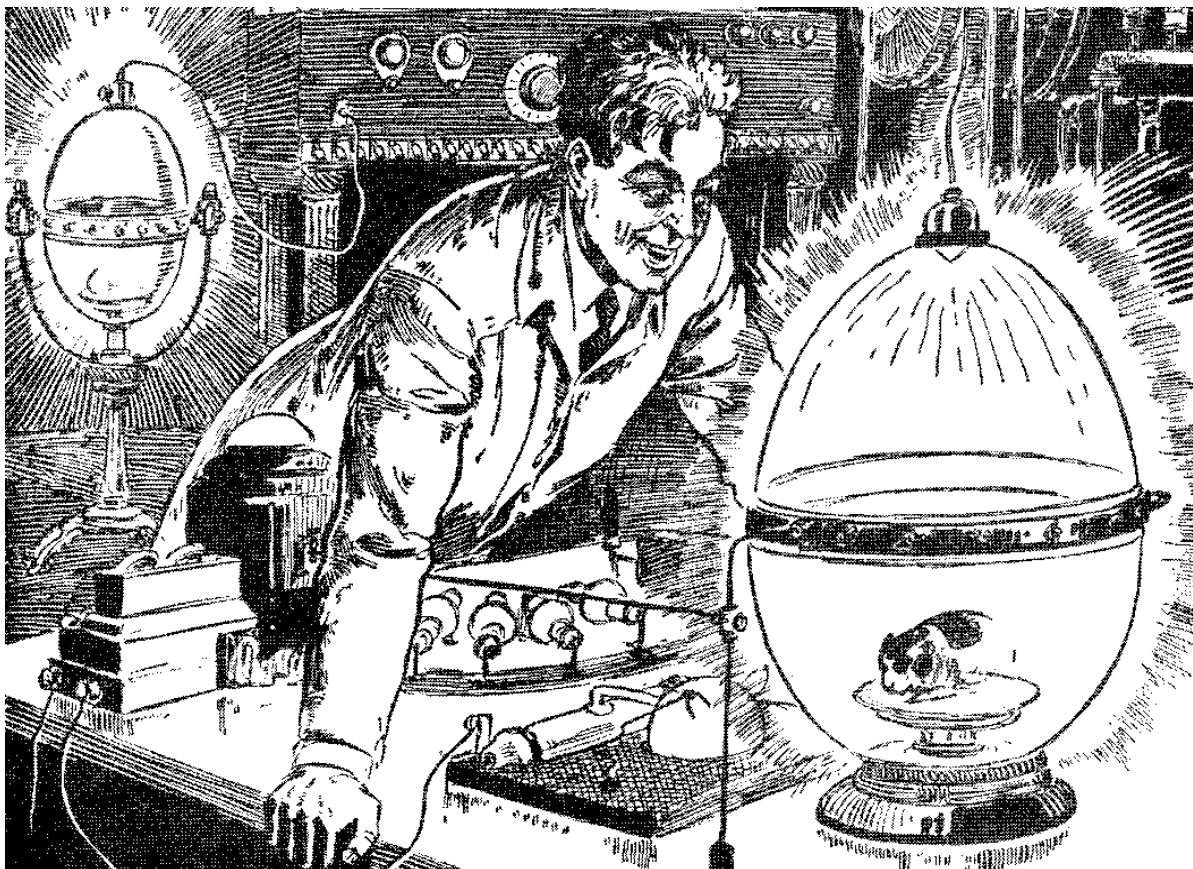


CORUSCATING CONUNDRUMS!



ASK MR. GUESS-IT-ALL!

As submitted by R. Graeme Cameron, official spin-doctor for Mr. Guess-It-All, well-known acolyte of Mr. Science, his mentor. (To contact The Graeme with questions to submit or comments on the answers, write: < rgraeme@shaw.ca >)

Ask Mr. Guess-It-All humbly offers these feeble revelations in tribute to the legendary Mr. Science and his hard-working Social Secretary Al Betz for their magnificent attempts to enlighten mankind as to the true nature of the nature of truth and sundry other matters of equally threatening import.

The columns included in this issue first appeared in the pages of *BCSFazine* (the clubzine of the British Columbia Science Fiction Association), *WCSFazine* (the promozine for VCON, the annual Science Fiction convention sponsored by the West Coast Science Fiction Association), *The Space Cadet Gazette* (the perzine of The Graeme), and *The Ask Mr. Guess-It-All Livejournal* (available at < <http://mr-guess-it-all.livejournal.com> >). See < www.efanzines.com > for the three zines
Mr. QR, of Toad River, B.C., asks:

WHY DOESN'T THE EARTH'S MOON HAVE AN OCEAN LIKE EUROPA HAS?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: But it does! The surface of the Moon is completely covered with an incredibly deep ocean of water whose volume matches that of the Moon itself.

Now, do not be misled by the recent discovery of water ice mixed with the regolith at the Lunar South Pole. This is mere regular water, or H₂O with two hydrogen atoms per atom of oxygen. And don't even think of heavy water, or D₂O, with two atoms of deuterium per atom of oxygen, making up a fluid with the same properties as water, but about 10% denser. The Lunar Ocean is comprised of neither of these.

The water coating the Moon is in fact He₉O, consisting of nine atoms of helium per atom of Oxygen, otherwise known as light water. So ethereally light is this fluid that it refracts sunlight no more than a vacuum does! Hence the Apollo astronauts bouncing around on the surface soil of the moon were totally unaware they were at the bottom of a vast ocean.

The proof of the matter is clear from the television footage broadcast live. The astronauts take long, floating steps, as if they were ambulating in a low gravity environment. But, as we all know, the bulk of the moon consists of solid lead. Consequently, though smaller than Earth, the Moon's gravity is four times what our bodies are used to. Yet the astronauts appear to drift about in a most languid manner. Obviously they are buoyed up by the He₉O! And the American flag slowly waving in what is supposed to be a vacuum? It goes without saying the gossamer gentle currents within the He₉O are shifting the fabric. An amazing phenomenon, this ocean of He₉O!

Mrs. SM, of Soda Creek, B.C., asks:

WHY DO TASMANIAN DEVILS MAKE SUCH HIDEOUS NOISES?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Both male and female Tasmanian Devils utter horrendous sounds, but for different reasons.

