

Guy P. Harrison

50

popular beliefs that people think are true

YOU'RE EITHER BORN SMART OR YOU'RE NOT 🧠 ASTROLOGY IS
SCIENTIFIC 🌱 A PSYCHIC READ MY MIND 🧠 ATLANTIS IS DOWN THERE
SOMEWHERE 🌊 THE UNIVERSE AND EARTH ARE FINE-TUNED FOR
LIFE 🌱 CREATIONISM IS TRUE AND EVOLUTION IS NOT 🦖 STORIES OF PAST
LIVES PROVE REINCARNATION IS REAL 🧛 GHOSTS ARE REAL AND THEY
LIVE IN HAUNTED HOUSES 👻 UFOs ARE VISITORS FROM OTHER WORLDS
👽 AREA 51 IS WHERE THEY KEEP THE ALIENS 🛸 THE END IS NEAR!

Foreword by Dr. Phil Plait

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Maybe you know someone who swears by the reliability of psychics or who is in regular contact with angels. Or perhaps you're trying to find a nice way of dissuading someone from wasting money on a homeopathy cure. Or you met someone at a party who insisted the Holocaust never happened or that no one ever walked on the moon. How do you find a gently persuasive way of steering people away from unfounded beliefs, bogus cures, conspiracy theories, and the like?

This down-to-earth, entertaining exploration of commonly held extraordinary claims will help you set the record straight. The author, a veteran journalist, has not only surveyed a vast body of literature, but has also interviewed leading scientists, explored "the most haunted house in America," frolicked in the inviting waters of the Bermuda Triangle, and even talked to a "contrite Roswell alien." He is not out simply to debunk unfounded beliefs. Wherever possible, he presents alternative scientific explanations, which in most cases are even more fascinating than the wildest speculation.

For example, stories about UFOs and alien abductions lack good evidence, but science gives us plenty of reasons to keep exploring outer space for evidence that life exists elsewhere in the vast universe. The proof for Bigfoot or the Loch Ness Monster may be nonexistent, but scientists are regularly discovering new species, some of which are truly stranger than fiction.

Stressing the excitement of scientific discovery and the legitimate mysteries and wonder inherent in reality, this book invites readers to share the joys of rational thinking and the skeptical approach to evaluating our extraordinary world.

50 Popular Beliefs That People Think Are True Details

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Cassie-la says

REVIEW ALSO ON: <http://bibliomantics.com/2012/03/30/a.....>

I had a lot of trouble with this book, and it wasn't for lack of trying. When I purchased it I was genuinely interested in reading a scientific take on the paranormal and the various mysteries of the universe. The problem: I seemed to be under the impression there would be concrete evidence to support most of these beliefs, which is silly considering if there was incontrovertible proof against ghosts and cryptozoology we would have seen it. Strike one: my perception of the world. Although to be fair, I didn't hear anything about a giant squid being captured until I saw a special on the Discovery Channel, so anything is possible.

This is where the problem lies in this novel, there are more arguments than evidence. As is touched upon in this book, it's incredibly hard to disprove stuff. We can point others in the right direction with reason and logic, but evidence that completely says these beliefs are false is hard to come by. For example, it should be easy to prove the Loch Ness Monster is real (a body), than to disprove it, the only way to do that would be to completely drain Loch Ness and not locate a sea monster. A lack of proof doesn't necessarily mean that something isn't true. I am of course applying this to the more fantastical ideas, not necessarily topics about biological race, evolution, and alternative medicine.

For the most part I felt a lack of interest in the way Harrison presented the material. This is mostly because he seemed more indebted in talking about himself than using anecdotal evidence, which would have been much more interesting. Rather than hear about the time Harrison thought he saw a UFO, explored the pyramids, interviewed Olympic athletes, was a news anchor, and even watched more videos about space than most astronauts (yeah, he went there), I would have rather enjoyed specific examples from history or the news. Anyone but the author himself and how awesome and amazing and more biologically adept he thinks he is. For example, in the chapter about Holocaust deniers, why not explain why they believe it never happened versus that time you felt sad interviewing a Holocaust survivor? If I wanted to read 400 pages of self-congratulatory writing I would have read a memoir. This is not a memoir.

