



*The North Texas*

# Skeptic

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<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

## Spooky? No

by John Blanton

**H**ow does it work?

You open a Web site, and up comes an ominous splash screen. “Click here to enter” it says, almost as a dare.<sup>1</sup>

“Think of a two-digit number [from 10 to 99]. Write it down.” You write it down.

“Now, add the two digits and subtract the total from the original number. Write it down.” You write it down.

“On the following screen you will see some symbols. Beside each symbol will be a number. Stare for ten seconds at the symbol beside the number you just wrote down. Click ‘Continue’ when you are ready.”

You click “Continue.” A page of symbols with numbers appears, and you quickly locate the number you just wrote down. You stare at the symbol beside it.

After ten seconds the page disappears to be replaced by another page showing the symbol you were just staring at.

How does this work?

I am looking at some of my e-mail. “Does the computer identify which symbol you were staring at?” Or, “There must be some psychic connection back to the Web server.”

Emma Roberson would have groaned at all this. She was my high school math teacher, and her towering accomplishment was to instill in me an appreciation for basic mathematics. Such was the significance of this accomplishment that they named a school after her.<sup>2</sup>

### EVENTS CALENDAR

#### September Program

**Saturday, 2 p.m.  
September 9, 2006**

Center for Nonprofit Management  
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

9/11 conspiracy theories. John Brandt will explain the current wing nut stories. See the Web News story in this newsletter.

**NTS Social Dinner  
/Board Meeting  
Saturday, 7 p.m.  
September 23, 2006**

Good Eats  
6950 Greenville Avenue in Dallas

Check the **NTS Hotline** for more information at 214-335-9248.

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So it was, when I first saw one of these cute puzzlers on the Internet I noticed one thing right off. Actually two things. First I was told to add up the digits. This sum is well known in mathematics. It is called the “digital root” of the number. Actually, the digital root is obtained by continuing the process until you end up with a single digit. A digital root of a radix 10 number is in the range 0 to 9. However, this trick still works as described.

The next thing I noticed was I was being asked to subtract the digital root from the original number. Wait, I’ve seen this before. When you subtract the digital root from the original number you will get a number whose digital root is 9. After that it’s immediately obvious...

OK, for those who don’t find it immediately obvious, here’s a short explanation, not a mathematical proof. I’m going to ask you to have faith. Hey! It works for the creationists.

Take a two-digit number. It has digits  $x_0$  and  $x_1$ .

What’s the value of this number? It’s  $x_0 + 10x_1$ .

What’s the digital root? It’s  $x_0 + x_1$ .

Do the subtraction. The result is  $9x_1$ .

Are you getting the picture. The digital root of  $9x_1$  is going to be 9. No proof given. This is going to be on the quiz.

The last number you wrote down has a digital root of 9. Now look at the page with all the symbols and the numbers. Every number that has a digital root of 9 has the same magical symbol beside it. You don’t get to see this page for very long, because if you did you would soon see the trick. You see the page for a few seconds, then it’s replaced by another page that shows only the magical symbol.

To keep the problem interesting, the programmer who wrote the Web application has programmed it to scramble the magical symbols each time, so you don’t always come up with the same symbol when you play the game.

**So, mystery solved.**

Not quite.

There’s another Web site, and this one is just as spooky. This one asks you to remove one digit from a four-digit number. You type in the remaining three digits, and it tells you which digit you removed. Spooky, no?

No. It’s the same trick. You were previously asked to scramble the digits of a four-digit number and then to compute the positive difference between the scrambled and unscrambled numbers. The result is a number with a digital root of 9. No proof given. Remember—faith.

Since the digital root is 9, when you delete one digit and type in the remaining three it's a simple matter to compute the value of the digit you deleted.

There's got to be a skeptical lesson here. Wait, I think I've got it: When you see something that's too spooky to be false, it probably is. When you get in a bind don't be too quick to grasp at the paranormal. Spend your effort searching out the rational explanation. Also, don't take a banana to a gunfight. Today's world requires advance preparation, a point Emma Roberson pushed and the creationists seem to have neglected.




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### References

- 1 See, for example, <http://www.milaadesign.com/wizardy.html>
- 2 [http://www.zoominfo.com/people/Roberson\\_Emma\\_210470791.aspx](http://www.zoominfo.com/people/Roberson_Emma_210470791.aspx)

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## Web News

by John Blanton

*The World Wide Web is a wonderful source of information and news. Some of it is true, and some of it is not.*

### How to Make Sure Children Are Scientifically Illiterate

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-08-15.htm#krauss>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/15/science/sciencespecial2/15essa.html>

**By LAWRENCE M. KRAUSS**

Lawrence Krauss is chairman of the physics department at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio. He does leading research into dark energy and its relation to the origin of the universe. He has been notable recently for his criticism of attempts to dilute the teaching of evolution in Ohio public schools and for his criticism of creationism in general.

