some female slaves back and have even closed down a few of these operations, but the response of the African states involved has been anemic. It appears that societies afflicted by magical thinking will often

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL does not reject paranormal claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

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have a majority dominated by the tyranny of a minority. Until reason can intercede via strong educational programs countering belief in magic, the Ju-Ju fetish priests will have the upper hand due to their skill in manipulating the fear and credulousness of the believers.

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[Richard Petraitis has written several articles for REALL about witchcraft and shamanic practices.] ♡

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From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

Well, this time Skeptic Jeopardy went off without a hitch! We had two great teams, a great scorekeeper, and an all-around great time! (Do you get the impression that I thought it was great?)

Team "Heads" won out over team "tails" (I bet you can figure out how the teams were chosen) by a score of 11,601 to 8900. Team Heads was made up of Rich Walker, Harry Markert, Jim Rosenthal, Clark Olson, and Bob Ladendorf. Team Tails was made up of Wally Hartshorn, Doug Walker, Daniel Walker, and Malcolm Levin. The scorekeeper was Dawn Bowman, soon to be Dawn Hartshorn.

Some of the questions these two teams had to answer were:

- "Latin for 'I shall please,' it's an effect that must be accounted for in scientific studies of medical procedures." (What is the placebo effect?)
- "This herb supposedly aids memory and brain function, but also may thin blood." (What is ginkgo?)
- "He runs the Skeptic News website." (Who is Wally Hartshorn – Wally honorably refused to answer that one.)
- "The face of a baby supposedly appeared in one of these in September." (What is a tree?)

Thanks to everybody for playing and helping!

Next month, we might not be able to have quite as much fun as we did for Jeopardy, but we'll try. On Tuesday, September 5, we'll be meeting as usual in the Lincoln Library. This month's meeting will feature a videotaped presentation from the Skeptics Society on "Carl Sagan, The Measure of a Man."

Recently, not one but two different biographies came out about Sagan. Both biographers (Keay Davidson and William Poundstone) talk in this seminar, which was originally filmed for C-Span's Book-TV. It sounds interesting, so you won't want to miss it!

Time for me to sign off now. As I write this it's the day before I go in for arthroscopic surgery on my knee. Believe it or not, I chose to use actual anesthetic instead of, say, acupuncture. I also chose to have the knee worked on by a real doctor instead of having somebody wave their hands over it and adjust my energy field. Hopefully, I've made the right choice.

See you on September 5! ♡

From the Editor

Wally Hartshorn

This issue is filled to capacity (and with more that wouldn't fit), so this is it for the editor's column. The feature article this month is from Richard Petraitis. Read it. Learn. Enjoy. Come back next month when I'll be married. ♡

Letters to the REALL News

(This e-mail was received in response to the November 1999 issue on the web site at < www.reall.org >.)

I was just reading your newsletter for the very first time, and for one thing would like to congratulate all of you for the amount of quality criticism you're putting out. The objectively written articles were just that, objective. It's a bit of a breath of fresh air.

One criticism I have though is in the REALLity Check November 1999. In it Mr. Bloomberg is talking about two reporters who called him (my gosh, reporters looking for FACTS?!?!?) for the skeptical view on two of their articles. The second letter ends with:

"One person quoted said he saw an example of after-death communication. What was it? A butterfly landed on a woman's shoulder. Now, we might be skeptical that this shows anything other than, well, an insect landing on somebody. But they believed it was "a joyful communication." I guess we just pooh-pooh everything."

Now it seems that the point of this is just to be cute and smug. As much as I hate to be the devil's advocate (and thoroughly suspect there's a flaw in my argument that's going to be very harshly, if fairly exploited) what's the context of the remark about the butterfly? Had the person who was used as the landing pad just said to the open air "if you're there, land an insect on me!" I assume that it was a case of "Everyone felt the energy in air and just KNEW it was John's ghost."

This just strikes me as being dangerously close to sacrificing the humble scientific opinion you've worked so hard to foster and develop for some literary grandstanding and "I can turn a phrase better than you, so I'm right."

Thank you for putting out something intelligent to read on the Internet.

