

WYSINWYG (What You See is Not What You Get)

By: Larry Flaxman

President, ARPAST

<http://www.arpast.org>

This month's topic comes hot on the heels of the highly anticipated release of the newest Indiana Jones saga: "Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skulls." I admit to being an Indy nerd, so, I've waited breathlessly since the last installment in 1989. I had high expectations. While I won't bore you with a review (you can find plenty of those online), I will say that I think the film will get a lot of people talking due to its fair share of "fringe" iconography such as the crystal skull, Roswell, Area 51, etc.

Watching the movie actually gave me the idea for this month's column. Have you wondered how often the popular media may distort the facts to fit their journalistic agendas? A quick Google search for "media conspiracy theory" reveals slightly over 3 million indexed pages! Three million! That is a lot of folks who believe that the media is manipulating and controlling our knowledge and facts.

Without donning my tin-foil hat, I believe that yes, the media is influencing our perceptions...but, not in the way popularly imagined. Watching the explosion of "fringe" programming on television, one will be assailed with a variety of topics which serve to ignite the curiosity and interest of the viewers.

Oftentimes, people will believe what they see to be the truth...regardless of the facts. The axiom of "unless I see it with my own eyes" comes to mind. Just because you see something does not necessarily mean it is so. Things are not always what they seem.

In the spirit of the movies namesake, the crystal skull mystery is one such example. It has been shown through careful scientific analysis that all of the crystal skulls (including the highly vaunted Mitchell-Hedges skull) are fakes, and not even close to the stated 3,600 year old age.

According to skepdic.com:

"The age of the object, as well as the other claims made about its making and history, were fabricated by Mitchell-Hughes. The man who owned the piece, Sidney Burney, and those who were on the Lubannatun expedition, denied that Mitchell-Hedges found the skull. Mitchell-Hedges himself never mentioned the skull until just after he bought it in 1943."

Due to the mystery surrounding the skull, as well as the family's insistence on its provenance, several cult-like factions have been formed. Again, according to skepdic.com:

"The questionable origin of the Mitchell-Hedges skull has not deterred belief in the skull's mysterious properties. Rather, at least 13 other skulls have mysteriously appeared over the years. Some of these skulls are claimed to have magical origins and healing powers. However, a study of several crystal skulls by the British Museum in 1996 indicates that the only magic involved in the creation of these skulls was in keeping their fraudulent origin a secret. The study concluded that the skulls were made in Germany within the past 150 years. The recent origin explains how they were made with tools unavailable to the ancient Mayans or Aztecs.

Using electron microscopes, the researchers found that two of the skulls possessed straight, perfectly-spaced surface markings, indicating the use of a modern polishing wheel. Genuine ancient objects would show haphazard tiny scratches from the hand-polishing process."

Ok, so, perhaps the most mysterious property of the crystal skulls is the manner in which they have captivated the interest and emotions of the public. The real question is how they have managed to maintain their mysterious aura and mythology even in the face of overwhelming scientific evidence.

So, what does this have to do with the paranormal? Actually, quite a bit. It would be a fairly safe bet that many of my readers are fans of at least one paranormal-themed show on television. Heck, I am a huge fan of Ghost Hunters (and not just because ARPAST is a member of the TAPS Family!).

Have you ever stopped to critically think, and analyze what you see on the show? The facts...the investigation...the evidence. Or, since you "saw it with your own eyes" did you just immediately believe it? Modern special effects and CGI wizardry can produce some astoundingly believable things. Is it a coincidence that none of the popular shows bill themselves as documentaries?

The point of this whole diatribe is that things may not always be as they appear. The media certainly can present one perspective; however, one needs to remain cognizant of that fact. It is only one viewpoint...and it may not necessarily be correct, nor be the consensus. Whether it is politically motivated, or based upon other factors (such as the fact that sensationalism sells advertising), the media may certainly have their own "agenda." Your critical analysis skills should take into account much more than simple visual assessment. Oftentimes, what you see is not always what you get.

"Well, the word for 'gold' translates as 'treasure.' But their treasure wasn't gold, it was knowledge. Knowledge was their treasure." Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skulls, 2008.

About the author:

Larry Flaxman is the founder and President of ARPAST (www.arpast.org) – the Arkansas Paranormal and Anomalous Studies Team, which is a member of the TAPS (The Atlantic Paranormal Society) family. He has been actively involved in paranormal research and investigation for over ten years, and melds his technical, scientific, and investigatory backgrounds together for no-nonsense, scientifically objective explanations regarding a variety of anomalous phenomena.

Larry has appeared in numerous newspaper, magazine, radio, and television interviews, and has authored several published articles regarding science and the paranormal. Larry is also co-authoring a series of books with Marie D. Jones, author of "PSlence" and "Supervolcano," starting with "11:11- The Time Prompt Phenomenon: The Meaning Behind Mysterious Signs, Sequences and Synchronicities," due for release in February 2009 by New Page Books.

In addition to involvement with ARPAST, he serves as technical advisor to several paranormal research groups throughout the country.