

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

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

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Was *The War of the Worlds* Inspired by UFOs?

by Martin S. Kottmeyer

A friend has brought to my attention a question of UFO history that he encountered in Bruce Rux's *Hollywood vs. the Aliens* (Frog, Ltd., 1997). He knew of my interest in and respect for H.G. Wells's science fiction and wondered if I could confirm Rux's statements concerning the origin of his classic story *The War of the Worlds* (1898).

According to Rux's notes, he got his information from a 1996 John Keel article for the magazine *UFO Sightings* titled "The Hidden History of the Flying Saucer Mystery." I have not bothered to acquire Keel's version, but will deal with Rux's own account. Rux will have to ultimately bear responsibility for believing and spreading this story.

Rux introduces the subject by briefly noting that in the years of 1896-7, mystery airships crewed by humans dressed in clothing of the period were being reported by the hundreds (for example, see "The Illinois UFO Mania of 1897," by Robert Bartholomew, *The REALL News*, Vol. 6, #3, March 1998). Claims Rux, "...the mystery airship was the inspiration for young genius, technological prophet, social reformer, and later British Intelligence man, Herbert George Wells, to write the most famous of all Martian invasion stories in 1898: *The War of the Worlds*." In a London hospital recovering from some illness, Wells received a package of clippings from the U.S. dealing with the airship mania. Wells determined no dirigibles were capable of performing the flight characteristics reported. Batteries to power the searchlights would be impossibly heavy. They could not be of Earthly design. "His conclusion was that it came from Mars." (pp. 14-15) Later in the book, Rux says of Wells that he "was the first man to seriously propose (in fictional garb) that Mars was an inhabited world, based on UFO reports of his time." (p. 580)

This tale perhaps sounds plausible to people who have never read *The War of the Worlds*. Those who have will likely be baffled. For most of the book, the Martians move about in walking tripods. The tripods fire heat beams that lay waste to their surroundings. In essence, they are a gimmicky form of tank. Flying machines are mentioned in only a few paragraphs

in chapter 7 and have no special significance in the story beyond a flourish showing their technological prowess. With so little of the story devoted to flying machines, how could airship reports be relevant to the creation of the story?

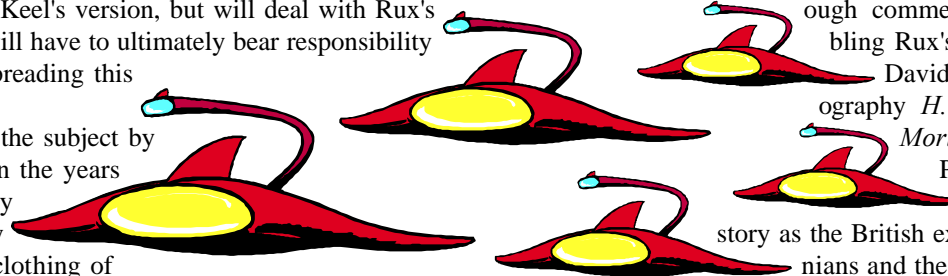
Wells's life is well-documented and the construction of *The War of the Worlds* has been microscopically studied by scholars. Nothing resembling the clippings in the hospital tale appears in the standard works. To offer the finest proof, The Hughes/Geduld *Critical Edition of The War of the Worlds* (Indiana University Press, 1993) offers an expansive and thorough commentary. Nothing resembling Rux's account appears in it.

David Smith's respected biography *H.G. Wells: Desperately Mortal* (Yale University Press, 1986) gives the inspiration of the story as the British extermination of Tasmanians and the general Mars mania of the era. Mars was much in the news for several years prior to *War of the Worlds*. Mars mania first bubbled up in the late 1880s. Mars observatories sprang up by the dozens. Amateurs reported light signals (more probably sun on mountains and clouds). Millionaires offered prizes for ways to communicate with Martians. Geniuses like Edison, Tesla, Galton, and Marconi checked in with their opinions and lent the idea a measure of credence. Many reports of messages appeared. For example the N.Y. Tribune published a claim in 1895 that the words "The Almighty" in Hebrew was formed in the dark markings on the planet. As early as 1894, Percival Lowell wrote about Mars being inhabited and had reached a much later stage in planetary development – "we are peering into futurity." By the time of Wells's book, Lowell's canals were well into their ascendancy. (William Graves Hoyt, *Lowell & Mars* University of Arizona, 1976)

(*"War of the Worlds"* continued on page 7)

In This Issue

Was <i>The War of the Worlds</i> Inspired by UFOs?	1
REALLity Check	4



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.