Dan Powell

David Bloomberg responds:

First, let me explain the context of the "pooh-pooh" comment to those who have forgotten since November. The paragraph immediately preceding the one quoted by Mr. Powell said:

"Indeed, the Rev. Elizabeth Hawkins, director of pastoral care at Memorial Medical Center, said, 'The people who would say that it is a hallucination are people who tend to pooh-pooh spiritual strengths.' In other words, anybody who is skeptical can be ignored. ..."

My comment about pooh-poohing everything was meant to show how ridiculous Hawkins' comment was.

As for the article in question, I no longer have a copy of it but as I recall, it was definitely not a case of, "If you're there, land an insect on me." It was just that a butterfly landed on somebody and they took this as a "sign." That's all well and

(Letters continued on page 7)

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

Well, after taking a month off from this column, my file hasn't gotten any smaller. So off we go again, trying in vain to catch up to the media as they continue to put out articles and shows related to pseudoscience.

If I may take a minute to put in a plug, here, please let me remind you that you can keep up daily with paranormal and pseudoscientific news on the Web by checking Skeptic News at www.skepticnews.com. Editor Wally runs the site, and has recently upgraded it so the news comes in more frequently than ever. Also, he has added a couple of people to help post those news items (including me, because I obviously didn't already have enough to do). The new software even lets users comment on the news items and have discussions with other readers.

Urban Legend Catches a Cop

The *State Journal-Register* reported (7/24) that Sangamon County Sheriff's Deputy **Tony Sacco** fell for an urban legend hoax spread by e-mail, and fell for it hard.

The hoax in question was a claim that some evil people are putting HIV-infected needles on gas pump handles so innocent people will be pricked while filling up their tanks, and end up with this deadly disease. It's pretty scary, but it's also completely untrue.

However, Sacco wrote an internal memo warning about this danger before actually checking it out. The memo related the legend as a true danger, without any hint that it might be incorrect. It even had a sentence in all-capitals, saying: "IT IS IMPERATIVE TO CAREFULLY CHECK THE HANDLE." Urban legend spreaders could hardly have asked for something better.

Sacco did eventually check it out and find that the story was a hoax, and wrote another memo to explain this to the troops. But by that time, it was too late. A copy of the "internal" memo got out and had been posted by at least one gas station, probably more. We can now expect that this memo will become part of the legend and be circulated as "real proof" that it's true. Considering that the Jacksonville, Florida, police department has gotten over 1000 calls and e-mails in a single week about this hoax because a nonexistent member of their force is listed as a contact person in the currently-circulating version, I wouldn't be surprised if Sacco gets calls about this until he retires.

A *State Journal-Register* editorial even weighed in on this one (7/25). They went through a laundry list of urban legends that have been circulating (remember, they had two articles on urban legends, plus one of my book reviews on the subject, in the past few years alone). They also pointed out that they have received numerous copies of this particular e-mail hoax and easily determined it to be false. Why couldn't Sacco do the same *before* sending out his warning memo? It took only one

phone call to find out when he did get around to it.

Of course, nobody mentioned that Sacco's boss, Sheriff **Neil Williamson**, had fallen prey to an urban legend a number of years ago and even went on WICS (channel 20) to warn parents that about supposed LSD-impregnated lick-and-stick tattoos. But I have a longer memory for these things than most people.

More Urban Legend Follies

Speaking of a person falling for an urban legend, **Ann Landers** did it again (7/23).

Landers, who seems to make a habit out of promoting urban legends as "true stories," had previously printed one about a woman who was doing her laundry and threw the clothes she was wearing in with the load. She also had her hair in curlers and wanted to protect it from the leaky pipes, so she was wearing her son's football helmet. Suddenly, she turned around and there was the meter man, who said, "I hope your team wins, lady."

But telling it once a number of years ago was apparently not enough, so she reprinted it at a reader's request.

It's an amusing story, but not a true one. It's been written up by **Jan Harold Brunvand** in several of his books, and can be found at the "snopes" urban legend website (www.snopes.com). In fact, the snopes site uses Ann's first telling of the story as its main reference, though they point out that the legend predates her telling.