In the case of the male, evolution has selected the size of their testicles as a sexual attractant. Over time their testicles have grown to enormous size in relation to body mass. Unfortunately, the size of the scrotum has remained a constant. As you may well imagine, this is extremely painful. No wonder the males continually emit bleating roars and rueful growls, not to mention angry belches, usually in combination.

Females, on the other hand, tend generally to remain silent, except when sighting a male, where upon they release a frenzy of screeching howls. After much relentless experimentation scientists have determined this

is the Tasmanian Devil equivalent of raucous laughter. Oddly enough, said hilarity on the part of females tends to induce the males to growl all the more.

Mr. P.Y. of Indian Tickle, Labrador, asks:

SCIENTISTS WANT TO DETECT GRAVITY WAVES. WHY? WHAT GOOD ARE THEY?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Einstein says any mass will distort time and space to produce gravity waves. (Liquor has the same effect on some people.) Paired super-massive Black Holes should, according to him, distort even gravity waves to the point of producing ripples within the waves. (Hmm, how much did Einstein drink anyway?)

Now Pulsars are like metronomes, their beats are precise. Any delay or acceleration in the detection of their beats indicates distortion brought about by a passing gravity wave and/or ripple. In theory, if you listen to the energy broadcasts of enough Pulsars you should be able to map the pattern of gravity waves throughout the universe.

This is a big deal because only then will it be possible to skip Starships along the crests of the gravity waves like a flat stone being hurled across the surface of a rippling lake. Mapping gravity waves will give us the stars!

Three problems appear insurmountable however, at least in light of current technology and knowledge.

First, what happens when a Starship loses momentum and sinks beneath the gravity waves?

Second, who can afford to build a mechanical device big enough to throw a Starship across the gravity ocean?

Third, how do you aim the damn thing?

But these are piffling details. Once resolved you will be able to take a somewhat bouncy ride to the Andromeda Galaxy! Which is great!

Not quite sure how you will get back to Earth, mind you. But then, why would you want to?

Mrs. H.J. of Bunbeg, Ireland, asks:

WHO INVENTED TOILET PAPER?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: If you discount the use of papyrus beginning with the ancient Egyptians, or tree bark paper by the Mesoamericans, it was probably the Chinese, since they're the ones who invented paper made from plant sediment such as we use today. They came up with this as early as the year 110 AD (the date of the oldest surviving sample).

The first use of paper as toilet paper is ascribed to Yen Chih T'ui, a court official, who wrote in 539 AD that he often used the literary works of authors he didn't like as toilet paper. This may not count, however, since the manuscripts in question were not purpose-built for this usage, or so we assume.

What is known to be a genuine fact is that by 1391 AD the Chinese Bureau of Imperial Supplies was manufacturing 720,000 sheets of toilet paper a year for use by the higher ranking court officials. Even more remarkable, and rather odd, is that each sheet measured approximately two feet by three feet! Modern historians regard this as proof that ancient Chinese officials endured a regimen of powerful laxatives as an aid to discipline and humility just as ancient tradition attests.

Equally significant is the written record stating that the Emperor and his immediate family made use of 15,000 sheets a year, a mere three inches square, described as "thick but soft, and perfumed." This also confirms ancient tradition which claims that the Imperial family was exempt from the strict regimen imposed on the civil service.

Some modern philosophers are of the opinion that the rather harsh laxative regimen of the Imperial Court should be revived and applied to contemporary civil servants everywhere. This has wide appeal.

Mr. L.O. of Kagawong, Ontario, asks:

CERTAIN MINERALS FOUND IN MARTIAN SOIL PROVE MARS ONCE HAD RUNNING WATER, BUT IT WAS FAR TOO SALTY AND ACIDIC TO SUPPORT LIFE AS WE KNOW IT. DOES THIS MEAN THE SEARCH FOR LIFE ON MARS IS DEAD?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Of course not. Quite the contrary, in fact. Small shallow lakes of an identical nature, featuring extremely high acidic levels, exist in Western Australia, and are teeming with microbial life, as well as fossilized microbes scientifically described as "hairy blobs". So you see, if anything, the discovery of those minerals on Mars PROVES life probably existed and may yet be found in fossil form.

Not only that, but Australian police confirm the shallow lakes in Western Australia consist of spillage from a vast network of illegal stills constructed by thirsty dwellers in the outback. Without any doubt this means that life existed on Mars long enough to evolve into a highly advanced creature similar to modern human bootleggers. All in all the discovery of these minerals on Mars is quite exciting really.

It should be noted that the Martian stills have long since rusted away, contributing their oxides to the colouration of the Martian surface. Considering how red Mars is,

logic would indicate Martians were even bigger alcoholics than we are. A clue, perhaps, as to why Martian civilization is long since dead.

Mr. Z.R. of Pahrump, Nevada, asks:

WHO INVENTED, OR DISCOVERED, CHEWING GUM? WHAT IS CHEWING GUM ANYWAY?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Modern marketing insists chewing gum is made from chicle, the sap of the Sapodilla tree found only in Central America, and that ancient Mayan prostitutes used to chew it while hanging around street corners, or more accurately, around the corners of pyramid-temple complexes. After the Spanish came along its use was forgotten, till 1870 when a madman named Thomas Adams Jr., randomly slashing trees with a machete, rediscovered the sap. He apparently told some one named Wrigley about it, and a brand new inedible food industry was born. This, of course, is false.

Chicle is simply an inferior sort of rubber sap no amount of chemical doctoring can turn into anything useful, at least in terms of the normal functions of rubber. Nevertheless early horseless carriage and bicycle manufacturers offered free pneumatic tires made of chicle because they were cheaper and easier to manufacture than proper rubber tires. In cold weather they worked fine, but in wet or hot weather the chicle tires turned all gooey and glued themselves to the pavement, effectively stopping all vehicles dead. A huge public relations disaster for the manufacturers.

Till one hot summer day in 1888, when an emotional French politician, stuck in Parisian traffic and late for an appointment with his mistress, got down on his hands and knees and attempted to gnaw his tire rims free of the melted, clingy chicle. To his surprise, it tasted rather good, and the texture met with his masticatory approval. THIS was the true beginning of the chewing gum industry.

