

A Retrospective on the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*

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Advances are made by answering questions. Discoveries are made by questioning answers... Bernard Haisch

Abstract—The development and progress of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* are described from its initiation to its growth to four issues per year with a circulation that at one stage exceeded 2000. The initial publisher, Pergamon Press, had soon withdrawn, whereupon Haisch and Sims took over all publishing responsibilities, engaging Allen Press as printer and distributor. The *Journal* founded a Web-site that was also the Society's only presence on the Web, at a time when few scientific societies had their own Web-sites. Several summer research visits to Germany by the editors also led to the organizing of the first European meeting of the Society.

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In a brief history of the Society of Scientific Exploration (SSE) published in the very first issue of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration (JSE)*, Society President Peter Sturrock wrote:

In 1981, a number of scientists and other scholars in the United States came to the conclusion that there was a need for a new initiative in scientific research. They could identify a number of phenomena that, for various reasons, were not being studied by the scientific community, but were potentially interesting and even important. Indeed, it was clear that some phenomena, if they are indeed real, will challenge some of our established scientific beliefs.

He then went on to discuss the highly compartmentalized structure of modern day science. Universities are divided into schools and schools into departments, those departments representing disciplines of study. Research in those disciplines is carried out by specialized national and international communities of scientists, each with its own societies and journals. Funding opportunities—mainly from federal agencies—that largely enable research are structured on similar lines. And thus it happens that topics that do not fall into a recognized branch of learning are usually ignored. An individual scientist foolhardy enough to venture into topics that “may seem curious or even bizarre” has no opportunity to find support for his research and runs a major career risk to boot



Fig. 1. Dr. Bernard Haisch, Editor-in-Chief 1988–1999 (left); Marsha Sims, Executive Editor 1990–2000 (right).

since reputation and advancement are contingent upon success in recognized disciplines. Moreover even substantive work of individual maverick scientists would not be sufficient to make progress. In previous centuries, natural philosophers—as scientists were once known—might open new vistas by summarizing years of solitary research and contemplation in a single influential book, famous examples being Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo and Newton. But whereas Darwin followed this path with his publication of *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859, Maxwell published his theory of electrodynamics in three papers appearing between 1856 and 1864 (which were then compiled into the single *Treatise on Electricity and Magnetism* in 1873). By the first decades of the twentieth century the scientific journal had become the collective repository of knowledge and seedbed of new ideas: Relativity and quantum mechanics were born in journal articles, not in books.

As Sturrock writes:

Scholarly publications are essential for the process of building consensus. For these reasons, it was clear to the Committee that real progress in the study of anomalies requires the publication of a new journal designed specifically for that purpose.

The establishment of a new peer-reviewed journal following the customs and standards of academic journals but designed specifically for the scholarly study of anomalies became the principal goal. But where to begin? It was decided to form a new scientific society to achieve this goal. A Founding Committee of 13 university professors was established whose immediate job was to recruit a larger number of other scholars to constitute a critical mass. About 100 Founding Members were enrolled, again all being university faculty in the United States or Canada. The Founding Committee then nominated the first set of officers

constituting the Council for the new Society for Scientific Exploration. The first Council meeting took place on January 5, 1982 at the Joseph Henry Building of the National Academy of Sciences, and the first meeting open to the full membership was held at the University of Maryland on June 3–5, 1982. Things had moved relatively quickly. Annual meetings followed and a newsletter, *The Explorer*, was started. But the goal of launching a journal proved to be much more difficult.

Two hurdles confronted the Society. The first was the circular problem that without articles there can be no journal, but without a journal there are not likely to be any articles written. The second was finding a respectable and reliable publisher. It thus took another 5 years before the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* became a reality.

Pergamon Press, a prominent international publisher, took on the *Journal*, after a meeting of Pergamon's Robert Miranda with Sturrock in San Francisco and later, at Stanford, with Sturrock and Prof. Ronald Howard, in the Department of Engineering-Economic Systems at Stanford University, who became the first editor, along with a cluster of seven associate editors recruited by Sturrock. The publication schedule was two issues per year. Volume 1 appeared in 1987 and contained a total of 196 pages consisting of 10 articles, an editorial by Howard, a 2-page history of the Society by Sturrock, and one rather peculiar letter to the editor proposing a far-fetched explanation for the Loch Ness Monster which appeared as the first page in Volume 1, Number 2. Things were off to a fairly good start.