Here she had a perfect opportunity to correct an error and let people know that the story she'd printed was an urban legend. Instead, she blew it big time. I guess there's a reason that her name pops up repeatedly in Brunvand's books.

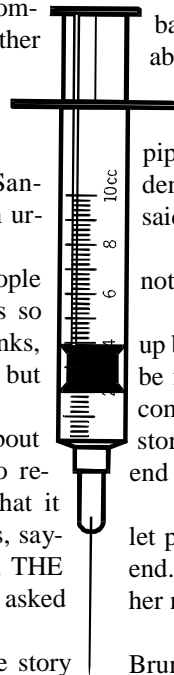
I sent her a letter asking her to check future stories with Brunvand or snopes so it won't happen again. I rather doubt she'll put the effort into it.

A Psychic Who Tried to Get Famous

Bugsy Siegel's safe, buried since 1940 or so, was opened on live television in May. You'd think the TV folks would have learned from **Geraldo** opening **Al Capone's** vault, but apparently not. Anyway, the safe was completely and totally empty (well, other than a second empty safe inside the first).

So why am I bothering to mention this? Because the Reuters article discussing this (5/24) notes that "a psychic" had said the safe would contain all sorts of things, like a ruby ring and the names of people who used Siegel's prostitution services. Alas, another psychic proven wrong.

The unfortunate part is that the psychic's name was never mentioned. You can bet that if even one thing that slightly matched the prediction was found, the psychic in question would have managed to get his/her name plastered all over the place. But since nothing was found, no name mentioned. I, personally, would have loved to see who it was.



Yet Another Psychic Who Is Getting Famous

The *Chicago Tribune's* Tempo section (unsurprisingly enough) ran what was essentially an advertisement for a local psychic in the form of an article (7/25). If that wasn't bad enough, they positioned this article on "love psychic" **Joanna Ammons** right next to **Ann Landers'** column, as if to assure that people who like to read about relationships would be sure to see it.

There was not a line of skepticism or doubt in the entire article. The writer put forth everything as if it were rock-solid fact. It involved an interview with Ammons, who said all sorts of wonderful things about her abilities, and with a few of her satisfied customers. The photo caption even stated, "Clairvoyant Joanna Ammons..." without any qualifiers.

The whole article disgusted me (as if you couldn't already tell that). She couldn't have *paid* for better advertising than this.

It's a Very Dangerous Thing, Part 3

In previous columns (April and July), I discussed South African President **Thabo Mbeki's** welcoming of "AIDS dissidents" like **Peter Duesberg** into the discussion of how to stop AIDS in his country. Duesberg believes that HIV doesn't cause AIDS, despite the reams of evidence showing that it does. By inviting him and his pals to the table, Mbeki has shown an apparent disregard for science and has threatened to set back anti-AIDS efforts in Africa.

In July, AIDS researchers from all over the world gathered in Durban, South Africa, for the 13th International AIDS Conference. Before the meeting began, over 5000 scientists and doctors signed a declaration affirming that HIV causes AIDS. The AIDS dissidents frequently assert that scientists are beholden to drug companies who profit from the myth that HIV causes AIDS, so to avoid any appearance of impropriety, only those who are not employees of drug companies signed.

The Declaration, published in the July 6 issue of *Nature*, briefly explains the evidence and background. It states, "The evidence that AIDS is caused by HIV-1 or HIV-2 is clear-cut, exhaustive and unambiguous, meeting the highest standards of science. The data fulfil exactly the same criteria as for other viral diseases, such as polio, measles and smallpox." A laundry list of some of this evidence is then given, followed by the statement, "It is unfortunate that a few vocal people continue to deny the evidence. This position will cost countless lives."

Later, it states, "But to tackle the disease, everyone must first understand that HIV is the enemy. Research, not myths, will lead to the development of more effective and cheaper treatments, and, it is hoped, a vaccine."