Sad to relate, certain modern Luddites, opposed to polluting combustion engine machines, deliberately masticate chewing gum into a state of gooeyness and callously cast it upon the pavement of cities in hopes that a sufficient depth will accumulate to trap said vehicles and bring traffic to a halt. You've no doubt seen evidence of this yourself, or even stepped in it. A pathetic form of protest, and very expensive to clean up.

The solution, of course, is to circulate liquid Hydrogen through the pavement so that the chicle becomes brittle and can be easily broken up. I have patented the process. It will make me wealthy. I therefore approve of chewing gum, even though I don't use it myself.

Mr. M.P. of Recluse, Wyoming, asks:

I HEARD SOMEONE INVENTED NANOSATELLITES. WHAT ON EARTH FOR?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Not ON Earth, but in orbit, that's the idea. Blame the Surrey Space Centre of the University of Surrey in Guilford, UK, for they created the concept.

The 'Cube Sail Craft' satellite is only 30 X 10 X 10 centimetres in size. Using the pressure of sunlight on its miniature sail, it will tack about in orbit till it gloms on to a minute piece of space debris, then use its sail to decelerate, ultimately plunging itself and its cargo of captive debris to fiery annihilation in the upper atmosphere. Larger debris will be 'escorted' by multiple Cube Sails. In theory the technology will eventually clear the space lanes and make space travel safer.

Unfortunately scientists estimate that only about 40% of launched CS Craft will actually work, the other 60% will wind up becoming space debris. The more CS Craft launched to clear space debris, the greater the amount space debris will accumulate. Bit of a catch 22.

On the plus side, by the time the Sun swells into a red giant incorporating Earth within its diameter, we will have built up a good, solid, and very thick metal shell protecting the entire planet. So in the long term at least, these nanosatellites are a very good thing indeed.

Mr. LA. of Lamprey, Manitoba, asks:
WHO INVENTED THE BIKINI?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Some French guy in 1947. He named it after the Bikini atoll where the Americans were conducting atomic tests. The idea was that the bikini bathing suit would have a similar explosive effect on any male within visual range.

Yet Classical historians will tell you the bikini was a common female bathing attire in ancient Roman times. There's a mosaic in Sicily depicting several beautiful women exercising in bikinis, RED bikinis no less. And archaeologists found an intact leather bikini in a first century well in London of all places. Must have been quite the party.

But the true historical import of the bikini lies in the role it played in the assassination of the Emperor Caligula. Oh, it had nothing to do with his prancing through the Forum in a bikini, he did that all the time, people were used to that. And his instructions to members of the Senate that they had to wear bikinis beneath their togas had little effect, they remained hidden after all. But when he then informed them they had to wear see-through togas of the sheerest chiffon, so that their bikinis would be visible to all, THAT was the final affront to their dignity, and so they arranged for him to be killed.

Subsequent Emperors occasionally ordered the Senators of Rome to wear their togas backwards, for a bit of a lark you see, but not even the grimmest military Emperors of the declining years of the Empire dared to repeat Caligula's mistake. Lesson learned, you might say.

Mr. L.K. of Dimmitt, Texas, asks:

**WHY DID PRESIDENT NIXON CUT SHORT THE
APOLLO SPACE PROGRAM, CANCELLING
MISSIONS 18, 19 AND 20?**

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Because missions 11, 12, and 14 thru 17 had already collected more than enough alien artifacts for scientists to study.

They concluded that, given mankind was barely mature enough to handle contemporary human technology, a sudden influx of alien technology via open contact with aliens would doom mankind much as contact with Europe doomed the Aztecs and the Incas. It was therefore imperative to self-quarantine Earth from the inquisitive aliens who had left trash from various expeditions to our Moon, expeditions apparently designed to study Earth. Next obvious step, a landing on the White House lawn. To be avoided at all costs!

Hence the creation of the Space Shuttle. As a cover, the multi-billion dollar space station was erected in orbit, to give the shuttle a place to go to. (Billions to observe spiders spin webs in weightlessness? And people believe this?) And as additional cover, the shuttle placed numerous satellites into orbit. (When dumb launch vehicles can do it far cheaper?)

In reality the function of most Space Shuttle flights, hauling 300 tons of water and 346 tons of hydrochloric acid, is to spew out a thin stream of its cargo while constantly shifting orbit at a very low altitude of 80 kilometres above the earth's surface. The resulting vapour tracery puffs into luminescence and lingers for months at a time. This phenomenon, occasionally noticeable to ground observers in the form of silvery blue, glowing clouds visible before sunrise or just after sunset, is termed 'Noctilucent Clouds' and is blamed on increasing air pollution and global warming.

Nonsense! The phenomenon is actually Space Shuttle skywriting warning the aliens to leave Earth alone!

Two questions may possibly spring to your mind:

First: But they're canceling the Space Shuttle program this year. Does this mean the aliens are no longer a threat?

Answer: Far from it. As great a threat as ever. But take note the US Airforce is about to test its unmanned 'Orbital Test Vehicle', about one quarter the size of a shuttle, yet capable of remaining 270 days in orbit and then land on its own. Plus it has a better sprinkler system.

An obvious replacement for the now obsolete Space Shuttle.

Second: Did we crack the alien written language? How do we know what to write?

Answer: We didn't. But scientists observed that no-longer functioning alien equipment found in the Lunar trash heaps bore slapped-on labels that were consistently identical. The 'writing' presumably means something like "Broken! Do not use!", and this is what we've been skywriting in our upper atmosphere for several decades.

Seems to be working so far. No aliens have landed and initiated contact to date.

Trouble is, all this is for naught if the aliens turn out to be do-gooders and their reaction upon reading our message is to swarm all over the Earth in an effort to 'fix' it. Then we'll really be screwed.

Mrs. G.T. of Swain Post, Ontario, asks:
SHOULD WE CLONE NEANDERTHALS?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Absolutely not!

Granted, the US Army was interested for a while, thinking it would lead to a useful type of obedient, physically strong soldier. Before the actual project could get underway, several recent paleontological discoveries caused the Pentagon to quickly shelve the program.

