The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

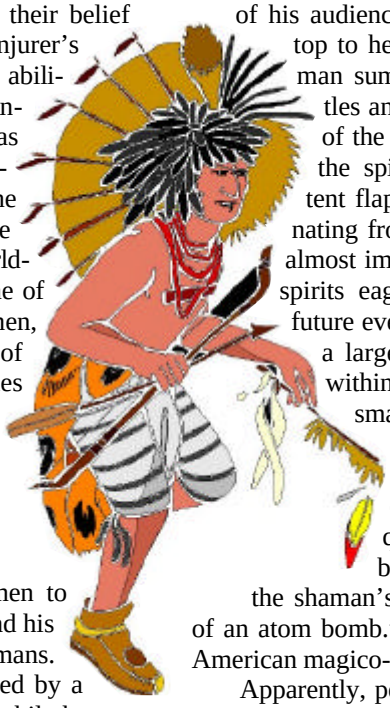
"It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense." — James Randi

Volume 9, Number 6 June 2001

The Conjuring Tricks of Native American Shamans

by Richard Petraitis

Lately, in our post-Carlos Castenada world, many Americans have embraced Native American Shamanism as a way to gain paranormal powers. There are many in our society who believe Amerindian shamans possessed supernatural abilities, via the practice of their Old Age arts. However, these believers in shamanic powers are firing up their belief engines in vain by not truly understanding the conjurer's trade. The only evidence for the wonder-working abilities of Native American shamans remains purely anecdotal. There is not one scientific study that has proven a shaman's ability to circumvent the physical laws of this universe. By exposing some of the shaman's tricks of the trade, I hope to convince many modern day adherents of this ancient worldview to reconsider their beliefs. I will explain some of the reputed supernatural exhibits of these famous men, and women, of magic. For millennia, the shamans of the Americas held great influence over their societies with the use of clever legerdemain. The following examples are some of their wonder-working best:



1. Shamans and the Shaking Tent

This alleged phenomenon led many white men to believe that the forces of darkness (i.e. the Devil and his demons) were in collusion with Amerindian shamans. Jesuit missionaries to the New World were terrified by a shaman's ability to make a ceremonial tent shake while he was in alleged communion with the spirit world. Were spirit beings really shaking the tents upon invocation by tribal shamans? Or was there a rational explanation for this alleged exhibition of supernatural power? To understand this unique demonstration of spirit channeling, detailed in historical accounts, a little background on this Amerindian magico-religious rite is required for the reader.

As late as the Twentieth Century, Amerindian shamans of the Great Lakes and the Sub-Arctic regions of North America used specially constructed conical tents for divination purposes. The shaking tent ceremony was very popular among the Cree, the Ojibwa, and the Chippewa Peoples. (Until 1973, the unusual ceremony was still reported in use among Canada's Innu People.) Usually, a shaman supervised the building of a barrel shaped tent, about seven feet in height, with special instructions being followed by the shaman's assistants in construction of the spirit channeling chamber. Anywhere from four to eight wooden poles were used, being bent inward at the top, during the raising of the special tent. The poles were secured with several tree branch hoops, while hides and birch bark covered the entire framework - better concealing the shaman from the view of his audience. The ceremonial tent was left open at the top to help the shaman's audience hear the medicine man summoning the animal spirits (manidous). Rattles and cups of lead shot were attached to the skin of the tent, so expectant tribe members knew when the spirits arrived. Upon the shaman's entry, the tent flap closed and strange noises were heard emanating from within. The tent's violent shaking started almost immediately upon the "manidous" arrival – the spirits eager to answer audience questions regarding future events. The top of the tent was observed tracing a large arc – allegedly due to supernatural forces within the structure. Observers claimed they saw small lights above the tent, while some witnesses even reported small beings, approximately five inches in height with long ears, dancing on the tent's hoops during the spirit question and answer session with tribe members. One twentieth century witness compared the shaman's shaking tent display as having the "energy of an atom bomb." So what really occurred during this Native American magico-religious rite?

