

The REALL News

The official newsletter of the Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land

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

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June 2000

Fighting Ignorance with The Straight Dope, Part 2

Evolution Edition

by David Bloomberg

For those of you who did not see the first installment of what will be a recurring column, I write for the Mailbag portion of *The Straight Dope* by Cecil Adams. The column itself is a question-and-answer column that runs mostly in alternative independent newspapers across the country (though not in Springfield). You can read it on the web at www.straightdope.com, which is where the Mailbag answers run, and buy his collections in book form at pretty much any book store.

Since a number of the Mailbag answers I have written are also related to REALL, we reprinted some here a few months ago, and will continue to do so from time to time. This month, we have a few questions related to evolution: How can you believe evolution is real? How could the Big Bang be true and why don't we see animals evolving? Are humans are all one species?

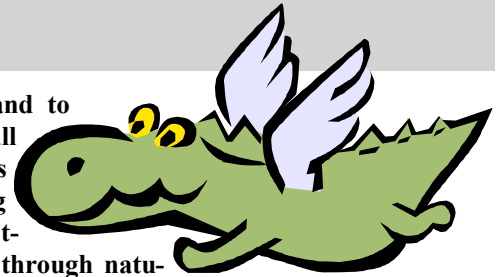
As before, Ed Zotti, Cecil's editor, did some editing on these answers.

Dear Straight Dope:

I understand your argument for evolution and it is pretty easy to understand the theory you present. The facts on the other hand tend to disprove evolution as a viable theory.

Let us assume for a second that evolution were true. Most of our evolution would have taken place after the great meteor collision that destroyed all the dinosaurs as well as 95% of all living things on the planet. Logically we would think that at least some of the dinosaurs would come into existence again through the evolutionary process. Birds returned as well as every other branch of animals that existed prior to the meteor. This in itself is very puzzling but also look at the other animals that did not evolve. The sabertooth tiger, the megaladon, and the giant bear species. I find it more than interesting that the animals that died off and never returned were the biggest strongest and most dangerous to man. If you believe evolution it would point in the opposite direction. The larger, more dangerous predators would not only be the likely successors but would continue to grow today as evolution is an ever continuing proc-

ess. It would stand to reason that all large carnivores would be growing and becoming better at their jobs through natural selection and the carrying on of the bigger, stronger animals' genes.



Now for the second part of my argument. Following the evolutionary process we could expect to see thousands and thousands of species on our planet that were in the middle of changing from one type of animal into another. There should be birds that were in the process of changing into reptiles, which is the accepted theory as how dinosaurs came into existence. Not only should we see many examples taking place right now but we should also find their fossils throughout history. There should be evidence of birds turning into reptiles on a continuing basis. — Kenneth W. Blackburn

Wow! So little knowledge and yet so much certainty. What a deadly combination. It's hard to know where to begin.

Most of your statements of "fact" simply aren't. There is no reason to believe the dinosaurs would miraculously come back after dying off. Some dinosaur "relatives" managed to survive in various forms, such as the birds you mention. But they didn't disappear and then come back out of nowhere. They survived the impact and subsequent changes to the planet. That's what "survival of the fittest" is all about – living through changes to the environment.

As far as the tigers and bears and so on, well, I hate to break it to you, but they weren't around during the time of the dinosaurs. The only mammals back then were more like rodents. They only managed to take over the ecosystem and spread out after the dinos died out. Those giant mammals you

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land is a non-profit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL does not reject paranormal claims on *a priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

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From the Editor

Wally Hartshorn

Welcome to another issue of The REALL News! With this issue we're halfway through our eighth year of publication. If you have any suggestions for improvements to be made, please feel free to let us know. And, as usual, we're always looking for more articles, so fire up your word processor and pound something out!

This issue features another series of responses from David Bloomberg to questions submitted to *The Straight Dope* by Cecil Adams, a popular newspaper column. This time the focus is creation/evolution. Reading some of these questions causes an almost/involuntary shaking of my head. Ah well.

