

Furtively Answered Queries -- ORL

What is Obscure Research Labs?

Obscure Research Labs (or ORL) is this world's only *true* research organization, dedicated to the acquisition of Total Knowledge in order to get the clearest idea of Just What's Going On.

What specifically do you do?

Oh, lots of things... but they all come back to our goal of finding out as much about everything as we possibly can. A lot has already been recorded by other people and organizations, so we mostly focus on what people think about it all; thus, our work takes place on the tenuous border between known and unknown things. (We at Obscure Research Labs feel that belief is a much more powerful force than knowledge, which isn't always as nice a situation as that may sound.) Among other things, we study and track the propagation of belief systems, factoids, religious and political cults, memes and meme complexes, fads, paradigms, fashions, obsessions, overnight sensations, one-hit wonders, extraordinary delusions and the madness of crowds. (We're also not above engineering a few of these in order to have a control sample.)

What *don't* you do?

1. Investigate sightings or occurrences of inexplicable or anomalous phenomena.
2. Scoff, ridicule, bait or poke fun at anyone who believes they have experienced an inexplicable or anomalous phenomenon.
3. Let charlatans, con artists or hoaxers get away with anything.
4. Divulge secrets, whether ours or someone else's.
5. Pull punches.
6. Jump to conclusions.
7. Endorse a particular religious, philosophical, political, ethnological, economic or ideological doctrine.
8. Participate in squabbles related to the superiority of a particular religious, philosophical, political, ethnological, economic or ideological doctrine.
9. Take any guff.

What's your hiring policy?

We're not accepting applications, if that's what you mean. Prospective employees are carefully screened from birth, often without their knowledge. Subtle hints and tests are left in their path; if they continue to demonstrate the "right stuff", one of our recruiters will eventually contact them. (By that time, the job offer comes as no surprise.) Our need for absolute security prevents us from doing this any other way; fortunately, our time travel apparati make the process relatively routine.

What's all this about time travel?

It's just something we do; another tool, like a microscope or sledgehammer. It gets the job done. Really, we don't understand why everyone is so curious about this one aspect of our research... a lot of people ask us to Reveal The Secret, as though an armed and ticking bomb is something you'd lightly give to an unfamiliar and possibly maladjusted child. We do not and will not engage in such irresponsible behavior. (On the other hand, we're not averse to discussing the subject with demonstrably competent fellow-tinkerers... meet us at 10.05.02N/170.0.0W//10k.4.1/2100U. BYOB.)

What is the Matrix?

(First, forget those movies – they're a tarted-up version of our 1991 pamphlet, and as far from the *true* truth as one can be and still gibber all the way to the bank.)

Among other things, The Matrix is the theoretical basis for just about everything we do here at ORL. Put simply, it's that vast area between what you know and what you don't; paradoxically, it's both universal and personal. (If you could make a circle around yourself to illustrate the limits of your perception, the area inside would represent your knowledge. Outside lies your ignorance. The circle itself is the Matrix -- the indeterminate state you use to account for the existence of things you can't see but "know" are there, like the person typing these words.) Sometimes people don't pay enough attention to the Matrix, and lose their sense of perspective; sometimes they pay too much attention, and lose their sense of humor. Fortunately, that's where the 3am Watch comes in.

What is the 3am Watch?

A simple solution to an age-old problem. When people get out-of-phase relative to the Matrix (a condition known as "Matrix Sickness" or the "3am Syndrome"), they sometimes need a little help becoming readjusted. Some turn to alcohol or other drugs; some reach for political or religious frameworks; some even commit mental or physical suicide. We at Obscure Research Labs decry these methods for their ineffective and often tragic consequences, and have developed instead a quiet little network of offline and online rephasing generators that thoroughly and inconspicuously stop Matrix Sickness, often before it even starts.

What other media do ORL utilize besides the World Wide Web?