Another problem was that I had to slog through a lot of chapters I didn't care about just to get to the parts I did. I didn't buy this book to read two sections about constructed versus biological race, nor did I pick it up to read chapters that seemed to repeat themselves back to back. This felt like a huge waste of time and information, especially when more interesting sections were whittled down to only four pages. Three chapters on biological race and its fallacies, and a chapter on creationism and another on intelligent design seemed like they could have been condensed into one chapter versus several. The same can be said of each chapter on medicine other than scientific (alternative and homeopathic), where I just felt like the same information was being constantly reiterated.

That's not to say that this book wasn't interesting. I generally like non-fiction because the real can be more fantastic than the imagined. Without reading this novel I wouldn't have discovered interesting tidbits such as: 41% of Americans believe in Atlantis, 18% of Americans think the sun revolves around the earth, 40% of Americans believe in creationism, and 42% of college students will never read another novel for the rest of their lives after they graduate. This last statistic probably horrified me the most considering the obvious love and reverence for reading we have on this blog. Although the statistics about creationism and the sun are disturbing, it probably pains scientists way more than me.

Even more interesting, I learned about the Bible Code (one of the few concrete examples mentioned), which when used in conjunction with Moby Dick “predicted” the assassination of Lincoln, MLK, and John F Kennedy. The Bible Code basically works by choosing a locus letter and then finding other words a certain amount of places after, above, below, etc around this locus by choosing a number. Both arbitrary options. Using this code (which feels very Dan Brown), believers have pointed to examples which they believe prove the existence of a divine being, using the Bible Code to create words like Holocaust, Kennedy, Roswell, and UFO. Skeptics took this same process and found similar words in Moby Dick, which just made some believe that Herman Melville could also see into the future. ::facepalm::

Ultimately, 50 Beliefs isn't the success I anticipated because it relies on argument over evidence (discussed previously) but also because its scope is much too big. With 50 beliefs to cover in 40 pages, that only equates to roughly eight pages per topic, which isn't nearly enough space to properly devote to each idea. If the idea behind this book was more limited perhaps I wouldn't have felt so lackluster while reading and been more indebted to finishing it quicker. It was definitely a struggle to get through the majority of the material.

Sotiris Makrygiannis says

Take the sceptic approach and do fact checking and here you goyou have a book.
Pop corn reading

Marsha says

I am sure that if I were one of those people who believe any of those "50 Popular Beliefs" I would probably not have enjoyed this book so much: I love the confirmation bias with which it supports me :-). But it is nice to hear support for the non-woo, non-sky fairy beliefs that I have and have basically always had. Provided some evidence for anti-cam which I like to practice, and I really liked the statistics that were stated about numbers of people actually believe some of the nonsense and about numbers of lies saved and affected by real medicine and vaccines. Every time I hear arguments about the horrors of vaccine ingredients, I shake my head up out the horrors of not providing protection to children (or self – I believe in flu shots!). And the section on religion is right on! A great book, but as I say, those who actually believe in support any of those 50 beliefs may not get full benefit of it. My experience is that providing evidence is, unfortunately, not enough.

Janall says

I didnt read this whole book, just skipped to the chapter of Ghosts to see how the author handled the subject. It goes like this;
The concept of ghosts have been around forever because prehistoric man had dreams of the dead he didn't understand. Author goes on vision quest - see raccoon. imagines communion. Goes to haunted house feels something- imagination. Sees plastics - ah that's the reflection in photos! Mystery solved. End the section with whenever he encounter believers he remembers that he too "was once scared by a few un identified silly sounds". It makes him humble. . What the ?...?...

Stephen says

First things first: that title is annoyingly redundant. Okay, now the review.

Chances are you know someone who harbors what you know to be irrational beliefs, and chances are they hold the same opinion about you. It isn't easy to stay sober with a monkey brain trying to impose order on the chaos of life, sometimes mesmerizing itself with its own fiction. *50 Popular Beliefs* consists of an introduction, fifty brief essays debunking various icons of culture from ghosts to horoscopes, and a conclusion. Those who count themselves skeptics already will find no surprises, and should not anticipate anything that will add greatly to their own knowledge, like *The Demon Haunted World* or *Why People Believe Weird Things*. This is straightforward debunking, along with some information on how we are so easy to fool -- especially when we're fooling ourselves. The ideal audience is people who regard themselves as well-informed and appropriately skeptical, but who are exposed to some ideas so often that they're wanting confirmation that yes, horoscopes really are BS.

