



The North Texas

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Predicting the past

by John Blanton

Astrologer Robert Tippett has a BS degree in psychology and is certified by the Atlanta (Georgia) Astrological Society. He was kind enough to present his views at the April meeting of The North Texas Skeptics. Afterward, he gave us a copy of his speaking notes, from which the following was taken. We used mostly his words—just did some heavy editing:

The talk was *The Prophecies (Les Propheties)* of Nostradamus, and it concerned Robert Tippett's interpretation of the works of Nostradamus. Tippett has been involved with the study and practice of astrology for roughly 27 years. He has maintained a general interest and knowledge of Nostradamus and his quatrains for about the same period of time.

Since September 11, 2001, his interest in Nostradamus has been intense. He has searched for quatrains that would fit current events—sometimes finding matches, sometimes not. Following September 11 he searched for one and found multiple quatrains that fit the events of that day. He considers that when strung together the quatrains told a story for that day. In particular:

The king will want to enter the new city,
They will come to subdue it through its enemies:
A captive falsely freed to speak and act,
The king to be outside, he will stay far from the city

On reading the quatrains Tippett noted a consistent theme involving Christianity (which he equated with Western nations) and Islam (which to him represents the Middle East). His copy of *The Prophecies* left 200 quatrains uninterpreted, and these repeated characters, areas, and themes. The 200 could be ordered to form a story. He interpreted the time frame ranges to be from 1948 to 2043, with the majority being from the September 11, 2001, until 2007.

Tippett's book in work *The Future According to Nostradamus* only presents the 200 uninterpreted quatrains. To him, the inaccuracies attributed to Nostradamus are really inaccuracies of the interpreters. Individual quatrains lose clarity when taken

EVENTS CALENDAR

May Program

Saturday, May 10, 2003, 2:00 pm,
at the Center for Community
Cooperation 2900 Live Oak, (just east
of downtown) Dallas

**Daniel Barnett – *My Big Fat Greek
Philosophy: A Brief History of
Skepticism***

What was critical thinking like before Randi, Shermer, and CSICOP? Danny will present the origins of skepticism in ancient Greece and trace its development from the Middle Ages to modern times. The philosophies of Sextus Empiricus, Montaigne, Descartes, and Hume will also be discussed, along with the rise of scientific philosophy and its links to skeptical thought.

Admission is free
For more info: (214) 335-9248

Social Dinner and Board Meeting

NTS social dinner and board meeting
Saturday, May 24, 7:30 p.m.
Black-eyed Pea Restaurant on Forest

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North Texas Skeptics

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 members receive the NTS newsletter and may attend
 NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or
 reduced cost. In addition, members will receive mailings
 on topics of current interest or social events.

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out of context, which makes most not subject to interpretation. However, they represent a puzzle that fits together.

Translators have taken extensive liberties in the translations, restating in their words something different than what Nostradamus wrote. For example, punctuation utilized by Nostradamus has been ignored.

Tippett's theory on *Les Propheties*, is based on the following principles:

- A work of this length must have purpose, more than an extensive work of generalizations, which would ultimately be found inaccurate.
- As a story it must include an introduction, body and conclusion.
- There must be consistencies in the methods of writing used, such that one quatrain equals one event relative in time and space, order is related to time, and words have consistent meaning.
- Seen as a non-fiction, the title must represent the work.
- The definition of "prophecy" is: the inspired declaration of divine will and purpose.
- Contained in the text must be allusions to the title.
- For the work to be prophetic it must be predictive, and found to be true from predictive events fitting the terminology exactly.
- The purpose of prophecy is to make people aware of changes necessary, which can avoid, or change, the future.
- A specific time frame must be present for the prophecy to be tested.
- The presentation of a prophetic story in poetic verse makes it a literary masterpiece comparable only to Goethe's *Faust* (1798).
- Nostradamus did not profit from his work, which makes the effort involved have to relate to a purpose.

In a letter Nostradamus wrote to his son, he clearly stated why he wrote the book, and what the future would find for the book in general.

The bulk of *Tippett's* book is an in-depth interpretation of the 200 quatrains, with references to words that link the quatrains, as well as the timing of the astronomical data. These interpretations generally detail each line, and key terms used.