Variable, according to need. Right now we're putting out most of our publicly-releasable material through the TRAPDOOR project, but we've also taken advantage of the following channels:

Print:

Our original PR foray was a small newsletter called Far Corner. Its six-year, seven-issue run received nice reviews from such varied secret celebrities as Joe Bob Briggs, Ivan Stang, Jim Moseley, Mike Gunderloy, Elayne Wechsler-Chaput, Kerry Thornley, Neal Wilgus, Brainbeau, Margaret Freeman, Robert Anton Wilson, David Crowbar and others. We hope to adapt much of FC's material for the TRAPDOOR project; meanwhile, a few back issues are available to satisfy your historical interest.

Radio:

ORL Director BT Elder made a number of guest appearances on San Jose (California) radio station KOME a few years back, featuring several heated exchanges with host Dennis Erectus regarding the relative truth or falsehood of the UFOs-as-aliens meme complex. These appearances led to...

Cassette Network:

We edited excerpts of the KOME shows with a few other odds and ends, titled the resultant 30 minutes "Voice of ORL" and tossed it into the mix around 1991. Unfortunately, due to unshielded equipment and shifting priorities not much ever became of this -- but it did net us some interesting cassettes in trade and was eventually played on subversive radio programs in Paris, France and (allegedly) Oslo, Norway.

Television:

Perhaps our proudest non-printed achievement is the baffling and disturbing video production *Obscure-o-Vision*, which incidentally earned N.H. Sparx the position of EMNet Group Leader.) Originally broadcast on Marin County (California) cable channel 31 in August/September 1996, *Obscure-o-Vision* used human-in-the-street interviews and actual footage to describe and explain ORL's mission and goals, and featured ORL Director BT Elder, Invasive Biology Head Dr (?) Calvin Biggins, ace interviewer Skip Smiley and the enigmatic B.A.G. Plans are underway for further exposure in this medium.

Chalk:

In June 1995 and 1997, EMNet Group Leader Sparx engineered a brilliantly-executed invasion of San Rafael's annual I Giovani dell'Arte festival. The idea is to fully cover a 10'x10' square of sidewalk with a full-color chalk drawing; while hundreds of other participants were happily reproducing the work of Italian Renaissance masters, Sparx and a couple of interns were bringing to unholy life one of the less-disturbing Schwa illustrations in stark black and white. (At one point, a mutated bucket brigade materialized among the other artists, staving off ORL's white-chalk shortage and enabling Team O/S to finish the drawing.) Flyers were handed out, people were impressed, camaraderie ruled the day and Sparx had to wash up afterwards very thoroughly.

Other:

Obscure Research Labs material has been posted (in both the publishing and military senses) on automobile bumpers, lampposts, Usenet newsgroups, telephone poles, walls (interior and exterior), telephone booths, magazine racks, prison cells, library shelves, skyscrapers, bridges, flagpoles, lavatories (male, female and airplane), classified-ad pages and bulletin boards (cork and electronic), and handed out at neo-pagan gatherings, rock concerts, streetcorners and UFO lectures. (Of these locations, only the Usenet postings have ever resulted in anyone contacting us. Infer from that what you will.)

What are your ethics?

Ethics?

When was ORL founded?

That depends on what you mean by "founded". The actual Matrix Principle was first *discovered* by New England intellectual gadfly N--- H----- in the early 1920s, but given that era's turgid moral climate his methodology could only be developed in the most clandestine fashion -- funding, equipment and suitable quarters were scarce, and the unexpected side effects of early Matrix Research caused more than one hastily-suppressed scandal. Despite almost forty years of variously-located setbacks and triumphs, Professor H----- and his few trusted colleagues persevered in their scientific and fundraising attempts; and in 1962, H----- protege BT Elder quietly signed a 78-page charter and plunged a ceremonial spade into the site of the Obscure Research Labs Main Facility.

Where is Obscure Research Labs located?

