The Arizona Skeptic
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The Secret of the Challenger Secret Mission

By Michael A. Stackpole

I'm not sure if it is good or bad that, in looking at claims of the paranormal, I run across claims that astound me with their absurdity. By now, of course, claims of miraculous healings and alien kidnappers have become old hat. Sure, those stories often have interesting twists on them as one person tries to top other claims but, in general, the tales have become rather pedestrian. If I want creativity and originality I generally turn to writers who are paid for providing it.

As a result of my laid-back attitude about this stuff, I was taken completely unawares when I read the text of an ad placed in The Wickenburg Sun on 20 October 1988. (I got the material as part of a packet containing all sorts of goodies.) The disclaimer at the bottom of the ad reads "This is a paid advertisement. The 'From the Earth to the Sky' organization is entirely responsible for its content." Other material in the packet suggests the organization's real name is "From the Sky to the Earth" but the local Arizona group seems to also go by the name "UFO Multidimensional." This organization is also running 60 second spots on 910 AM KFYI, a Phoenix talk radio station.

The ad excerpts material from a book called "Apocalypsis [sic] and New Age" by Professor Pedro/Peter Romaniuk. The ad alleges:

What was the [Challenger shuttle's] secret mission? They transported a powerful THERMO-NUCLEAR MISSILE steered by one of the infrared laser [sic], highly advanced and sophisticated, with the purpose of investigating in depth the COMET OF HALLEY. The purpose of this mission was to hurl the missile at the comet and see what would happen(?)[sic] The SUPERIOR Intelligences said that throwing the missile at Halley's Comet would be the same as throwing it at life on Venus or Jupiter, namely, to take war into space among the civilizations who inhabit those planets and satellites. They communicated directly with the main countries on three occasions in that attempt to stop the attack on the comet. However, not being able to dissuade this criminal intention, the Challenger was immediately destroyed after its take-off. At the time of the explosion, millions of people were able to see a huge white parachute which was automatically released at the time of the explosion [sic], where the nuclear missile was, landing safely in the waters of the ocean near the launching base. The Challenger exploded at about 57,000 feet of altitude, (16.5 mi), with an acquired velocity of 3.181 kph. Thus, where did the parachute come from if it did not come from the Challenger? And considering the altitude, did it perhaps come from space. The Higher Intelligences would not cause death or destruction unless it could not be avoided, and even then, only to safeguard the indispensable order and equilibrium of the cosmic space. They are protected by a scientific technique of teleportation, from a Fourth Dimension, thanks to which the 7 ASTRONAUTS were taken out of the shuttle seconds before the explosion. They are alive. They will be returned in the very near future, when all of mankind will know and see them healthy and alive in the height of their youth.

Stunning, isn't it? On the basis of common knowledge, the idea that the shuttle might be hauling a nuclear missile into space isn't that far fetched. Furthmore, everyone knows that part of the reported payload was a satellite meant for the study of Halley's Comet. With the grand conspiracy theories even suggesting that we never made it to the moon, deception concerning the Challenger's real mission is not surprising. Really, how dare our politicians launch an attack on the cosmos!

Unfortunately for The Sky to the Earth folks, this theory has holes large enough to drive a Titan II ICBM through. Actually, that's the first problem. What missile were they using? A quick check of shuttle data notes the cargo bay is 60 feet long and 15 feet in diameter. This actually puts a number of our

nuclear missiles out of the running because they're just too big. The Titan II, for example is almost twice as long as the cargo bay. In fact, of the missiles currently in service in the US/NATO nations, only the Poseidon C3, Trident D-5 and Minuteman III[1] are viable candidates that will actually fit into the shuttle.

The Minuteman III and Trident D-5 both wash out as candidates when we look at the next problem. The shuttle's max payload is 65,000 lbs. The Trident is a real pig, weighting in at 120,000 lbs. The Minuteman III is a bit more svelte and comes in at a trim 67,900 lbs, still losing out. The Poseidon C-3 comes in at 58,000 lbs which allows for things like crew and supplies on the shuttle. Poseidon C-3 is it.

So, we have our missile and it's on the shuttle. Now we have to look at our target. Halley's Comet. The comet came within 39,000,000 miles of the Earth at its closest approach (April 11th). The Challenger went up on 28 January 1986, a good ten weeks before this event and we know the reported payload included a satellite meant for Halley's study. The theory is holding up.

