It's been quite a week for news stories. If you haven't been glued to your TV (and your Twitter feed) following the presidential elections, you may have been reading about Simon Cowell hiring a house healer (more on what the JREF is doing to help Mr. Cowell in an upcoming post) or tracking Theresa Caputo's tour across the United States. But what can you do with news of pseudoscience and paranormal claims, besides gently tugging at the roots of your hair until your head bleeds? Here are a few suggestions.

UFO Spotted Over Pregnant Mother in the United Kingdom

What Happened: The Irish Sun is reporting that a Buzz-Lightyear-like figure was spotted floating above an unsuspecting pregnant woman last week. The photographer claims he did nothing to manipulate the photo and that he didn't notice the Tim Allen-like figure until after the photo was taken. Okay, sure, so the Sun isn't exactly the premiere source of credible

information, but this is just the sort of claim we hear every day, from people who accidentally catch their own thumb in a photo, to those who intentionally insert an object into the frame. And, unfortunately, these fakes often fool many people, causing them to wonder if aliens are on their way to Earth to rob graves and slowly chase women .

What You Can Do: If you can recreate the effect in the photo, send us your own version, and we'll share the best ones, so the world can see how easy it is to manipulate a photo and get the same effect. We've already received many fantastic entries, so hurry up and send us your own version ! The best one wins a Team Randi shirt!

Back Scraping Gaining Popularity

What Happened: The Washington Post brings us this story of the growing popularity of "back scraping," a process in which the practitioner scrapes her client's back with a spoon, shell or other hard object, for thirty minutes or more, to relieve all sorts of ailments. Sound too good-- I mean, painful -- to be true? It just might be. The study trotted out to support the treatment's efficacy contained no "sham" version of the treatment, and so it is difficult to know whether the positive results were actually from the placebo effect. In any case, scratching your back raw is generally considered an unhealthy way to spend an afternoon.

What You Can Do: Send a letter to the editor of the Washington Post and let their readers know why everyone should carefully consider the evidence before paying for an unproven alternative medicine procedure. After all, there's no shortage of stories of people who have been seriously hurt (or even killed) by seemingly innocuous treatments.

Sylvia Browne Creeps Across North America

What's Happening: Notorious psychic Sylvia Browne, known for her many false predictions and attempts to exploit grieving families is on the loose again. She's taking her "50th anniversary" tour across North America, and may be landing in your city. We invited Ms. Browne to prove her powers were real by taking our Million Dollar Challenge, and she accepted, but never followed through with the test, despite being offered a million dollars to pocket herself or give to the charity of her choice. So how does she sometimes seem to successfully tell a viewer secrets only they should know? Ms. Browne appears to use "cold reading" techniques to manipulate her fans into believing she has psychic powers, to her own financial gain.

What You Can Do: If Ms. Browne is coming to your area, plan a demonstration, letting people know that her powers look exactly like the tricks mentalists have been using for years. You can e-mail us for help getting started.

Did you see a media story that deserves the JREF's attention? Send it to us !

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