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For past issues, bibliography, links to other skeptics, and more, check out the SORT Website:

www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html

SORT's Next Meeting

**Wednesday,
April 25, 2001
7:00 P.M.**

La Sierra Community Center,
Sierra 1 Room
5325 Engle Road
Carmichael, CA

The *SORTified* NEWS

"Doubt is the beginning of wisdom."

—Clarence Darrow

April 2001 SORT Meeting: *Lurking Beneath Your Feet* **UNDERGROUND WORLDS AND THE CREATURES THEREIN**

It starts preying on us at an early age. There are monsters lurking under our bed, coming up from who knows where. The religious around us talk about Heaven and Hell. Later on we hear the myths and legends, Orpheus enters the Underground, malformed dwarfs slither out of deep holes leading into strange places. Ancient inhabitants of Atlantis recreate their magnificent cities in the hollow center of the Earth. The "Hidden Masters" plot the fate of the world from their subterranean headquarters. The Nazi party fanatics rebuild their armies in secret bases deep inside the Earth—the bases can only be accessed from a gigantic opening at the North Pole.

Tales of the underground have darkened the human consciousness for centuries. Fantastic pseudo-scientific theories about a "Hollow Earth" and increasingly complex internal arrangements of the Sun and planets revolving around the inside of the Earth's crust continue to boggle the rational mind. What's it all about, this fascination with the dark places of the underground? What is it about human consciousness that continually draws us towards such subterranean beliefs? Join us at this month's SORT meeting as we take

a look at some of these fantastic tales, myths and theories—and discuss "Underground Worlds and the Creatures Therein."

MEETING DETAILS

We'll meet as usual in La Sierra Community Center, at 5325 Engle Road in Carmichael—but in the facility's new meeting room. You can park at the Engle Road side of the building (as many of you usually do). Then, as you enter the hallway, follow the SORT meeting signs and take a left between the two gyms—you'll find SORT in the "Sierra 1" room, located at the end of a short, well-lit walkway. See you there!

TOTAL HEALTH EXPO

A Report by Ron Fredrickson

The Sacramento Convention Center was the site of the Total Health Expo from March 30th through April 1st. This was my first opportunity to attend a large trade fair of this type; those I attended previously in Kenosha, Wisconsin, were comparatively small. The opinions expressed here are my own and not necessarily those of the devotees of complementary medicine.

The vendors were selling unproved nostrums, dietary aids, procedures, and devices to an apparently receptive audience. One vendor was explaining to me

about her product called 'Hydrox-ygen' which seemed to boil down (an appropriate expression for water) to a 'special' sea water.

Another vendor gave me a demonstration of his chakra stones (similar in appearance to new age crystals I would guess) based on Yoga. He claimed that there are six chakras from the top to the bottom of my spine, and each corresponds to a part of the body. He then took another stone, suspended from a string, and let it rotate above a chakra stone. If it rotated in one direction, say counterclockwise, all was well with that part of the body, but if it rotated in the other direction all was not well. This simple explanation may not be entirely correct because I don't truly understand these deeper aspects of health science.

Want to know more about colonic cleansing, network spinal analysis, chakras, alchemical awakenings, human energy fields and auras, rolfing, reiki, quantum connective healing, homeopathy, intuitive energy medicine, yin and yang (no, that's not the name of the original Siamese twins), body detoxification, applied kinesiology, nutraceuticals, herbal treatments for what ails you, etc., etc., ad nauseam? Well, you're too late to learn about all of these marvelous things this year, but never mind because Total Health Expo will return—you can count on it.

Among what I would recognize as legitimate booths at this show were the Sacramento Fire Department, Kaiser Permanente, Lifedata Systems, Accent Care, the Beachcomber Motel from Fort Bragg, Senior Nutrition Services, and St. Helena Hospital. There probably were a few others who dealt in something besides unproven panaceas, and I suppose that's not bad

out of about 90 exhibitors.

Freebies were plentiful. I got refrigerator magnets, miniature first aid kits, slogan buttons, letter openers, two dietary supplement tablets, coconut foot creme, many small glasses of purified water, pencils and ball point pens (at my age a lifetime supply), and two audio tapes. The two dietary supplement tablets containing 73 listed ingredients, including bee pollen.

One of the tapes was devoted to ridding ourselves of bodily toxins by colonic cleansing (euphemism for enema). Did you realize that if you eat three times per day you must have three bowel movements per day? Neither did I, but I'm certainly glad now that I don't snack between meals. Did you realize that constipation can result in allergies, arthritis, headaches (possibly from pressure on the brain?), insomnia, rash, varicose veins? Neither did I and, mercifully, I haven't given you the entire list. When one of the testimonials for colonic cleansing dwelt on the "gook" which came out after the treatment, I was glad that meal time wasn't approaching.

The other tape was devoted to the greatest cause in America—weight reduction—and mentioned the many products available from the sponsoring company to accomplish this goal. I was surprised to hear that they still had good words to say about ephedra, now generally recognized to be dangerous, especially for those with hypertension or cardiac problems.

One bright spot of the day was the fact that senior citizens didn't have to pay on Friday for all of this enlightenment.

See you there next year?

The Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT) . . .

- Is dedicated to the promotion of rational thinking in all areas of life.
- Upholds the superiority of science over the mystical.
- Promotes and supports all efforts of intelligent communication that provide a counterpoint to the strong waves of anti-rationalism, irrationalism, and mysticism sweeping the world today.

Toward these ends we . . .

- Host a monthly discussion group.
- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Host special events, talks, and presentations.
- Host a web page.