Seems the Neanderthals were accustomed to burying their dead in pits filled with flowers and saffron. They played bone flutes. They wore seashells as jewelry. They painted both themselves and their jewelry with red ochre. To sum up, the Neanderthals were nothing but a race of hirsute hippies! The last thing the Pentagon wants. More hippies!

On the other hand, the Canadian Army program of retro-breeding humans back to Hominoid level has produced several generations of really superb hockey players.

Mr. C.P. of Crapaud, Prince Edward Island, asks:
RECENTLY SCIENTISTS CREATED A FOUR TRILLION DEGREE TEMPERATURE IN A LABORATORY. WHY?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Scientists would have you believe they briefly reproduced conditions similar to the state of the universe shortly after the big bang, and that this was their intention all along. They are lying.

What actually happened was a matter transporter experiment. The good news is that four Star Trek fans volunteered to be guinea pigs. The bad news is that just

after the test subjects were vapourized into a fluid plasma state the experiment broke down before they could be reformed.

More good news, their 'existence' is currently in stasis within a magnetic field, so they are not dead yet, if not quite living. On the other hand, the fact that their collective fluid plasma state is now hopelessly intermingled into a single 'blob' may possibly be construed as further bad news.

Scientists anticipate that the forthcoming continuation of the experiment wherein every effort will be made to reconstitute the 'plasma kids' into material form should prove most interesting. Several circus sideshows have already offered to bid on the result. As has Ripley's Believe It Or Not museum.

Fortunately the government will be offering compensation to the relatives.

Oddly enough, the recruiting drive for additional test subjects appears to have stalled for some reason. Perhaps Star Trek fans are not as fanatical as they used to be.

Mr. E.M. of Skookumchuk, British Columbia, asks:
IS MOTHER NATURE REALLY OUR MOTHER?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Absolutely! Unfortunately, not even she knows who our father is.

To the best of her recollection, it was one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. She can't decide which one, since she went to bed with all of them at the same time. She describes the experience as "rough but fulfilling."

Occasionally lawyers working on behalf of the Human race have gone to Mount Olympus (where the orgy in question originally took place by the way) to demand the Gods force the Four Horsemen to take a DNA test to determine paternity.

Interestingly enough, every time this happens a major war breaks out. Far be it for Mr. Guess-It-All to suggest this 'co-incidence' implicates one of the Four Horsemen in particular...

In any case, Mother Nature has done a terrific job as a single mother. There's really no need to identify our father. Not if we know what's good for us.

Mrs. A.D.. of Sicamous, British Columbia, asks:
I WEAR A LAYER OF TIN FOIL INSIDE MY HARD HAT TO KEEP THE GOVERNMENT FROM READING MY MIND. SHOULD I ADD A SECOND LAYER FOR EXTRA PROTECTION?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Absolutely not! You are the victim of misinformation spread by the government. Tin foil doesn't repel RCMP mindsuck rays, it attracts them! Rest assured the RCMP know your every thought, conscious and unconscious, when you wear your hard hat.

Even worse, if you add one or more extra layers, the RCMP will CONTROL your thoughts and turn you into a mindless zombie. Under NO circumstances add more tin foil! Take the tin foil out of your hard hat NOW!

But don't throw it away. Instead, tear it into myriad tiny pieces, fashion each into a miniscule cap, and place them on the heads of local garden slugs. That will really annoy the RCMP.

However, single layer only. Mr. Guess-It-All refuses to answer for the consequences of two or more layers of tin foil should the RCMP utilize their newfound horde of mind-controlled slugs to hideously nefarious purpose.

Mr. B.K., of Osoyoos, British Columbia, asks:
A NEWS REPORT ON APRIL 1ST STATED SWISS POLICE ARRESTED A MAN CLAIMING TO BE FROM THE FUTURE WHO HAD COME BACK IN TIME TO SABOTAGE THE HADRON COLLIDER. IS THIS JUST AN APRIL FOOL'S HOAX?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: That's what THEY want you to believe. Logically, however, the technical details in the article reveal the veracity of the report. It is a mere coincidence this extremely dangerous event happened on that particular date.

The "strangely garbed man," who gave the name 'Eloi Cole', was attempting to disrupt the functioning of the Hadron Collider by "stopping supplies of Mountain Dew to the experiment's vending machines." This is the key phrase. For as we all know, the Hadron Collider, the world's largest and most powerful atomic particle accelerator, is powered by Mountain Dew.

It used to be thought that the 'fizz' in carbonized soft drinks was, apart from a certain tendency to introduce acid reflux disease, completely harmless. We know now that acid reflux is a symptom of radiation poisoning brought about by what is really going on in your typical can of soft drink, namely cold fusion.

On the one hand, this discovery proved extremely beneficial to humanity as it offers us limitless energy at very little expense. Then again, the ready availability of this potent nuclear process could, in the wrong hands, prove disastrous in the extreme.

For this reason there is a movement afoot to ban soft drink vending machines from high schools. The cover

story is combating obesity through removing a major source of sugar, but in reality the idea is to prevent students from utilizing their 'pop' in shop class to fabricate nuclear weapons. I think we can all agree the ban is a most necessary precaution.

Mr. J.G. of Longniddry, Scotland, asks:
IS CIVILIZATION DOOMED?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Absolutely! But look on the bright side, there will be many employment opportunities for wannabe horde leaders, at least for a while.

Even better, once the milling locust-like throngs of humanity has died off, and the population worldwide crashed to under a million, conditions for settled agrarian communities centred on castles and walled villages will become ideal, especially when the landscape turns wild again as plant and animal life stage a comeback and flourish.

The important thing is to prepare NOW for the impending future. Having chosen locations with ready access to fresh water and arable land, we need to construct buildings out of blocks of granite or basalt roofed with slabs of same. Individual rooms will necessarily be tiny, but cozy and easy to heat. Above all, these buildings will be extremely low maintenance, standing for millennia even if uninhabited.

These settlements should be stocked with easy to keep livestock like chickens and goats, and packed with as many hand axes, spear points, arrowheads, sickles and other useful tools as possible, as long as they're made of either flint or obsidian, both very long lasting.