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From the Editor

Wally Hartshorn

Welcome to another issue of The REALL News! Creating this month's issue has been a bit of a challenge for me! My computer had a mental breakdown earlier this month from which it is still recovering. Now my desktop publishing software now informs me that I have not installed the clip art package. (If so, then I want my 600 megabytes of disk back!) Since you're reading this, I guess I finally overcame these difficulties.

This month's issue features a new article from Martin Kottmeyer. It has been quite a long time since we've received anything from Mr. Kottmeyer, so I was quite glad to see this one! (If you want to see the earlier airship article that he mentions, you can find it on our web site.)

Our other feature is another installment of David's popular "REALLity Check" column. David had quite a backlog of items that wouldn't fit in earlier issues, so it was nice to have a chance to get them printed.

By the way, did I mention that I'm engaged? ☺ Dawn and I are to be married in September. I think I'm going to be a bit busy between now and then.... ☹

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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From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

First of all, congratulations to Editor Wally and his fiancé, Dawn, on their engagement! I hear they're going to have one of those celebrity weddings where the press is restricted from attending, but I've already rented a helicopter and plan to hire photographers to swoop in and take pictures to sell to the tabloids. You heard it here first.

On a more REALL-related note, the June meeting had a less-than-stellar turnout. It seems to have been a bad weekend all around for people. Plus, it was raining, which probably stunned so many people in Springfield that they just stayed home to watch it.

So, we put off our Second Annual Skeptic Jeopardy game to a rain date. Normally, that would have been July, but the first Tuesday in July is Independence Day. Moving it to a different day has proven difficult, so there will be no July meeting.

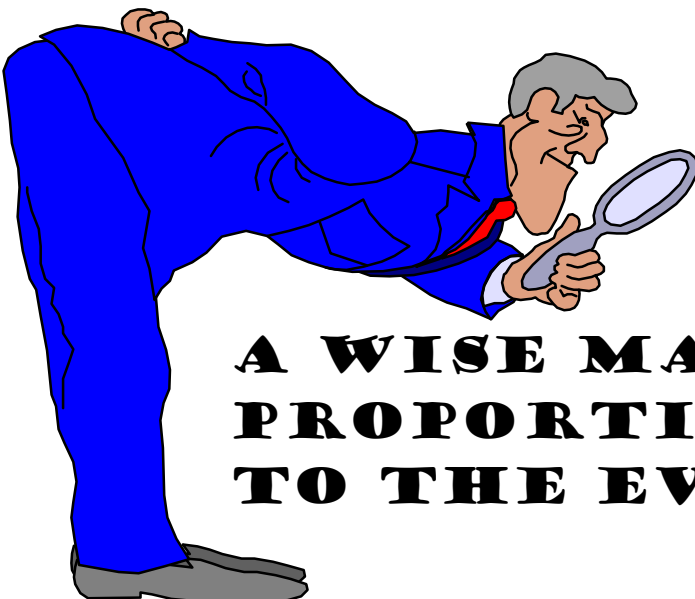
Which brings us to:

August Meeting

Tuesday, August 1, at 7:00 in the Lincoln Library will feature the rain date for our **Skeptic Jeopardy** game. Come join the fun and maybe even learn a thing or two in the process!

REALL Librarian Needed

As I noted last month, REALL has collected a number of books, magazines, and videotapes. Right now, these are all being stored at my house in a rather unorganized fashion and we are still looking for a volunteer to keep these items in a more organized fashion so other members can borrow them. If you'd like to volunteer, please let me know!