Apparently, per Dr. A. Irving Halloway (in his work "The Role of Conjuring in Saulteaux Society"), the shaking tents were easy to set in motion, not being as rigid as they first appear to outside observers – being constructed of extremely flexible poles. Medicine men claimed it is the work of spirits that sets the tents in motion, but an account by one shaman, recorded in the 1930s, challenges those claims. This wonder-worker confessed to an outsider he feared walking in the woods alone, because he had been discovered shaking the spirit tent himself. Despite popular misconceptions, Native American so-

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In This Issue

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.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Annual Membership Rates: Regular, $20; student, $15; family, $30; patron, $50 or more; subscription only, $12.

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From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

Once again, I find myself writing this column at the last minute (well, not quite the last *minute*, but definitely the last evening). It's amazing how this stuff can so easily sneak up on a person, even when I know it's coming.

Luckily, I already knew what I was going to talk about – what went on in Buffalo, NY, for the meeting of local skeptics group leaders.

Overall, the meeting went very well. We spent a lot of time talking about how we can all interact better so we are not merely individual local groups but can act in concert, help each other out, and in turn be helped out by the local groups and the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). One of the main ways we plan to do this is by making greater use of e-mail and the Web in general, which is something I pushed for (when each leader got up to introduce him/herself, we were supposed to give two things we wanted to spend time on during the rest of the weekend – my two were "computers" and "computers"). In fact, I pushed so much that I ended up leading the group that discussed it.

Also, for a while I have been the "listmaster" of a small private list of local skeptics group leaders. We have now converted that to a bigger list for all the leaders to discuss any issues that may come up. There is also going to be discussion of how Skeptic News (www.skepticnews.com – which is run by our own Editor Wally, and to which I contribute) could be of use to local groups and how they might be able to help with it. We're still looking at that one, but meanwhile CSICOP is creating a web page for local groups to use to help each other out in a variety of ways.

Another item that came out of the meeting was that all members of REALL (and other local groups) will begin getting – free of charge – the newsletter *Skeptical Briefs*, which

A Nod to Our Patrons

REALL would like to thank our patron members. Through their extra generosity, REALL is able to continue to grow as a force for critical thinking in Central Illinois. To become a patron member of REALL, please use the membership form insert. Patron members are:

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had been only for "affiliates" of CSICOP until now. This newsletter comes out quarterly and will be sent to us; we will then slap our labels on them and send them out. However, I should point out that this can only be a benefit for **members** – if you are a newsletter subscriber (paying the $12 annual rate), you won't be getting *Skeptical Briefs*. (Of course, if you're a subscriber now you can change that by upping your membership – I certainly won't argue!).

This brings up another point. The subject was raised of exchanging membership information. We will probably be asking CSICOP to help us with a new mailing to try to expand our ranks. In return, CSICOP may ask for our mailing list. We have never given out that information before, but we think this is a fair trade. So you will soon be getting a postcard asking you if you agree to allow us to exchange such information with like-minded groups. If you do **not** want your address information given out, please e-mail me at chairman@reall.org or call and leave a message on the REALL answering machine at 726-5354. If you don't care, you don't have to do anything. (The postcard will address the same issues, but it can't hurt to mention it twice.)

Special June Meeting!

Our June meeting will **not** take place on the first Tuesday because the Library has its annual book sale coming up and they use our meeting space to prepare. Instead, we will be having a picnic at REALL Board Member Dave McMaster's house! See the back of the newsletter for more information and please remember to RSVP so we'll know how many people are coming. REALL will provide the main course—let us know if you can bring a side dish or dessert. Please feel free to bring your families – there has been a lot of discussion indicating that people want more social events, so I hope to see you all there!