Bang, we hit another problem. At burnout, a Poseidon C-3 travels Mach 10. That's 2.054 miles per second. That's a fair clip, but what is it to the distance to the comet? That puts the missile 219.76 days from its target. That means a C-3 would have had to have been launched back in September of 1985 if it was meant to hit its target. The Minuteman III travels roughly twice that fast at burnout (4.14 mps), which still puts it 109 days out from the target. In short, none of the missiles that could have been launched to hit the comet were launched in time. (These missiles have a range of 2,875 miles and 8,078 miles respectively and use inertial not laser guidance systems.)[2]

If this is true, the nagging question of what was a Halley study satellite doing on the Challenger anyway still crops up. The Halley-Spartan spacecraft was indeed on the shuttle and was lost during the horrible explosion of the space vehicle. The reason it was going up on the Challenger is because it was never meant for a flyby on the Comet Halley-Spartan was a low Earth orbit satellite and all of its study was going to be performed from that orbit.

The Poseidon C-3 carries 10 50-kiloton warheads. Halley's Comet masses out at 100 billion tons with a density of between .1 and .3 that of water. What 500 kilotons of blast would do to the Comet and whether or not the MIRV vehicles could survive traveling through the ion cloud surrounding the comet is still open to question. I have included this information for the further study of anyone so inclined.

A couple of small matters from the advertisement remain to be addressed. First, the explosion that ripped the Challenger to pieces would have shredded one of these missiles and have dumped plutonium all over the Gulf Coast. Second, concerning the parachute that came down after the explosion – the parachute that the aliens must have teleported in from the Fourth Dimension – I don't recall ever having seen it in the videotapes of the accident I saw. I do know, well after debris had stopped hitting the water, divers were sent in by the Navy, but I don't recall their having been dropped using parachutes.

Lastly, the question of where did the astronaut bodies come from if the aliens teleported them into the Fourth Dimension must be asked. In a related piece of information in the From the Sky to the Earth packet, I found the following:

The Man of the Earth in his present state of evolution is made of one part astral and 3 parts "matter." The more evolved human beings are made of 2 parts "astral" and 2 parts "matter." Our Brothers of the fourth dimension are made of THREE parts "astral" and one "matter."

This leads me to believe that, when the astronauts were teleported into the Fourth Dimension, they left most of their body behind in the doomed Challenger. As sick and disgusting as this idea is, in some ways it would be nice – for their families – if it were true.

Overall examination of this claim leads me to wonder why beings of superior intelligence couldn't have figured out that the missile would never hit its target? I wonder why they just didn't teleport the missile into the Fourth Dimension and then teleport it into the sun? I wonder why they just didn't teleport themselves out to the place

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where the missile's momentum lost its battle against gravity and began to slide back toward Earth?

Most of all it makes me wonder where these strange ideas come from and why people believe them?

The author thanks John-Allen Price for his information on shuttle and missiles and Gary Mechler for his information concerning the Comet.

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1 The Minuteman III is 59' 8.5" long giving no room for the spin table needed to launch it. The problem is that solid fuel rockets do not burn evenly. A spin table is used to impart a spin to all boosted objects being launched from the shuttle so the uneven burning will not have an effect on the launching. Video tapes of satellite launchings confirm this.

2 Given that neither missile reaches escape velocity of 7 mps, they would, in fact, slow because of the pull of the earth's gravity and probably would never make it to the comet in any event.

Meeting Announcement

Our April Meeting will be held on Friday, April 6 at 6 pm at the Jerry's on the west side of Rural/Scottsdale Road between McDowell and the river bottom. Our speaker will be Dr. Robert Deitz, Professor Emeritus of Geology at ASU. His presentation is titled **The Sacred and Profane History of The World**. Dr. Deitz is a well known thorn in the side of Scientific Creationists and regularly appears on KFYI and KTAR radio programs concerning the debate between science and religion as it concerns the history of the world. He is the author of **Satiricon**, a humorous look at the history of the world from a Creationist point of view.

Dissension in the Ranks of the Institute for Creation Research

Jim Lippard

Two recent articles in the Institute for Creation Research (ICR)'s monthly series of technical monographs, **Impact**, indicate that there may be a schism developing in the ICR faculty. Specifically, Dr. Gerald E. Aardsma, head of the Astro/Geophysics Department of the ICR Graduate School, has been advocating positions at odds with the many of the rest of the ICR members.