**A WISE MAN, THEREFORE,
PROPORTIONS HIS BELIEF
TO THE EVIDENCE.**

— DAVID HUME

New Board Members!

With our annual elections, we welcome two new members to the REALL Board of Directors, and say goodbye to a Board member who has been with us since the first Board was elected in June of 1993. Steve Egger has chosen to leave the board as he will be on sabbatical from UIS for the next year. We wish Steve well and hope he comes by to visit. Thanks for your years of service, Steve! All of the other officers stayed in their positions.

Steve's position and the one Board vacancy we had last year are being filled by Rich Walker and Clark Olson. Rich was on our board a couple years ago, and we welcome him back. You can see his introduction in April/May 1998 newsletter (Vol. 6, #4). Below, Clark will introduce himself.

Clark Olson: *After receiving degrees in biology from the University of Miami, I, and my family, went to Ethiopia where I taught biology and chemistry to students in public health. Because of political problems (revolution) we had to cut that short by a couple of months and return to the U.S., where I had a research fellowship in toxicology at NC State in Raleigh. After that we moved to Springfield where I have been employed by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency for many years in water pollution control, and where I work on environmental standards and advise permits personnel.*

I have always had an interest in evolution, philosophy of science, science and religion, and comparative religion and cultures, which has grown this past year attending REALL meetings. I'm also an avid birder and have participated in many censuses and banding projects.

Welcome aboard, Clark! And welcome back, Rich! ♡

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

Where to begin? As I noted last month, I have a massive overflow of items for this column. So I guess we'll start with the two that couldn't fit into last issue and move on from there. I'll catch up eventually.

Museum of Falsehoods

Most museums exist to educate, whether about history or science or whatever. However, *Science* reports that a new museum is being planned to promote miseducation in science, history, and other topics (4/28).

Creationist **Ken Ham** recently received approval to build a complex housing a "creation science" museum in Kentucky. They plan to use materials from a defunct real science exhibit he acquired at auction, but with their own beliefs attached instead of pesky science.

Science reports they will have exhibits on superfast plate tectonics (to "explain" how the Earth is young but the continents have moved around so much), criticism of radiometric dating, etc. They also plan to display some 70 life-sized models of dinosaurs, hoping to draw people in because of public interest in that topic.

One of Ham's explanations shows the circular reasoning he uses. He says that dinosaur fossils show evidence of cancer. Since **Adam** and **Eve** lived less than 7000 years ago, and there was no disease before their fall from grace, so dinosaurs **must** have existed more recently than that! He seems to ignore the fact that the whole Adam and Eve thing is a supposition of his belief system, not actually a basis for doing science. The potential problem is that it may sound good to less knowledgeable museum-goers. If he raises enough money for his "Genesis Park" museum, we can expect to be seeing a lot more of these types of claims parroted by those who don't know better.

No Miracles, Only Death

Yahoo! News, in their "Oddly Enough" section (5/4), had a short article that I think deserved much more attention. It discusses how four Kenyans, including two children, died waiting for evangelist **Benny Hinn** to pray for them and grant them miracle cures. All four had been released from a hospital so they could go to Hinn's revival. Far be it from me to suggest that perhaps they'd have been better off staying where they were. The results certainly couldn't have been worse.

Meanwhile, ten others were seriously injured by falling out of trees they'd climbed to get a better view of Hinn. No word on miracles from Hinn to cure their broken jaws and other injuries.

The article ends by noting that preachers like Hinn, who promise miracles, have become increasingly popular in Kenya because of the failings of real health care there. It seems that skepticism has been overcome by despair in their hopes of finding anything better than what they have now.

It's a very dangerous thing, Part 2

Three issues ago, I mentioned how **President Mbeki** of South Africa was inviting people who believe that AIDS is not caused by HIV to participate in helping to solve his country's AIDS crisis. Since then, things have only gotten worse. Articles have appeared in the journals *Science* (4/28, 5/19) and *Nature* (4/27), and even the *Chicago Tribune*, which had two articles (5/5, 5/7) and an editorial (5/23) on the subject.