While many of the essays address areas of constant skeptic scorn -- astrology, homeopathy, ancient aliens, Area 51, Holocaust denial -- Guy Harrison also covers matters that aren't low-hanging fruit, like the value of television and the dimensions of race. He explores race as a concept, then some stereotypes about it in regards to sports and intelligence. The pieces have a strong personal flavor, as Harrison uses his own experiences to try to understand those of others, and he attempts to experiment directly when he can. For instance, in the chapter on psychics he successfully cold-reads someone, and in the chapter on faith healing he attends a Benny Hinn performance. The pieces are sometimes too short to do their topic service, which I think will expose them to "what about" rebuttals as believers present similar convictions from a slightly different angle. Not every article has the same length, however; Harrison is particularly passionate about the veracity of the Moon landings and that essay goes on for a bit rebutting the various arguments for their being a fraud.

The most valuable part of *50 Beliefs*, personally, are its resources for extended reading. I saw more than a few titles in here which I'd either long forgotten about or had never heard of at all. Harrison has written more in this genre, but I'm more interested in Brian Dunning's new book dissecting conspiracies or *The Skeptic's Guide to the Universe's* October release of a book using their name.

Marcus Clark says

50 Popular Beliefs That People Think Are True

Of course what is implied is that these beliefs are not true, or at least unproven. And as it happens that's quite right, he sets about dismantling each of these beliefs. Harrison does this by assembling the facts, the evidence, the basis of the story. Where did it come from? Who said this? What evidence is there for this belief? With some beliefs like flying saucers, he is ready to believe, he does not dispute the possibility, but is waiting for reliable evidence, which he shows does not yet exist. Because something is not understood, that does not mean we should believe in some explanation that has no factual basis, like ancient Greeks thinking Zeus was throwing lightning bolts whenever there was a storm.

There are plenty of beliefs to consider. Here's a list of a dozen.

Your Either Born Smart Or You're Not.
Astrology is Scientific
A Psychic Read My Mind
Atlantis is Down There Somewhere
Creationism is True and Evolution is Not
Stories of Past Lives Prove Reincarnation is Real
Ghosts Are Real and They Live in Haunted Houses
UFOs Are Visitors From Other Worlds
Area 51 is Where They Keep the Aliens
My Religion is the One That is True
Global Warming is A Political Issue and Nothing More
Television News Gives Me An Accurate View of the World

Well there are still about 40 more beliefs to be examined.

This is an interesting book, one that you can dip into at any chapter. First he gives a presentation of the belief, and then explains why it is false or unsubstantiated. That is, he gives factual evidence, not opinions.

Yet there is another aspect to this book; someone who believes in Creationism -- that the world is only 6,000 years old and was created in six days--is not going to be convinced by any amount of factual information. Their beliefs are not evidence-based, but faith-based. People who believe in many of these beliefs do so not from logical, scientific, reasoned information, they do it from emotional convictions, or accepting the word of some authority. Facts are not going to disturb their beliefs. And yes, they have a perfect right to their beliefs as all of us have.

We can understand that, because most of our beliefs become set with emotion, and once that happens it is hard to shift them. For example, most of us vote for one political party, and will do so all our lives no matter what happens. It is the small number of swinging voters who actually decide who wins elections.

Harrison met a woman in California who carried a sandwich board which proclaimed the world would end on May 21, 2011. She believed that 97% of the world's population would be destroyed; only the faithful, the chosen, would be taken to heaven. Despite all his arguments, she was utterly convinced of her belief. The Judgement day had been proclaimed by Harold Camping, but when it failed to occur he told his followers, it was an "invisible Judgment Day" and the actual date of destruction had been revised to October 21, 2011. Even after this, many of his followers still believed in his prophecy.

This book is interesting reading, particularly if you are prepared to listen to what is presented. For example, "A Flying Saucer Crashed Near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947..." Personally, I have always had doubts about this, possibly it could be right, yep, I saw some blurred photo of a Martian, but was never quite convinced either way. It is nice to get some unbiased information about something that so many people believe in.

Reading this book will expand your understanding of life. It gives you both sides of many issues, and teaches you to consider the facts, the science if there is any, without swallowing some internet story without thought.