("Shamans" continued from page 1)

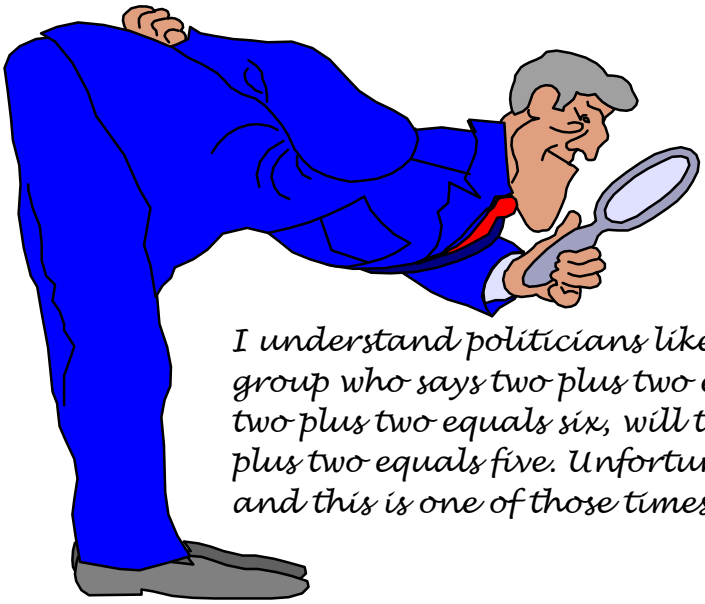
cieties didn't lack skeptics, many Amerindians knew the shamans shook the tents and they gave, as evidence of their skepticism, stories of frail old shamans shaking giant lodges in ages past (emphasizing that more than human strength was involved when the spirits were summoned.) Many Native Americans knew the spirit conjurers were expected to grab one of the inside tent poles during the invocation ceremony. To convince skeptics, some shamans entered the tent bound in ropes to provide proof that they weren't manipulating the structure, but once inside the tent they escaped the bindings using a technique called the wrist tie, specifically invented by American Indians for use in "escape magic." However, we must be careful not to classify all these "shaking tent shamans" as charlatans. Many Amerindian shamans who converted to Christianity remained adamant in their belief they had summoned animal spirits (manidous), despite the skepticism of outsiders regarding their wonder-working.

And what of these alleged spirits? I believe a more earthly explanation can be found for the disembodied voices emanating from the shaking tent. Most shamans were, and still are, quite adept at ventriloquism, mimicry of animals, and the ability to throw one's voice at will. Generally, this technique is taught to apprentice shamans during the course of their shaman training. Most "tent shakers" spoke with the voice of only one animal spirit, but even when there was allegedly more than one spirit present inside the tent, somehow they didn't speak at the same time while dispensing advice, or predicting future events. Were these "manidous" just extremely polite? Or were the voices strictly generated by the medicine man alone, located inside the tent ?

2. Shamans as Fire-walkers

Today, many people believe in the ability of Amerindian shamans to walk across heated coals, and even rocks, barefoot, as proof positive of their extraordinary powers over nature. Tribal shamans, and even some Buddhist monks, have used this seemingly uncanny physical feat to demonstrate their alleged powers over nature. The shamans of the North American Plains Indians were known to engage in tests of supernatural power against rival shamans, which included tests such as fire-walking. This particular type of contest probably wasn't the tie-breaker because almost anyone can do this feat. Shamans walked across beds of glowing wood ash without fear of injury because the ash had low "specific heat." Similarly, lava rock is still used in tribal fire-walking exhibitions on the islands of Polynesia, because the stones are easy for magic men to navi-

("Shamans" continued on page 5)



I understand politicians like to compromise and that faced with one group who says two plus two equals four and another group that says two plus two equals six, will tend to arrive at a position that says two plus two equals five. Unfortunately, sometimes the answer has to be four, and this is one of those times.

— Eugenie Scott

REALLity Check
by David Bloomberg

Crossing Over Into Your Living Room

As you may or may not have heard, "medium" **John Edward** is expanding the number of people who will be able to fall for his cold reading and believe in his magical abilities. He can currently only be found on the SciFi channel – which is quite appropriate. However, his show, *Crossing Over*, is going into syndication next season as well and stations in all the major markets have picked up his show. I don't know if Springfield will be getting it or not; we can only hope that we are spared.