The *Science* article describes how Mbeki is "publicly flirting with scientifically discredited ideas about the cause of AIDS" and how he is comparing the condemnation he's received for doing so with apartheid, calling it "tyranny" because scientists are pointing out the errors of his way. He went further overboard by writing in a letter to **President Clinton** and the U.N. Secretary General that, "The day may not be far off when we will, once again, see books burnt and their authors immolated by fire by those who believe that they have a duty to conduct a holy crusade against the infidels." I'd say that's just a tad melodramatic.

Malegapuru William Makgoba, the first black to head South Africa's Medical Research Council, said, "I think the letter was emotional and irrational. ... He displays things he doesn't understand." Makgoba had previously tried to explain to Mbeki that material from the "AIDS dissidents" was "pure rubbish" and noted that, "They never provided any data and, at the same time, they are taking things out of context."

Makgoba also contributed the May 19 article to *Science*, further expands on those thoughts, saying that "South Africa is rapidly becoming a fertile ground for the types of pseudo-sciences often embraced by politicians."

Nature's editorial takes the form of an open letter to Mbeki, explaining to him that just because Galileo was a heretic who was persecuted, that doesn't mean "AIDS dissidents" like **Peter Duesberg** are automatically right. It explains that science thrives on heretics, but those heretics must prove themselves. Quite the contrary, these folks have not done that. "Our columns have been – and remain – open to anyone offering evidence [that HIV does not cause AIDS], but on one simple condition: that their evidence passes the same rigorous tests of scientific robustness that are applied to any scientific paper that we receive. So far this has not happened."

The *Tribune's* article discusses the clash between culture and science, saying that Mbeki is looking at AIDS through the eyes of a man who has suffered through white colonialism and racist policies – he doesn't trust the "establishment." Because the AIDS problem in South Africa is unparalleled in Western countries (one in eight South Africans is HIV-positive), he says that they can't just use Western science is a cookie-cutter approach. But scientists say the AIDS problem in his country is exactly why he shouldn't be taking this approach. One scientist noted, "With 16,000 new infections a day worldwide, a majority in sub-Saharan Africa, we can ill afford to take a step back-

wards.”

The editorial notes that Mbeki should be focusing on stopping the disease, not wasting time and effort to rehash discussions that have already been decided by the weight of evidence.

This is the worst kind of pseudoscience. It could encourage behavior likely to lead to further infection because people may come to believe that HIV doesn't cause AIDS. The few scientists who are still promoting this nonsense should be ashamed of themselves. Mbeki should be as well.

From Doc to Quack

It may be appropriate to follow that item with discussion of this article by **Dr. Dean Edell**. I'll discuss more of his stuff below, but this one should stand alone. It's a discussion of how a doctor can become a quack (4/17).

Edell says there can be a number of reasons, such as a midlife crisis, divorce, or other stresses. One study he mentions says over 50% did it after having religious or spiritual experiences. Edell also cites an article from *Nutrition Forum*, which gives the top ten reasons doctors move towards quackery (alas, it's not a funny top ten list). Some of them seem a bit like they're reaching, such as the “boredom” reason, which says some doctors do it because they switch from the dullness of daily practice to the novelty of pseudoscience. I just don't think that's too big a reason, personally. Some make more sense, such as the pre-existence of a tendency towards the paranormal or superstition or the encroachment of their philosophical or religious beliefs into their practice of medicine. Of course, the “profit motive” is one that is listed, and may indeed be true for too many of these folks, but more importantly is the “prophet motive,” which puts the doctors in the mode of being saviors.

One that wasn't listed and that I think is important in a number of cases is the motive of being afraid to be wrong. I happen to believe this is the case with some of the AIDS “dissidents.” A doctor or scientist stakes his claim and has it shot down. But he publicly supported this claim and cannot bring himself to back down. I suspect that in many cases, this is going on at the subconscious level – they are not thinking, “Whoops! I've gone too far. Now I'll be branded a fool.” They just cannot bring themselves to admit they were wrong, and thus lapse into a mode of thinking similar to the creationists who cannot admit that they are wrong about a literal interpretation of the Bible.