We also have another article from Richard Petritis, writing about the problems in Africa caused by belief in magic. As his article points out, this is not simply a problem of the past. It is ongoing and seems likely to continue.

Lastly, David has another edition of his "REALity Check" column. He has so many items waiting in the queue that we may well have an "all REALity Check issue" in the future just to get caught up. In the meantime, take a look at some of the latest wonders – and try to control the involuntary shaking of your head. ♡

A Nod to Our Patrons

REALL would like to thank our patron members. Through their extra generosity, REALL is able to continue to grow as a force for critical thinking in Central Illinois. To become a patron member of REALL, please use the membership form insert. Patron members are:

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From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

Once again, David Gehrig gave us a great presentation on the pseudohistory of Holocaust deniers – specifically David Irving – at the May meeting. Not only that, but he provided us with the first (and hopefully only) showing of The REALL Players, featuring the three Davids – Gehrig, McMaster, and Bloomberg – as prosecutor, judge, and David Irving, in that order (yes, I got to play the bad guy – it’s the role I’ve always dreamed of; but I really want to direct...). Our little scene showed how detached from the real world David Irving is, as he tried to explain to the court how a racist song he made up for his 9-month-old daughter doesn’t show that he is a bigot.

With the trial over and Irving losing big, hopefully we’ll hear less from these guys – but I’m not counting on it. To them, I’m sure the trial loss was just another spoke in their grand wheel of conspiracy.

Thanks, David!

June Meeting

June brings us to our annual lunch meeting and **Skeptic Jeopardy** game, on Sunday, June 4, noon, at Shakey’s Pizza & Buffet in Springfield. In case you missed last year’s game, here are a few of the answers you missed (because it’s Jeopardy, you are given the answers and come up with the questions – the proper questions are at the end of this column).

- 1: This nationally-syndicated cartoonist got annoyed at my review of one of his books and wrote a letter to the editor.
- 2: This skeptic’s investigation of faith-healers won him a MacArthur foundation “Genius” award.
- 3: In 1978 he lead over 900 members of his People's Temple in a mass suicide.

- 4: An ability used by “psychics,” sometimes without even realizing it, to determine information about a person by seeing how they act and react.

I hope to see everybody there for some food and fun!

Elections

And one more thing at the June meeting – as I mentioned last month, we’ll also be having our annual elections then. So please let me know ASAP if you are interested in helping us out as a Board member or in any other way. While we of course want everybody to come to the meeting, you don’t need to be present if you can’t make it and still want to be an officer. Just give me a call or e-mail in advance!

July Meeting??

We don’t yet know what we will be doing for the July meeting, as the first Tuesday is July 4 and the library is closed. If you have any suggestions, please don’t be shy!

REALL Librarian Needed

REALL has, over the years, collected a number of books, magazines, and videotapes. Right now, these are all being stored at my house in a rather unorganized fashion (anybody who has ever seen my office at work or home will be *shocked* to hear that this stuff is a bit unorganized). We would like to find a volunteer to keep these items in a more organized fashion so other members can borrow them, and so we can encourage people to donate books and the like to make the library more useful to our members. If you’d like to volunteer, please let me know!

Proper questions, from above:

- 1) *Who is Scott Adams?*
- 2) *Who is James Randi?*
- 3) *Who is Jim Jones?*
- 4) *What is “cold reading”?* ☠



EVIDENCE

(Continued from page 1)

mentioned were around for quite some time and survived into the dawn of man. Some even think humans helped usher them into extinction.

Your statement that the larger and more dangerous animals should be favored in evolution again shows a lack of understanding of evolution. "Survival of the fittest" doesn't mean "survival of the most dangerous." It means survival of those with the right stuff – whatever it takes. Sometimes conditions favor *smaller* species. If the environment is filled with a mix of giant animals and smaller animals, and there is a food shortage, the smaller ones, who need less fuel to keep them going, are going to have a better chance of winning out. Your idea that animals should just get more and more dangerous while they grow bigger and bigger is, well, ridiculous.