Meanwhile, a debate on his powers appeared in the April 7 issue of *TV Guide*. **James "The Amazing" Randi** took the role designated as "The Nonbeliever" and *TV Guide* contributing editor **Michael Logan** took the role of "The Believer."

Much of Logan's article concentrates on allegations of trickery, such as asking audience members to fill out information cards or spying on them with microphones. The producers, of course, deny such things. But, frankly, I think that misses the point. He, like all the "mediums" and "psychics" before him, doesn't need such trickery (whether he uses it or not is still a matter of debate). The simple techniques of cold reading suffice quite well.

Logan briefly mentions cold reading in a claim by **Gary Schwartz**, a University of Arizona psychology professor who believes in Edward's abilities. He claims to have tested Edwards in a lab environment where cold reading couldn't work. Yeah, and those scientists who had tested **Uri Geller** were convinced that he was the real deal, too. All too often we've seen scientists taken in by trickery that magicians could catch if they were only consulted.

In any event, it should surprise nobody that Logan is a True Believer because he has had two readings from Edward that "knocked [his] socks off." As I noted earlier, though, he focuses his reasons for believing on the idea that Edward had no spies or hidden mikes or whatnot. Mr. Logan just doesn't understand that Edward (or any other cold reader) doesn't need such information.

Randi, on the other hand, begins by slamming Edward (okay, so that's not a big surprise). Indeed, Randi doesn't even think Edward is a particularly talented cold reader. "He is a run-of-the-mill operator profiting from grief," he says. He then goes on to explain some of Edward's methods. For example, he talks about an appearance Edward made on the *Today* show in which he was supposed to be getting information about a dead relative for a woman in the audience. But, whoops! Edward said he later found out it was actually a message for a parking attendant outside. As Randi says, "If the field of possibilities includes everyone within a New York City block, John Edward cannot fail."

Also hitting on the idea of using trickery, Randi points out that audience members write in for tickets, which means the staff has their names and addresses, and can therefore get their telephone numbers and other data about them that could provide a "miracle 'hit.'" He also notes that we have only Edward's word (and that of the producers) that information discussed by people waiting to be on the show as they sit around talking doesn't make it back to him, or that audience note cards that are encouraged (though not required) by the staff don't get somehow used, or that none of the editing ever skews things to make Edward look more successful than he really is.

Randi then takes a look at a specific episode and describes "a rather bad guessing game." He starts with a father figure, moves to a younger man, then to a "D" name that turns out to be his mother-in-law. Edwards counts all of these as hits even though he didn't actually say anything about them. As Randi says, "He simply knew that a fifty-something man in the audience had a father who had died." Randi also points out several "gimmicks" Edward uses to instantly correct any errors in such a way that most people won't even notice he'd been wrong to begin with. He summarizes by saying the reading was a "resounding failure," yet the subject of the reading ended up in tears and everybody around was impressed.

Neither of the articles refers to the other, even though they ran side-by-side. It's too bad, because I'd love to know what Mr. Logan thinks about everything Randi said. Logan seems to have simply taken anything good said about Edward at face value because he had a good reading from him. I have to wonder if he seriously took a critical look. OK, I don't really have to wonder – I suspect I already know the answer. Hopefully, readers of the two articles will have better success at separating the sense from the nonsense. But I'm not counting on it…

Miracle of the Saints?

One "miracle" that has, in past years, been used to support claims of sainthood for many medieval candidates has been that their bodies somehow resisted decay. Until recently, such claims were not scientifically scrutinized because nobody really wanted scientists picking over the bodies of saints.

However, that recently changed, and *Discover* magazine (June) had a good article describing what has happened on how these long-dead bodies have managed to stay so well-preserved. Actually, there are two different situations at work.

First, scientists found that some of the bodies had actually been purposely mummified, but that fact had been either well-hidden or forgotten through the ages, or both. This was not apparent at first glance, but when scientists were allowed to examine the bodies, it was immediately obvious (it's hard to hide where you cut into somebody and take out their organs).