Tippett presented some past predictions that have been proven, some present predictions that are partially predictive, and some future predictions that can be tested for accuracy. He does "not presume to be 100% accurate, as others have failed in their prediction. Any errors in my interpretation cannot possibly reflect on Nostradamus." The basic theory, however is sound, he says.

Here are the past events:

- Creation of the State of Israel



Certified and licensed astrologer Robert Tippett explains Nastradamus for The North Texas Skeptics

Photo by John Blanton

- The 1960 earthquake in Argentina
- The 1972 Munich Olympic Games
- The 1994 UN actions in Africa

Here are the present events:

- President George W. Bush
- Afghanistan/Osama bin Laden
- Bush/Blair unity
- Three days of warning before war with Iraq begins
- The assassination of Saddam Hussein

Finally, here are some future predictions:

- Quday Hussein leads the new Iraqi government as a changed man
- Plague outbreak in/from southern France effecting a million people, killing 666,667. Delta-42 mutated gene.
- Poisoned drinking water in New Jersey
- Easter earthquake (Orthodox Easter) April 27, 2003

- Founding of a new sect in April, due to earthquake
- Saturn removes topography, tombs exposed, while holy philosopher sect proliferates
- Earthquake in Greece, collapsing a full Olympic Stadium (2004 site) May 11, 2003
- Abysses in two great nations, with seven stadiums
- Two earthquakes in succession in the Spring

Other predictions that he sees strongly present in 2003:

- Terrorism in the United States on the levels of—poisoned grains and the cattle raised for slaughter poisoned from poisoned grasslands—attacks/bombs in urban areas—deliberate forest fires set in west/northwest—Summer 2003
- CDC ordering the destruction of much US meat and grain by end of Summer, leading to onset of wave of famine
- Outbreak of bubonic plague around Naples, Italy (southern Italy)
- The United Nations being called to send French troops into Italy to support American troops, due to rapid increase of political climate change against the West in the Middle East
- Later this year the NASA project that has sent a probe to the comet Encke will be increasing news – this probe will come within 40 miles of this comet, and send pictures back to earth
- The worst naval defeat in the history of naval warfare, in the Persian Gulf

Comments by John Blanton:

Being skeptics, we naturally scoffed at Tippett's prediction of an earthquake for 27 April. In a separate conversation he had told us the quake would be level nine on the Richter scale in Turkey. A few predictions like that could get a person our \$10,000 Paranormal Challenge prize—provided they were correct.

Flash. It's a few days past 27 April and a level six (plus) quake has just caused destruction and death—in Turkey. OK, it was not level nine, and it was not on Sunday.

However, looking at the remaining predictions, we are growing increasingly worried about the future of Saddam Hussein. I guess Saddam's worried, too, provided he's still alive. As for son Quday, he *will* have to become a changed man to rule Iraq. For example, he may have to change his name to Jay Garner.



Mind over matter

by John Blanton

Russell Shipp wrote us: ¹

My name is Russell Shipp. I have accepted the James Randi Challenge, and I gladly accept yours (North Texas Skeptic), as well.

My paranormal ability I've chosen to demonstrate is low level telekinesis.

An object at rest tends to stay at rest unless outside forces influence said object. I shall use my will to spin an object 5 grams (negotiable) in weight.

From a dead stop I shall put an object into motion with my mind. I require line of sight to move (spin) an object, and glass isn't an issue.

The object(s) should be suspended by string about 6 to 12 inches in length. The room should have zero air current, at least one video camera focused on the object(s) at all times during the demonstration.

Gratefully yours,

Russell Shipp

The challenge Russell Shipp mentioned is the NTS Paranormal Challenge. For over ten years the NTS has offered a monetary prize to anybody who can demonstrate paranormal abilities under controlled conditions. The prize is underwritten by five individuals, and its current value is \$10,000. ²

A standing requirement of the challenge is that before we will agree to a formal test (and possibly pay the award) we need an exact description of the paranormal ability that is claimed. We need claimants to tell us up front what it is they will demonstrate. There is good reason for this. Some extraordinary claims really are not paranormal at all. For example, a person who claims to be able to lift one end of an SUV off the ground may well be strong enough to do it. We don't consider that a paranormal ability, and we won't pay \$10,000 to see it done.

