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 Rational Thinking
 (SORT)**

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SORT’s Next Meeting:

**Wednesday, May 26, 1999
 7:00 P.M.**
 La Sierra Community Center,
 Room 415
 5325 Engle Road
 Carmichael, CA

The *SORTified* NEWS

MAY 26th MEETING— HOLOCAUST DENIERS

The Holocaust is almost universally recognized as one of the darkest hours of our century, and yet there exists a cadre of people who claim it never happened.

The existence of Holocaust deniers poses a difficult, perplexing and often emotional subject—one your SORT editors have experienced recently in researching a book they have contracted to write on genocide. In looking at the already ghastly question, “Why the Holocaust?” we have found ourselves running up against the phenomenon of denial. What is it all about? Who are these holocaust deniers? What do they believe? What do they want?

You may already be familiar with some of the names—Ernst Zundel. Arthur Butz, David Irving, Mark Weber and Bradley R. Smith—but there are many more out there, producing badly printed pamphlets or well designed web sites.

What is this phenomenon all about—what fuels it, and why does it continue to grow? At the May 26th Meeting of SORT, we will be taking a look at this subject, as well as some printed papers and web pages (including the notorious Zundelsite) produced by the Holocaust deniers.

Bring your thoughts and ideas and join us for coffee cookies and conversation—all free. And, while the conversation may be strong, we promise that the coffee won’t be quite as strong as it was at last months meeting—Ray has promised to let someone else make it this time.

We meet at 7:00 p.m. at La Sierra Community Center on Engle Road in Carmichael.

NOSTRADAMUS IN JAPAN

No, it’s not only in America. According to Associated Press writer Joji Sakurai in a piece carried on <http://www.sfgate.com> (the combined San Francisco *Chronicle*, *Examiner* and KRON-TV web site), Nostradamus fever is sweeping Japan. Sakurai reports that the nation is currently caught “under an odd spell—the apocalyptic preachings of the 16th century soothsayer Nostradamus.” Sakurai writes, “Bookshelves are lined with Nostradamus spinoffs. Celebrities comment earnestly on his predictions. The Internet is awash with thousands of Japanese Web sites devoted to the French prophet of doom. . . . Every week, millions of Japanese TV viewers tune in to watch a couple of men building a bunker for the end of the world.”

Sakurai also reports that a best selling Japanese book on Nostradamus hit the stands

during the oil crisis of the 1970s and that another wave of interest in Nostradamus emerged during the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf. Currently, though, Sakurai says, "The current gloom of Japan's recession and jitters about the international situation...has created the most virulent Nostradamus boom yet."



According to Sakurai, a recent Japanese book "even purports to have discovered 'through scientific research' the precise hour and date of the great cataclysm: 5 p.m., July 24, 1999."

While Sakurai states that few people in Japan are seriously preparing for the end of the world, and most find the present Nostradamus boom just an "entertaining distraction," the "Supreme Truth" cult responsible for the deaths of 13 people in a 1995 subway gas attack has also been increasing in popularity recently. The cult, according to Sakurai, is believed to have been inspired by Nostradamus's writings.

Sakurai finishes the article with this observation by the Japanese anthropologist Yoshida, "More and more Japanese are turning to superstition...people's anxieties are pushing them to search for answers in the supernatural."

Sound familiar?

More Stops along the Net: THE NAZI GENERAL FROM BEYOND

Wandering through the many worlds of the net can sometimes be a surrealistic experience. Following the rabbit down one hole recently we discovered the fascinating "channeling" activities of Marina Michaels McInnis. While McInnis juggles the usual assortment of "higher entities" and spokespeople from the other plane it seems she has also been visited by "a certain German general (and I didn't get his name)," adds McInnis, who "wanted to set the record straight." What follows in McInnis's account is an absurdist monologue from the WW2 German general that outshines the "Springtime for Hitler in Germany" numbers in Mel Brooks's *The Producers* for sheer perversity. Rambling through a sixteen page account beginning with his escape to Argentina after the war, McInnis's "general" then proceeds to explain the secret motivations of the Third Reich ("we did the magic"); the real meaning of the concentration camps "which were of astrological points of power;" and the dramatic battle of "the

forces" of love and hate within the hearts of the Nazis themselves. Or at least this is apparently what this exceedingly weird and disjointed monologue is all about. We have to admit that it is rather difficult to tell. Perhaps McInnis's astral connections were bad that day. In any event, you might want to take a look for yourself. Connect at:

http://www.sonic.net/~marina/channel/jan23_96.html.

DAWKINS-PINKER DEBATE

Moving from the ridiculous to the intellectually comprehensible, you might want to look in at:

<http://www.edge.org/documents/archive/edge53.html> for a fascinating discussion between Richard Dawkins and Steven Pinker titled "Is Science Killing The Soul?" The transcript comes from a February 10, 1999 debate at the Westminster Central Hall in London chaired by Tim Radford, science editor of *The Guardian*. It's a fascinating and thought-provoking piece of reading with both thinkers in top form, an example of civilized and intelligent discourse at its best.

SORT GOING ON-LINE— FINALLY !

Thanks to web guru Teresa Lum, who has generously agreed to design our web site, SORT should be on line sometime within the next month or so. We will keep you informed of ongoing developments and notify

you via e-mail or a snail mail note as soon as the page is up and we have an URL to give you.

**UPCOMING SORT
“SPECIAL:”
BOB STEINER PRESENTS
“DON’T GET TAKEN!”**

From time to time, SORT will present special programs of interest to the community at large, as well as critical thinkers. The first special we’re planning will be coming up in September with a presentation by Bob Steiner, magician *par excellence* and bunco expert. Bob will be speaking on the topic “Don’t Get Taken,” and the meeting promises to be a rousing one. More information coming soon!

**REACHING OUT WITH
SORT**

Although SORT is a sort of (ouch) low key conversational group of people interested in the rational exchange of ideas and we have been seating about 15 people around our round table at each meeting the nature of the group is such that different meeting topics bring forth different faces; although we do have a handful of stalwart regulars.

Thus, despite our concern that the meetings become too large for our conversational approach, we have found out human nature seems to be balancing things out nicely. What this means is that while in the past we have not been actively promoting SORT beyond the usual channels we have decided that we can keep SORT within reasonable conversational bounds and still reach out and invite wider community interest.

During the summer months we will be printing up some special brochures explaining the nature of SORT along with extra copies of our SORT newsletter which we will be distributing to libraries, colleges, etc. We could use some help in moving these about and if you would be willing to take a handful and distribute them to your local library, or to anyone else you think might be interested please let us know.

“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”
—Clarence Darrow

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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 29 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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