The second cause was not intentional, but incidental. A tradition had been built of burying important people in the cold ground within medieval churches, many of which were lined with alkaline stone. As the article notes, "These vaults had both chemical and climatic environments conducive to mummification." Furthermore, when later proponents of sainthood would dig up the bodies, they would often choose the one that was most well-preserved if there was any doubt as to which was which. Why? Because resisting decay was a sign from God. So they pick the one that was least decayed and then proclaim that the fact that it's not decayed is a miracle. Talk about a self-fulfilling prophecy!

But unlike so many stories you read in this column, this

one has a happy ending. The Catholic Church has looked at this scientific information and "has now virtually abandoned the notion of incorruptibility," according to the article. They no longer accept preservation of the body as one of the miracles required for a potential saint to be recognized by the Pope. It shows me that there is hope that rational thought can be put to use in any situation, if only people will allow it.

Quit Monkeying Around!

CNN.com reported (May 16) that mass hysteria had overtaken New Dehli, India, because of reports of a "monkey man" running loose and attacking people. Indeed, at least two people died due to falls caused by this hysteria, and another has been beaten by people who thought he was the monkey man.

Police tried to calm residents, but it didn't work too well. The article notes that "Police have blamed the panic on uneducated poor people, many of them superstitious and strong believers in the supernatural." I know readers of this column will find it difficult to believe that supernatural beliefs are behind this. I mean, how could the police doubt testimony like the witness who said, "It was a monkey alright, and about four foot tall, but as soon as I grabbed it, it turned itself into a cat with tawny, glowing eyes." Hmm.

A follow-up article (5/21) says the police have specifically said that the whole thing was a case of hysteria. Looking at some of the statements in the article, it's apparent that people were, indeed, hysterical. The assistant police commissioner said, "The moment somebody shouted 'monkey man,' people would run helter-skelter which is how most injuries occurred." Sounds like yelling "Fire!" in a crowded theater.

The article also notes, "Police say they now think the initial rumors may have spurred a gang of pranksters into dressing up and scaring people." It reminds me a bit of crop circles – as soon as people started paying attention to them, pranksters started going out and putting them in every field. Of course, that was somewhat less dangerous as people weren't afraid for their lives when they saw a crop circle.

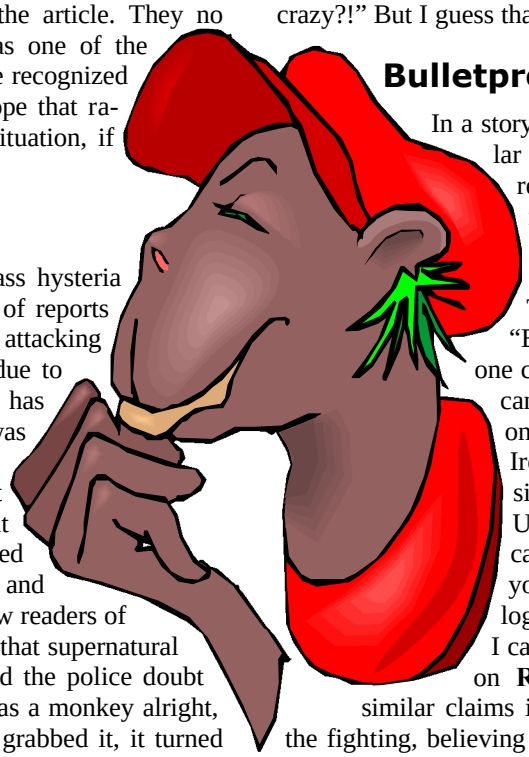
James Randi said it best – and we have it quoted on our masthead: "It's a very dangerous thing to believe in nonsense."

Rainman, Rainman, Go Away

ABCNews.com reported (5/22) that the Yakama Indian Nation performed two rain dance ceremonies to help solve the drought in the Northwest, and then billed the Bonneville Power Administration – a federal agency in charge of selling electricity from dams – for $32,000 for their services. The BPA, however, has refused to pay.