Both *Nature* and *Science* covered the "Durban Declaration," and both cheered its forceful nature in speaking up for good science (7/6 and 7/14, respectively). Duesberg criticized those who were on Mbeki's panel for signing the declaration, claiming they were prejudging the issues that the panel was supposed to be considering. He seems to be ignoring the 17 years of work that has culminated in the declaration. But then,

I guess he can't really hold his opinions without ignoring a lot – like, for example, all of the scientific evidence. He further called the declaration a "pogrom" and said the declaration was "designed to intimidate scientific minorities from questioning a hypothesis that has yet to cure a single AIDS patient." By this illogic, we should reconsider whether a virus really causes colds. After all, we've never cured a cold. He really did used to be a decent scientist once, from all reports. Somewhere along the line, though, he seems to have forgotten how science works. Just because we don't have a cure doesn't mean we don't know how the disease is caused. And it doesn't mean that he is in any way, shape, or form correct.

Meanwhile, **Malegapuru Makgoba**, the president of South Africa's Medical Research Council and a signatory of the declaration as well as being on the same panel as Duesberg, said of Duesberg and friends: "The crunch has come for them, as experimental evidence in support of their views is being demanded of them – something they have never been able to provide."

Finally, Mbeki made a small movement towards science when he gave a speech to the Durban gathering saying he would support research on an AIDS vaccine and anti-HIV medications. He did not mention his refusal to supply fairly cheap anti-HIV drugs to pregnant women, which have been shown to halve the chance of passing the virus to their babies. He also complained about the criticisms of him for welcoming Duesberg and friends, saying, "What I hear being said repeatedly, stridently, and often angrily, is 'Do not ask any questions!'" I'm sorry, Mr. President, but this is just baloney. Nobody is saying you shouldn't ask questions, just that you shouldn't re-ask the same questions that have already been answered with mountains of scientific evidence. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, and certainly no reason to invite people who say the wheel cannot ever even be invented!

The bright side is that he did address both AIDS and HIV in his speech, which some saw as the closest he's ever come to acknowledging that HIV does indeed cause AIDS.

We shall see...

Not So Healthy, the Continuing Saga

Rather than continuing to number every installment of my "Not So Healthy" segments in this column, I think it's time to just make it an ongoing saga. It seems that every few weeks, another study shows that some herb or supplement interacts in nasty ways with drugs or patient conditions.

Dr. Dean Edell reports (8/1) that there is concern that St. John's wort, which has already been implicated in a host of other problems, may damage certain proteins in the eyes, which can lead to cataracts.

A HealthCentral report (8/11) notes that St. John's wort, echinacea, and ginkgo biloba all reduce sperm production and ability to conceive. Springfield fertility specialist **Dr. Philip Galle** was quoted in the story, noting that herbals are not considered drugs and therefore "don't go through the same safety and purity testing as do drugs." He noted that ginseng, kava

Psychic Junk Mail Hell Update

Arkansas Sues Psychic Hotline Service

by David Bloomberg

Last year, I discussed how the REALL post office box became filled with junk mail from psychic hotline services. These letters and postcards were originally sent to “Leo Bloomberg,” though a couple of other names eventually followed (adding to the evidence that we were put on a mailing list by a practical joker). Some of the “psychics” who wanted to help poor Leo included some who are apparently fairly well-known in the psychic biz. These included Joyce Jillson and Jenni Sinclair.

Before I start with the update, I should clarify one thing. At the time of that writing, I mentioned that one letter from Sinclair used tortured language when describing her background. Specifically, it said she was “SEEN ON TV DURING:” and listed a few talk shows. This made it sound like she hadn’t actually been on the shows she claimed to have been on. With the additional information I’ve gotten, it looks like she was, in fact, on such shows. I still wonder why that language to describe such appearances was chosen.

The update, as you could guess from the subtitle, above, is that the State of Arkansas has sued the psychic hotline service that appears to have been the one that sent me all that junk mail. The company in question is Access Resource Services, and they are headquartered in Fort Lauderdale, Florida (this solves another mystery, which was where they were located; you might recall that most of the mail was postmarked Sioux Falls, South Dakota, though one did have a Fort Lauderdale, Florida, address).

According to the complaint, as described by the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* (August 8), the attorney general of Arkansas has received about 40 complaints that this hotline service has billed them for calls that were supposed to be free or, in some cases, calls that were never even made! (Hey, they’re psychics. I’m sure they knew they were *planning* to call and just didn’t get around to it.)