As far as seeing all the animals changing into new animals, guess what? You do see that. In fact, every animal around could be considered a transitional species. But since we can't predict the future, we just don't know what they might be transitioning into. Evolution works continually. Genes mutate. Good ones survive; bad ones don't. Have you heard of antibiotic-resistant bacteria? Know how they became antibiotic-resistant? Evolution. It's happening all around you whether you realize it or not.

When you start talking about birds turning into reptiles, we're back at the "ridiculous" stage again. All I can do is urge you to pick up a basic biology textbook before making claims about this topic again.

The best scientific minds in the world have discussed and debated evolution, according to scientific principles, for over 100 years. I really doubt you are going to find a "logical" argument that magically overturns sound scientific principles, especially when you don't even understand the basics. Birds turning into dinosaurs?! Come on.

Dear Straight Dope:

If cecil belive's in evolution,first of all how do you explain the big bang theory,if all the matter was pulled together by a gravitational spin, and then it exploded creating the planets and thier orbit, how is it possible that the planets and moons rotate in different directions? Also how do you explain that we havent ever seen a animal "evolve" into something else? It is a fact that the sun is shrinking at a constant rate, knowing this, if the earth was millions of years old it would have ingulfed the earth, and life would not be possible. these are few of many questions i have about evolution, thank you so much for your time. – john, Alabama

Well, somebody's been reading creationist literature and pretty much nothing else, from the looks of things. Excuse me for not correcting your writing mistakes, but I figure when I have to spend this much time dealing with basic logic problems – you bring up three major fallacies in a few short lines! – for spelling and grammar you're on your own.

All the questions you raise are standard creationist claims. All have been debunked many times. Heck, I even wrote an article debunking the "shrinking sun" myth, "Honey I Shrunk

the Sun! – Evolution of a Creationist Myth" (Vol. 4, #11, November 1996). In the interest of brevity I won't replay that whole discussion here. Instead let's address your other two arguments.

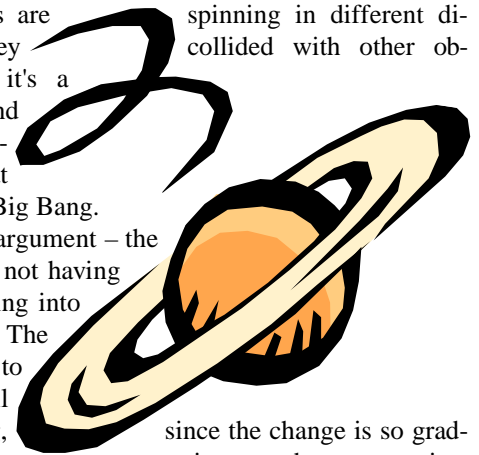
A good start would be to realize that there's a difference between biology and physics. The theory of evolution has nothing to do with the Big Bang theory. Yes, creationists oppose both, but that's about the only connection. Evolution deals with what happened to life on Earth once it began. The Big Bang deals with how the entire universe came into being. If the Big Bang theory was somehow proven wrong tomorrow, it would have absolutely no effect on the theory of evolution, and vice versa.

That said, let's look at your Big Bang "spin" argument. The main problem is your initial assumption. According to the Big Bang theory, the universe exploded into being from a singularity. I'm not sure where you got your claim of it being "pulled together by a gravitational spin" (actually, I'm pretty sure I know where you got it – creationist propaganda; indeed, I am reasonably sure I even know which creationist!), but it's just not part of the theory.

The Big Bang exploded everything outwards, including space itself. There was no previous spin so there is no reason everything should be spinning in the same direction. Furthermore, some planets are spinning in different directions because they collided with other objects. All in all, it's a faulty premise and doesn't take into account anything that happened after the Big Bang.