Prof. Howard had done the Society a great service by pulling together the opening issues of *JSE*, but he was not himself involved in any anomalies research and had other pressing mainstream projects. By the summer of the following year, 1988, with three issues of the *Journal* out, he was ready to turn the reins over to a successor, and it fell to Society president Sturrock to find one.

In its early days the Society leadership was dominated by astronomers and astrophysicists. SSE President Sturrock was a well-known Stanford University astrophysicist who had worked with cosmologist Fred Hoyle at Cambridge University and would later win prizes for his work in the field. SSE Vice-President Yervant Terzian was chairman of the Department of Astronomy at Cornell University (where Carl Sagan worked). The Secretary and Treasurer of the Society were Lawrence Fredrick and Charles Tolbert respectively, two University of Virginia astronomers who had recently served those same roles for the American Astronomical Society. In searching for a replacement editor for Ron Howard, Sturrock wound up turning to two other SSE astrophysicists: Richard Henry and Bernard Haisch.

Henry, who was and still is a professor at Johns Hopkins, had an interesting article under consideration by *JSE* at the time: "UFOs and NASA." When President Jimmy Carter made good on a campaign promise to open up the UFO issue, he asked his science advisor, Dr. Frank Press, to send a "Dear Bob" letter to NASA Administrator, Dr. Robert Frosch, asking him to consider NASA's forming a small panel of inquiry into this topic. This was sent on July 21, 1977,

and this “hot potato” landed in the lap of a young visiting scientist acting as deputy to Bland Norris, Director of the Astrophysics Division at NASA headquarters: this young scientist was Richard Henry. In the end, NASA wound up politely declining the president’s request, and Henry’s article offers interesting insight into how this issue was handled and how the decision was made. Henry’s interest in the UFO phenomenon and his status as a Johns Hopkins professor would have served the *Journal* well.

Haisch had been serving as editor of *The Explorer* since 1983. He was heavily involved in solar-stellar astrophysics, having organized and then serving as co-chairman of a major International Astronomical Union conference on “Solar and Stellar Flares” at Stanford University in August 1988. He was not himself involved in any anomalies research, but was familiar with a number of the key figures in UFO research and in the CIA-sponsored remote viewing program at Stanford Research Institute (SRI, later SRI International), and as a result felt that topics like this did deserve a scientific forum. Interestingly, since he was working as a staff scientist in the Lockheed Palo Alto Research Laboratory there was less peer pressure to “toe the line” than within a university environment. At the end of August 1988, Haisch took on the editorship of the *Journal*.

By this time, there were inklings of problems brewing: Volume 2, Number 2 was already behind schedule, and it soon became evident that Pergamon Press was having second thoughts about publishing the *Journal* since subscriptions were disappointingly small. This problem might have been foreseen. Not serving any particular funded research community or university discipline, there was no pressure on libraries to subscribe, and in 1987 dollars, a \$75 institutional subscription for two issues totaling approximately 200 pages was quite steep.

Issue 4 (Volume 2, No. 2, 1988) under the editorship of Haisch came out in early 1989 (and contained Henry’s article “UFOs and NASA”). Volume 2 (1988) was about 25 percent larger than Volume 1 (1987), an encouraging sign that appropriate material to sustain the *Journal* could be expected.

Since the job of editor was and still is an unpaid volunteer position, the role of the editor has been to make content and policy decisions, but not to engage in the nuts and bolts editorial functions of corresponding with authors and referees, tracking articles and the like. When Haisch took over, Sturrock arranged for an assistant editor for these functions: Ms. Henrietta Bensussen, who worked in the Stanford Library. Sturrock’s spacious office in the old (and now demolished) Electronics Research Laboratory (ERL) building on the Stanford campus served as the mail drop for the *Journal* and the place where Haisch and Bensussen passed material back and forth. Pergamon Press subsidized this by providing \$5000 per year to pay an editorial assistant and for office expenses, which were minimal.