Voters in Kansas ensured this month that noncreationist moderates will once again have a majority (6 to 4) on the state school board, keeping new standards inspired by intelligent design from taking effect.

This is a victory for public education and sends a message nationwide about the public's ability to see through efforts by groups like the Discovery Institute to misrepresent science in the schools. But for those of us who are interested in improving science education, any celebration should be muted.

This isn't Kansas' first trip to the punch bowl. Six years ago creationists on the Kansas school board removed evolution from the required exams, all but ensuring Kansas teachers would waltz around it in the class room. Following that voters had a fit and dumped enough offending board members, that evolution got back on the slate. Then off again and most recently back on again as conservatives and normal people battled back and forth over the issue.

But perhaps more worrisome than a political movement against science is plain old ignorance. The people determining the curriculum of our children in many states remain scientifically illiterate. And Kansas is a good case in point.

The chairman of the school board, Dr. Steve Abrams, a veterinarian, is not merely a strict creationist. He has openly stated that he believes that God created the universe 6,500 years ago, although he was quoted in *The New York Times* this month as saying that his personal faith "doesn't have anything to do with science."

"I can separate them," he continued, adding, "My personal views of Scripture have no room in the science classroom."

A key concern should not be whether Dr. Abrams's religious views have a place in the classroom, but rather how someone whose religious views require a denial of essentially all modern scientific knowledge can be chairman of a state school board.

Dr. Krauss has taken heat for taking other scientists to task for making science a religious issue.

...However, the age of the earth, and the universe, is no more a matter of religious faith than is the question of whether or not the earth is flat.

It is a matter of overwhelming scientific evidence. To maintain a belief in a 6,000-year-old earth requires a denial of essentially all the results of modern physics, chemistry, astronomy, biology and geology. It is to imply that airplanes and automobiles work by divine magic, rather than by empirically testable laws.

Surviving board member John Bacon said of scientists in 1999, about the removal of evolution and the Big Bang from the

science standards: "I can't understand what they're squealing about. I wasn't here, and neither were they."

This again represents a remarkable misunderstanding of the nature of the scientific method. Many fields — including evolutionary biology, astronomy and physics — use evidence from the past in formulating hypotheses. But they do not stop there. Science is not storytelling.

...

But when we win minor skirmishes, as we did in Kansas, we must remember that the issue is far deeper than this. We must hold our elected school officials to certain basic standards of knowledge about the world. The battle is not against faith, but against ignorance.

### Criticism of Evolution Can't Be Silenced

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-08-15.htm#schlafly>

<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=16499>

by Phyllis Schlafly Posted Aug 14, 2006

So, what's wrong with that? I see. It's a science versus creationism issue. And it's that liberal press again. Thus reports Schlafly:

The liberal press is reporting that the seesaw battle for control of the Kansas Board of Education just teetered back to pro-evolutionists for the second time in five years. But to paraphrase Mark Twain, reports of the death of the movement to allow criticism of evolution are grossly exaggerated.

In its zeal to portray evolution critics in Kansas as dumb, rural fundamentalists, a New York Times Page 1 story misquoted Steve Abrams (the school board president who had steered Kansas toward allowing criticism of evolution) on a basic principle of science. The newspaper had to correct its error.

The issue in the Kansas controversy was not intelligent design and certainly not creationism. The current Kansas standards state: "To promote good science, good pedagogy and a curriculum that is secular, neutral and non-ideological, school districts are urged to follow the advice provided by the House and Senate Conferees in enacting the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001."

I don't read a lot of Schlafly, but I understand she is a sincerely religious person. So, I wonder why she would want her religious preferences subjected to the scathing reviews

characteristic of scientific discourse. Maybe it is Ms. Schlafly doesn't see this as an evolution versus creationism issue and thinks this criticism is going to be one-sided. We can only guess which side she thinks will get criticized.

Schlafly reminds us the current standards, about to be scuttled, "recognize that quality science education should prepare students to distinguish the data and testable theories of science from religious or philosophical claims that are made in the name of science. Where topics are taught that may generate controversy (such as biological evolution), the curriculum should help students to understand the full range of scientific views that exist, why such topics may generate controversy, and how scientific discoveries can profoundly affect society." She, and other creationists, refuse to acknowledge this is meant to be a target drawn solely on the backsides of evolution and all other scientific theories that dispute their special world view.