On to the next argument – the common one about not having seen animals evolving into "something else." The obvious answer to this is that while all species are evolving, since the change is so gradual, it takes many generations to become noticeable. But it's happening all right. As noted in *Science and Creationism, A View from the National Academy of Sciences*, "on a minor scale, we 'experience' evolution occurring every day. The annual changes in influenza viruses and the emergence of antibiotic-resistant bacteria are both products of evolutionary forces. Indeed, the rapidity with which organisms with short generation times, such as bacteria and viruses, can evolve under the influence of their environments is of great medical significance. Many laboratory experiments have shown that, because of mutation and natural selection, such microorganisms can change in specific ways from those of immediately preceding generations.

"On a larger scale, the evolution of mosquitoes resistant to insecticides is another example of the tenacity and adaptability of organisms under environmental stress. Similarly, malaria parasites have become resistant to the drugs that were used extensively to combat them for many years. As a consequence, malaria is on the increase, with more than 300 million clinical



cases of malaria occurring every year."

In addition, contrary to your claim, there are examples of speciation having indeed occurred. You can find some of them in the "Observed Instances of Speciation" and "Some More Observed Speciation Events" articles at the talk.origins archive (www.talkorigins.org/faqs/faq-speciation.html and www.talkorigins.org/faqs/speciation.html).

Incidentally, I think it's safe to say Cecil does indeed accept evolution, because of the mountains of evidence supporting it. He doesn't "believe" in it, though, because it's not something one "believes in." It's science, not religion. The only way you can buy into creationism, though, is to take it on faith.

Dear Straight Dope:

How certain is it that all humans evolved from one common primate ancestor? Is it possible that the all the organisms on this planet that we now lump together as humans could actually be the roughly identical results of several different branches of primate evolution? –Jeremy

It's pretty certain, assuming by "one common primate ancestor" you don't actually mean a single individual. A single group or species, yes.

While evolution can produce similar results among differing species (for example, birds, insects, and bats, all of which evolved wings independently), it doesn't converge two different species into one. To put it more precisely, two species can't merge so completely that they appear, even through DNA tests, to be a single species.

The DNA tests are key. In all the tests performed on people since DNA testing started, nobody has ever noticed that some results were completely different from others to the point of being a separate species. It's considered highly unlikely, to say the least.

Fossil evidence also stands against the idea. I can't create an evolutionary tree diagram very easily here, but there's a good one in the January 2000 issue of *Scientific American* ("Once We Were Not Alone," by Ian Tattersall, p. 60). The article talks about how there used to be a number of different hominid species sharing the planet, but now we're down to just us. The accompanying diagram shows the evolutionary tree branching a bit differently from when I went to school and it was thought that A begat B begat C in a nice linear arrangement. Not so, say scientists now. Instead, you see the classic branching of most other species: *Australopithecus anamensis* begat *Australopithecus bahrelghazali* and *Australopithecus afarensis*. *A. afarensis* begat *A. africanus*, *A. garhi*, and *Paranthropus aethiopicus*. *P. aethiopicus* begat *P. robustus* and *P. boisei*. Somebody in the *Australopithecus* line begat *Homo rudolfensis* and *Homo habilis*, who begat *Homo ergaster*. *H. ergaster* begat *H. erectus* and *H. antecessor*, who begat *H. heidelbergensis* who begat *H. neanderthalis* and good old *Homo sapiens* (us).

Throughout all of the begetting, various species shared the land with similar hominids. But in the end, only *Homo sapiens* survived, though we shared the world with Neanderthals until as little as 30,000 or so years ago. While we don't know for certain how they interacted, the authors of the *Scientific*

American article note, "In light of the Neanderthals' rapid disappearance and of the appalling subsequent record of *H. sapiens*, we can reasonably surmise that such interactions were rarely happy for the former."

The authors go on to note, in a more direct answer to your question, "the repeated pattern at archaeological sites is one of short-term replacement, and there is no convincing biological evidence of any intermixing . . ."