In the May 1988 Impact (#179), titled "Has the Speed of Light Decayed?", Aardsma debunks the work of Australian creationist Barry Setterfield, who claims that measurements of the speed of light over the last three centuries show that the value of c has been decreasing. Aardsma's reanalysis shows no decay trend and he also points out that two of the earliest data points Setterfield uses are erroneously high. Aardsma makes a more extensive critique of Setterfield in an article in the June 1988 Creation Research Society Quarterly. (For more details on the creationist theory of speed of light decay, see Lippard (1989), Brown (1989), Lippard (forthcoming), and Brown (forthcoming).) While this looks prima facie like the ICR as a whole disclaims the theory of speed of light decay (which would probably be a wise move), this is not the case. At the ICR's "Back to Genesis" seminar in December 1989, the speed of light decay theory was endorsed. When I asked Dr. Michael Girouard of the ICR, who endorsed c decay in his presentation, about this, he stated that not everything Gerald Aardsma says may be correct. He did not say whether the ICR takes an official position on c decay, but he did try to defend it against my critical questioning. After the public question and answer session I asked Girouard if he could provide me with a copy of a technical report on the speed of light decay which he had made reference to. He said he would, and that I should simply write him in care of the ICR. I wrote him a letter on December 5, 1989, and have still not received a response.

The second article of note is also by Aardsma, and appeared in the March 1989 issue of **Impact** (#189), titled "Myths Regarding Radiocarbon Dating." In this article, Aardsma debunks six "myths" about radiocarbon dating. One of his myths is of particular interest because it is a myth which is propounded by the ICR. "Myth #3: The shells of live freshwater clams have been radiocarbon dated in excess of 1600 years old, clearly showing that the radiocarbon dating technique is not valid." Aardsma quite rightly points out that such cases involve clams whose shells have been contaminated by carbon atoms from dissolved limestone, which artificially inflates the radiocarbon

date. But this claim is made in Duane Gish's "Have You Been Brainwashed?" tract, which is still sold by the ICR. (This booklet contains other inaccurate statements which Gish has never recanted, though in his 1988 debate with geologist Ian Plimer (see Lippard (1990), p. 4) he stated that the pamphlet was 17 years old and implied that it shouldn't be taken to represent his views today.)

Aardsma, unlike many creationists, defends the accuracy of radiocarbon dating for dating objects within the last few thousand years. A section of his CRSQ article on speed of light decay uses arguments based on radiocarbon dating. And Aardsma is in a position to be confident in radiocarbon dating--he received his Ph.D. from the University of Toronto involving research in accelerator mass spectrometry, a technique now widely used for radiocarbon dating.

Aardsma is to be complimented for providing self-criticism of the creationist movement, something it has great need for. It remains to be seen, however, what effect his writing will have, since the ICR itself has obviously not taken it to heart.

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HGH 3X and The New England Journal of Medicine

Mark Adkins

By now, most of us have seen the commercials touting a dietary aid called "HGH-3X," manufactured and sold by Hi-Health through its chain of health-food stores. Recently I saw one of their television ads in which it was implied that an article in the 28 December 1989 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine supports claims for HGH-3X. "The prestigious New England Journal of Medicine reports that subjects receiving recombinant HGH (rhGH) experienced a significant decrease in body fat," states the perky narrator of the commercial.

I found it hard to believe that NEJM would deign to notice, much less tout, this health-food store product. As a result I went to the main branch of the Phoenix Public Library, which has an extensive collection of periodicals, and examined the issue in question.

In volume 321, no. 26, on page 1797, there is indeed an article dealing with rhGH, but this has nothing to do with HGH-3X. The article is a published study on the effect of recombinant human grown hormone (rhGH) on the body composition of individuals deficient in this homone. This hormone, rhGH, is a strictly regulated substance: not something you can go down to your local health-food store and purchase.

When I asked Hi-Health about this, they admitted that HGH-3X contains no rhGH, but rather, four protein amino acids. (Editorial note: all foods contain amino acids as amino acids are what make up the DNA double-helix, among other bodily structures.)

Hi-Health claimed that HGH-3X works "by stimulating the pituitary gland to produce more rhGH." The NEJM article said absolutely nothing about the effect of protein amino acids on the pituitary gland. Hi-Health went on to say that "HGH-3X" continas nothing but foods."

But Is It Science?

edited by Michael Ruse
1988, Prometheus Books, 406 pp
Reviewed by Jim Lippard

University of Guelph philosopher of science Michael Ruse has put together a collection of essays which focus on "the philosophical question in the creation/evolution controversy"; that is, do creationism (or evolution) satisfy any reasonable criteria of what it is to be a science.