Schlafly laments that the new board does not want any criticism of evolution, and "[t]hey don't want students to learn 'the full range of scientific views' or that there is a 'controversy' about evolution."

Liberals see the political value to teaching evolution in school, as it makes teachers and children think they are no more special than animals. Childhood joy and ambition can turn into depression as children learn to reject that they were created in the image of God.

The press is claiming that the pro-evolution victory in Kansas - where, incidentally, voter turnout was only 18 percent - was the third strike for evolution critics. In December a federal judge in Dover, Pa., prohibited the school from even mentioning intelligent design, and in February, the Ohio board of education nixed a plan to allow a modicum of critical analysis of evolution.

But one strikeout does not a ballgame win. Gallup Polls have repeatedly shown that only about 10 percent of Americans believe the version of evolution commonly taught in public schools and, despite massive public school indoctrination in Darwinism, that number has not changed much in decades.

Schlafly is correct in a couple of respects. A low voter turnout doesn't tell us much about which way the wind will blow in the future, and the public polls are definitely on her side.

### Evolution backers seek to influence Ohio elections

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-08-15.htm#ohio>

<http://www.ohio.com/mld/beaconjournal/news/state/15260908.htm>

Posted on Sat, Aug. 12, 2006 Associated Press

Meanwhile, back in Ohio:

COLUMBUS, Ohio - Supporters of teaching Darwin's theory of evolution to school children have launched a campaign aimed at unseating a state Board of Education member who has supported critical evaluation of the theory.

Help Ohio Public Education, a coalition of evolution proponents, on Friday announced an advocacy group headed up by Lawrence Krauss, director of the Center for Education and Research in Cosmology and Astrophysics at Case Western Reserve University.

"I think what you're seeing is grass-roots democracy at work. This is a referendum on intelligent design and creationism," said G.R. Schloemer of Cincinnati, a Republican board member who supports the evolution theory and has the group's support. "This issue has bogged down the board since I came on five years ago. We've got a very divided board. There is no trust among any of us."

Nine members on the 19-member board will see their four-year terms expire at the end of this year, with voters going to the polls in November to fill five of the vacancies and the others to be appointed by the next governor.

Isn't it wonderful when scientific controversies are settled by politicians. I only wish they would take up some of my favorite concerns. Lately I have been annoyed that the sun comes up in the east.

In February, the board voted 11-4 to delete a state standard and corresponding lesson plan that encouraged students to seek evidence for and against evolution. Critics said the lesson echoed arguments from proponents of intelligent design.

"They got what they wanted," said [Republican board member Deborah] Owens Fink, who voted to keep the standard. "I don't understand why they are even engaged on the topic. Ohio isn't Kansas."

## Big church publisher buys 9-11 Bush plot

<http://www.ntskeptics.org/news/news2006-08-15.htm#bush>

[http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=51463](http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=51463)

By David Ray Griffin

Skeptics, it's getting mighty deep out there.

### Presbyterian press to release book by conspiracist who blames attack on White House, not bin Laden

"[O]ne in three Americans believe the federal government was complicit in the Sept. 11 terror attacks." Which, I will assert, is a lot better than two in three.

It wasn't Osama bin Laden who orchestrated the 9-11 attacks, it was George W. Bush, according to a book to be published this month by the Presbyterian Church USA.

Called "Christian Faith and the Truth Behind 9/11: A Call to Reflection and Action," it is the third book on the conspiracy theory authored by David Ray Griffin, a professor emeritus of theology at Claremont School of Theology.

The Bush administration planned the attacks so they would have an excuse to attack Afghanistan and Iraq. This according to Griffin. He is quite obviously way in the weeds on this, because quite obviously two planning teams were involved. As evidence I point how well the September 11 attacks were planned and executed. The Afghanistan and Iraqi campaigns, not among this country's military show pieces.

"I became more convinced that if the truth about 9-11 was going to be exposed, the churches were probably going to have to be involved," Griffin told the magazine. "If we become convinced that the so-called war on terror is simply a pretext for enlarging the American empire, we have every reason as Christians to try and expose the truth behind 9/11."

Officials at the 160-year-old Westminster John Knox, the book imprint of the official Presbyterian Church publisher, said they decided to give Griffin a contract and promote his work because of the questions he raised in his previous books, "The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions About the Bush Administration and 9/11," and "The 9/11 Commission Report: Omissions And Distortions."