Security forbids us from revealing the *exact* co-ordinates, but we can reveal that the Main Facility is located somewhere in Northern California. (Close proximity to Silicon Valley as well as to fresh, tasty produce were the deciding factors; also, there are so many freaky little "cutting-edge" businesses nearby that our presence doesn't really attract much notice.) We also have a number of affiliated satellite facilities (and a few actual satellites) worldwide, which makes it easier to plan the rare vacation or office party.

Who runs/staffs ORL?

Dedicated, sensible people from every nation and state on Earth. (Our actual numbers are a closely guarded secret, but suffice to say our >Kbiot-capacity Staff Lounge gets a bit crowded when the shifts switch.) The degrees which barnacle up the office walls at ORL include B.A.s, B.S.s, M.A.s, M.S.s, Ph.D.s, A.D.C.s, A.E. and P.s, A.A.s, Ar.M.s, B.A.E.s, B.Ag.Sc.s, D.J.s, K.S.C.s, B.Mech.E.s, C.E.s, Ch.M.s, D.C.s, D.C.L.s, DD.S.s, DD.Sc.s, D.O.s, D.Litt.s, D.L.S.s, D.P.H.s, Th.Ds, D.V.M.S.s, Ed.D.s, E.E. and M.P.s, Eng.D.s, Fs.A.A.A.S., Fs.A.C.P., N.U.M.s, Fs.A.C.S., Fs.R.G.S., M.O.T.s, J.D.s, G.M.s, H.J.S.s, Com.D.s, Met.D.s, J.C.D.s, M.Ch.s, LL.D.s, M.D.s, Rh.D.s, Mus.D.s, Mmt.D.s, Ph.C.s, Phar.D.s, Pd.D.s, R.P.D.s, Ss.N.G.S., A:A:s, Ss.R.A.S., Ss.E.C.V., Ss.N.P.S.D.V.C., Ss.N.H.S., C.F.R.s, Fs.C.H.J., S.J.D.s, Fng.I.H., M.U.L.C.s, Sc.D.s and S.T.D.s, as well as many other certifications in emerging and/or less-easily classifiable fields.

Who is--

BT Elder?

Director, Obscure Research Labs. Aside from signing paychecks, authorizing expenditures, answering mail, dealing with local authorities, making coffee, overseeing employment, drinking with clients, attending section meetings, rallying the troops, spanning the globe, squelching leaks, writing and editing TRAPDOOR content and nibbling on the occasional snack, Elder also personally sets the standards and direction of ongoing ORL work. He holds a Ph.D. in Applied Memetics, an M.S. in Vector Sociology and a B.S. in Socratic Ontology from various colleges who would prefer he didn't mention them by name.

NH Sparx?

EMNet Group Leader. Sparx' primary responsibilities include TRAPDOOR structure and maintenance, development of new infojection technologies and the day-to-day supervision of all of ORL's "heavy equipment" usage. His perpetual expression of vague worry is attributable to an obsessive twiddling of wires, diodes, inodes, circuits, lenses, parabolae, buttons, switches, filesystems, knobs, dials, and meters.

the enigmatic B.A.G.?

Section Liaison, Seamless Inconspicuity Group. The enigmatic B.A.G.'s duties include... or rather, she's responsible for... develops... oversees... supervises... hm. In any case, we couldn't get task one accomplished without her.

Dr(?) Biggins?

Chief of Staff, Invasive Biology Group. The unblinkingly serious Biggins, most famous for his breakthroughs in creative genetics and rejectionless prosthesis, has also authored several studies including the twelve-volume "Mammalian Reactions to Variable-Frequency Neurosignal Induction" (*San Francisco: Montfort Publishing, 1989*) . Shunning publicity, Dr(?) Biggins prefers the moist dark of his operating theatres to the harsh glare of a CRT.

Ed Simmons?

Maintenance Chief. A stooped figure in greasy coveralls and sagging toolbelt, the elderly Simmons was Prof. H-----' machinist back in "the early days" and is still responsible for the fabrication and upkeep of anything with gears, pistons, flywheels, links, pumps, fans, ducts, valves, motors, coils or lubricants. Scorning the use of written documentation ("Just gets in the way, sonny") he performs his rounds with a deceptive nonchalance that keeps his subordinates frantic.