Since they charge \$4.99 per minute, some of these really added up. One guy was billed \$240, but says he wasn’t even in town that day. Another woman was billed for almost \$170, but her phone had been disconnected three months before the call was supposedly made.

In addition to billing people for calls that apparently weren’t made, the charges against the company include violations of the Arkansas Deceptive Trade Practices Act, including make false representations that some services were free and then billing for those services, claiming people had won prizes when they hadn’t, and various others related to proper disclosures and the like.

All of the names I mentioned in my original article appear in the newspaper story as psychics that supposedly work for this company. But the story doesn’t end there.

Two days after the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* announced the suit, it followed up with an article saying that Joyce Jillson

claims she is not associated with the hotline service and that they never had permission to use her name. She said that she is a victim as well because this company has been using her name and reputation. She claims that the company might have bought another with which she did have a previous association, but that she was supposed to have approval rights, and they never got her okay. Meanwhile, they were using her name, her signature, and even her picture, to sell their services.

Sounds a bit strange to me. Supposed psychic power aside (she might say she can’t use it on herself or something), if it had been me in that situation, I think I’d have looked into it when the previous company was bought, if only to find out where my checks would be coming from, or if they’d still be coming. We’re supposed to believe that she had no idea whatsoever that this was going on.

Jillson was quoted in the article as saying, “I like to do a good job and believe in what I do, but there are a lot of phonies in this business.”

I certainly can’t disagree with that last part. ♡

(REALity Check continued from page 5)

kava, and black cohosh also cause problems if you’re trying to conceive a child.

It’s interesting that St. John’s wort is one of the herbs listed as causing fertility problems. Previously, the herb was implicating in reducing the effectiveness of birth control pills. So if you’re trying to get pregnant, you should avoid it; and if you’re trying *not* to get pregnant, you should also avoid it!

CNN Interactive reported on the Center for Science in the Public Interest’s call for the FDA to put strict regulations on “functional foods” (7/18). These are the food items, some made by major companies, that claim to boost memory, improve your energy, or make your immune system stronger. The Connecticut attorney general is also looking into these claims, which he calls “outlandish and ridiculous.”

Kansas Finally Evolves

By now most readers probably know that the Republican primaries for state school board members in Kansas removed two of the anti-evolutionists from office, including the board’s chair, and a third anti-evolution candidate lost as well. The *Chicago Tribune* editorialized on the subject (8/5), noting that the chair complained that an “elite group in Washington” and other scientists put too much pressure on Kansans, and that’s why she lost. If only scientists really did have that much power! The editorial noted, “Creationism supporters complained that academics and journalists embarrassed the state and had Kansans believing ‘people are just laughing at us, people think we’re rubes.’” They continued, “Well, just as long

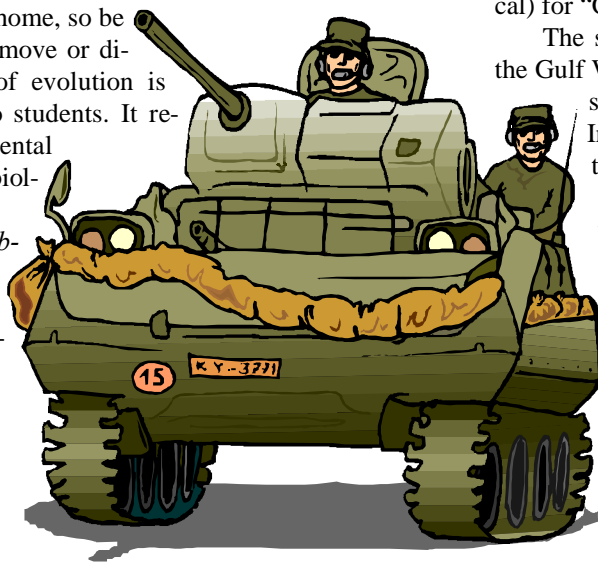
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as they got the message.”