We also insist on seeing a free demonstration. This helps us in two ways. First if the claimant has nothing to show (can't really do what is claimed), we just say "good day," and part company. Second, if a person does demonstrate something extraordinary (such as picking the ace of spades from a card deck while blindfolded) we want to watch a demonstration to pick up signs of chicanery (such as peeking) so we can be prepared to defeat the claimants tactics during the formal test.

Russell drove to Dallas to give an initial demonstration during our regular April meeting. Those who remained after the Saturday afternoon talk were able to observe a demonstration involving a compact disk (CD) suspended from the meeting room ceiling by a piece of sewing thread. During prior correspondence Russell had agreed a CD was one of the objects he could use.

We minimized air currents in the room by making sure the air conditioning was shut down. We also asked those remaining to remain still, because we had noticed that air currents stirred up by people walking around the room caused the CD to move.

NTS Board member Prasad Golla, who is also one of the Challenge underwriters, set up a video camera, and agreed with Russell that everything was ready.

Despite having demonstrated to himself previously that he could move a CD by mental action alone, Russell was not able to demonstrate the effect that Saturday. The agreed requirement was for the CD to rotate at least one rotation in a clockwise direction, come to a stop, then continue in the clockwise direction for at least another complete rotation. As far as we could tell, the CD seemed to move only slightly, apparently in response to air currents in the room.

Afterward, in a conference over a Guinness at the nearby Tipperary Inn, we discussed the outcome with Russell. Not wanting to rush to judgement, we agreed the short time available following the meeting and the unsupervised activities at the site would not be considered an ideal venue for a controlled demonstration. In fairness to Russell, we parted with the promise to set up another demonstration after all had a chance to re-view the video.

Later, after copies of the video had been distributed and viewed by the interested parties, Russell agreed that the video did not show a successful demonstration. He offered to come again to Dallas for a follow-up.

Our determination for the new demonstration was to eliminate air currents as much as possible. Russell mentioned he had previous success using the interior of a passenger car for a test venue. He said he had also successfully used a large, transparent container. In both cases, the aim was to cut off the suspended object from outside air currents while allowing him to view the object.

We set the demonstration for the first Saturday in May, and I arranged to suspend a CD inside my car, using the old close-the-sunroof-on-the-string trick. I also obtained a (nearly) clear plastic container. One CD was suspended from the ceiling of an air conditioned room. The plastic container was placed on a stand so that the CD hung inside the open container. The top opening of the container was blocked using pieces of cardboard,

except for a small gap, through which the suspended thread passed.

When Russell arrived for the demonstration the two CDs were already in place and had come to rest. It was obvious air currents would not be a problem.

We decided to work with the car first. It was parked outside on what was a warm day—not an ideal situation, because differential heating inside the car can generate air currents.

Prasad set up the video camera again.

However, during the initial demonstration, the CD never made a complete rotation in any direction. We had noted that Russell expressed some dissatisfaction with his viewing position, so we next allowed him to start over from another position of his choosing. Still no success.

We discussed some problems. Side windows of the car were tinted. Front windshield was not tinted, but glare on the windshield made viewing difficult. Besides, we were at risk of sunburn if we stayed out in the parking lot much longer.

Moving inside, we again observed the CD was stationary inside its plastic protector. Again, however, no success. Inside the container in the air conditioned room the CD did not move at all.

Reasons were sought. The plastic was not as clear as glass. Also there might be some problem trying to project mentally through the plastic. Russell noted that he had previously had much better success in private using his own objects.

My own theory was, and still is, that all the time nothing has been moving the objects for Russell but air currents. In response to Russell's objections about the plastic container I removed it. Without the protection of the container the CD began to rotate under the influence of the currents inside the room. Prasad and I pointed out that an experimenter who was not care-

ful could convince himself he was responsible for these motions.

Finally, to demonstrate the effect of the air currents we suspended a key ring with various keys—without the plastic container. Russell was sure he would be able to mentally move the suspended keys. However, since the keys were more compact than the CD, they did not offer very much surface for the air to act on. The keys refused to move. And there was no plastic container.



Stand back. We're doing real science here. Russell Shipp concentrates on the CD in the car, while Prasad mans the video camera.