Prof. H-----?

Discoverer of the Matrix Principle. Sir Dr. Professor N--- H----- was (and maybe still is) a renowned anthropologist, physician, mystic, chemist, herbalist, archaeologist, lemming breeder, amateur pugilist, explorer, sailor, master chef, architect, champion swimmer and all around crack shot. His many careers came to an apparent end in the late 1930s, when his deserted yacht *Belum Cukup* was found drifting off the island of St. George. H-----' lusty, larger-than-life Renaissance-manhood has spawned numerous cargo-type cults the world over, and he remains an ongoing influence here at ORL.

Who or what is MIBCO?

Oh, nobody you need to worry about. That's *our* job.

How are you funded?

Certainly not by your hard-earned tax dollars, so please feel free to put *that* worry to rest. Much of our funding comes through private donations or the barter system; where neither of those are feasible, we also pick up the odd shekel doing contract work for the entertainment industry (no, we can't say in what capacity). And of course, there's always the annual Obscure Research Labs Bake Sale.

How can I get a straight answer to any of my questions?

By being worthy of it. We don't mean that as an insult, but our years in the Field have taught us that very few people understand enough about it to know what to ask; specifically, which questions can be answered and which can't. But we try to answer each query according to the querent's abilities and needs; what sometimes seems like flippancy on our part is actually a concern for the seeker's well-being and a gentle nudge to their hidden perceptions. Security concerns enter into it as well; we try to give as complete an answer to every question as we can without jeopardizing the overarching and underlying goals and mission of the Project as a whole. When you consider that many people come to us with overburdened hearts, overloaded psyches and overactive imaginations but are extremely sincere and frightened, plagued as they are by

nameless and terrible forces that they not only don't understand but don't want want to, crying out to any sympathetic ear to JUST MAKE IT STOP, then... well, you see our point.

Why isn't there any specific info on your web site?

Simply put, we're not in the "specific info" business. (We are the *Obscure* Research Labs, after all.) Our function isn't so much information *dissemination* as it is information-reaction *analysis* . On the other hand, we'd be needlessly coy if we didn't put anything back into the stream; this website -- indeed, this file -- is part of that replanting effort. With the site refit and TRAPDOOR initialization, we're trying to provide links for those who want to know more about the sort of things we study; for more details see the THROUGHPUT section.

Why all the secrecy?

Protection, mostly -- yours *and* ours. You just *think* you want to know what we're up to.

Why does it take so long for you to answer your mail?

There are a couple of reasons for that, chiefly because ORL's actual day-to-day activities are time-heavy concerns than don't always allow for answering mail on a daily basis. Another reason is the relatively high quality of the mail we get; some questions are less easily answered than others, and we try not to hand out false or misleading information when we can. (Sometimes we have to, but that's not *our* fault.) And the third reason is that -- as attested by our INPUT section - - we get a *lot* of mail, and we make a point of answering it *all* . (If you took the trouble to send it, we'll take the trouble to answer it.) What usually happens is that Director Elder gets a cup of hot cocoa from the Staff Lounge, fires up his TRS 80 and answers all the current mail at once; harder questions are bookmarked and gotten back to a little later. The results of these sessions are written to a file, edited, HTMLized and posted to INPUT. Now that TRAPDOOR is up and running, we'll be posting each mail mix around the end of the month; hopefully, this will satisfy eager readers as well as give us a reason to drop out of n-space with greater regularity.

Why does it take you so long to update your web site?

That depends on what you mean by "update". Not being an entertainment site, we only publish documents that relate to our research; as not all of our research bears publishable fruit, not all of it finds its way to our website. But with the TRAPDOOR implementation, EMNet Group Leader Sparx has seen fit to remove Director Elder's electronic training wheels and let him help with the day-to-day running of ORL's digital analog. Hopefully, these enhancements (plus a couple of others slowly rolling out of R&D) will ensure a more continually current online presence.