The book is divided into four parts: the nineteenth-century background of creationism, evolution today, the creationist challenge, and the philosophical aftermath. The first section is a collection of writings including the first two chapter of the book of Genesis, an excerpt from William Paley's "Natural Theology" giving an argument for the existence of God from design, a short selection from Darwin's "On the Origin of Species." Also included is Ruse's "The

Relationship between Science and Religion in Britain, 1830-1870."

The second section describes the state of evolution in the 1980s. Chapters by Stephen Jay Gould, John Maynard Smith, and Richard Dawkins debate the Eldredge/Gould theory of "punctuated equilibria." Karl Popper's attack on Darwinism is printed here, along with a reply by Ruse. Ruse writes on "Is There a Limit to Our Knowledge of Evolution?" and geneticist Francisco Ayala describes "The Mechanisms of Evolution."

In the third section some of the arguments of creationists are presented. First, Ronald Numbers gives an excellent description of the twentieth century development of "creation science" and its current institutions. Michael Ruse presents a summary of Henry Morris' book Scientific Creationism. Duane Gish's "Creation, Evolution, and the Historical Evidence" is reprinted, as are the texts of Arkansas' "Act 590 of 1981," Ruse's testimony before the court, and Judge Overton's decision. The choice of Gish's article is rather unfortunate, as it was written in 1973 and contains statements which Gish now disclaims (such as his claim that there are no fossils in Precambrian rocks).

Finally, in the fourth section, the "philosophical question" arises. In actuality there is more than one question here. Besides the question of whether or not creationism is a science, philosophers of science Larry Laudan and Philip Quinn raise the question of whether or not even a set of criteria for finding the "demarcation between science and non-science" is possible. They argue that it is not, and that all criteria which have thus far been proposed either admit things we do not wish to consider science or shut out things we do wish to consider science. They specifically argue that Judge Overton's decision overturning the Arkansas creationism act was based on faulty reasoning and an erroneous set of criteria for deciding what is and is not science. (Yet neither Quinn nor Laudan are creationists. Laudan states that "if any doctrine in the history of science has ever been falsified, it is the set of claims associated with 'creation-science.'" Quinn writes that "'creation-science' is, at best, not just bad science; it is dreadful science.")

While some exchanges of articles between Ruse and Laudan are printed, Ruse unfortunately decided not to respond to the final salvos of Laudan and Quinn. This leaves the reader with the impression that they are correct and that Ruse has surrendered. Yet while I think both Quinn and Laudan make excellent points against Overton's line of argument, I think their case against a "criteria for demarcation" is overstated. If, as both Quinn and Laudan admit, one can make a distinction between "good science" and "bad science," why cannot one also make a distinction between "science" and "non-science"? It seems that once "bad science" gets bad enough, there is no point in even calling it science. But perhaps, on the other hand, they simply believe that the boundaries of science and non-science are fuzzy (perhaps overlapping) ones in which every claimant to the title of "science" does not necessarily have any single characteristic in common with all other such claimants.

This seems plausible, but even such a position does not necessitate abandoning use of the term "scientific," as Laudan would have us do. Such fuzzy boundaries seem to be present in many "natural kind" terms, yet that does not make these terms any less useful. And, getting back to the question at hand, it appears to me that creationism does not satisfy any reasonable definition of "science," even allowing for fuzzy boundaries. In effect, Laudan is arguing that because not all birds fly and have wishbones, and because other creatures fly, it makes no sense to say that a dog is not a bird. I beg to differ.

What is Occam's Razor?
Michael A. Stackpole

Christy Willis wrote recently to ask a very good question "What is Occam's Razor?" This is a good question because Skeptics tend to toss that term around the way soldiers toss grenades. After all, once a phenomena has been sliced to bits by Occam's Razor, what else can one say about it?

The 1989 Information Please Almanac says this about Occam's Razor: "[It is] the philosophical maxim by which William of Occam, the 14th century Franciscan, has become best-known..." It has been quoted in many forms, the most familiar being "Entities are not to be multiplied without necessity."

Bertrand Russell restated it in this more modern format, "If everything in some science can be interpreted without assuming

this or that hypothetical entity, there is no ground for assuming it." In short, the solution that comes with the least amount of extra nonsense attached is best.

This principle applies very well to the study of the paranormal. Take, for example, the case of a haunted house. The people living there report all sorts of strange noises, especially after the sun has gone down. There is a story about the house that says someone was murdered in it about 30 years ago and the current residents feel the noises are because of the ghost of that victim.

