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**Music:** “Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song” by Brian Keith Dalton. A jaunty, upbeat instrumental.

**Carrie Poppy:** Hello! Welcome to *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*, the show where we don't just report on fringe science, spirituality, claims to the paranormal—no way! We take part ourselves.

**Ross Blocher:** Yep! When they make the claims, we show up, so you don't have to. I'm Ross Blocher.

**Carrie Poppy:** And I'm Carrie Poppy. And we are here today with a very special talk from one Ross Blocher! Have you heard of this guy?

**Ross Blocher:** I have!

**Carrie Poppy:** You're him!

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah, that's right. (*Laughs.*) And this was a talk that I gave for SkeptiCamp LA this year. And it was a free conference. It's this fun kind of like grassroots participant-driven conference where you sign up friends be speakers. And they just share something either they've been thinking about or working on, and—you know—the pressure's low. And our friend Wendy Hughes organized this this year and brought it back to LA. And she was goaded on by Susan Gerbic, another friend of ours, and helped by Heather Henderson and Paula Lauterbach and Emery Emery. And they put together this, again, free conference in North Hollywood.

And I've got to give a shout out to one of our listeners. I had put out a very short notice blast, just like, “Hey, this thing's going on. Feel free to join.” And Terry showed up and not only participated in the day and made new friends, but she gave us these two bags of vegan snacks.

**Carrie Poppy:** Oh, yes! I just ate some of these barbecue chips the other day. They were great!

**Ross Blocher:** I've got one bag of artichokes left.

**Carrie Poppy:** Oh, I had those already. Those are great. Thank you, Terry!

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah, that was awesome! Oh, and so this is a video that you can see as well, and about 900 of our listeners have figured that out already. But if you want to see me delivering this, there are some visuals as well. So, that's the only thing you're missing out on here. Like, I do share some screenshots of letters from lawyers and a video of me with Bob Larson participating in an exorcism. Some fun little visuals like that. I mentioned a picture that I modify, from the International Academy of Consciousness, taking one of their

staggered images of someone transitioning from their physical body to their astral body. I recreated it as myself, so.

**Carrie Poppy:** It's so good.

*(They giggle.)*

**Ross Blocher:** Very proud.

**Carrie Poppy:** It took so much time. It's so good.

**Ross Blocher:** Very proud of that. So, if you want to see the video, it's on our *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!* YouTube channel. But if you go there, you'll also see links to a full playlist of all of those talks that were given. And there's some really great ones. Adrienne Hill, she gave a talk on spirit photography. She does really awesome work, and she gave a talk on another topic once that I saw at SciCon that I'm not going to mention now, because I really want us to make an investigation out of it. I've been looking forward to it for a long time.

**Carrie Poppy:** Oh, okay. Wow, yeah. Your eyes are really shining while you think about whatever it is.

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah. The last time we were in the Santa Cruz area, I was trying to make time for us to go do this, and there just wasn't enough.

**Carrie Poppy:** Okay. I'm sure you told me then, but I can't think of what it is. Okay. One slide that I have to give a shout out to, 'cause you don't say it out loud, is that on the Bob Larson slide, it is titled, "How Are You Missing This?"

*(They laugh.)*

It's all about how he—how Bob Larson hasn't picked up on us reporting on him for years and continues to interact with us.

**Ross Blocher:** How? How?!

**Carrie Poppy:** And so, *(chuckling)* Ross has all this imagery of our investigation and then just the words, "How Are You Missing This?!" Anyway, I really loved that.

**Ross Blocher:** That's hilarious. There's also a talk by Susan Gerbic on telling stories through Wikipedia. Heather Henderson talks about the social insecurity of SSI, or Supplemental Security Income. And Tory Christman was there. She's a long time Scientology critic who had been a member for years. And when she left, Scientology made it really difficult for her. And so, she decided, "You know what, if you guys are going to be jerks about it, I'm going to become a public enemy." And she's awesome. We've got to have her on the show sometime.