The first post apocalypse generation will no doubt defend their keeps with automatic weapons and Claymore mines, the second with Claymore swords and catapults, the third and all subsequent generations with stone age devices.

One can maintain a fairly high level of culture in a stone age society, providing the nobles have sufficient numbers of warriors to keep the slaves in line. Mr. Guess-It-All suggests a ratio of twenty slaves and five warriors per noble as being the most practical.

Should things work out as planned, the new stone age civilization will resemble a non-stop SCA event. That's not so bad, is it? Could be rather fun in fact, at least for the nobles.

Ms. H.R. of Langanoxie, Kansas, asks:
WHAT HAPPENED TO SOUTH TALPATTI ISLAND?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: You refer to an island in the bay of Bengal claimed by both India and Bangladesh. A small island whose highest point was only six feet above sea level, but sturdy, consisting entirely of rock with very little soil. It has now permanently disappeared beneath the waves.

Scientists blame global warming, arguing that melting ice caps and glaciers have added so much water to the oceans that low lying islands are being inundated. This is nonsense.

As we all know, water is highly compressible. The 'extra' water from ice melt is simply making the ocean water denser and heavier, with the result that the sea level world wide is actually dropping as the oceans compress.

This in turn, because of the lateral pressure against the base of both continents and islands, is compressing the 'roots' of land masses into denser and heavier material, causing the land to sink at a rate faster than the sea level decline, yet creating the illusion that the sea level is rising when in fact the opposite is the case.

The clear implication of this process, of course, is that the world is shrinking into itself and at an ever accelerating pace. Now you know how Black Holes are born.

Mr. P.A. of Upper Liard, Yukon, asks:
SCIENTISTS RECENTLY DISCOVERED A PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN SPECIES OF GIANT LIZARD IN THE PHILLIPPINES. HOW DID IT REMAIN UNDETECTED FOR SO LONG, DESPITE CENTURIES OF HUMAN HABITATION IN ITS HABITAT?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: You refer to *Varanus Bitafawa*, a species of monitor lizard up to two metres in length which is related to the larger Komodo Dragon found in Indonesia. Unlike its fearsome meat-eating cousin, the Bitafawa feeds on fruit. It is also rather pretty, being dark grey and covered with myriad greenish yellow spots.

However, you are mistaken in ascribing it a prolonged period of habitation on the Island of Luzon. The species only recently arrived a mere two years ago. As well, scientists are mistaken in declaring it a separate species from *Varanus Komodoensis*, the infamous Komodo Dragon. Both creatures are one and the same.

All that has happened is that a California guru named Apollonius Siddhartha Zarathustra Jr. succeeded in converting a number of Komodo Dragons to vegetarianism and these converts, every one of them smaller than the dominant Alpha males, fled to Luzon to establish a commune free of harassment from their orthodox relatives. They speckle themselves with

greenish yellow paint as a sign of their newly beloved-of-the-Gods status.

Alas, the commune is unlikely to survive very long as Apollonius will be unable to guide them, having himself been converted into Komodo Dragon scat. Seems he made the mistake of preaching to a particularly large Komodo Dragon who happened to become both bored and hungry at the same time.

By the way, once the acolytes lose faith they are liable to transform back into carnivores. Local villagers take note.

Mr. T.R. of Whangarei, New Zealand, asks:
WHY IS THE NEWLY DISCOVERED ELEMENT UNUNSEPTIUM 117 SO UNSTABLE?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Because it is very unsure of itself. I mean, really, it should be proud because it possesses 117 protons, no mean achievement. But since it has yet to be granted an official name or be presented with a unique chemical symbol it quickly gets miffed at this lack of recognition and leaves in a fraction of a second from when it first appears. Consequently it can be put to no practical use.

The last time the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry assigned an official name and chemical symbol to a new element the process took a decade! Years may pass before they make a decision about Ununseptium 117.

However, assuming the new element is fully certified at some point in the future, it will quickly settle down and become quite stable, lasting for centuries. Many manufacturers are drooling at the prospect because the properties of Ununseptium 117 are such that it can be cheaply and safely substituted for the mercury, lead, and arsenic additives found in the majority of household products we currently use. Overall this is considered a good thing.

Mr. G.S. of Phu Kradung, Thailand, asks:
LATELY THE CANADIAN WEST COAST SALMON RUNS HAVE BEEN ABSYMMALLY MEAGRE, AS IF MILLIONS OF SALMON HAVE VANISHED IN THE DEEP OCEAN. WHAT'S KILLING THEM?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Nothing. They are still out there, in perfect health and perfectly happy. But they're boycotting the Salmon Runs. They won't be back for years, if at all.

You see, they are upset by their fish farm cousins. The latter layabouts enjoy free food, socialized medicine, and cozy, purpose-built condo complexes free of predators,

not to mention an active life style of social and sexual intercourse due to the density of population.

The more conservative country Salmon are both scandalized and extremely jealous. Extremists want the fish farms dismantled and the inhabitants forced to swim in the open ocean, but the vast majority of salmon want equal rights (and equal standard of living) with their fish farm cousins.

By the time either solution comes to pass and the wild Salmon return to spawn in the Salmon rivers and streams, local fishermen will be facing quite a challenge (and danger) as the Salmon will have grown sufficient in size to rival the Killer Whales in status as the largest predators off the West Coast.

On the plus side, the sight of Salmon attempting to climb water falls should prove somewhat more spectacular than hitherto, and the battles with Salmon hunting Bears less lopsided than usual. All in all a heck of a tourist attraction.

Mrs. A.H. of Godel Iceport, Antarctica, asks:
WHY IS THE SKY BLUE?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Because Mother Nature is depressed.

As is well known, our planet's atmosphere's primary function is that of an emotional aura for Mother Nature (or Mother Earth, or Gaia – she has many names).

Clouds represent confused thoughts, Rain her weeping sorrow, Wind her rage or even outrage, and a Clear Blue Sky her utter depression.

Why so sad? You would be too if your skin was overrun with nasty parasites killing off your luxuriant plumage and burrowing deep into your flesh to retrieve essential oils and vitamins. I refer, of course, to the plague of humans infecting the Earth. Nothing to be done about it till the horrible little beasts over populate and become extinct.