Photo by John Blanton

We discussed the results of the demonstration with Russell, and it was apparent the light was beginning to come on. As Prasad explained, since he and I work as scientists at a research facility, we are forewarned and cautious about accepting conclusions based on our expectations. This is not to say this caution is always taken, but good work requires an experimenter to act diligently to disprove his own ideas.

I am sure Russell will continue to test his perceived abilities, and I hope he will now start to

apply some of the controls we showed him.

As always, our \$10,000 is quite safe.

Coming up next for the NTS Challenge—an astrologer claims he can produce “readings” for individuals unknown to him. He further states that these people will be able pick their own readings from a pile containing readings for a number of other people. What’s more, we think this astrologer just might be right. We intend to put the astrologer to the test, and we hope to have something to report in the future.



References

- 1 Edited.
- 2 A description of the challenge protocol and details of some activity related to the challenge are on the NTS Web site at: <http://www.ntskeptics.org/challenge/challeng.htm>.

Who wants to marry a rabid skeptic?

At least one person it turns out.

Former NTS President Curtis Severns has taken time off from investigating creationists and other urban legends to get married.

The turnout on a fine Sunday in March at the Heard Museum in McKinney took on the appearance of a skeptical convention. Who should be surprised, since skeptics have long been noted for their fondness of traditional ceremonies and free food. In addition to prominent NTS members, there was representation from the North Texas Church of Freethought. In fact the wedding was performed by Dr. Tim Gorski, who, besides heading up the Dallas-Fort Worth Council Against Health Fraud, is minister of the church and empowered by the State of Texas to sentence couples to lifelong commitments.

To Susan and Curtis, our best wishes.



Susan and Curtis tie the knot as Tim Gorski looks on

Photo by John Blanton.

What's New

By Robert Park

[Robert Park publishes the What's New column at <http://www.aps.org/WN/>. Following are some clippings of interest.]

FREE ELECTRICITY: THE PAIN IN MAINE IS PLAINLY ON THE WANE.

Notorious perpetual motion huckster Dennis Lee, barred from doing business in the State of Washington last year (WN 4 Oct 02), has now gotten similar treatment on the other side of the country. Armed with a report from a physicist familiar with Lee's free energy scams, the Maine Attorney General filed a Complaint in Superior Court citing Maine's consumer protection laws. The Court enjoined Lee from doing business in Maine and required him to conspicuously state on his website that his products and services are not for sale in the State of Maine. At its meeting on April 4, the APS Council adopted a Statement on Perpetual Motion Machines, deploring "attempts to mislead and defraud the public based on claims of perpetual motion machines or sources of unlimited useful energy" (<http://www.aps.org/statements/03.3.html>).

HOMEOPATHY: JAMES RANDI FLAUNTS HIS PSYCHIC POWERS.

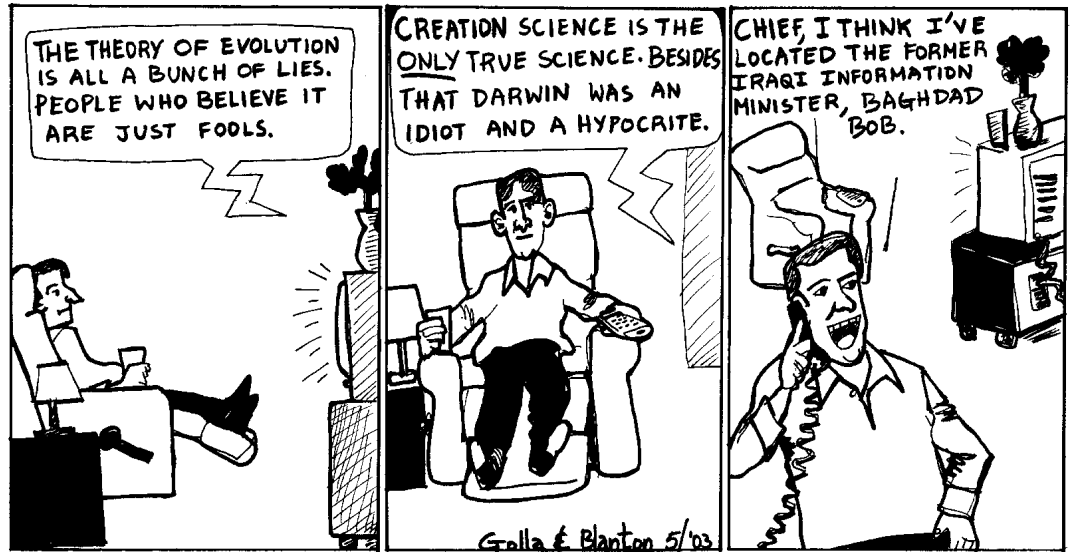
The BBC program Horizon did a thorough job of debunking homeopathy last year, with legendary debunker James Randi devising a simple test, which of course the homeopaths failed miserably. However, an Australian psychic saw right through it. Randi, she explained, is a secret psychic who used his awesome power to either alter the test results or the perception of the results. "Damn!" Randi replied, "You got me, Marylou." He warned her he would "make your hair fall out," and if she persisted, "give you a rash all over your body." Whew! You don't want to mess around with psychics. Meanwhile, according to the Daily Mail, the UK is dumping more than a million pounds into research on alternative medicine, including homeopathy, at the urging of Prince Charles.