*(Carrie agrees with interest.)*

So, there's also a mentalism show that involves hypnotism, and I end up being chosen as one of the main participants, because I was quickly gauged as one of the most impressionable people in the room. (*Chuckles.*) So, if anybody wants to look up that fuller playlist, again, we link to it from our YouTube page.

**Carrie Poppy:** Interesting. Who felt you were the most impressionable person in the room?

**Ross Blocher:** The mentalist. He had us do, you know, those things where you put out your hands and imagine one is weighted and the other is not. And he's like, "Okay, you're going to come up here." And then I performed well. So, he's like, "Okay, I'm going to use you for this next thing and this next thing."

(*They laugh.*)

**Carrie Poppy:** That's great.

**Ross Blocher:** So, you can see me being very impressionable.

**Carrie Poppy:** That's so interesting. 'Cause remember when we went to the hypnotism Institute in—what's it called?

**Ross Blocher:** Tarzana.

**Carrie Poppy:** Tarzana. I was—

**Ross Blocher:** The Hypnosis Motivation Institute.

**Carrie Poppy:** Yes! Thank you. We went to one class where I was like their like—what do you call it? The decoy client? For the teacher. And the teacher, I remember when it was over, she said, "Wow, that's if you have like a perfect client."

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Like, one who just responds to eeeverything you say. But I just felt like I'm just giving you an honest response. You're telling me to lift my hand. I'm lifting my hand. I don't—what? You want me to resist?! What do you want from me?!

**Ross Blocher:** That's so funny that you and I would both be really compliant hypnosis test subjects.

**Carrie Poppy:** I know! But on the inside, it doesn't feel that way. Yeah, very strange.

**Ross Blocher:** Well, and I think this is a self-selected audience of—you know, it was a pretty intimate affair. A lot of longtime friends there. It was a good, fun day of hanging out. But I think out of some of the people there, I was one of the more influenceable people who would work well for public demonstrations.

**Carrie Poppy:** How fun! (*Laughs.*) That's cool. Well, I loved this talk. I just got to hear it today.

(*Ross thanks her.*)

And yeah, it was really fun. It's also just a really good like resource. 'Cause people ask us all the time about how do people respond to you? And they'll recall a particular investigation and wonder if the people in it ever heard that episode? And if so, how'd they respond? And this has just sort of a nice rundown of the different kinds of ways that these groups or individuals respond and whether that reveals or doesn't anything about them, about us. And yeah, it's a lot of good stuff to think about, and I really enjoyed it.

**Ross Blocher:** Oh, that's great. Well, I'll follow up at the end with just a few tiny notes, but let's start with the talk!

(*Scene change.*)

Welcome to *Testing the Perimeter Fences: How Practitioners of Non-Science Wall Themselves Off From Criticism*. So, as mentioned, criticism in this context means joining a group or organization or gathering of people who believe in things that aren't fully supported by science or maybe are on the fringe of what we know and what we don't know, and then just reporting on them. So, I do that with my friend Carrie. From the title of the podcast, you have no idea what it's about. *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!* means absolutely nothing. But that's presumably the attitude that people have when we show up.

(*The audience laughs.*)

So, we get a variety of responses. Of course, when we go to investigate, we're not saying like, "Hey, we're here to make a podcast!" We use our real names almost all of the time. Very few counterexamples to that. And we're there as ourselves, but the people that we're interacting with—though we will interact with them as people—they're not our audience. And so, there's this kind of awkward divide where you later on now give your honest opinion that you kind of withheld in the moment, because you're not there to disrupt. You're not there—you know, you're there to observe and just kind of see what happens.

So, you put that out into the world, and now you have this awkward situation of like, well, if I was talking to you about your beliefs, it would be a different conversation. We'd have a different starting point. And so, we get a variety of responses, and that's gonna be kind of what we cover in this talk. And I would say the most common is just completely unaware, like they have no idea that we did it, as far as we know. And that looks a lot like being ignored until they get prompted and then we realize, oh, they do know who we are. There's the passive response—maybe, passive aggressive? There's the walling off, the cutting ties. That's another response. There's shielding. There's a just full-on attack mode. There's the good humor response, and there's the positive engagement response. And none of these are exclusive categories. So, you know, some of these examples will fall into multiple ranges of the spectrum of responses to criticism. And again, criticism just being us giving our honest opinions of: here's how we were convinced and how we weren't.