Randy Settler, a member of the tribal council, said, "It was pretty much a blow to me to hear from the BPA administrator that he couldn't find the funds ... to assist in this." Yes, shocking. After all, Settler said rain *has* increased since the ceremonies. Oh, well, that proves it! Give them the money!

What surprised me the most about this article was that it focused on how the tribe hadn't gotten permission from the BPA, as if that's the main reason their bill is going unpaid. I just wanted the guy from the BPA to say, "What, are they crazy?!" But I guess that's too much to ask for.



Bulletproof Soldiers

In a story that should sound familiar to any regular reader of this newsletter, a paramilitary rebel force in Indonesia claims to have magical powers that will lead them to victory. **Muhammad Subur**, a senior commander of the Defenders of the Truth Front, is quoted as saying, "Bullets will bounce off our chests. No one can stab us. Cars cannot run us over. We can disappear and reappear. We can walk on water."

Ironically, members of this group have signed oaths pledging to die for the cause. Um, if you can't be hit by bullets, knives, cars, etc., why do you need to pledge that you'll fight to the death? I'm guessing logic isn't exactly their strong point here.

I can also guess how this will all end, based on **Richard Petraitis'** various articles on similar claims in other countries: those who are doing the fighting, believing themselves to be invulnerable, will end up **dead**.

("Shamans" continued from page 3)

gate due to the same property of the glowing wood ash (low "specific heat"). Why aren't the shamans ever demonstrating fire walks through open flames? Could it be only the soles of feet which become fire immune when paranormal abilities are exercised? I would like to witness just one such demonstration of power by those claiming special powers over Nature.

Other fire-handling acts of the shamans deserve attention. The early French explorers of the New World reported Amerindian shamans handling hot coals, using bare hands, without injury. Thankfully, these early accounts didn't simply attribute these conjurers' displays to Satan and his minions, but they mention a special ointment applied to the hands of the Native American shamans, "jugglers" as they were called by the French, used by the magic men to handle the hot stones. It seems the term given to shamans in different parts of the world, "the cunning man," is often quite appropriate (the term being popular in reference to reputed magic workers in Australia and Scotland).

3. Shamans and Immunity To Bullets

The belief in the ability of human beings to repel bullets, fostered by the carefully crafted displays of tribal shamans, has led to tragedy in many societies throughout the world. Sadly, it isn't a belief that became extinct with the demise of the Boxer rebels of China, or the Maji-Maji warriors of Africa. This belief

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("Shamans" continued from page 5)

in magical immunity to gunfire continues to survive in parts of our developing world. It shouldn't be surprising that tribal conjurers have often convinced audiences of their supernatural immunity to physical danger. Prior to the Twentieth Century, Amerindian medicine men used these displays of supernatural immunity as a precursor to war, or as a preliminary act to tribal revolt. So how were these illusions of magical immunity created for tribal audiences?

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Native American shamans created impressive proofs of their immunity to firearms (muskets) through the use of clever gimmicks. Algonquin wonder-workers often proved their immunity to musket fire by simply taking a dirt ball and then covering it with a thin coat of lead - a process not observed by witnesses at the shaman's demonstration. Before a tribal gathering, a shaman would ram the gimmicked " musket ball" down the gun's barrel, using the ramrod to break the ball into harmless fragments. When the musket was discharged by an audience volunteer, usually pointblank at the shaman's mouth for greater effect, the wonder-worker fell to the ground writhing and convulsing. Waiting for just the right moment, the shaman jumped up to present himself unharmed before astonished tribe members. Many unbelievers in the shaman's powers were converted on the spot! Another variation of this trick was conducted when a tribal shaman, pretending to be downed by musket fire, crawled over to a nearby basin and spat a musket ball out of his mouth (one hidden in his cheek before the musket's discharge) into the iron bowl. The basin chosen was usually made of iron to produce an audible clanking sound for maximum audience impact.