Harrison points out that good sceptics don't accept any wacky claim that comes along without evidence, but neither do they reject wacky claims totally. There is always a door left open, waiting for evidence.

Harrison discusses some of his own experiences, which leads him to understand why people believe things that are not true. He tells of his college days when he lived in an old two-storey house. Often he was alone in the upstairs section, but he would hear creaking noises, as if someone was walking around downstairs. When he investigated, he found nothing. Although he logically came to accept this, his emotions often cried out with fear. So when he hears of people believing that a house is haunted, he feels some sympathy, some understanding.

He makes an interesting point about miracle cures by evangelical preachers when he points out that although there have been many thousands of people who say they are cured from various illnesses, in all history there has never been a case of an amputee being restored. The cures are all on the inside. He once went to a religious meeting and wrote about an elderly woman who was taken up to the stage, blessed, and cured of cancer. He wrote this case up for his newspaper. But the following week she died. The newspaper editor told him not to run the story of her death. So people were misled.

Harrison explains how we accept some of these beliefs. Think of a stage magician, he is not using magic to perform these miraculous tricks. He is using Tricks! Smoke and mirrors, psychological tricks, false panels. Sure, you can enjoy the "magic" but don't for a minute believe in his "magical powers" just because you don't understand how his tricks are done.

In this book, each belief fits into a larger pattern, such as Magical Thinking, or Strange Healings. At the end of each chapter he provides a list of books that give evidence about each belief so that you can follow-up with some more detailed information.

If you read this book, it is certain that you will broaden your mind, and learn to think more objectively. You will be more aware, not sceptical, but less unsuspecting.

Finally, he provides a theory as to why people continue to believe unproven, discredited beliefs.

"... it is important to be aware of how we perceive and assess the world around us. We know that humans are pattern-seeking creatures. Without even trying, we naturally attempt to connect the dots in almost everything we see and hear. This is a great ability if you are trying to catch a camouflaged bird in a tree for your dinner... But pattern seeking also leads us to see things that are not there... which might waste our time and maybe get us into trouble... we also have a tendency to automatically make connections and find patterns in our thinking. This is one reason that unlikely conspiracy theories are able to take root and blossom in the minds of so many people."

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Jokoloyo says

I like the ideas of the author. I even thought one or two similar ideas myself years ago. That's why I still read this book until the end although this book is so boring for me especially after I have read about 40% of the book.

Well, it is subjective from me. My opinion is if the author/editor could cut-off some 50-100 pages, the book would be an easy 3 star or even 4 star (if they could cut-of 150 pages, it would be even better). There are so

many similar ideas/arguments between chapters/topics.

Book says

50 popular beliefs that people think are true by Guy P. Harrison

"50 popular beliefs that people think are true" is a fascinating book about skepticism and critical thinking applied to fifty popular beliefs. In a true open-minded and respectful manner, Guy Harrison takes us on a wonderful journey of applying the best current evidence to popular beliefs. This 458-page book is broken out by the following eight sections: Magical Thinking, Out There, Science and Reason, Strange Healings, Lure of the Gods, Bizarre Beings, Weird Places, and Dreaming of the End.

Positives:

1. As accessible a book as you will find and written in an elegant and engaging conversational tone. A fun, page turner of a book to read.
2. A well-researched book evidenced by the number of books referenced and comprehensive bibliography.
3. Excellent format! Each chapter begins with an appropriate quote or two about the popular belief and ends with a "Go Deeper" section of further reading.
4. A respectful and sympathetic tone used throughout. Mr. Harrison treats his topics with utmost respect and care. He's one of the few authors that can take on "sensitive" topics in a considerate manner. A rare quality indeed.
5. Fascinating topics! There is something for everyone. I thoroughly enjoyed this book. The book covers a great and diverse selection of popular beliefs. Bravo!
6. The ability to express his thoughts in a logical and lucid manner. It's such a treat to read a book in which the author makes clear and succinct points.
7. Thought-provoking quotes and comments. "Being a skeptic means being honest and mature enough to seek answers that are based on evidence and logic rather than hopes and dreams."
8. A great defender of science and logic. The author does a great job of providing meaningful statistics and illustrations to back his points. Furthermore, he relies on subject matter experts to provide the best current evidence.
9. Some key concepts introduced that really helps understand why we believe. How we really see for instance and how our memories work. Great stuff.
10. The author makes it very clear what we know versus what we do not know. A good job of keeping things in perspective.
11. How cold readings work and an amusing tale that illustrates the points.
12. Wisdom and knowledge throughout. Everyone will have their favorite chapters, I enjoyed those that taught me new things and are helping me change my perspective. The chapters involving intelligence and race were a pleasant surprise to me.
13. Chapters and concepts involving the supernatural are always a personal favorite and the author doesn't disappoint. Miracles, angels, souls, spirits...oh my.
14. This is an engaging book because the author's innate curious personality comes through so genuinely. There are many popular beliefs that the author himself would love to be true and hasn't completely ruled out. As an example the chapters on Aliens and UFOs. Absolutely love the self-deprecating humor and love for the awe of the unknown.
15. Pseudoscience placed in its proper place but done so as mentioned before with respect. Surprisingly but necessary, the author also does so with science.