Okay. So, that first response. Again, as far as we can tell, this is the most common response. We'll put this thing out in the world, and then we'll kind of like gird ourselves. Are we gonna get like angry lawyer letters? Or are people going to start writing articles about us online? Are they gonna write us an email and tell us how deeply hurt they were? Or—you know, or say we totally changed their minds? You never quite know.

So, likely this is dependent on just size. So, when you talk about like a really big organization, maybe you're just not worth their time, or they're not busy checking their social media every day. So, they just don't know that you did it. They're kind of in their own bubble. Or sometimes maybe we're just too small of a fish. You know, it's a popular podcast, but you know, it's not *60 Minutes* or something. And so, we have, you know, like people like JohnEdward, the psychic. I reported on him in a couple episodes about his cold reading technique, never heard anything. I'm still on his newsletter. I'm part of his little online group and interact with people on like the JohnEdward.com website or whatever it's called. You know, no one seems to care.

Now, it's a little more surprising with someone like Cindy Kaza, that's another psychic that we've talked about.

**Audience Member:** She says hi.

**Ross Blocher:** She says hi. Yeah, every ghost she ever talks to, you know, she establishes this connection. “Yes, sir, I'm sensing your—” I'll say your mother, because I know she's still alive. “I sense your mother, and she wears this thing,” and we get this deep connection, and finally just she'll wrap up with, “Oh, and she says hi.”

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When she realizes, oh, I forgot to convey something deep and meaningful for you in this interaction with your dead parent.

*(Laughter.)*

So, you would think that she would be aware of us having publicized about her, because she's not that big of a deal. She doesn't have like a major network presence or a TV show. Same thing with like Travis McHenry. He's this occultist, and we did like this deep dive just because he was this crazy guy who not only sold tarot cards, but he also claims himself to be the ruling principal of Westarctica, this like section of Antarctica. It's just like weird, random things that he does and so we reported all about him. We talked about his OnlyFans, where he jerks off for money and stuff.

*(Laughter.)*

And you know, you would think he's aware of it, but we haven't heard from him. So, that's sort of one's like I assume you know, but you decided not to raise it and make an issue out of it. Some are just downright perplexing, like Linda Moulton Howe is this alien—she's not a contactee herself, but she writes about other people's experiences with aliens. And she has

just these crazy things that she says about like the different like races of aliens that are out there. And if you hear her talk for more than a minute, she will mention the tall whites, and we'll all awkwardly sit there as she talks about like the Norwegian aliens and how they're our friends.

*(Laughter.)*

Yeah. Super awkward stuff. But you know, like we're high up in her Google search results. How does she not know about us? But Carrie sat with her just a few weeks ago and asked her questions. No recognition. I've taken pictures with her. You know, she just seems to have no idea who we are. The other one that really surprises me is Bob Larson. He's this exorcist. The most prolific exorcist in the world. I don't think that's a controversial statement.

*(Scattered laughter.)*

And I enrolled in his school. I took classes. I talked about it. I like gave all the details of how you learn his curriculum. We attended multiple deliverances—when you hear about a deliverance ministry, that's talking about exorcism. And he'll even post videos online with—you might see someone familiar.

**Clip:**

**Bob Larson:** How many generations does this curse go back? How many?! How many?

**Speaker:** 52.

**Bob Larson:** 52?

**Ross Blocher:** (Over the clip.) That's me, helping hold back the demoniac.

**Bob Larson:** 52 generations!

**Speaker:** 52 generations.

**Ross Blocher:** That's right, on his newsletter he sends. You know, “Hey. Ross from California. I attended one of your seminars and signed up. I wanted to absorb everything and do it right. I was raised in the church, but deliverance was always in the background.” He took that as a positive testimony. I was trying to say the nicest but true statements that I could.