Other Amerindian shamans demonstrated their immunity to rifle fire by capitalizing on one particular feature of nineteenth century firearms – an air hole in the side of the weapon. This air hole allowed oxygen to enter the rifle sparking the gunpowder to fire the weapon. With a show of supreme confidence, a shaman would demonstrate his immunity to gunfire by handing an unsuspecting volunteer a rifle, which already had the air hole plugged by the quick conjurer's hand. Though the volunteer pointed the rifle directly at the shaman's heart, the dropping of the hammer didn't produce the expected discharge. The medicine man would then take the rifle back from the surprised volunteer and again, with a practiced motion, remove the air plug, allowing the necessary oxygen to enter for ignition of the black powder. It was with great fanfare that the medicine man now discharged the rifle into the ground, as proof that the spirit world was on his side! (During the 1850s, North African shamans attempted to incite desert tribes to revolt against French rule with just such a demonstration.) Shamans' supernatural abilities had certainly evolved from the days when they plunged arrows into their naked bodies to produce a blood flow without sustaining fatal injury. (According to a 1723 French report, Amerindian shamans used arrow shafts with retractable arrow heads, and beet juice for human blood, to pull off this trick.) Today, many shamans still use an array of gimmicked items to fuel the supernatural belief engines of their people.

4. Shamans as Healers: Using the Placebo Effect

Since time immemorial, Amerindian shamans have banked on the human body's amazing recuperative abilities to work their cures. Tribal shamans have been esteemed because of their alleged supernatural healing skills. These extraordinary healing powers, in cases where shamans' patients actually recovered from illnesses, were nothing more than an example of what doctors have termed "the placebo effect." Shamans manipulate a patient's expectation of healing by using a variety of techniques, especially sleight of hand, to produce small objects hidden on their person, during healing ceremonies. These tricks strengthen a shaman's suggestive powers with his, or her, patients. During ceremonial healing, shamans have pulled worms, mice, small pieces of bone, crystals, and bloody tufts of hair (produced by biting one's tongue with a hair tuft hidden inside the shaman's cheek), from their mouths. These items are allegedly sucked out of the patient's body as the cause of illness and then spat out of the shaman's mouth for added drama. Shamans have even used red clays, chewed in their mouths, to give the appearance of blood issuing forth. For even greater effect, tribal healers are trained to self induce vomiting. One Amerindian shaman vomited bits of maize she claimed to have sucked out of a patient's body. (Unknown to the patient, she had swallowed grains of maize earlier after first swallowing some tobacco to make herself nauseous!) Once these initial steps were taken, she pulled discreetly on a rope tied around her waist, hidden under her garment, and subsequently created a most unnerving effect for those present at the healing ceremony. As a whole, shamans probably did quite well with patients who were suffering from psychogenic illnesses, using their deceptions to build patient confidence in their reputed powers. The human body often did the rest. After all, a tribal healer worked hard to build patient belief in his, or her, powers. During their apprenticeship with veteran practitioners, medicine men spent nearly a year working on a solemn look, "as if he were the possessor of knowledge quite hidden from ordinary men."

However, Amerindian shamans did much to stack the deck in their favor, especially when it came to the healing arts. They used spies called "dreamers" to gain as much information as possible, regarding patient illnesses and symptoms. (Perhaps this was also the reason many Native American shamans had a fair track record locating lost items.) It was with the information provided by the "dreamers" that the shaman chose the pa-

tients he would attempt to heal. Those in an exceptionally bad way, healthwise, were probably on their own, with no assistance being rendered by the medicine man, or woman. A failure to heal could bring a tribal shaman a serious loss in reputation among his, or her, people, or worse, a severe beating by distraught family members. Some of the methods used by shamans to diagnose illnesses were: scrying (staring into a bowl of water to discern illnesses via spirit aid), a head-lifting test performed on the patient (holding the patient's head and asking questions as to the source of illness, with careful sensitivity to the weight of the patient's head during the diagnostic survey), and the use of a hand held pendulum to divine a patient's health via the pendulum's motion in response to the shaman's questions. Eskimos and others were known to use this last method of diagnosis; it capitalized on the ideomotor effect (the unconscious involuntary movements of muscles due to suggestion.) However, we shouldn't feel superior to more magical thinking cultures, unless we can explain away the successful sale of Ouija boards in the Western World, with their popularity linked to the ideomotor effect.