Only then will the sky revert to its natural expression of Mother Nature's happiness. Those who journey to the far Arctic or Antarctic may enjoy a preview however, for humanity is sparse in these regions and occasionally this joyous fact is reflected in the sky, though only at night when the humans, few though they may be, are asleep and inactive.

In the north, we call her delightful shimmering veils of green, red and gold happiness the Aurora Borealis, and in the antipodean south, the wonderful dance of pink and green the Aurora Australis. If we could but reduce our teeming billions to ashes, our ghosts would witness these joyous displays in broad daylight worldwide and the

doleful colour blue would be banished forever. It is to die for.

Mr. F.D. of Pewsey, England, asks:
WHICH IS HEALTHIER; TO EXPRESS ANGER OR TO SUPPRESS IT?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Never, ever express your anger! Suppression is by far the better choice.

For example, giving vent to your anger and opening your front door in order to chastise the Werewolf / Vampire / Zombie / axe-wielding neighbour who has been demanding entrance is always a bad idea.

What you should do instead is suppress your anger. Now in the case of a few, rare individuals this will lead to hyper-tension and high blood pressure, followed by apoplexy, heart attack or stroke. But for the vast majority of people, your frustration and anger will build and build till it explosively vents through the 4th dimension into a planetary atmosphere somewhere else in the universe, affording you instant relief and peace of mind.

Not unexpectedly, scientists are excited at the prospect of somehow harnessing this phenomenon to achieve matter transmission as a means of space travel.

That the phenomenon could perhaps be utilized in reverse in order to return home is proven by global warming, itself the product of alien anger being directed to our planetary atmosphere. Nothing personal you understand. We just happen to be a convenient destination for suppression venting. Something to do with our location on the edge of the Galaxy. Out of sight out of mind I guess.

Ms. M.G. of Wonewoc, Wisconsin, asks:
IS INVISIBILITY A SCIENTIFIC POSSIBILITY?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: I assume your question refers to a process by which visible objects are rendered invisible. Is that possible? Well, scientists at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in Germany recently claimed to have invented an invisibility cloak which somehow diverts light around an object, rather like water around a rock. Mind you, the object in question was only 0.00004 inches high and 0.0005 inches across so I tend to suspect it was rather invisible to begin with.

Frankly, I'm not impressed. I can dump a pile of laundry on one of my shoes and no one can tell it's there, so what's the big hairy deal? Invisibility is easy to achieve. Anybody can do it.

At this very moment, for instance, I am alone in my den and thus invisible to the entire human race, as well as to

all other sentient beings throughout this and all other universes past, present and future! That is a pretty fantastic power of invisibility, and I can do it effortlessly. So can you.

So why is the European commission of Science and the German Ministry for Education and Research jointly funding the ongoing research into invisibility at the Karlsruhe Institute? This is a question beyond the capacity of my logic to deduce the answer, unless it simply be that they are fools.

Yes indeed! They ARE fools, or at least ignorant, as they seem completely unaware many ordinary and common things are already invisible. Most of my friends for instance, and the Martians I share my apartment with, not to mention the giant squids hovering in the air above our cities (responsible for many unexplained disappearances I might add). How can they not know this? Fools!

Mr. O.S. of Nyukka, Russia, asks:
IS THE UNIVERSE NOTHING MORE THAN A VAST QUANTUM COMPUTER?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Physicist Vlatko Vedral thinks so. In his book ‘Decoding Reality’ he argues that, since our universe is composed of atoms, and atoms are composed of tinier bits in a quantum flux state of being and not-being, i.e. ‘on’ or ‘off’ bits, it must mean that the universe we perceive as a ‘place’ is really more of a stream of information amounting to a functioning computer. He even claims to have calculated, based on the amount of matter presumed to exist in the universe, how much RAM virtual memory the universe possesses.

He’s a bit of a crank, this Vlatko Vedral.

In reality, our universe is but a single bead on just one of the wires of God’s abacus. The cosmic background radiation, popularly ascribed to a residual remnant of the ‘Big Bang’ creation of our universe, is in fact merely a remnant of the ‘Big Bang’ which occurred when God flicked our abacus bead to record a transaction. If we could but observe the other ‘beads’ (universes) we might possibly be able to deduce what price God is charging.

The implications are staggering!

Mrs. H.G. of Malbooma, Australia, asks:
RECENTLY ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN GREECE FOUND A 23,000 YEAR OLD STONE WALL PARTIALLY BLOCKING A CAVE ENTRANCE, A WALL CONSTRUCTED AT THE HEIGHT OF THE ICE AGE! WHO BUILT IT, AND WHY?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Archaeologists hypothesize our caveman ancestors were attempting to prevent cold wind from sweeping into the cave. What nonsense!

In truth the Ice Age represented the greatest extent of the natural range of the Yeti, or ‘Abominable Snowmen,’ who flourished under such conditions. Naturally they were peeved to come into contact with our rather uncouth and dangerously aggressive Cro-Magnon forbearers. Consequently the wall in question, possibly the last surviving example of Yeti architecture and engineering (outside of Tibet that is), was built by the normally passive Yeti to seal the cave entrance and entomb the slumbering humans within.

Unfortunately, the wall is only two thirds complete, which strongly indicates the Yeti’s effort was interrupted by the emergence of angry cavemen bent on driving off or perhaps slaughtering the poor Yeti. We can only speculate as to their fate.

In the end, of course, global warming reduced the habitat of the Yeti to the highlands of Tibet, allowing mankind to triumph everywhere else.

Even more distressing, the majority of surviving Yeti architectural wonders were seized by the first humans to enter Tibet, eventually to be converted into palaces and monasteries. No wonder the surviving Yeti are so reclusive, and disgruntled. Hence the term ‘Abominable,’ which describes their manner when confronted by a human. Hardly to be wondered at, considering the way we’ve treated them.

Mr. F.T. of Oke Odde, Nigeria, asks:
RECENTLY A NEW HOMINOID SPECIES, NAMED ‘AUSTRALOPITHECUS SEDIBA’, WAS DISCOVERED IN SOUTH AFRICA. IS THIS THE SO-CALLED ‘MISSING LINK’ BETWEEN APE AND HUMAN?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: I am not the least bit interested in speculation about the ‘missing link’ between Man and Ape. I am far more interested in discovering the ‘missing link’ between Man and Praying Mantis. That would be infinitely more cool.