*(Laughter.)*

And it just boggles my mind. Like, I'll still get calls from his people asking if I want to be part of the local deliverance response team, if someone has a team. I'm like how do you people not know?! I've published like 16 podcasts about you and your organization. Whatever. Alright, so then there's the other response that, as far as I can tell, is completely indistinguishable. They've never responded, until we try to interact again. And this is a really good strategy, as long as you can get away with it. If you are peddling something, if you're saying something that science doesn't agree with or maybe is like taking advantage of people's pocketbooks, you might not want your audience to be aware that there are critics of you and your position. Maybe if you ignore them, they'll just go away.

Really, strategically, it does make sense just to like pretend it didn't happen unless there's a big stir about it. And then it's like, oh great, now we gotta say something. And oftentimes they have an audience that's not motivated to look for disconfirmation. So, they're not gonna find out about your podcast unless like someone tells them like, “Hey, are you following that TwinRay group? You should listen to this podcast about them.”

So, there are people like that—like TwinRay, for example. They're these new age—like this couple. The guy looks like Jesus. Yeah, I could talk about them for a long time. But we reported on them, didn't hear anything. But then we reached out for an interview and got a few emails back and forth in before they just went completely silent. And I realized at that point, okay, they figured out who we are. Teal Swan, same thing. She's another kind of new age person, very present on social media. Answers in Genesis, I did a whole report like on visiting Noah's Ark out in Kentucky and reached out to two of the presenters directly to ask questions, wall of silence. I'm assuming they just went, “Okay, no. We're not going to engage with this guy.”

This was a fun one. We—every year we'll go see psychics or like call a psychic. We'll get our prognostications for the coming year. And then we check back later. And Carrie got read by the psychic sister, Rocky, and wanted to call her back just to ask, “Hey, how do you feel about the fact that my life didn't go the way you told me it would over the past year?” And this is just a little snippet of a very awkward conversation, but kudos to Carrie for holding her own.

**Clip:**

**Rocky:** Okay, and what is your name?

**Carrie:** Carrie.

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**Rocky:** Carrie? Okay, yeah. You came in with a gentleman?

**Carrie:** Yeah!

**Rocky:** Yeah, how are you doing, sweetie?

**Carrie:** Oh, pretty good. How do you remember that?

**Rocky:** Uh, because you made a blog about me. That's why.

*(Audience laughter.)*

**Carrie:** Okay, alright, I wondered about that. Okay.

**Rocky:** Yeah.

**Carrie:** What did you think of that?

**Rocky:** Mmm, what did I think about it? I think you just like overdid your part.

**Carrie:** What does that mean?

**Rocky:** Meaning a lot that I—what I was saying, you just—you know, overacted it a little bit. More than what—you know, what I told you.

**Carrie:** Okay, well I wanted to get your impression. I wrote down all the things you said would happen. And you know, a lot of them didn't happen. And I don't know, I was just kind of curious what you thought about that.

**Rocky:** Mm-hm. Okay, well actually I'm not there. I'm in New York City. And as far as to do a reading or like that, I don't have time. And to tell you the truth, I really don't want to read for you.

**Ross Blocher:** *(Chuckles.)* Awkward!

*(Laughter.)*

So, that's one form of response. Like, you know, we would have never heard from her again, but she was somewhere stewing about our obnoxious coverage online. I don't think we overdid it. I think we represented what she told us. Then you have this kind of response where you won't hear anything. Like, we did this, you know, 10+ part podcast series on the International Academy of Consciousness, and they teach you methods to do out of body travel. I thought it was fascinating. *(Chuckles.)* It's a big topic.

Anyways, never heard anything from them. Until! Like, I don't know—like, at least a year later. They sent this email saying, “Hi there, could you please remove the image at the top of this page and link to our website? Please confirm when you've removed it.” Smiley face! How nice! Very civil, but like, “Hey, we see you. We think you should take down our picture.” Now, there's no reason I should have had to take down their picture. That's another

part of this talk is know your rights. There'd be nothing wrong with us keeping it there. But I thought it was too fun.