16. The author provides a great point about global warming.
17. Guy Harrison's background is so vast and interesting that he is able to talk about topics from a firsthand perspective such as television news. Insightful takes on journalism and science.
18. A refreshing look at conspiracies. I'm a better person for having read it.
19. Great takes on alternative medicine, homeopathy, and faith healing. Benny Hinn...
20. Topics on religion are very interesting and even more so because the author is able to talk about all the main religions and not just Christianity which adds depth to the conversation.
21. Creationism and evolution, and even more interesting potential future debates.
22. Prophecies. The chapter on Nostradamus is fascinating and there is a separate one on worldwide prophecies, good stuff.
23. An interesting look at prayers.
24. Archaeology and what we don't know with conviction.
25. Bizarre beings like Bigfoot were fun chapters to read.
26. Loved the chapter on the Bermuda Triangle.
27. The Mayans and 2012 so topical and a great water-cooler topic for months to come and Mr. Harrison provides the insight.
28. The book "ends" with a bang. No really...many examples of how it will end.

Negatives:

1. Having to wait for the Kindle version. I couldn't wait so I purchased the book instead. No big deal.
2. Because this book is so ambitious and covers fifty popular beliefs; some chapters may not have the depth that some readers would have liked but the author did a wonderful job of providing further reading material.

In summary, I absolutely loved this book! It's one of the reasons why I enjoy reading so much. This is one of those few books available that everyone can enjoy. You can jump to your favorite topics if you desire or read it straight through. Either way you will at the very least respect the author's approach or best, enjoy it as thoroughly as I have. This is a book about skepticism that is fun to read, thought-provoking while never being unintelligible. Don't hesitate to get it! I highly recommend it!

Further suggestions: "50 Reasons People Give for Believing in a God" by the same author, "The Believing Brain..." and "Why People Believe Weird Things" by Michael Shermer, "Scientific Paranormal Investigations" by Benjamin Radford, "The Belief Instinct" by Jesse Bering, "Why Evolution Is True" by Jerry A. Coyne, "Godless..." by Dan Barker, "Society without God" Phil Zuckerman, "The Faith Healers" by James Randi, "The Christian Delusion" by John W. Loftus, "Caveman Logic" by Hank Davis, "The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning" by Victor J. Stenger, "The Blind Spot" by William Byers, "Paranormality" Richard Wiseman, "Storms of My Grandchildren" by James Hansen, "Braintrust" by Patricia S. Churchland, "The Panic Virus" by Seth Mnookin, "Science Under Siege" by Kendrick Frazier, "Superstition" by Robert Park and "Science and Nonbelief" by Taner Edis.

Pooja says

Excellent book, but a little too repetitive in its explanation of all 50 beliefs.

Peregrine 12 says

Read this one if you like taking a critical (i.e., 'fact-based') view of things we hold dear in our popular culture, such as climate change, Bigfoot, and the existence of God/god(s). Even if you disagree with some of the authors' premises (as I do), you'll probably have to admit that logic is the best way to approach these things.

Shanshad Whelan says

Eh. Interesting, but one-sided. And while skepticism is all well and good I found this a bit repetitive and problematic.

Beyond the simple fact that this is a book where the author presents his refutations or skepticism about beliefs according to his own opinions (which is fine as such, but gets dull), it's the fact that this throws a hell of a lot of things together that I don't think balance well.