In 1982 Cecil Adams wrote a Straight Dope column that dealt tangentially with the claim that the different races actually evolved separately from different species (www.straightdope.com/classics/a1_099.html). He described an alternative hypothesis about human evolution that was then being discussed: "To put it another way, Caucasians are most 'advanced,' Mongoloids slightly less so, and Negroids least of all. The most elaborate expression of this theory was given by the anthropologist Carleton Coon in the mid-60s. Coon's idea was that there originally were five basic races that evolved separately, in widely differing times and places, from our *Homo erectus* forebears – Caucasians, predictably, being the first." Cecil went on to state that Coon was not a crackpot, and there was some fossil evidence supporting this view. But, he said, "there are some major objections to it as well, the most obvious being that one would expect races that had evolved separately to be unable to interbreed, as all humans today clearly can."

That was then, this is now. Now we have genetic techniques that weren't available back when Cecil wrote that column. Those techniques show that Coon's ideas don't pan out.

Coon himself died in 1981, but his son, Carleton Jr., has tried to incorporate this new information into his father's hypothesis. Carl Jr. (the man I'm discussing here, not the restaurant chain) has a web site dedicated to "Progressive Humanism" (www.progressivehumanism.com) and also has a book coming out in June (*Culture Wars and the Global Village*, Prometheus Books). In both he puts forth some of his views on human evolution. From a chapter of the upcoming book, which he e-mailed to me, the hypothesis he favors is that "*Homo sapiens* evolved relatively recently, in Africa, and spread out, as the geneticists think they have demonstrated. But as modern people dispersed, they interbred with the local populations of *erectus*. At least some of the offspring of these unions were 'sapient' in their possession of large brains that could conceptualize, and a capacity for languages that gave them the verbal tools they needed for what now passes as human thought. Such hybrids were doubly advantaged in terms of their chances of surviving and passing on their genes in the specific environment in which they were born. They were the new models of the old winners, according to this explanation, and became the ancestors of modern racial groups." Basically, he's saying that *Homo erectus* was already adapted into "races" (much like his father said) and members of *Homo sapiens*, by interbreeding with *erectus*, adopted existing racial characteristics rather than evolving them on their own.

I suppose it's not impossible, but as he even notes on his web page: "Majority opinion favors the so-called 'radiation'

(*"Straight Dope" continued on page 7*)

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

This is unbelievable! I have a folder full of clippings and articles for “REALLity Check” that is over an inch thick. There is no way we can fit more than a few in this month’s issue, so we’ll make due with what space we have available and look to an upcoming issue for an expanded column.

Big Feet, Little Evidence

The *State Journal-Register* had a feature article by **Kimbre Chapman** on a Palmyra Bigfoot investigator (5/15). Chapman had interviewed me for balance and many of my quotes made it into the story.

The investigator is a member of a group that is trying to make Bigfoot hunting respectable and legitimate. Unfortunately, they are still plagued by the same problems of evidence as the others. It reminds me of the self-proclaimed psychics who criticize the con artists in their business. Sure, they’re better, but they’re still missing the evidence. In this case, sure, the group isn’t out to fleece people, but we still need to see some good science.

Unfortunately, one thing Chapman wrote made me sound like I was just against the whole idea, rather than against making claims without evidence. She said I “scoff” at this guy’s “professed fact-based Bigfoot research.” In fact, I specifically told her I was unfamiliar with this organization and just discussed Bigfoot claims in general.

Other than that, it was pretty good, and, indeed, my remarks did provide balance and may have even tipped the scales towards proper skepticism.

Fatima or Nostradamus?

The Catholic Church finally revealed the third “secret” of Fatima, which was supposedly revealed by the **Virgin Mary** when she appeared to some children over 80 years ago. While we normally stay away from issues of pure religious faith, this one seems more like a **Nostradamus** prophecy than anything dealing with religion.