More Dr. Dean

Speaking of Dr. Dean, I should mention that he has a radio show, does segments for TV news, and also has a website on HealthCentral (www.healthcentral.com). He covers many topics of interest to skeptics, and I encourage interested readers to check out his columns. I have a whole pile of interesting news items from him here, but I can only briefly go over a few more.

One of the strangest New Age health fads is ear candling (or coning), where you stick a candle-containing paper in your

ear to “draw out” wax, dirt, bad energy, whatever. They you open the cone to see all the things it pulled out of your ear. Lo and behold, there's wax there! Must work! Well, Edell reported (6/16) on a *Time* magazine article highlighting this practice as a “new” trend. It's not new, and Edell actually has a special report on his website dealing with this silliness. It shows photos of the contents of a cone from a person's ear and compares it to the contents of a cone that was done without being in anybody's ear. Guess what? They were the same. I know it may be hard to believe, but the wax in the cone might just come from the wax candle! Amazing!

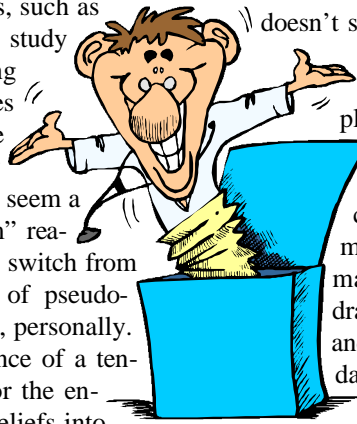
Edell frequently discusses alternative medicine claims. One of the biggest recently has been putting magnets in everything to supposedly reduce pain. They've put them in belts, shoe inserts, and even mattresses (Edell reported that the mattress ones may deactivate pacemakers in a 5/17 article)! It doesn't seem to matter that scientific studies haven't held up the claims. Well, actually, I guess it does matter somewhere – in Northern California, of all places. Edell reports (6/14) that the district attorneys of Napa County and Sonoma County have been going after companies making bogus health claims about magnets. They got a \$45,000 settlement against two companies who advertised their magnet products with claims like: “magnets help draw pain, swelling, and stiffness out of your body” and “Doctors report: pain sufferers enjoy instant all-day relief without the use of drugs!” The companies told the district attorney that they didn't actually have scientific evidence to back the claims. Whoops! In addition to the fine, the companies are prohibited from making these types of claims in the future. Unfortunately, there are probably a couple hundred others out there like them, including recent magnetic additions to the Dr. Scholl's line and even Florsheim shoes.

Some of the stories Edell reports are a little off the beaten path. For example, he mentions Georgia minister **Jim Peasboro**, who thinks that Satan can possess your computer (6/8) – if it has enough memory, that is. Um, yeah, sure. Edell says, “The notion that evil spirits reside in computers that have sufficient memory seems pretty weird, but Peasboro will probably have a best seller in his upcoming book, ‘The Devil in the Machine.’” I can hardly wait for that one!

FTC In Action

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has been busy lately in tackling false health claims. Dr. Dean Edell reports (5/15) that the FTC cited two manufacturers of “dietary supplements” for claiming their products could treat or cure Attention Deficit Disorder. These companies are now barred from making those claims.

In another case posted on the Quackwatch website (release date 4/26), the makers of “The Enforma System” settled an FTC charge for deceptive advertising, requiring them to pay out \$10 million! Claims such as, “With Enforma, you can eat what you want and never, ever, ever have to diet again” were



said to be false.

Three internet companies offering various cure-alls also settled FTC charges and agreed to repay their customers, according to articles on CNN Interactive and CBS HealthWatch (both 4/6). The CNN article quoted the director of the FTC's Bureau of Consumer Protection as saying, "The promotions for these supplements as 'miracle' cures are really reprehensible because they target people who have very serious, if not life-threatening, health conditions."

One of the three companies sold an herbal tea, Essiac, claiming it cured cancer, diabetes, AIDS, etc. A linked article on CBS HealthWatch discusses the claims for Essiac Tea, and basically repeats that while there isn't any good evidence that it can cure cancer, it's not going to hurt you either. Well, that depends. If people think it *can* cure cancer and thus drink some tea instead of getting proper treatment, I'd say that it would hurt!