To explain the noises, the residents have said a ghost exists in the house. This means, de facto, we have several things assumed that may or may not be valid assumptions. To have a ghost we have to agree that people can exist on in a spirit form after death. We also, in this case, have to agree that a death took place in the house. Moreover, we have to assume that this spirit form is capable of creating physical effects (sounds) and is attempting to communicate or disrupt the family in some way. The reasoning behind this last point leads to a whole new list of assumptions, and so it goes.

The application of Occam's Razor helps clear out extraneous material. What are we looking for in this house? We are looking for the source of strange sounds at night. Could it be that the sounds are just natural, caused by the house's cooling at night (since that is when they are reported)? Could it be that the residents, being relatively new to the house, just have not gotten used to the sounds so are seeking a "solution" to something that is not a problem?

Instead of hunting a ghost, which requires us to accept as fact a bunch of hypothetical postulates we can search for a solution that is more practical. It is interesting to note that in some cases, people who are in over their heads in terms of mortgages or leases have used the incidence of a "haunting" to try to break their lease. Banks and landlords frown on this sort of nonsense, but it does happen.

Of course, it is true that the simplest solution is not always correct. The beauty of the scientific method is that once we have a possible solution, we test for it and see if it works. In the case of our haunted house, we might make recordings of the noises for a whole year and compare the noises as the seasons change. If the noises stay consistent while the warming/cooling cycle speeds up and slows down, we have to find another solution to the problem.

But that's okay: we've never maintained we know the answer to everything – just that we have a way to find the answers, or eliminate the improbable answers.

Editorial Blathering

We missed getting a February issue out because of a technical problem and we *are* trying to put out a *monthly* newsletter. As a result we want to keep it shorter and more timely than when we were doing a larger, bi-monthly newsletter. To this end, some short articles would be very welcome – 2000 words or less. (That's 8 typed, double-spaced pages on a normal typewriter.) If you have a computer we can make arrangements so the articles don't have to be retyped. Jim Lippard and I write unforgivably long...

An article on the Phoenix Skeptics appeared in the Arizona Business Gazette on 23 February 1990. It was written by Paul Schneider and gives a good overview on the group. It runs two whole pages and, among other things, mentions some of our predictions for 1990.

On 8 March 1990 I appeared as a guest on the Jami McFerren radio show on KTAR. Her show runs from midnight to 4 am, but I was only there from 1-3 am. Those of you who remember Jami from KFYI might have gained the impression that she was a dyed-in-the-wool, crystal-toting, New-ager. Sorry to disappoint you, but she's too intelligent to be sucked into buying this drivel – and mistaking good interview techniques for collaboration is something we Skeptics would do well to watch out for.

The show went very well. We managed to keep the tone light while we discussed things from Channeling and Ramtha to Whitley Streiber and local psychics. Right in the middle of the show, in response to a caller, we did have a discussion about the need for critical thinking. I was given more than ample time to make my points and Jami's questions and comments directed me to explain things fully.

We do have the show on tape, as well as taped copies of other radio shows done locally. If you want copies, send us – or at a meeting give me – 3 c-90 or c-100 cassettes and $2 for postage and I will fill your tapes with various programs, including the exposure of a local

preacher's "cure" for AIDS

Arizonans occasionally make the news in other places for things concerning the paranormal. Lyle Rapacki is one such individual. And what a splash he made!

Lyle describes himself in promotional material this way: "With training and experience as a sworn police officer and a background in political intelligence and analysis, Lyle understands the difficult and sensitive world of investigations. He has applyed this traiing to the study of the occult, Satan worship and associated movements in the United States.

"Upon leaving the investigative field, Mr. Rapacki returned to school receiving clinical and medical training and credentialling in the area of Medical Psychology. Pursuing a private practice as a Christian counselor, Lyle began to see patients who had suffered from exposure to the occult and satanism. Since 1982, Lyle has worked with, and researched the growing and multi-faceted problems of Satan worship in America. A consultant to law enforcement and memebers of the criminal-justice system nation-wide, Lyle provides public presentations and workshops, and private consultations for those combatting this diabolical attack."

According to the Anchorage Daily News article of 14 December 1989, "[Alaskan] Department of Corrections employees who attended Rapacki's Law Enforcement Awareness Seminar on Satanism and Occult Crimes will not receive training points, said Bill Parker, special assistant to the commissioner."

According to the article, "...officials who looked into speaker Lyle J. Rapacki's background found that he was not qualified to teach investigative techniques to law-enforcement officers." Moreover, a state investigator found, "Rapacki had perjured himself in an Oklahoma trial where he served as an expert witness on satanism, and that he had publicly lied about the death of a teen-age girl. In a televised interview, Rapacki had described her sacrificial murder at the hands of Satanists. He later admitted that the girl was not dead."