POLYGRAPH: DOE DECIDES TO SIMPLY REISSUE ITS OLD POLICY.

The National Academy of Sciences completed its review of scientific evidence on the polygraph (WN 15 Dec 00). The NAS report, "The Polygraph and Lie Detection" (NAS Press, 2003), found polygraph tests to be unacceptable for DOE employee security screening because of the high rate of false positives and susceptibility to countermeasures. Congress instructed the Department of Energy to reevaluate its policies on the use of the polygraph in light of the NAS report. DOE carefully reevaluated

Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.
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ated its policies and reissued them without change, arguing that a high rate of false positives must mean the threshold for detecting lies is very low. Therefore, the test must also nab a lot of true positives. Since that's the goal, the DOE position seems to be that the polygraph tests are working fine and false positives are just unavoidable collateral damage. But there is still a countermeasures problem: anyone can be trained to fool the polygraph in just five minutes. WN therefore recommends replacing the polygraph with a coin toss. If a little collateral damage is not a problem, coins will catch fully half of all spies, a vast improvement over the polygraph, which has never caught even one. Moreover, coins are notoriously difficult to train, making them impervious to countermeasures.

EPHEDRA: WELL, NOW THAT YOU BRING UP SCIENTIFIC PROOF...

The American Heart Association has joined the chorus calling for a federal ban on ephedra, a herbal stimulant linked serious side effects including heart attack and stroke (WN 14 Mar 03). A spokesman for the powerful ephedrine industry snorted that a ban would be "irresponsible," since the allegations against ephedra had not been "proven scientifically." That's the problem, isn't it? Neither has ephedra been proven safe. As a result of the 1994 Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act (DSHEA), the herbal market is totally unregulated: herbal products don't have to be proven safe or effective. But in the case of ephedra, the bodies are starting to pile up (WN 14 Mar 03).

PRAYER HEALING: WELL WHAT DID YOU EXPECT FROM "PARADE"?

WN got a lot of mail from people who read "Why Prayer Could Be Good Medicine." As near as WN could tell, no one on Earth doubts that sick people who pray may derive some sort of

emotional benefit, perhaps even improving their prognosis. The only question with any religious implications is whether intercessory prayer, prayer offered by others without the knowledge of the patient, helps. The answer will not be found by reading Parade. Elsewhere, In Touch Ministries distributed a pamphlet to troops: "A Christian's Duty in a Time of War." It included a helpful scripture from Romans 13:1 "Every person is to be in subjugation to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God..." This was the basis of the Divine Right of Kings.

WORLD PEACE: "UNIFIED CONSCIOUSNESS FIELD" IS NOT WORKING.

In September of 2001, John Hagelin, string theorist and perennial presidential candidate, held a press conference in Washington to call for donations of \$1B to train a corp of 40,000 Yogic flyers to go forth and meditate in unison, thus creating permanent world peace (WN 28 Sep 01). Judging from the news out of Iraq, he must have come up a little short. Last week, Hagelin issued a press release announcing that he won't be a candidate in 2004. Instead he is throwing his support behind Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH). □

Events Calendar continued from page 1

Lane in Dallas – about one block west of Central Expressway, south side of Forest Lane

Call the NTS Hotline at (214) 335-9248 for more information or if you plan to attend. We sometimes reschedule these events.

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