Not So Healthy, Part 4

It seems that almost every week, there's another study that shows how the wonderful herbs and supplements that are supposed to help without side effects aren't quite so harmless. I've been over a number of them already in the first three installments of the "Not So Healthy" segment within this column, but there are still more.

For example, I'd already described some of the problems being encountered with St. John's wort, such as interfering with AIDS drugs, anti-rejection medicine for transplant patients, and anesthesia, but here's a new one: MSNBC reported (May) on a study showing that it also may weaken the effectiveness of birth control pills.

MSNBC also reported (3/16) that "increasing numbers of Americans are falling seriously ill or even dying after taking dietary supplements that promise everything from extra energy to sounder sleep." Among the information in this article (some of which has been mentioned here before), they note that poison control centers across the country have been reporting adverse reactions to ginseng, St. John's wort, ephedra, melatonin, and others. In one particularly heinous case, a woman gave her 18-month-old child eucalyptus oil because a store clerk told her it was good for fever. The child almost died and ended up suffering permanent neurological damage.

U.S. News & World Report had an article showing a chart of "Dangerous potions" (5/1). Among the drug interactions listed were licorice (the herb, not the candy), which is supposed to help upset stomach and ulcers, but which can interact with heart and blood pressure medications and make it more difficult for the heart to contract. Ma Huang, which is used as a stimulant, may reduce the effectiveness of blood pressure medications. Mate and Guarana, herbs that are supposed to help weight loss, may slow the body's ability to get rid of clozapine, a drug used to treat schizophrenia. If taken together, the clozapine may build up in the body and kill bone marrow. Shankapulshpi, which is supposed to treat epileptic seizures, has the ironic effect of reducing the levels of anti-seizure medicine Dilantin, which could lead to more seizures.

Several news agencies, including the *Chicago Tribune* in a *New York Times* News Service article (6/8), reported on a Chinese herb, *Aristolochia fangchi*, that is supposed to help weight loss, but actually is linked to kidney failure and now urinary tract cancer. This one is bad enough that the FDA can act, because the supplement has been proven dangerous. They will be banning import of herb.

As if all of these things weren't bad enough, HealthCentral reported (5/16) that there was also a recent study on St. John's wort showing that it is no better than a placebo in treating major depression. Also, *U.S. News & World Report* had an article (5/22) about vitamin E not living up to claims of helping to speed healing and minimizing scars when used in a cream to put on injuries. Not only does it show no effect, it can even cause allergic reactions similar to poison ivy in some cases!

Only in Illinois

Well, here's something I'd rather our state wasn't the first one to do – HMO Illinois (run by Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois) has contracted with Alternative Medicine Inc. (AMI) to allow chiropractors as primary care physicians – a first in the country, according to an article from WebMD (11/15/99 – I just found out about it).

Yes, that's right, chiropractors. According to HMO Illinois, these chiropractors have to go through the same credentialing process as real doctors, but the article notes that "Illinois has one of the more liberal licensing laws for chiropractic physicians." Indeed, I have to wonder – if they supposedly get the same training as real doctors, why didn't they become, well, doctors? They can't write prescriptions, but are supposedly "specially trained" to know when to call in a doctor to prescribe antibiotics or to refer to a specialist doctor. So why not just use a real doctor then? I guess I must be missing something here...

Where'd They Go?

Speaking of chiropractors, Dr. Dean Edell (yes, him again) had an article (5/11) about the chiropractors who still insist that vaccination is evil. I should note first that, as Edell says, "Most chiropractors no longer believe this," but some do, and others, non-chiros, do as well.

Edell asks these folks in the article's title: "If vaccines are so bad, where did the infectious diseases go?" He cites numbers from the Centers for Disease Control: Over 16,000 cases of paralytic polio annually prior to 1955, which is when a vaccine became available. 1998 had zero. 503,000 cases of measles annually before its vaccine. 89 now. 152,000 annual cases of mumps before. 606 now. 48,000 annual cases of rubella before. 345 now. 20,000 annual cases of influenza type B before. 54 now.