While SORT began with and still continues to be concerned with the promotion of critical thinking in areas dealing with the pseudo-scientific, the paranormal, the mystical, and the fraudulent, we strongly promote critical thinking in *all* areas of human thought and endeavor.

The core of SORT activities is our discussion group. The art of intelligent conversation is not dead. We at SORT believe that rational conversation--the meeting of minds, the free exchange of ideas and the provocative stimulation of critical questions-- is one of the most civilized and enlightening of all human activities.

SORT discussion topics have ranged from UFOs to the Holocaust, from "alternative medicine" to the problems in communicating science to the public, from classic and recent cons and scams to the teaching of critical thinking. Our discussions are hosted by one of the SORT founders, and participants are by no means limited to experts (although they may include experts) but are made up of intelligent and questioning people concerned with the topic of the evening.

MORE ON THE “NEW AGE”

As you can see from Ron Fredrickson's article, the “New Age”—which really isn't so new anymore and never was anything more than a hodgepodge of age-old nonsense—continues to run rampant. Last month we gave you a few titles to help you keep in the rather ragged groove of new age thought. This month we've been asked to offer a few specific titles specifically critical of “New Age” thinking (forgive the oxymoron). *Thinking Critically About New Age Ideas* by William D. Gray is a short book that should be on every skeptic's bookshelf. Published by Wadsworth Publishing, it's really a short course in critical thinking centered around the not so critical thinking of new age claimants. It offers perfect ammunition for the next time you get into a discussion with a believer. You probably won't win any points with them (you never can) but at least you will know that you're on the high ground.

Martin Gardner's classic *The New Age* is another good bet. Gardner's essays and articles in this one focus primarily on the favorite topics on new-agers, everything from channeling to talking to your plants. As far as we know no one has yet begun to channel departed magnolias but it may be coming. As always with Gardner the prose is sprightly and the thinking lucid. Prometheus publishes this one.

Henry Gordon's *Channeling into the New Age* (also Prometheus) is another good bet and it focuses primarily on new age gurus. His dissection of Shirley MacLaine is a particular delight here. These should get you started. And finally, an

apology, the bibliography on our web page is woefully behind these days but we promise as soon as we get through our current deadline hassles with our own publishers to try and get it all up to date and annotated. Yeah, yeah, we know, that's what we always say—but honestly folks, would anyone try to fool you?



ANOTHER VISIT TO NEVERNEVERLAND

And, since we are on to the New-Age schtick . . .

Our favorite weird media story this month comes from the *San Francisco Chronicle* online edition. The dateline here is Parowan, Utah, (04/10/01). According to the *Chron*, two men—Peter Halvorson, 54, and William Lyons, 56—pleaded guilty to practicing medicine without a license and were fined \$200 and placed on three years probation when they admitted to drilling holes in a woman's skull “in a procedure they said was intended to restore her to her childhood buoyancy.” The *Chron* goes on to inform us that “Some new age followers believe the centuries-old drilling practice promotes higher consciousness and relieves depression.” Apparently the women had traveled from England for the operation which was broadcast on ABC's 20/20 telecast in February 2000. The prosecutor in the case, Scott Burns is presently investigating “whether an ABC reporter encouraged the surgery, which could lead to charges.”

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About the Founding Members:

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 34 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

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The story goes on to say that Halvorson had bored a hole in his own head 29 years ago with a power drill. In addition to their fines and probation both Halvorson and Lyons had been ordered to undergo psychiatric evaluations.

You know, sometimes you can take this new-age “open-mindedness” stuff just a little too far.



SPEAKING OF PECULIAR OBSESSIONS . . .

We've always said that you can find just about every weird thing imaginable on the Web. We suspect that this one is tongue-in-cheek but it walks a pretty precarious line. Take a look at <http://users.1mi.net/tcs55/> and try to figure it out for yourself. The Site is called "BUS PLUNGE! : Real people, real plunges. And becoming disturbingly so." Yes, it's just what it sounds like—a bizarre collection of press stories and personal narratives about bus plunges and crashes around the world.

Is it paranoia? Is it a put-on of paranoia? Is it another conspiracy nut, or a put-on of conspiracy theories? Or maybe it's just plain nutty and in questionable taste? We can't figure it out—maybe you can.

AND FOR SOMETHING A LITTLE MORE UPBEAT

Just in from CSICOP is an announcement that a new *Skeptical Inquirer* series will soon be running on the Discovery Science Channel. The series, hosted by William B. Davis of *X-Files* will consist of 10 three-minute shorts covering such timely topics as acupuncture, astrology, hauntings, homeopathy, and magnetic therapy. The three minute segments running throughout the day will feature such CSICOP regulars as Paul Kurtz, Joe Nickell, Jim Alcock, and Robert Park, who's book "Voodoo Science" we recently reviewed in this newsletter. It's another step in CSICOP's important effort to reach out to the younger generation. As the authors of many science and critical thinking books for young adults we know first hand how badly needed such

efforts are and we heartily applaud CSICOP for their splendid and continuing efforts.

SORT PICNIC IN JUNE—PLAN ON IT!

Like to spend some recreational time with other SORT supporters? Get to know some of your fellow skeptics a little better? Join us then on Sunday, June 24th at the first annual SORT potluck picnic. It's going to be a great time just to relax, hang loose and enjoy good food. We will return to our regular last Wednesday of the month meeting time in July. We will be talking about it a little bit more at this month's SORT meeting. Also, look for more information coming up in the May *SORT-ified News*. In the meantime mark your calendar!

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SORT

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*"Educating ourselves
and educating others"*

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