Why don't you release some of this secret tech you say you have?

Partly because we don't trust anybody not to go hog-wild with it; partly because the world wouldn't be able to afford the economic and social costs of possessing it; and partly because it's not our job to do act as innovators or entrepreneurs. Mostly, though, it's because we have nothing to prove. Whether or not people believe our claims doesn't actually affect our research all that much (aside from adding their reactions to our slowly fattening files, anyway).

Are you guys for real or is this all a joke?

This is the most often-asked question we receive at Obscure Research Labs. Generally we answer it according to what the questioner seems to want to hear; but since that's usually the last

we hear from them, we'll just let our record speak for itself. We are real in the sense that we exist, we occupy space and time, we can be perceived by others, and we actually do all of the nifty and scary things we say we do. But the essential nature of our research gives us a different set of priorities from most of those in the Field (or even out of it), people look at us and mutter. Just remember, all of our results can be *independently verified* -- can you say the same?

Are you affiliated with any other organizations such as SRI, the NSA, Rand Corporation, etc.?)

Not officially, no. We do a little independent consulting sometimes in exchange for library privileges or other favors, but that's about it.

Do you give tours of the Main Facility?

Hardly. For a variety of reasons, such a thing would be a Really Bad Idea. But the R&D boys are toying with the idea of putting together an ORL Virtual Tour as a TRAPDOOR adjunct, so don't dash *all* your hopes quite yet.

Do you have an official position on Roswell, Area 51, UFOS, ghosts, parapsychology, Elvis sightings, crop circles, et al?

Specifically, no -- and if we did, we wouldn't publish it for fear of tainting the sample. But our general position is that it's a big, poorly-understood universe out there; in contrast to the nearly-infinite expanse of space and time, human sense-organs (including the brain) are painfully finite. With those factors, it would be silly to rule anything out-of-hand simply because it doesn't fit in with what we already think we know; after all, you *never can tell* ...

Do you have an official position on: The X Files, Strange Universe, Sightings, Unsolved Mysteries, In Search Of, et al?

Suffice to say that we keep a *big* salt shaker next to the Staff Lounge TV set. Seriously though, we don't generally watch a lot of those programs; Director Elder, for example, has never even *seen* an episode of The X Files ("Why bother? The stuff you *can't* make up is much more entertaining than the stuff you *can*"). As for the current glut of "strange but true" programming, we feel there's too much of a serious sensationalist/believer slant to recommend it for anything other than anthropological value. (No offense to producers or fans -- but the bottom line is that television programs exist to generate revenue for the stations that air them. We at Obscure Research Labs feel that anything that uses illusion to separate you from your money should be treated with all the suspicion you can muster; that said, don't forget to enjoy the Good Parts.)

I have seen or experienced something I can't explain. Can you help?

If you need an investigation, no. (We don't handle that sort of thing, although we can probably refer you to someone who does.) But if you just need to tell someone about it and gain a little perspective, then yes. Obscure Research Labs observes a strict code of confidentiality; if you ask us not to publish your correspondence, we won't. (Everything else is fair game, of course.) Also, we've pretty much heard it all by now, so don't be afraid that we'll think you're nuts; inexplicable phenomena can be fairly draining, but they tend to fall into certain patterns which, while not themselves explicable, are at least understood -- otherwise, we'd have gone out of business long ago. We're not jaded, but we are experienced...

I'm interested in this kind of stuff and want more info. Can you recommend any good books on the subject?

There are so many books about "this kind of stuff" on the market these days that sifting the bran from the husk is a daunting task, even for our Print Reconnaissance Group. But we've compiled a short list (by no means complete) of authors whose works we either admire or find useful for one reason or another. We hope you will too.