The secret was somewhat anticlimactic, being a supposed foretelling of the assassination attempt against **Pope John Paul II** in 1981. While some believers were in awe, others were a bit more skeptical. One was quoted in the AP article run by the *State Journal-Register* (5/14) as saying, “What they said all happened in the past. This isn’t a prediction.” Indeed. If it were a prediction, perhaps he wouldn’t have been shot to begin with. But instead, this is read as so many other “predictions” – with 20/20 hindsight.

According to the New York Times News Service article run by the *Chicago Tribune* (5/14), **Cardinal Angelo Sodano** said the prediction was: “The ‘bishop clothed in white’ makes his way with great effort toward the cross amid the corpses of those who were martyred. He too falls to the ground, appar-

ently dead, under a burst of gunfire.” The problems here are numerous. The main one is that he was not amid any corpses or making his way towards a cross when he was shot. Apparently, those portions can be ignored for some reason.

Like I said, just like a Nostradamus prophecy, or one from any self-proclaimed psychic you’d care to name. Ignore the parts that have nothing to do with the point you’re trying to make, and hype the parts that seem to be hits (even though they could describe a hundred other things).

Watered-Down Claims

The Federal Trade Commission settled charges against marketers of “Vitamin O” for \$375,000 in consumer redress, according to Reuters (5/1). The companies had been charged with making false health claims for their “nutritional supplement.” The companies claimed the product could cure cancer, heart disease, and myriad other serious problems by infusing the blood with extra oxygen. It had been described in ads as “stabilized oxygen molecules in a solution of distilled water and sodium chloride.” In less technical terms: salt water. The FTC was less than thrilled with this clever bit of scientific-sounding language.

In addition to the fine, the companies are also prohibited from making further unsupported statements about this particular “supplement.” But, frankly, I think they got off easy.

For Cows Only

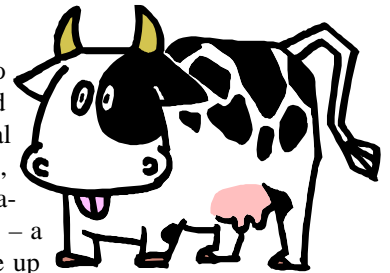
Dr. Dean Edell, who has his own radio show and web site on HealthCentral (www.healthcentral.com), talks and writes about alternative-medicine related claims – a lot. In fact, his articles make up quite a bit of my thick folder right now, and you’ll see more of it in later issues.

Right now I’m just going to mention his article on colostrum supplements. While I hadn’t heard about it before, apparently a lot of people have been asking him about some claims being made for colostrum, the first breast milk that comes in after having a baby. It’s loaded with vitamins, nutrients, antibodies, and all sorts of good stuff. So if it’s good for babies, it must be good for everybody, right?

Wrong, says Edell. He notes that despite newsletters claiming miracle cures from cancer and other serious problems, there is no scientific evidence that such supplements actually do anything. Indeed, the stuff you can buy isn’t even human colostrum, but is from cows. So if you’re not a cow, it isn’t going to do you a whole lot of good.

Even worse, Edell notes that while the product itself may not directly harm a person, anybody who takes it as a cure for

(“REALLity Check” Continued on page 7)



The Magic Wars of Africa: Update 2000

by Richard Petraitis

The 1987 annihilation of the Holy Spirit Movement, formerly led by the prophetess Alice Lakwena, didn't bring an end to the magic wars of Uganda (see "Africa's Curse," Vol. 8, #4, April 2000). Instead, they have continued, unabated, inside that country's borders. A new movement has arisen, created by Alice Lakwena's cousin, Joseph Kony, a former altar boy and herbalist. It combines fundamentalist Christianity with traditional African religion. Mr. Kony, a protege of the deposed Lakwena, believes in the restoration of a "paradise" based on the Ten Commandments. The villagers of Northern Uganda, already wary of rebellion, believe that the spirit that possessed Alice Lakwena has found a new body to reside in – that of Joseph Kony! This charismatic leader has claimed magic powers and, following in the footsteps of the prophetess, he is now involved in a thirteen-year-old war to oust Uganda's president, Mr. Museveni. Kony has rallied the remnants of Alice's army and obtained military aid from the Sudan. His warriors now have machine guns and mines, not the sticks and stones of Lakwena's army. At the start of this new millennium, Alice's student is conducting a brutal guerilla war with a force called the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