Given the small circulation and the \$5000 annual editorial office allowance, the *Journal* was not a money-maker for Pergamon. By the end of the third year (1989) Pergamon indicated its desire to terminate publication short of the 5-year commitment agreed to at the outset. Vice-President Yervant Terzian, whose

low-key powers of persuasion are considerable, if not legendary, drove from Ithaca to New York City to meet with Pergamon vice-president Robert Miranda, and this gave the *Journal* a one-year reprieve.

By the middle of 1990 another perturbation was looming. Haisch was awarded a NASA contract for a 6-month extended visit to the Max-Planck-Institut für extraterrestrische Physik in Garching, Germany, to analyze data from the new joint US-Germany-UK ROSAT X-ray mission. This would put a serious crimp into the editorial interaction between the editor and assistant editor. By this time, however, Ms. Bensussen had lost enthusiasm since her role proved to be primarily secretarial. Fortunately, Marsha Sims, Haisch's wife, who was an administrator at the Lockheed Palo Alto Research Laboratory, agreed to take on this responsibility. This greatly increased the editorial efficiency, since *Journal* business could now be conducted in person at all sorts of hours. This also solved the overseas visit problem since the entire family (including three children) planned to move to Munich, and thereby the editorial office as well. Marsha Sims took over as assistant editor with Volume 4, Number 2.

In late 1990 Pergamon was once again desirous of canceling publication at the end of year four, and one more time Terzian made the trek to New York City—with his customary persuasive success.

Owing to the Gulf War in early 1991, the 6-month visit to Germany was delayed. Housing for a family of five was also proving difficult to find. But in June 1991, Haisch, Sims and children moved to Germany. About 200 pounds of books, scientific documents and *JSE* material were shipped separately as was the Macintosh SE computer which was the *JSE* workhorse and which thankfully suffered no mishaps.

As it turned out, this scientific visit to the Max-Planck-Institut was only the first of four. Following the 1991 6-month stay, there were 2- to 3-month visits each summer in 1992, 1993 and 1994. The same Macintosh SE was hauled back and forth each time, but to be safe it was taken as carry-on luggage. Unfortunately this computer was just a little too big to fit under the seat or into the overhead bins on some of the smaller aircraft. On more than one occasion when taking a 727 from Heathrow to Munich, Haisch managed to use blankets to conceal the fact that the computer was not quite stowed as required—at least until after takeoff. Having it offloaded and put into the luggage compartment by a flight attendant and thus possibly having it damaged would have put a serious crimp into the *Journal* operation.

The extended stay in Germany led to the initiation of European meetings of the Society. Following a personal meeting in Vaduz in July 1991, Prince Hans-Adam of Liechtenstein generously offered to support a Society meeting. Prof. Dr. Gerald Eberlein, a sociologist at the Technical University of Munich, who had recently joined the Society, enthusiastically offered to host the meeting at the University. He, Suitbert Ertel from the University of Göttingen, Eberhard Bauer of the Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie und Psychohygiene in Freiburg, and Haisch were the organizers. A 2-day Euro-SSE meeting was held in August

1992, during our second summer visit to the Max-Planck-Institut. This European initiative would significantly augment submissions of high-quality material for the *Journal*.

By the end of 1991 the 5-year contract with Pergamon was finished and given the cutbacks they were making at the time to their entire journal catalog and the presumably negative profitability of *JSE* (their budget was not shared with us), this was the end of the line for that partnership. Indeed, upon returning from the 6-month stay in Germany a few days before the Christmas holidays, we discovered for the first time how bleak the situation was. Apart from the 300 or so Society members who received the *Journal* as part of their membership, there were a mere 29 private subscribers. As for library subscribers, which are generally the bread and butter of a journal budget, the 100 or so libraries Pergamon had accumulated over 5 years had all been mistakenly informed that the *Journal* was ceasing operation.