If you're writing a serious book refuting theories of religious belief, or racial prejudices, or health concerns, those are some big, meaty and pretty serious topic points that people have argued over for centuries. If, on the other hand you're writing a book refuting or questioning belief in aliens, ghosts, Atlantis and Bigfoot, well that's also been argued over a lot, but not as seriously. To associate the two sets of ideas in the same book tends to imply they be afforded the same weight of thought. This can be interpreted as offensive (if you're religious and do not like religion being equated with something like Bigfoot) or dangerous (race as a definition being refuted and Atlantis being refuted in the same pages kind of makes the race question seem fanciful, when it is dead serious for many). Also, I have add that this is a very "Western" sort of stance and attitude, and I find myself wondering how it would play to other corners of the world.

Lumping all this stuff together doesn't really work well as a book for me.

Kevin says

This is the only book I've started this year that I couldn't get through. I made it through 130 or so pages, but found no real reason to keep reading. I had it for a month and when the library due date came, I abandoned it for more interesting reading material. I even had to make a new "abandoned" bookshelf to store this book.

This book just doesn't offer anything new. If it is intended to act as a Skepticism for Dummies handbook, then it seems to have succeeded. Aside from believers in any of these 50 topics who are looking for the lightest already-available evidence to no longer believe in them, I don't know who is the intended audience for this book.

For example...

If you believe in psychic powers, are you convinced they don't exist due from the author's insistence that he could do an accurate cold-reading of a person with only a few minutes of studying the technique? Doubt it.

If you believe aliens crashed at Roswell, are you persuaded otherwise by the author's statements that the government said it was a top secret spy balloon and not a spacecraft? Probably not. If you already don't believe aliens crashed, well, why the fuck are you reading this chapter anyway?

As a skeptic, I just didn't need to keep reading about things I already know aren't true. Maybe the sum of the parts would have added up to something worthwhile, but I just couldn't keep going.

Rustin says

Guy Harrison writes about 50 popular beliefs that he claims are actually false. Largely, he is convincing on each issue chapter by chapter.

For example, he addresses the issue of the bible code revealing the future. That is, take every 10th letter (or some other made up rule) in the bible and amidst the noise the bible code predicts JFK's assassination or some other event. To counter this claim he shows that any random string of letters, if long enough, will eventually describe some event in history. Ironically, a discovered bible code prediction always describes something that happened in the past and never in the future which eventually occurs, stretching the meaning of the word "prediction".

Another popular belief he tackles is television news accuracy. Harrison's expose on television news is insightful and demonstrates how television news looks for stories that will increase ratings and not necessarily provide an accurate view of the world.

However, some of his arguments fall short of convincing. Harrison spends a chapter explaining why biological races do not actually exist. I found this topic interesting since I have heard the claim before but never heard the reasoning. His argument is that because there is no definitive dividing mark between Asian or Caucasian or any other race then races do not exist. If you lined up all the people in the world from darkest skin to lightest skin you would find a gradual change in skin color without any definite change from darkest to lightest. Because of this lack of a clear boundary line between races he concludes that biological race does not exist. To illustrate his argument he gives the example that the distinct oceans also do not exist because there is no clear dividing line between the Pacific and Indian oceans as you sail through the Indonesian islands. Because you cannot draw an exact line to distinguish the oceans then distinct oceans do not exist. And because you cannot draw an exact line to distinguish the biological races then races do not exist.

I find this argument lacking. Simply because there is no agreed upon exact line of demarcation does not mean that the concept is void. If his argument was applied to many other concepts the absurdity would quickly be seen. For example, take the color spectrum of the rainbow. As you move across the color spectrum red slowly becomes more and more orange which slowly becomes more and more yellow. While the dividing line between red and orange is hazy that does not mean that color does not exist. We simply navigate the ambiguity when it is there and accept red and orange when the ambiguity is not there. We do not throw up our hands and say that "red" does not exist. Try applying his logic to the difference between homo sapiens and homo erectus - species do not exist! And where is the exact dividing line between the troposphere and the stratosphere? - the atmosphere does not exist!

Where is the exact dividing line between a white lie and a regular lie? - Lying does not exist!
In the same way, we do not discard the useful concept of race simply because the dividing line between Asian and Caucasian is hazy.