But in the meantime, this particular event is yet again proof positive that Paleontologists make poor Archaeologists. Consider the following quote on the location of the find: “The first downpours of the rainy season may have swept the bodies into a pool rich with lime and sand – the ingredients of cement – which essentially froze them in place.”

Doesn’t anyone understand what this means? They’ve discovered a Hominoid cement factory! A fantastic level of technology for two million years ago.

Now the physical description makes sense: “*strode upright on long legs with human-shaped hips and pelvis, but still climbed through trees on ape-like arms... relatively primitive feet...*” Perfectly designed for picking their way through a tangle of rebar and for climbing scaffolding.

And here’s the kicker: “*Dr. Berger pointed to a Hominoid skeleton plainly visible in the road bed.*”

Road bed? Hominoid road construction. Follow the road. It will lead to the Hominoid construction site that was serviced by the Hominoid cement factory. At the very least a two million year old concrete building. Maybe even an entire Hominoid city. The greatest archaeological find ever!

And all poor Dr. Berger can see are bones. He needs to step back and see the wider view. Forget the bones. Look at the artifacts! At the very least assign a mechanical engineer to accompany every Paleontologist in the field. Otherwise we’ll never learn the technological secrets of our ‘primitive’ ancestors. How can we hope to advance if we can’t learn from the past?

Mr. M.V. of Bugat, Mongolia, asks:
DOES THE UNIVERSE EXIST INSIDE A WORMHOLE?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Physicist Nikodem Poplawski of Indiana University in Bloomington thinks so. He claims conditions in the ‘Big Bang’ creation of our universe are exactly what you would expect at the halfway point in a wormhole leading from one universe to another, ergo our universe exists within a wormhole stretching between two other universes. Apparently this resolves a number of cosmology conundrums, though not necessarily the conundrum of Mr. Poplawski’s sanity.

For example, he says our universe is expanding simply because the wormhole is getting wider as we approach the exit. Makes sense to me.

While his theory is supremely elegant, I do hope it is incorrect; for if it is true, our universe is but an impediment to travel between the two other universes. I fear there exists a powerful alien lobby in the corridors of inter-dimension power demanding our universe be dismantled in order to improve transit time for other travelers. With any luck bureaucratic inertia will prevent our destruction any time soon.

Ms. T.Q. of Capel Curig, Wales, asks:
DID HANNIBAL REALLY CROSS THE ALPS WITH 37 ELEPHANTS?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Yes indeed! Though I fear the traditional account, written by the victorious Romans, left out a few embarrassing facts they’d rather future generations knew nothing about.

The celebrated elephants in question were not live animals, but life-sized elephant-shaped hot air balloons leftover from the annual Moloch parade in downtown Carthage. The sight of these contraptions bobbling about in the air above the Carthaginian army as it deployed in the plains of the Po valley so discombobulated the Romans that Hannibal easily defeated them at the battle of Lake Trasimene.

However the Romans were nothing if not practical, and when Hannibal’s war elephants floated over Rome to drop nasty, sharp, pointed things on the hapless civilians below, vast flocks of wicker-work hot air Dormice soaked in flaming naphtha were released and quickly rose into the air to horrific effect on the elephant fleet. This so discouraged the Carthaginians that they packed up and sailed away back to Africa, where they were eventually defeated by Scipio Africanus.

This is why, for many centuries afterwards, the deliciously tasty barbecued Dormice available at most Roman snack bars were known as “Carthaginian Crisps.”

Ms. O.B. of Neptune Beach, Florida, asks:
IS EYJAFJALLAJOKULL TRYING TO KILL ME?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: Absolutely! And Grimsvotn, Bardarbunga and Laki will join the effort as well should they awaken.

I am referring to the wonderfully powerful volcanoes of Iceland, a joy to geologists everywhere (though oddly enough, not to spelunkers).

If the eruptions continue you can expect all life in the northern hemisphere to be extinct within a week or so. This presents certain problems.

Fortunately it is a universal law that for every action there is an apposite and equal beginning. For every ton of pumice and sulfur dioxide pumped into our northern atmosphere by Eyjafjallajokull, volcanoes in the southern hemisphere are sucking in a ton of dust and pollutants.

Equally fortunate, the intense heat of the equatorial regions prevents the two atmospheric hemispheres from mixing, so that while the northern atmosphere will shortly become a deadly, dust-laden toxic mix of chemicals, the southern atmosphere will soon be crystal bright and clear, fantastically fresh and smelling really quite lovely.

All in all, it would be a good idea for everyone to migrate to the southern hemisphere immediately. But

don't fly as the pumice dust circulating in the northern atmosphere is likely to grind the turbine engines of aircraft into plummeting junk.

In your specific case, Ms. O.B., I advise you to fashion a raft and paddle like mad till you reach landfall at Curuca on the north coast of Brazil. That will bring you just south of the equator. But do not dawdle. Time is limited.

One last warning. Wherever you ultimately chose to settle in the southern hemisphere, make sure you are at least five miles from the nearest volcano as otherwise you might be sucked into its intake crater subsequently to be vomited from the mouth of Eyjafjallajökull. People would laugh.

Mr. D.F. of Ura Guba, Russia, asks:

RECENTLY ASTRONOMERS FOUND TRACE ELEMENTS OF CALCIUM, MAGNESIUM, SILICON AND IRON IN A BUNCH OF WHITE DWARF STARS. THIS GOT THE SCIENTISTS ALL EXCITED. WHY?

MR. GUESS-IT-ALL: White dwarf stars normally contain atmospheres of pure helium. But at least 30 of these things are polluted with contaminants suggesting their gravity has pulled in rocky bodies such as asteroids or even whole planets, the implication being that they possess planetary systems similar to the Solar System which include Earth-like planets, or at least planets made out of rock and not just ice. This in turn appears to confirm theories on the formation of planetary systems and how ubiquitous they are. Which further suggests that life as we know it may be quite common in the universe. An indirect chain of logic as it were.