Just prior to leaving for Germany, in May 1991, Haisch had visited Allen Press (a publisher suggested by Pergamon's Robert Miranda) and they had indicated a willingness to print and distribute the *Journal*. However, unlike Pergamon Press, a genuine publisher, Allen Press was in the business of providing any and all publishing services for a fee. The services they provided were exceptionally good, but nonetheless the publisher of *JSE* would have to be the Society itself, which would be fine so long as the Society could pay the Allen Press bill for services rendered.

And so just before Christmas Eve of 1991, a flurry of activity commenced. Haisch, Sims and their 12-year-old daughter, Elizabeth, printed, folded, labeled, stuffed and mailed out letters outlining the change of plans and publication by Allen Press with Marsha Sims acting as assistant editor. Haisch licked all of the envelopes, and then upon returning home had a nice Bourbon and ginger ale to wash away the taste of envelope glue.

Rather than just try to catch up, Haisch decided to "go for broke" by signing on with Allen Press and taking the *Journal* from a twice to a four times per year publication schedule. This was more than just bravado. It was decided that one of the problems holding back the *Journal* was the infrequent publication rate. If you receive something only twice per year, and sometimes late at that, it is easy to forget about it altogether. A quarterly schedule seemed like a minimum but achievable level of engagement between the *Journal* and its readers.

Like many a Silicon Valley startup, much of the *Journal* operation temporarily moved into a combination bedroom/office at the Haisch-Sims residence. But in the meantime, construction was started on a major home improvement that would serve as the *Journal* editorial office for the next 7 years: a 500-square-foot, second-floor office addition to the house. In the years to come this would be served by four networked Macintosh computers and the usual office equipment plus a part time staff of five to seven students. Because of the slow turnaround time getting proofs back and forth between Allen Press and the editorial office in California, Sims traveled to Allen Press in 1995. There she

learned first hand about the printing and publishing business during a 3-day seminar. She learned Quark Express and how to typeset and do page and figure layouts in addition to doing editorial work. Both economically and for purposes of quality control, more and more of the pre-production was carried out by Sims and her crew. (The Allen Press charge for corrections was a flat \$3.00 per each fix. Not only was this sometimes costly, but it was tempting to overlook the really minor errors, such as a comma here or there, to save precious money. Handling all of this in-house was a great improvement.)

Much of the office operation was carried out by a talented, hand-picked group of college and high-school students under Sims' supervision. Some of the noteworthy students were: Steven Enstad, Diane Foerder, Elizabeth Henderson, Marcel Kuijsten, Erik Lee, and Erin Thompson. On occasion there were as many as four assistants simultaneously working in conjunction with Sims, with computers crashing, questions and papers flying, faxes coming in and telephones ringing. Now Sims had to learn how to troubleshoot computer software and hardware problems and be the software and page layout instructor and personnel manager. In addition to journal preparation and author correspondence, we also handled subscriptions and renewals, promotional campaigns and back-issue mailing. We got an on-line Visa card service up and running for charging subscriptions, back-issue purchases and even SSE memberships. Sims also arranged to have out-of-print issues reproduced locally so that we could sell complete sets of back issues to the really enthusiastic readers. Our garage and upstairs closet were overflowing with *JSE* back issues.

With the financial burden now squarely on the Society, recruiting new subscribers became an essential and ongoing activity. New brochures were designed and printed and thousands were mailed out. Special prices were offered for promotional copies to give to friends and colleagues. A discount gift subscription and introductory rates for new subscribers were introduced. Sims had to learn about non-profit postal regulations and how to prepare bulk mailings in order to receive the postal discounts. Her inventiveness helped her to locate non-profit services provided by retired seniors and a handicapped training center, the Morgan Center, which assisted with preparation for huge promotional mailings of up to 12,000 brochures at a time . . . free of charge. In recognition of her increased responsibilities, Sims was promoted to Executive Editor.

Midway through our first year of independent operation (1993), the number of non-member private subscribers to the *Journal* had gone from the remnant 29 of Pergamon to 122. This grew to over 600 by 1995 and thanks to the assistance of the Institute for Noetic Sciences actually topped out at 1566 in 1998. Together with Society members that put our circulation well over the 2000 mark. Unfortunately this level could not be sustained. It was our experience that a fair number of subscribers who were enthusiastic about the topics covered in the *Journal* found the level of the research articles beyond their comprehension. This was to be expected. The intent of the *Journal* was (and is) to publish world-

class original research. Our model is *Science* and *Nature*, not *Scientific American*. This does, however, put a crimp in the readership.