So, I said, “Sure thing. Confirming that the image has been removed.

Their response was, “Thanks Ross.” But here's what happened in the meantime. I took down their image on the left, and I replaced it with my own recreation of their image on the right.

*(Laughter and approval from the audience.)*

And I gotta say, I think mine's better.

*(Applause.)*

But I just love the thought that they went to the website. They saw it and went, “That jackass.” But they just replied with a “Thanks”.

Now this can really depend on just the personality. So, if it's a larger group, they probably have a PR department. They have like a process for handling these sorts of complaints or interactions. If it's a smaller group, it will come down just to the personality of the leader or whoever's interacting with you. So, in this case, you have someone like Kathryn Krick. And oh man, what a character. She's here in LA, and today's a Sunday. So, later on today, at 1 o'clock, I think her service starts. She'll be casting out demons and healing the sick. Which, healing the sick is just casting out demons. It's all the same thing.

But we published a multi-part series on her, and she would start Vague-booking about (*with intense pathos*) “some parts of God's will aren't fun. The cost of the anointing is truly a cost. But Jesus is worth it! He is worthy of it all. Though there is a cost, there is never defeat. And when you are persecuted, you are blessed!” And the way I read that is not at all an exaggeration. She would have said it far more exaggeratedly. And she's got her Bible verses—“blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness”.

So, this is a really hard nut to crack, because she feels she's on a mission from God, and it's an unfalsifiable position. There's nothing that could ever happen where she would say, “Oh, you know what? Actually, turns out God's anointing of me wasn't a real thing. That's all in my head.” Because anytime things are tough or she feels put upon, it's going to be because she's being tested, because of Satan, because of all these other outside factors. And it really reminds me of—from cognitive dissonance theory in general and one of my all-time favorite books, *Mistakes Were Made But Not By Me*.

*(Scattered cheers and applause.)*

Yeah! Carol Tavris, Elliot Aronson. Oh, I'm clapping, and I'm changing slides.

*(Laughter.)*

Okay. Lesson learned. So, you start at the top of this pyramid in this illustration, and you could make a decision either way. You could say, okay, I could be the person who does A, or I could be the person who does B. Let's say it's, you know, like I pay my taxes on time, and the person who says, "I don't pay my taxes on time." And at some point, you're like kind of 50/50. You could go either way. But once you descend down the bottom of the pyramid—let's say you make that decision; now you paid your taxes on time—you start to build back this narrative to sort of justify why you ended up going this way and turning that 50% into like 100% and saying, "Oh, those other people who don't pay their taxes on time, they're really shifty and, you know, unreliable." Whereas you could have very easily ended up on this other side. And so I think with someone like Kathryn—

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She has made that decision. She's gone over here. But you can tell that she still has this glimmer of discomfort with other people criticizing her. And so, she'll do it with the Vague-booking. Oh, and by the way, I replied to that. I said, "And yet, it's important that you don't shield yourself from legitimate criticism." And then I quoted the Bible as well. "Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who needs correction gains understanding. Proverbs 15:32."

*(Laughter and applause.)*

**Audience Member 1:** Well done! Well done!

**Ross Blocher:** And I know she saw it, because it was hidden.

Yes?

**Audience Member 2:** Can you say a little bit more about Vague-booking? I don't know what it is.

**Ross Blocher:** Oh, okay! So, Vague-booking is when you—it doesn't have to be on Facebook; this was Instagram. But the term came from when, on Facebook, you're writing about some problem that you're having, but you're not giving anyone any actionable information. You're just saying like, "Oh, I'm really down in the dumps right now, and oh, making some really tough decisions, and everybody's against me."

And you, as the uninformed reader, are going, "Wait, what are you even talking about? What is this?" Someone wants to have their grievance, but minus the content of what it's about.

**Audience Member 3:** You don't mention names.

**Ross Blocher:** You don't mention names! Yes, there you go. That's the important key. Carrie had also replied to this and said, "Who are you talking about?" Question mark.

*(Laughter.)*

Right after we'd released some of our episodes about her.