All complete nonsense! A far more direct trail of logic proves the existence of aliens. The astronomers in question are misinterpreting the evidence. The trace elements they have discovered are not contaminants left by asteroids or planets being absorbed into the white dwarfs, but traces of gigantic spaceships!

It's an old story. Teenage delinquent aliens and their hot rods playing chicken with each other, racing close to the surface of the white dwarfs to get the maximum gravitational sling-shot effect to boost their speed, but frequently and fatally misjudging the angle of inclination as they approach. Tragic, sad, and all the rest, but at least no innocent bystanders are hurt in these accidents.

The same cannot be said for the growing fad of Black Hole Billiards among adolescent aliens. Now THAT is cause for worry!

COMMENTS ON ISSUE #1:

Very cool, Graeme. Thanks for sending it. :-)- **Fran Skene.**

Received. Thanks! Will try to review for BCSFAzine #443. -- **Felicity**

Hee! That's a good giggle. -- **Danielle Stephens**

Definitely amusing! Thanks for passing it along. :) -- **Jenni Merrifield**

A natural for the next Aurora ballot. (You would be right to wonder what I really meant by that.)

I do, actually.

I think the obvious cover would have to be something about Bullwinkle the Moose, don't you? -- **Tara Wayne**

Surely not a pun implying anything less than utter veracity and versatility?

Spot-on! 'Twas most amusing, Indeed! -- **Chilam**

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April 20, 2010

Dear Graeme:

Thank you directing me to this best-of-all compilation of the wisdom and best guesses of Mr. Guess-It-All, collected in the first issue of Corruscating Conundrums! I will make some comments on Mr. Guess-It-All's answers to questions that have stumped humanity since the beginning of time, or since last Thursday, at least.

My own researches have shown that the discovery of methane in the Martian atmosphere comes from the Martians' own version of cows. They graze the little bit of Martian plant life they can find, and water themselves from convenient canals. However, these Martian cows are prolific, and their increasing numbers mean that the methane in the atmosphere is actually increasing to dangerous levels. I mean, one spark, and kaBOOM!, and the balance of power and methane in the solar system might topple in mere minutes.

Unfortunately there's not enough oxygen in the Martian atmosphere to trigger a spark or any other manifestation of fire. But it's nice to know should the Martians grow tiresome a single interplanetary Molotov cocktail with its own liquid oxygen content will do nicely.

Actually, Mr. Guess-It-All might be a little mistaken about why stars twinkle. The twinkling of stars might be,

according to my own researches, attempts by these stars to communicate with us. Twinkling is akin to the stars waving their arms and shouting, "Over here!" Instead of expensive programmes meant to find even clearer images of distant stars, what we need to do is find research into ways to make our own Sun, and perhaps this very Earth, twinkle, to get the attention of those civilizations out there trying to reach us in the most basic fashion.

Four Hundred trillion tons of glitter trained to move in unison, such that sunlight is collectively reflected or not reflected, is Mr. Guess-It-All's solution to the technical aspect of the problem.

The greatest difficulty in achieving this lies in converting glitter into a usefully compliant and trainable life form. A potential advantage of success in this endeavour will be the option of unleashing the glitter on the aliens should the latter prove hostile. A potential disadvantage might be that the glitter will eat us instead.

Methane seems to be a trend here...more and more, we are looking for more sources of energy, and the US government is currently trying to harness the hot air that comes from Congress and the House of Representatives in Washington. If all that energy and heat could be harnessed, America could be closer to being energy-independent than they've been in years. Canada could lose money on that deal, so we need to find ways to do the same to Parliament Hill in Ottawa, and sell and send that energy and hot air to the US hot air grid. (That grid connects all the state capitals with Washington.) We'd need to see if the exchange of hot air is covered by NAFTA.)

Trouble is the cost of additional pipelines to connect the hot air grids is truly prohibitive in this era of fiscal restraint. Fortunately all we need do is fill cheap paper balloons with the valuable substance and let them drift south on the prevailing cold air currents that we currently employ to inflict Canadian winters on the Americans.

And then there's splicing the genes of cattle and politicians together. Maybe we can somehow link them to the above-mentioned hot air grid...

Herding them together into hot air farms and harvesting their output seems like a reasonable course of action.

The age of the universe is still a difficult figure to decide upon. We do not yet have the technology to take a heavenly body, cut it in half, and count the rings. About the only thing we truly do know about the potential age of the universe is that its warranty has expired, and it is beyond its Best Before date.

I don't understand why you would want to cut Mr. Guess-It-All in half.

(Mr. Guess-It-All's answer about the worthlessness of the human race reminds me of the comic strip Brewster Rockeit: Space Guy!. One of the recent strips detailed the plaques on the Voyager satellites, and how some alien species might, and do, mistake them as ads for take-out. Yes, we are Soylent, To Serve Man is a cookbook, and we are delicious with sweet-and-sour sauce.)

Not all aliens want to eat us. Some are simply nudists, and the naked human figures on the plaque prove our culture is entirely nudist in nature.

Consequently we can soon expect a sudden incursion of countless hordes of naked aliens eager to bask in the sun and show off their resplendent and highly varied genitalia. Should be quite a boost for our local pornography industry which will be able to tap the market of the more hibited alien cultures which elected not to come.

The hadron collider in Switzerland has shows us that hadrons are difficult to find. It's because they are embarrassed by their name, so easily typoed into another word, recently printing in major newspapers around the world, the typo we were expecting to happen at some point, anyway. If your name could be typoed into an embarrassing word, you'd hide away and be hard to find, too.

This is why Mr. Guess-It-All avoids public appearances. The precise nature of the typo in question is, of course, too obvious to merit explanation.

Please relay my compliments to Mr. G-I-A, and I look forward to seeing more of his immeasurable smarts in print. And see you next time, too, Graeme, and say hello to Alyx for me.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

It is not commonly known that Alyx, myself, and Mr. Guess-It-All are legally married to each other. A threesome phenomenon unique to Canadian liberalism I might add, and one responsible for increased immigration of threesomes from other lands. Only in Canada, eh?

By the way, Mr. Guess-It-All likes the 'look' of the word 'coruscating', but has been persuaded by the language police to change the title of this scientific monograph series to 'Coruscating Conundrums' to bring it into line with tradition. Sigh. It is so hard to be innovative these days.