So where did all of these go? Where is smallpox and diphtheria? The answer, of course, is that vaccination programs have virtually eliminated them. I wonder how that could have happened....

(*"REALLity Check"* continued on page 8)

Composition of *The War of the Worlds* began in late summer 1895 when Wells lived in Surrey, not London. This is obviously rather too early for the U.S. airship mystery to be an inspiration. There is no mention of any illness or hospitalization around 1895. Wells was ill years earlier in 1888 and read many books, but his biographer says nothing of airship clippings. There is no talk of hospitalization, even at this date, despite his spitting up blood.

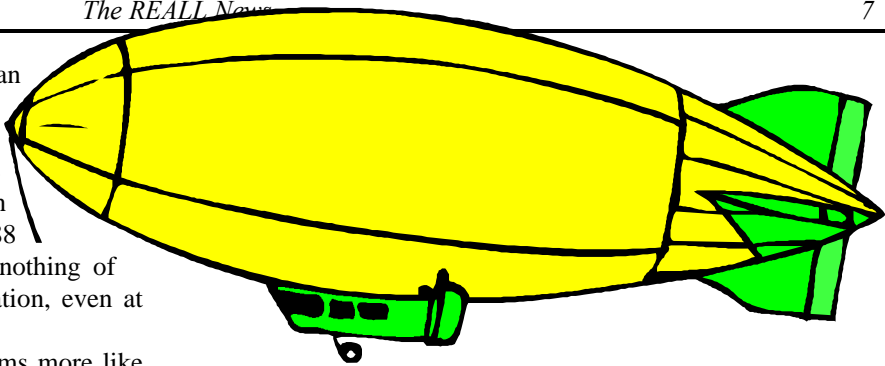
The talk of unusual flight characteristics seems more like contemporary UFO rhetoric than what bothered people during the American airship craze. It didn't seem a dominant issue in the accounts I've seen. People were surprised airships existed at all rather than whether they flew oddly. They wanted to know who had invented them. Who was flying the airships? (Neeley, Robert B. *UFOs of 1896/1897: The Airship Wave* FFUFOR, undated)

There may be some plausibility that some skepticism existed about searchlight power. In 1883, Tissander failed to make a steerable dirigible fly with 440 pounds of batteries. In 1884, D.C. Krebs flew a dirigible with 210 pounds of batteries, but only about 12 miles. Whether such things would bother a forward-looking man like Wells enough to fall into Martian mysticism seems a stretch. Perhaps irrelevantly, in his 1897 novel *When the Sleeper Wakes*, Wells talks of future men building a 600 foot long craft that can travel at 90 miles per hour and carry 200 tons of weight. (Beril Becker, *Dreams and Realities of the Conquest of the Skies*, Atheneum, 1967, pp. 101, 129)

Rux's final statement is especially easy to refute since the evidence against it is so plentiful. Wells was far from the first fiction writer to populate Mars with life. "Interplanetaries" were a growing body of fiction in the mid-1880s and Wells's story appears just as the form was peaking. (George Locke *Voyages in Space: A Bibliography of Interplanetary Fiction: 1801-1914* Ferret Fantasy, 1975) Henre de Parville's *Un habitant de la planete Mars* (Paris, 1865) involves the discovery of a meteorite bearing the fossil of an anthropomorphous Martian. Mars is an older world with an older race. Though the Martians should thus be superior, they turn out to be futuristically over-perfected and inferior to us. "Life is swifter and a being is less capable of being perfected." (Guthke, Karl *The Last Frontier* p. 371.)

More Mars fiction slowly followed. Percy Greg's *Across the Zodiac* (1880) has a Mars where the material side of life has been perfected. Unfortunately this did not guarantee that people would be happy. Robert Cromie's *A Plunge Into Space* (1890) has Mars an old world, worn and aged, where evolution has run its course. Feelings and passion has dwindled to nothing, leaving "purely intellectual beings" that amounted to "coldly calculating scientific animals."