The number of libraries carrying the *Journal* did not recover quite so well, stabilizing at around 80. The trend of pruning journals was an unfortunate, economically-driven reality of the 1990s, and library subscriptions would probably have declined even without the premature *JSE* obituary by Pergamon.

Haisch and Sims made a point of attending every SSE conference during their years with *JSE*, in order to network with Society members and hear presentations of interesting anomalies research. They encouraged authors of the best talks to submit formal articles on their topics to the *Journal*. Not only did this help the *Journal* grow with pre-screened high-quality material, it also served to archive research that might otherwise survive as nothing more than a meeting abstract.

Two book reviews had been published in 5-2 (the last Pergamon issue), and to help provide material for the forthcoming quarterly publication schedule, book reviews were made a regular feature. In 6-3 a column called “The Skeptical Perspective” by SSE member and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) chemist Michael Epstein was introduced. In 6-4 “Anomalous Propagation” by Topher Cooper was inaugurated, summarizing miscellaneous articles or news items of interest to SSE members. A short SSE News Items section also became a regular feature. In the following year a Guest Column was added and Invited Essays were solicited. (The model for these changes actually came from trendy directions along lines at the time in *Science* and *Nature*.) The goal was to publish a 100-page-per-issue quarterly: This was reached: Volume 6 contained 402 pages. But ultimately with enough good “hard material” being submitted and some grumbling about diluting the *Journal* with “soft material” the columns were gradually phased out in Volumes 8 and 9. On the other hand, the book review section, edited by Henry Bauer, continued to grow in size and importance.

In late 1994, Ed May introduced us to the World Wide Web. This was just beginning to catch on as a new medium for commerce, and so we selected “jse.com” to launch our Web presence. A fairly early version (November 1996) of the Web-site can still be accessed by going to the Internet archive known as the “Wayback Machine” at <http://web.archive.org/collections/web.html>>. The *JSE* Web-site was actually the home page for the Society and remained so for several years. In retrospect this was a curious arrangement but came about because the Web-page was a *JSE* editorial office responsibility and because Web norms were still ill defined. Nonetheless, curious arrangement or not, the Society became one of the first scientific organizations to have a Web-site.

Two major publication events stand out during those years: the government-sponsored remote-viewing-program retrospective in 1996, and the summary report of the Pocantico Workshop on the UFO phenomenon in 1998.

From 1972 to 1995 the Central Intelligence Agency, the Air Force Foreign Technology Division, various Army, Navy and NASA units and, finally, the

Defense Intelligence Agency sponsored, in succession, a psychic remote viewing program at an average level of about \$1M per year. This program began at SRI in Menlo Park, California, and experiments and mission-oriented operations took place at both SRI and Ft. Meade, Maryland. The California operation transferred from SRI to Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) in 1991. In 1995 Congress directed the CIA to do a retrospective analysis of the program. The results were two reports that reached opposite conclusions, one by Prof. Jessica Utts at the University of California at Davis, a well-respected statistician, and one by Prof. Ray Hyman, a psychologist at the University of Oregon. These reports were made publicly available. It was decided to provide a broader perspective on the program by combining these reports with invited articles by the three key leaders of the program—first director Hal Puthoff, researcher Russell Targ and second director Edwin May—in one issue of *JSE* (Volume 10, No. 1). The *JSE* articles marked the first time that names and details of this series of top-secret, codeword, special access programs were published in the open scientific literature.

In the fall of 1997 a workshop sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation took place at the Pocantico Conference Center on the Rockefeller Estate. This was the first time since the Colorado Project, headed by Prof. Edward Condon in the late 1960s, that mainstream scientists formally confronted and seriously considered UFO evidence. Presentations were made by eight respected UFO investigators, over a 4-day period, to a panel of nine senior scientists having no prior involvement with the topic. This was followed by a private meeting of the scientists several weeks later in San Francisco, to discuss among themselves what they had heard and to draft a report.

