

## Shame On You, Sci Fi Channel

It is the twenty-first century and we are living in the most advanced, rational civilisation that has ever existed. And yet, a substantial proportion of our fellow citizens still **waste** their sense of wonder on rubbish like telepathy, astrology and UFO sightings.

One of the most blatantly irrational aspects of contemporary culture is the cynical way in which institutions that should and do know better (particularly the media, though **governments** are not blameless either) pander to this tendency. Browse the so-called 'documentary' channels on your cable TV, and you are more likely to find a program on astrology than on astronomy.

It should not be necessary for us to stress – but let's do so anyway – that we are not calling for regulation or censorship (even self-censorship) as a means of replacing bad television by good. In fact we are implacably opposed to any such measure, which would be rather like trying to cure pneumonia by firing a Gatling gun at the patient's head. The problem originates in the foolish audiences, not the venal producers, and we have no objection to bad programmes being produced and aired whenever there is a market for them. But it is one thing to show bad programmes, and quite another to endorse their content, either explicitly or by associating them with genuine science or genuine news reporting. It is *dishonest* to present notorious falsehoods or silly urban myths as if they were true. It is *irresponsible* to treat nonsense with the respect due to genuine discovery. And it is *wilfully stupid* to claim that one does not know, or need not take a position on, the difference.

The Sci Fi Channel shows such programmes too, but at least it has the (thin) defence that most of its other programmes are avowedly fictional. But now they too have crossed the red line. They are sponsoring a campaign to have the US government be "**more forthcoming and aggressive in investigating UFO sightings**" and to **reveal** "what the Pentagon knows" about them.

"The Sci-Fi channel has had an interest in [UFOs] for some time. The difference here is that they are focusing attention on the serious, factual side of the issue, and that scientists have not had a chance to thoroughly examine it," Rothschild said.

"Of course it could help programming. But Sci-Fi thought

they had some resources they could bring to the table.”

Shame on you, Sci-Fi Channel.

Sun, 06/29/2003 - 00:12 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

## UFO? Cui Bono?

As absurd as the SciFi Channel's exhortation seems on the surface, examination of its campaign ought not to stop there.

Follow the money, friends. Follow the money.

Curmudgeon Emeritus, Palace Of Reason

by [fporretto](#) on Sun, 06/29/2003 - 12:09 | [reply](#)

## The Real Shame...

is that SciFi cancelled MST3K. The bastards.

by a reader on Sun, 06/29/2003 - 21:39 | [reply](#)

## Do you know of any actual "no...

Do you know of any actual "notorious falsehoods or silly urban myths" being presented by SciFi or it is just your practice to paint any sort of program on UFOs with ad hominem attacks?

The way you present it here, it sounds like you haven't seen anything beyond these two edited press releases and have automatically assumed that there is absolutely nothing to learn. It is logical to go to the state to try to figure what people are seeing -- most of the time, they are seeing military projects.

"UFO sightings" have led to the discovery of high-altitude sprites and ball lightning, in addition to blowing the cover off of the SR-71 (or RS-71) and the F-117 deployments. Dismissing observations out of hand is not science; it is the exact sort of mysticism that you profess to oppose.

by [Phelps](#) on Mon, 06/30/2003 - 20:32 | [reply](#)

## What We Mean By "UFOs"

Phelps:

"UFO sightings" have led to the discovery of high-altitude sprites and ball lightning, in addition to blowing the cover off of the SR-71 (or RS-71) and the F-117 deployments.

LOL. Yes you're quite right: we should have made it clear that by "UFO sightings" we mean purported sightings of technology of extraterrestrial origin, and not the kind of unidentified flying object that hits you on the back of the head during a football match.

However, if anything, a campaign to make the government reveal

the attributes of secret military aircraft before they deem that the time is right would be even more reprehensible than one to make it reveal its alleged knowledge of extraterrestrial intelligence, and almost as futile.

by [Editor](#) on Mon, 06/30/2003 - 20:49 | [reply](#)

## **Bookshops included.**

I'm sure I'm not alone in being annoyed and depressed by the way small bookshops often put wicca-pyramids-on-Mars type codswallop on the same shelf as popular science titles.

by [Tom Robinson](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 01:12 | [reply](#)

## **\_Felix**

Well, I \*enjoy\* all this crap. I mean I do admit that it's crap and don't think it should have any repercussions on the real world, but I enjoy pretending that things exist, like, say, giant birds of prey unknown to science, or super-fast cold-war-era russian saucer-shaped vehicles, or global hi-tec stone-age societies, or talking ghosts of mongooses, for the duration of a TV program or while I'm reading a book (and not beyond that).

Imaginary mysteries and fantasies of lost or hidden knowledge and things like that are wonderfully enjoyable. (If you know of any real ones, kindly present them to me instead of all this boring politics.)

Yes, pseudoscience sucks, but imagination is fun. I'm not sure what you can do about that; putting a disclaimer before these programs that says "the following is all bullshit" doesn't appeal to me, as a consumer of them, nor presumably to the program makers.

I also think James Randi is a lot of fun. Probably your best tactic is to follow in his footsteps and debunk things hilariously, rather than grouching about the Sci-Fi channel and its kin, at least if they don't cross any "red line". Like I say, I enjoy them, they're good.

by a reader on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 06:07 | [reply](#)

## **oops**

Excuse me... I forgot to log in, and put my name on the subject line. Must have been distracted by the aliens landing in my garden.

by [\\_Felix](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 06:13 | [reply](#)

## **Bullshit!**

Speaking of bullshit, Penn & Teller had a great series on Showtime called "Bullshit!" where they exposed lots of paranormal, junk science claims.

Check out if it airs again in your area.

by [Gil](#) on Tue, 07/01/2003 - 18:04 | [reply](#)

## People..

..have the **RIGHT** to waste **THEIR** time. Coz its **THEIR** time.

by [Phylo](#) on Thu, 04/19/2007 - 12:47 | [reply](#)

## "Not Right" does not mean "No Rights"

It's not about rights. (Obviously, people have a right to...)

It's about what people ought to do.

by a reader on Thu, 04/19/2007 - 21:54 | [reply](#)