Robert Anton Wilson

Wilson tops this list because of his passionate devotion towards Getting To The Bottom Of Things as well as his excruciatingly multi-level sense of humor. You really ought to read all of his books, but those most relevant to the current context include *The New Inquisition: Irrational Rationalism* and the Citadel of Science (a searing indictment of those who've traded scientific method for lockminded establishmentarianism), *Coincidance* (a collection of random essays about, among other things, the nature of belief and reality), and *Prometheus Rising* (an exploration of the lesser-publicized properties of human consciousness).

Charles Fort

The self-effacing Father of Weirdology. Fort was a fellow with enough money and time to pore through the New York Public Library's magazine and newspaper stacks around the turn of the century looking for Damned Things ("By the damned, I mean the excluded") like lunar lights, rains of crabs and periwinkles, mysterious footprints and other unsatisfactorily-explained-away phenomena. He found quite a few of them, and filled four books (*The Book of the Damned*, *New Lands*, *Lo!* and *Wild Talents*) with them. His writing style takes a bit of getting used to, but this is *must reading* for any serious student of the Field.

Jacques Vallee

Aside from Jim Moseley, Dr. Vallee is quite possibly the only sane human being currently conducting UFO research. His theory is that UFOs are a sort of physically real but psychotropic phenomenon, with pattern-parallels in fairy and religious folklore. This theory is developed and substantiated in *Dimensions: A Casebook of Alien Contact*. Also highly recommended is *Messengers of Deception: UFO Contacts and Cults*, which (as the subtitle implies) is about the human effects of these still-inexplicable events.

John Gribbin

British science writer, whose *In Search Of Schrodinger's Cat* is the best layman-oriented introduction to quantum physics we know of. Light, informative and imbued with a sense of drama as Max Planck, Nils Bohr, Albert Einstein et freres learn to cope with the realization that Sir Isaac Newton *didn't* have all the answers.

Jan Harold Brunvand

It's getting a bit trendy to quote urban folklorist Brunvand's work (*The Choking Doberman*, *The Mexican Pet*, et al); but anyone who wants to understand the structure and propagation of rumors and wishful stories would do well to check him out. He'll put a whole new spin on those jokes, stories and fables that wind up in your email box.

John Keel

Grab your salt shakers, ladies and gentlemen. Although some of his scholarship has a tendency to evaporate on closer study, nobody can spin a creepier yarn of cosmically sinister modern paranoia than ol' John. His *The Mothman Prophecies* was largely responsible for good spread of Men In Black lore; also good for a shudder are the little-known *The Eighth Tower* and *Disneyland of the Gods*. He's a bit of a curmudgeon (his reply to our interview request is notoriously unprintable), but well-lettered.

Frank Edwards

If Charles Fort was the Father of Weirdology, radio announcer Frank Edwards was the Paperback Uncle. His *Stranger Than Science*, *Strange People*, *Strangest of All* and *Strange World* collections were the precursor to the weird-book boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s as well as the current glut of sensationalist "oooooooooooo" television programs. Ghost stories, lost squadrons, tumbling coffins, precognitive dreams, talking animals -- we have copies in each Obscure Research Lavatory.

Douglas Curran

Curran drove around North America one year, talking to and taking pictures of flying saucer fans. He published the results in the excellent *In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space*. Don't let our relatively sparse praise fool you -- it's an important work on many levels, not the least of which because of Curran's ability to get into the heads of his subjects. A must for those who really want to understand the human/inexplicable interface.

Ted Schultz (ed.)

Rounding out this list is *The Fringes of Reason: A Whole Earth Catalogue*. Subtitled *A Field Guide to New Age Frontiers, Unusual Beliefs and Eccentric Sciences*, this 224-page guide is packed full of enough resources -- books, magazines, belief systems -- to keep you scratching your head and saving your pennies for months. Years, even.

0. Coda

This concludes this transmission of the Obscure Research Labs Furtively Answered Queries List. We hope it's been helpful in explaining some of our goals and methods. Obviously, this list is not exhaustive; although we can't honor all requests, if you have any suggested additions please email us at faqreq@orl.org. Thank you.

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Violators will be haunted