This report was published by the *Journal* in two forms: a printed article in Volume 12, Number 2 and a much more extensive presentation of the data on the *JSE* Web-site. When the report was made public and announced via a press release issued by Stanford University, no doubt the first ever by Stanford on this topic, there was a ground-swell of interest. Local television vans drove right up to the *JSE* office to pick up copies of the *Journal* and the telephone rang off the hook. The *Journal* found itself showcased on the nationally broadcast “Good Morning America” and in numerous other national and regional television, newspaper and magazine stories and commentaries, including *Science* magazine, with most coverage being serious.

It would be nice to say that this brought about a lasting change in interest by the scientific community or in serious treatment of the topic by the media, but that cannot honestly be said to be the case. However, like the butterfly fluttering in Beijing in May, giving rise to the thunderstorm in New York in June, one can hope that our sincere attempt to promote the open-minded pursuit of anomalies will ultimately have its effect.

In retrospect, the optimism of the early days when the Society was founded was premature: providing scholarly, well documented, competently analyzed data supporting the reality of anomalies did not win over or even attract much



Fig. 2. Participants in the 1997 Pocantico UFO Workshop from left to right: T. Holzer, V. Eshelman, M. Rodeghier, J. Schuessler, H. Melosh, J. Jopkii, H. Puthoff, D. Pritchard, P. Sturrock, C. Tolbert, F. Louange, L. Rockefeller, J. J. Velasco, I. von Ludwiger, H. Diamond, M. Sims, J. Vallée, B. Haisch, B. Veyret, R. Haines, M. Swords, J. Papike, G. Reitz, E. Strand.

attention from the mainstream scientific community. It is quite amazing how resistant to evidence the supposedly objective practitioners of modern science can be. Not that everything the *Journal* publishes will prove to be true, of course, but there is certainly a wealth of data that on its own merits is every bit as good as that within the established disciplines. The threshold for recognition of validity and the consequent acceptance for journal publication is far lower for research that supports or at most proposes minor modifications of existing theory. Science is more dogmatic than it admits. This is not written from the perspective of an outsider chewing on sour grapes. During much of the time that Haisch was editing *JSE* he was also a scientific editor of the prestigious *Astrophysical Journal*. He served in this capacity for 10 years (1993–2002), longer than the current 6-year maximum terms, and during his tenure exercised the authority to accept or reject well over 1000 articles submitted to that journal.

On the other hand, Sims found that the student office assistants were fascinated with the topics covered in *JSE*, particularly in the Pocantico issue. Many lively discussions on the UFO topic and other anomalies topics took place in the *JSE* office. College science students seem to be quite open minded to the anomalies research done by SSE members and published in *JSE*.

Physicist Max Planck is often quoted as having said that “science advances one funeral at a time.” What he actually wrote is slightly less melodramatic, although the message is the same. “A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it.”

Perhaps energy invested in the SSE Young Investigators program will increase interest from the future scientific community in the *Journal* and *Society*.

JSE is unique in its positioning between scholarly publications for mainstream professionals and the broad spectrum of real and virtual publications challenging conventional paradigms or simply embracing alternative beliefs unquestioningly. It stands head and shoulders above the latter, and by rights should have a place of honor among the former as a source of new ideas. Serious students of human nature will find it no surprise that the resistance *JSE* has encountered is as much, and perhaps more, due to psychological predispositions, belief imperatives, power politics, economic realities and other utterly non-scientific motivations than to objective scientific factors. It is one thing to be searching loftily for “the truth” and yet another to recognize such when it conflicts menacingly with established beliefs. As Winston Churchill said: “Men stumble over the truth from time to time, but most pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing happened.” It is also worth noting that in a Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) lecture on the “The Burden of Skepticism” Carl Sagan himself stated that “If you are only skeptical, then no new ideas make it through to you.”

Outside the scientific community, Western society is moving toward a growing interest in, and in many cases for better or worse acceptance of, many of the subject areas covered in the *Journal*. To cut to the chase, we are proud of the years we spent producing the *Journal* and are confident that history will render a favorable judgment on our efforts.