*(Laughter.)*

So! One test would be just to show up and see what she does with us—which we may do at some point in the future. Another response that she has, and this is another tactic, is to flood the zone. So, there are videos online that are “Kathryn Krick Exposed”, “Exposing Kathryn Krick”, and then talking—usually they're like from other Christians who are saying that she's not being biblical in how she uses the gospel. And so then, she starts releasing videos like “My Response to ‘Exposed’ Videos” and “Not Exposing False Teachers”. And so, now she gets to change the algorithm so that her content will come up. And she just produces so much video content. She'll release like a two-hour video, and then she releases like 12 little segment videos from that. And there's just so much content. If you look for her, whatever's against her will get buried under the flood.

**Audience Member:** *(Inaudible.)* I'm writing that down.

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah, write it down. Yeah, this is useful intel, right?

*(Laughter.)*

*(Scene change.)*

**Carrie Poppy:** Stop! Stop it! STOP!

**Ross Blocher:** Alright, I'll stop, lady.

**Carrie Poppy:** Stop your talk! I'm standing up in the middle of the room! Stop!

*(They hold back laughter.)*

**Ross Blocher:** Don't hurt us, lady.

**Carrie Poppy:** I object! I object to every single thing that's being said!

**Ross Blocher:** Alright.

**Carrie Poppy:** I don't know what my accent is or where it is from!

**Ross Blocher:** Aren't you Carrie? Aren't you the person I make this podcast with?

**Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, it's me. Hey, what's up, Ross? I just—whenever you talk for more than 15 minutes, I'm like, “I need a break to talk about websites!”

*(ADVERTISEMENT)*

**Carrie Poppy:** Okay, well, I guess I'll go back to my seat. Oh no, wait! I forgot. I forgot! Ross, we had that secret plan.

**Ross Blocher:** Oh yes, the plan!

**Carrie Poppy:** Oh, let me get it. I'll roll in this huge TV. Rrrr—it's a Jumbotroooooon!

**Ross Blocher:** Hey, everybody, look at this screen! As you can see, this is a message for Isaac, and it's from—

**Carrie Poppy:** Sheila!

**Ross Blocher:** And Sheila says—

**Carrie Poppy:** *(In a nasal, elderly voice.)* “Hi, Isaac! Happy 10-year anniversary, Isaac. There's no one else with whom I would rather share a life. I am honored to be raising two little critical thinkers with you! I love you!”

**Ross Blocher:** Not necessarily Sheila's voice, but maybe! We don't know.

**Carrie Poppy:** I had to guess about Sheila's age, and now I'm looking at 10-year anniversary, and I'm like I may have overshoot. But I don't know. I think I did a really good job.

**Ross Blocher:** They could still just be young people in love. But for 10 years, that's amazing! Congratulations, Sheila and Isaac.

**Carrie Poppy:** Yes, congratulations, guys. That's wonderful. And two little critical thinkers. That sounds promising for our future.

**Ross Blocher:** Absolutely! We're glad they are in the world and that you are their parents. So, good work, keep it up, and thanks for listening! And before I talk again, people should know about this Maximum Fun show.

**Promo:**

**Music:** Paramore-inspired pop punk music.

**Sequoia Holmes:** It's Webby season. Hi, I'm Sequoia Holmes, host of the *Black People Love Paramore* podcast. And we are nominated for a Webby for the episode where I interviewed Hayley Williams. In case you're unfamiliar, *Black People Love Paramore* is a podcast delving into the common and uncommon interests of Black people in order to help us feel more seen.

We would love your vote to help us win this Webby. Please take a second and go over to the *Black People Love Paramore* podcast social media accounts, and you can find

them at BPLPPod across all social media platforms. Hit the link in bio and vote for *Black People Love Paramore*.