"We have a long tradition of being a publisher of somewhat progressive stances on theological and social issues, so it is not out of character for us to do this," Jack Keller, vice president of publishing at WJK, told Christianity Today. "Whether or not people were fully persuaded by the arguments, he was certainly raising some interesting issues."

My guess is WJK is about to pick a reputation of another kind shortly.

But after investigating [Griffin] concluded that the Twin Towers were brought down by controlled demolition, military personnel were given stand-down orders not to intercept hijacked flights and the 9-11 Commission, ostensibly created to uncover the truth behind the events of 9-11, “simply ignored evidence” that the administration was involved in the attacks.

The controlled demolition is self evident from watching the video of the towers coming down. One can easily see the demolition charges going off in sequence, blowing out windows and sending out showers of debris. OK, you have to use your imagination just a little. Regarding the stand-down orders, that’s easy to accept. These guys did what they were told and kept it to themselves. We all know what a well-disciplined and button-down group these fighter jocks are.




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## What’s new

By Robert Park

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

### Evolution: guess what was missing from the smart-grant list?

The Chronicle of Higher Education reported on Tuesday that the list of majors that qualify for Smart grants, prepared by the Department of Education, had a blank line. It turned out to be the line where Evolutionary Biology should have appeared. The Department says the exclusion was inadvertent. That’s possible, but it reminds us that evolution denial in America is not only widespread, it’s growing. According to a study by Jon Miller of Michigan State University in Lansing, acceptance of evolution by Americans declined from 45% in 1985 to 40% in 2005. Only Turkey and the Vatican trail the US. For example, intelligent design critic Rev. George Coyne was replaced as director of the Vatican Observatory <http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN05/wn111805.html>.

### Perpetuum mobile: “all great truths begin as blasphemies.”

This is the slogan of Steorn, a Dublin company that is assembling a jury of scientists to evaluate a device using moving permanent magnets to produce free energy. WN has exposed so many of these devices in the past that it gets depressing. So this time we examined the slogan instead. It’s from George Bernard Shaw’s *Anajanska* [1919], but the full quote must have been lost. We’ve found the full quote: “All great truths begin as blasphemies, but all blasphemies do not become great truths.”

### Evolution: pope will conduct “creation and evolution” seminar.

The weekend seminar in early September will examine the impact of Darwin’s theory on Catholic teaching of creation. The Popes “student circle” includes Austrian Cardinal Schoenborn whose support of intelligent design created controversy a year ago (WN 15 Jul 05).

### Freedom of science: or why the scientific method works.

In my mail this week was “The First Open Letter about the Freedom of Science” from somebody named G.O. Mueller in Germany. It went to 290 “public figures” in Europe and the USA. Must be a lot of G.O. Muellers in Germany. This one thinks the Special Theory of Relativity is nonsense. He says 2896 publications agree with him. He’s probably right, I’ve been sent about that many over the years. I would say the system is working just about right.

### Kansas: voters drowse through another primary election.

Moderate Republicans took a 6-4 advantage over conservatives on the Kansas Board of Education. Evolution, of course, was the issue. In principle, evolutionists could increase that to 8-2 in November, but this is Kansas where the general election is just a formality. Whether this is more evidence of the “Dover effect” is not clear (WN 17 Feb 06), but don’t count the intelligent design movement out.

### Bleep: William Tiller and “Ramtha’s School of Enlightenment.”

August is a slow month, and I promised last week to say a little about Ramtha and William Tiller. Ramtha is a 35,000 year-old spirit-warrior from Atlantis who showed up in JZ

## Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.  
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Knight's Tacoma, WA, kitchen in 1977. She is his channel. I first learned of Ramtha a year ago from William Tiller, PhD, a physicist who was the expert witness for Pacific Health Center, Inc., charged by the State of Washington with violating consumer protection laws with a fraudulent medical diagnostic device. I agreed to be the expert witness for the State of Washington. Pacific Health lost. Tiller had been at Stanford before taking "early retirement," I think they call it. I was familiar with a 1994 medical device that Tiller said would protect computer users from the effects of EMF (WN 27 May 94). To my knowledge, no one who bought the device was ever harmed by EMF from their computer. Tiller says he has a high regard for the graduates of Ramtha's School of Enlightenment who produced Bleep. He said the movie doubled the sale of his books.

*Bob Park can be reached via email at [opa@aps.org](mailto:opa@aps.org).*

### Future Meeting Dates

October 14, 2006	April 21, 2007
November 11, 2006	May 19, 2007
December 9, 2006	June 16, 2007
January 13, 2007	July 14, 2007
February 17, 2007	August 11, 2007
March 17, 2007	

### The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

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