According to Human Rights Watch, the LRA has forcibly abducted some 8,000 to 10,000 children, between the ages of twelve and sixteen, to fill its ranks. Young girls are forcibly married to LRA cadres and officers. Any children refusing to fight are beaten and killed. The frightened LRA inductees are ritually smeared with a nut oil and advised that the oil will make them holy and fearless. During further indoctrinations, new LRA soldiers are told by their commanders that those who obey the Holy Spirit won't die in battle; death will only come to those who displease the Holy Spirit. Apparently, even at such a young age not all the recruits believe the LRA propaganda, so the dissenters are forced to charge the enemy unarmed. Unbelievably, the young soldiers are told that the Holy Spirit orders them not to take cover in battle! (Kony must believe Alice's similar tactics touched on genius.)

Unfortunately, the belief in a healer's powers aren't limited to one area of Africa. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has its share of bullet-proof rebels to contend with as well. Africa has no shortage of charismatic healers exploiting local conflicts.

Currently, the Congo is being torn apart by a civil war. It is an exceptionally bloody conflict which involves at least seven African nations. President Laurent Kabila has lost control of the eastern portion of his nation to warring rebels. How-

(*"REALity Check"* continued from page 6)

cancer and ignores real treatments may end up dead. He wonders if this is "akin to corporate murder" and asks if the supplement manufacturers should be held responsible for conning victims. An interesting thought, and one I'd like to see addressed. Unfortunately, I think we were lucky just to see action taken against the folks selling salt water, above. ☹

ever, in what is an extremely confusing state of affairs, Mai Mai tribesmen, together with Hutu militias, have staged numerous attacks against both rebels and civilians. The Mai Mai fighters enter combat fearlessly because they believe in the power of maji, and water-related charms, for protection. The Mai Mai sprinkle themselves with a magic water (maji), and in its absence they enter the fray of battle wearing shower caps and bath plugs! The warriors believe these items will make them immune to bullets. Long gone are the anti-bullet-pills specially created by witch-doctors during the BiAfrican civil war of the 1960s (the pills were meant to give protection against modern arms for thousands of spear-wielding tribesmen). If the use of maji is being revived for war, despite the documented slaughters that occur with the belief in protective magic water, I believe some witch-doctor (healer) must be readying a batch of new and improved anti-bullet-pills for field tests soon.

Any volunteers ?

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[Richard Petraitis has written several articles for REALL about witchcraft and shamanic practices.]

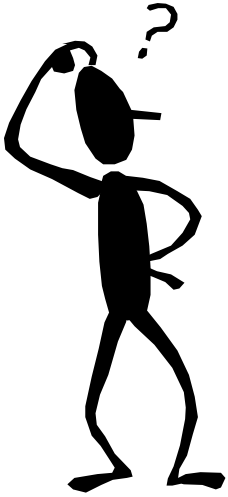
(*"Straight Dope"* continued from page 5)

theory, based on the genetic evidence." In other words, most people in the field think *Homo sapiens* beat out everybody else and evolved on its own, in the process splitting into the superficially different varieties we call races.

That said, even if Coon is 100% correct, it still means the answer to your question here is "no." Even if there was some interbreeding between racially subdivided *Homo erectus* populations and *Homo sapiens* populations in the ancient past that led to racial differences, we're all still one species. I only bring it up as an interesting side note and because Cecil mentioned the idea in that previous column, and I know that someone, somewhere, would have asked about him if I didn't.

So, I'm afraid it's just *Homo sapiens* from here on out. We won the race and beat our cousins into extinction, either metaphorically or literally. ☹

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