Harrison also tackled the popular belief that NASA faked the moon landings.
This belief happens to be much more popular in Russia than in the US.
I suppose if a Soviet Union craft had landed on the moon in 1969 then Americans would be just as skeptical.
Some people believe that NASA filmed the moon landing on earth in a movie set.
There was plenty of motivation to fake a landing since we were in the middle of a heated space race and there was no outside observer to witness the occasion.
But denying that the moon landing was faked is just silly in the face of all the evidence.
However, I for one was unclear on what that evidence was and so I eagerly looked forward to this chapter.

Unfortunately, I am always disappointed with the arguments showing that the US did indeed land on the moon.
These arguments usually throw out the normal skeptical view of a claim and ask the moon-landing-deniers to prove that we didn't land there.
Harrison was no different.
Instead of showing proof why we did in fact land on the moon he turned the tables and put the burden of proof on the deniers.
He asked deniers to prove a negative (which is scientifically impossible) and prove that we did not land on the moon.
The chapter then proceeded to go through each of the deniers claims and debunk them.
Okay, so the deniers have no proof for their point.
But where is the proof for the moon-landing-believers side?
I want to believe, but I am always disappointed in the arguments presented by Harrison and other believers.
Ultimately, we must rely on a government agency's word that we did in fact land on the moon.
No rock hard proof is offered, at least not in this book.

My disappointment is in how Harrison throws out his normal skepticism and accepts the moon landing.
He then puts his skepticism hat back on for the remaining chapters and carries on as normal.
I have no sympathy for moon-landing-denier's sketchy arguments.
But I am disappointed in the lack of skepticism on Harrison's part.

Suppose before the 1969 Neil Armstrong moon landing that President Nixon, under pressure to win the space race with the Soviet Union, instructed NASA to film a faked moon landing in a movie set just in case we failed.
Nixon has done much worse.
Suppose the first landing was faked and we didn't actually make it to the moon until the Jack Schmitt landed on the moon in 1972.
However, to save face, we told the Soviets and the rest of the world a slightly different story.

I doubt these scenarios were actually played.
I bet that NASA actually did land on the moon.
But it would be nice to see more convincing arguments to support the claim.
I am disappointed in the arguments that throw out standard scientific skepticism when refuting moon-landing-deniers.

Finally, Harrison is a journalist and not a scientist.

Books from journalists on scientific topics should always be taken with a grain of salt.
Journalists have engaging and entertaining writing styles but lack expertise on their subject matter.
Scientists have great expertise in their fields but lack the enjoyable writing style of journalists.
This book would have been a step above the rest if he had co-authored each chapter with a field expert rather than tackling each subject himself.

Heath Lowrance says

This is a good book if what you're looking for is a sort of overview of the possibilities of critical thinking. The only real problem with it is that every false belief addressed is treated with the same reverent and respectful tone-- Harrison takes great pains to be non-offensive-- when some of the subjects are clearly unworthy (belief in Atlantis, for instance, or the Bermuda Triangle, are given just as much space as Creationism or the anti-vaccine crusaders, positions that Harrison admirably shows to be quite dangerous). Fortunately, the book is set up in such a way that jumping around to subjects of particular interest is easy to do.

So: a suitable book to act as a starting point on your way to deeper and more meaningful books about the value of skepticism. And a fun read.

bjneary says

Thank you Marianne D for a great review for my PSLA books:

Harrison, Guy P. 50 Popular Beliefs That People Think Are True. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012. 978-1-61614-795-1. 485p. \$18.00 Gr. 9-12

This book concerns itself with the beliefs of people which they hold dear to their hearts, believe completely with their minds, just know they are true...but are they? One needs to keep an open mind when reading this book. The author just might step on your own toes. Harrison takes time honored areas of our world such as global warming, creationism, alien visitors from outer space, the existence of Noah's ark, even the existence of God. He delves into alternative medicine, the existence of Atlantis and the 2012 Mayan end of the world and lots more. He presents each topic and the beliefs and then he respectfully and gently presents the facts or the lack of facts. He is scientific, logical and thoughtful but humorous at times. A great book for students who want to explore new ways of thinking about our world. Excellent, promotes thinking outside the box.

Marianne D