The *Tribune* went further, explaining, “Creation science is ‘so-called’ because it is not a science at all. It is a belief based on faith but presented as a matter of scientific deduction. If parents teach it in the home, so be it. But the effort to remove or diminish the teaching of evolution in school is damaging to students. It restricts their fundamental understanding of biology.”

Thank you, *Tribune*! It almost makes up for your promotion of the psychic discussed earlier.



(Letters continued from page 3)

good, but it really doesn't tell us anything at all about the reality of after-death communication. It wasn't meant to be smug or particularly cute. I was going for a bit of humor, though, as I often do in my "REALLity Check" columns. We don't have to be humorless or bland to continue to have a good background of science, and I hope that I generally blend the two.

Dear Editor

I enjoyed reading your review of "psychics" in REALL. As a former telephone psychic I can tell you that my employer was never concerned with my ability to pass a Rhine test. If you wanted to know what my real job was, I would say it was to take drunk, lonely and desperate people and make them feel a bit better about themselves for a fee that would probably match any psychiatrist's. The service charged 3.99 a minute and we could keep them on the line for up to 45 minutes. I was a very good "psychic", top 1 percent of a staff of 5000. My average call length was close to 25 minutes, although working weekends I often racked up the 45 minute maximum.

Being a phone psychic is harder than doing it in person, you lack the visual feedback and people can always hang up on you whenever they want. I don't know anything about Herb Dewey's books other than as a magician and entertainer he is held in high regard by other magicians. What I used to do is profile my callers, a technique I learned in telephone sales. The elderly were usually concerned about their health, or their children's marriages. Middle aged women usually were going through a divorce or suspected their spouses of cheating on them. Young women had romance questions, and young men were split 25 percent romance and 75 percent career, or school oriented.

Normal Solider Syndrome?

Dr. Dean Edell reported (8/17) that a recent study published in the *American Journal of Medicine* strikes another blow against a physiological cause (as opposed to psychological) for "Gulf War syndrome."

The study compared almost 1900 veterans who served in the Gulf War with a similar number of those who did not. The same pattern of symptoms were found in both groups. In other words, the complaints of Gulf War vets are the same as those of other vets. But the Gulf War complaints have gotten lots of press and have been turned into a "syndrome," while the rest are considered normal complaints.

Edell explains that this is why he considered Gulf War syndrome, along with sick building syndrome, most silicone breast implant problems, etc. as mass sociogenic illnesses. The study sure seems to support that view. ☹

I would tell a caller that I see a triangle they are being pulled in different directions, then go on the fishing expedition. Callers to psychic lines want help and companionship not a scientific test. My most useful skill though was just being a good listener, and allowing people to talk about their pain in a non judgmental manner. Although I will say that my Tarot cards had this uncanny ability to tell young people to go after that degree, not to run away from home, for divorced women I would tell them to go attend church, battered women would always do better leaving their husbands.

The easiest and most lucrative calls I received were from grieving family members wanting to talk to their departed loved ones. I would ask for some information about the person, just so my spirit guides could locate them faster, how considerate of them, and then proceed to answer their questions. These callers were handing me all the information I needed, along with my life experience and a little imagination I could hold them on the line for the maximum time, every single call. Sometimes I was even asked to commune with pets, dogs in my heaven have a pretty good time, cats do not come off so well.

For all this I was paid the princely sum of 12.00 dollars an hour, remember this next time you call for a winning lottery number. Just for the record I have never won anything in a lottery.

If anyone thinks there are real psychics working on those phone lines, I would tell them to apply for a job with a psychic service, what they will hear is talk about average call times and keeping their production up. Frankly, no one in the business has any respect for the pigeons who call up. If you're feeling lonely or depressed have a cup of coffee with a friend, go to a social activity, do something, anything for someone else and you won't need a psychic "friend".

Name Withheld by Request ☹



Our Next Meeting

Carl Sagan: The Measure of a Man A Video Presentation

Not one, but two biographies about Carl Sagan came out recently. In this videotaped seminar, originally filmed for C-Span's Book-TV, Both biographers, Keay Davidson and William Poundstone, discuss the life and career of Carl Sagan the scientist, social activist, and mediagenic star. They discuss everything from Sagan's pot smoking to his involvement with the SETI program.



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