Camille Flammarion's *Urania* (1890) more optimistically presents a eulogy for progress in his vision of Mars. "May we not comfort ourselves with the hope that physical and moral beauty will go on perfecting themselves more and more as they have done hitherto, and that intelligence will enlighten itself progressively." His Martians live only for and by the mind.



Their bodies are at once delicate and strong. Delicacy of sensation decides everything. "Passions are not the same there. Murder is unknown. Humanity, being without material needs, has never lived there, even in the primitive ages, in the barbarity of rapine and war. The ideas and feelings of the inhabitants of Mars are of an entirely intellectual nature." Emotionless aliens obviously have a lengthy pedigree. These notions reflect Flammarion's serious speculations. He believed the evidence of a network of waterways testified the planet was a seat of vitality. "The world of Mars is older than ours and mankind there will be more advanced and wiser. No doubt it is the work and noise of peace that for centuries has animated this neighboring home."

Gustavus Pope's *Journey to Mars* (1894) describes a technologically advanced civilization. The canals are actually linear cities built for protection against constant meteor bombardment. The moons are about to fall and some Martians plan to colonize Earth. George du Maurier's *The Martian* (1896) portrays a Mars that is physically inhospitable. It is "far advanced in its decadence and within measurable distance of its unfitness for life of any kind." Kurd Lasswitz's *Auf zwei Planeten* (1897) portrays Martians centuries ahead of us. They are united by the hostility of their aging planet as the atmosphere thins and the water supply diminishes. The Martians are physically identical to us save for brighter eyes that flash moral and intellectual superiority. They are culture-bearers who wish to enlighten us.

It has been claimed that maybe a dozen or more Martian romances appeared in the 1880s and 1890s incorporating this idea that Mars was an older world whose civilization surpassed Earth's (Hillegas, Mark "Victorian Extraterrestrials" in Buckley, Jerome H., ed. *The Worlds of Victorian Fiction* Harvard U. Press, 1975. & Hillegas, Mark R. "The First Invasion of Mars," *Michigan Alumnus Quarterly*, 66, Winter 1960, pp. 107-12.)

Conclusion: Rux's tale about Wells is nonsense in every detail. *The War of the Worlds* was not inspired by UFOs. ☹

(“REALLity Check” continued from page 6)

This is the Best They Could Do?

It had to happen eventually, I guess. **John** and **Patsy Ramsey**, parents of murdered pre-school beauty queen **Jon-Benet Ramsey**, have posted a sketch of a supposed suspect on their website. Where did this sketch come from? A description from deceased “psychic” **Dorothy Allison**, who described her “vision” on a TV show in 1998. (As a reminder, Allison is the one who was on **Morton Downey Jr.**’s TV show with **Bruce Walstad** and I, and who got so mad at me for daring to ask for evidence that she stood up and pushed me. See “Don’t Push Me, Lady!” Vol. 3, #3, March 1995.)

According to an AP article on CNN Interactive (6/3), the Ramseys web site says they “firmly believe that this most horrible of killers will be caught based on information provided by people who care about right and wrong.”

And in the “wow, I’m shocked” department, they also said they want the police to stop focusing on them as suspects.

Speaking of Psychics and Dead People

James Van Praagh has managed to get himself yet another piece of free publicity, this time in the *USA Weekend*

magazine (appears locally in the Sunday *State Journal-Register*, 5/5-7). The interviewer, **Jennifer Mendelsohn**, tossed him some softball questions that enabled him to show how caring and wonderful a person he is, and how nasty those evil skeptics are (we are “mediocre minds” and he is a “great spiritual leader” according to him). When asked for proof, he gave the standard answer of the “thousands of people” who have used his services. Funny how he didn’t mention the times he was caught cheating.

For some actual information on Van Praagh, see our February issue (Vol. 8, #2) for a book excerpt about him by **Michael Shermer**.

Oh, in case you were wondering, it’s not only dead people he can talk to, but dead animals as well. Woof! 🐾

No July Meeting

There will not be a meeting on July 4, due to the holiday. The next meeting will be held in August. See the Chairman’s column for details.

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