The Phoenix Skeptics are in the process of gathering more data about Mr. Rapacki for a future report. Rapacki's "ministry," called INTEL, is based in Flagstaff. Any information about Lyle, or the activities of anyone else touting themselves a cult experts is welcome.

Who Are We?

by Michael A. Stackpole

From time to time, as the executive director of the Phoenix Skeptics, I am asked "What sort of people do you allow into the Skeptics?" The question comes in various forms, from members, potential members and the press in an attempt to figure out who we are and what makes us tick.

The question is logical. To outsiders who enjoy hearing titillating stories about Bigfoot or UFOs, we seem like a humorless bunch who try to quash what is so obviously silly. To members, the concern seems to be based in wanting to insure that their trust in the group will not be betrayed.

Most of you have not seen the charter of the Phoenix Skeptics, but it defines very well our purpose.

The Phoenix Skeptics endorses the principle that the scientific method is the most reliable approach for obtaining valid knowledge about our world and universe. However, the Phoenix Skeptics does not endorse the *a priori* rejection of claims.

Later in the charter we claim to the right to subject paranormal, occult and fringe claims to "tests of science, logic and common sense." We also resolve to act as a clearinghouse for information and, as an organization, "to promote critical thinking and the scientific method."

In short, we're interested in hearing even the most outlandish claims and looking into them. I think subjecting claims to the test of common sense cannot be underestimated, but following up with solid scientific or evidentiary proof of our conclusions is vital. If not, we end up being no better than those who make the groundless claims we seek to clarify.

More to the point of who we are, the charter defines what we want in form of members for the Skeptics:

Membership in the Phoenix Skeptics is open to anyone in the greater Phoenix area who shares [our] concerns and objectives. Members' views may represent a broad spectrum of beliefs on the possibility of paranormal phenomena, from completely impossible to highly probable. However, all members should hold in common the principle that truth can be established only through rational inquiry, while

misinformation, irrationalness, and fraud can only block the way. Membership is open to all persons regardless of race, sex, ethnic group, age, or religion.

That last sentence is very important because we don't want to be a group that can be easily dismissed with a label like Atheist, or Fundamentalist or Mens' Club or radical whackoid tree-hugging loonies The broader the base of our membership, the broader our acceptance within the community, and the easier it is for us to get our message out.

It is also important to note that members are going to have differing views on bits and pieces of the paranormal as the New Age is not one item, but a legion of fringe disciplines that get grouped under one banner. While I might think Cryptozoology is neat and has produced some proof of weird animals living in the wilds of Africa another member can think it's all nonsense What is important is that we all accept that only through good solid scientific inquiry can we discover the truth.

There is one caveat to all this The Phoenix Skeptics is **not** a group that seeks to investigate doctrinal matters based in religion. We'll look into claims of faith healing to verify or deny them and the same goes for claims of Cult crimes, but no further. Even CSICOP spun off the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion to handle questions of theology. Those with interests in this direction are quite welcome to form a group for that purpose, but we've got our hands full with enough whackoes as it is now.

"I don't know," is a far better answer to a question about the paranormal than a blanket, "Nope, no way is it possible." We would be untrue to our principles if we said in each and every case, that UFOs have **not** landed on Earth. Instead we can say that in each and every case investigated in a thorough manner, a mundane explanation has been found for the UFO phenomena As for the other cases, either evidence is insufficient for investigation or we are unable to explain what happened.

Contrary to the opinions of some people, to admit we cannot explain everything is **not** a defeat for reason and good sense. Instead we are avoiding the trap so many of our foes fall into. Accepting our ignorance reminds us that we are questers after the truth, not its sole guardians

It gets tough sometimes I recall, in a radio debate, an expert on astrology saying to me, "Clearly you know nothing of astrology so how can I have a discussion with you?" I cannot recall my reply, but I wish it had been. "If you know so bloody much, how come you can't answer the simple questions someone one as ignorant as me can ask?" When pressed, that expert admitted that he did not know what made astrology work, but he *knew* that astrology *did* work.

What is important about the Phoenix Skeptics is that we all agree that we want more proof that an "expert's blanket assurance" that something exists before we buy what is being said. We seek to understand what is behind unusual claims. That unity in purpose is why we've come together. Other differences of opinion, background and views are unimportant when we hold dear the desire to put claims to the test of reason

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