5. Shamans: Of Dancing Dolls and Buried Men

Shamans have employed many ruses to convince the uninitiated of their awesome powers. One common trick of Amerindian medicine men, from Mexico to the Artic Circle, was to cause bobber type wooden heads to move around, guided by the mysterious forces summoned by the shaman. The unsuspecting witness never saw the hidden assistant who moved the figurines with almost invisible threads, nor did they suspect the stoic medicine man of manipulating the images himself by long hairs running from either his toes or his fingers. (This trick was practiced among the Ojibwa People.) However, one of the most famous exhibits of magic power was recorded by the early Spanish colonists in Mexico – the challenge of the sixteenth century conjurer, Tlacavepan, to have the Christians tell him how he made a doll dance in the palm of his hand, unaided by natural means. As worshiping Toltecs left clusters of fruit around him, Tlacavepan taunted missionaries observing his dazzling magical act "What manner of trick is this? Ha, why do you not understand it?" The magician Christopher Milbourne explains that sometimes small paper dolls are made to dance in the palms of modern street hucksters by means of a bent wire running from the base of the doll, underneath the street artist's calloused skin, to his second finger which controls the figure's movement. Was this Tlacavepan's secret to his doll magic?

On a more humorous note, one show of power by tribal wonder-workers went bad when an Amerindian man was buried alive before astonished spectators, which included his brother. The subject was first covered with embers and then with a layer of clay. Frantic, the man's brother was finally allowed to sift through the clay to search for his buried relative, by poking around with a stick. When the distraught family member's search revealed only glowing embers, he was sent to a neighboring town, miles away, only to find his brother resurrected from the grave, but strangely exhibiting burns on the body and some loss of hair. So what happened ?! The burns were probably due to the burned man not being quick enough in use of the escape tunnel that was previously dug to perform this miracle. A similar trick had once been tried in British India, minus burning embers, when a fakir promised to project his astral body two hundred miles away after he was buried in a coffin, to be seen there by the townspeople on the fifteenth day of his thirty day burial period! The ruling governor became suspicious of the performance of this feat, especially when two weeks was enough time to walk back on foot to the original burial site. Guards apprehended the fakir's assistants, and they were soon led to a secret tunnel entrance, hidden under a jar, which aided the fakir's escape from his burial coffin. The fakir was soon arrested and he was tried as a fraud.

6. Shamans as Rainmakers

I know this is the one you have all been waiting for! I hope I don't disappoint you. Shamans may have built great reputations as magical practitioners simply by possession of foreknowledge, as it relates to the weather. Some medicine men simply were probably better able to read the wind conditions, the cloud formations, and the humidity, than others in their tribe. It has been suggested by orthopedists that some of them may have felt the rains coming "in their bones" because of changes in barometric pressure that literally can be felt by those with arthritis. A funny feeling in the bones could have meant the right time to begin rainmaking rites for the medicine man.

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Our Next Meeting

A REALL Potluck Picnic!

Instead of our June meeting, we will be gathering for a potluck picnic at Dave McMaster's house. Bring your family for some food, fun and relaxation!

Directions to the REALL Picnic: From Springfield, take I-72 to Exit 104 (just east of K-Mart on Clear Lake). Turn right at the exit stop sign, and go 5 miles to Whispering Woods subdivision (it's on the right—there's a big sign—can't miss it), then to 401 Blane Court (there are only two streets).

Please RSVP to Dave McMaster at 217-364-5353 by June 28.

Springfield, Illinois
401 Blane Court
Saturday, June 30, 4:00 PM

www.reall.org

Free and Open to the Public

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