**Carrie Poppy:** Okay, I'm going to go back to my seat. Is that—? Okay. Okay.

**Ross Blocher:** Alright. Yeah, sure. Okay. Yeah. Enjoy the rest of the talk, Carrie. Bye.

**Carrie Poppy:** Okay. Okay. Bye.

*(Scene change.)*

**Ross Blocher:** Another tactic is to cut ties. So, this is sad for me, because I like making friends. I like people when I meet them. And when we meet people within these groups, we like them too. And you make friends with them as humans. And usually your gripe isn't with them. It's with the thing that pulled them in, and otherwise you have so much in common. So, it's really tough for me when I get removed as a friend of the Etheria Society and don't get the newsletter anymore.

*(Laughter.)*

Or when I'm removed from Eck membership by Eckankar, and this is them sending me a Dear John letter in 2019.

“Dear Ross, we are discontinuing your Eck membership.” Oh yeah, Eckankar. How do you briefly summarize that? They're kind of a new age-ish—oh man! How do you even describe this? They're based in Minnesota, and their ecclesiastical leader is Sri Harold Klemp, if that tells you anything.

*(Laughter.)*

Like, yeah, they blend like Eastern mysticism and White people westernism. It's weird.

“We are discontinuing your Eck membership. If later you'd like to take up the path of Eck in earnest, do write in. And you're welcome to attend our open events for the public, but please identify yourself as media and honor the spiritual nature of the gathering.”

Oh, I was so tempted to write a response. I did not. I was just busy. I don't want to get down the pyramid and be like, “Oh yeah, I was too good for them to write a response,” No, I just didn't have time. Also, removed from the International Association of Scientologists. That was very sad.

*(“Aw”s from the audience.)*

**Audience Member:** So sorry. *(Inaudible)* Mormons.

**Ross Blocher:** Yes, okay, Mormons will come up in this. Yeah, that's a different response.

*(Laughter.)*

I was also dismissed from an OTO meeting. Super uncomfortable, like in the moment being told to get the hell out of there. Yeah, that feels bad. So, we've already—yes?

**Audience Member:** What provoked them to do that?

**Ross Blocher:** Provoked—oh, the OTO? That's a good point. We learned a lesson there. Don't publish a podcast mid-investigation and then go back thinking like, “Oh, they won't have heard of us.”

*(Laughter.)*

It's a group of—

*(An inaudible comment from the audience.)*

Right. Yeah. It's a group of 10 people. And yeah, we have gone back to places after replying to them. And you enter the room with trepidation. Like, am I going to get kicked out? Do any of you—you don't seem to recognize me. Okay. We're cool.

[00:30:00]

In this case, we were definitely not cool.

*(Laughter.)*

So, we've talked a little bit about this, but there's the shielding. And the shielding is like keeping your followers from seeing this content that we're producing or knowing that we exist. So, one way to do this is just to discourage your members from interacting with the world, from reading books that are not written by the founder of the group, from not going on the internet, period. And so, you get like—oh, well Scientology. They're very good at this. So, they publish their Super Bowl ad. They do this every year. And so, they had this on YouTube.

And so I wrote, “I did exactly what Scientology is recommending here in this video. I tried it for myself. My friend Carrie and I took the free personality test, and immediately the pressure was on. The first class was \$50. The second was \$100. And we were continually pressured to spend our time with Scientology and buy more book packages and sessions. I spent 22 hours at the local org on one weekend! I was getting ready to sign up for the \$2,500 purification rundown when they learned we had a podcast and kicked us out before we'd said a single thing about our experience. Scientology lives up to its reputation: a religion based on the timeshare presentation model.”

*(Laughter.)*

“These commercials aren't for us on the outside. They're to assure the folks on the inside that Scientology is still growing and saving the planet, whatever that means. For those of you still inside, have hope. There's a whole wide world out there waiting for you.”

So, like Susan said, I can be mean sometimes. (*Chuckles.*) And they just hid that comment, because, you know, you've got to curate the online look. Yes?

**Audience Member:** How long did it take them to figure out who you were?

**Ross Blocher:** Mere moments. Yeah, and they monitor our social media too, which is a whole separate story, but yeah.

**Audience Member:** Are they here?

**Ross Blocher:** What's that?

**Audience Member:** They might be right here!

**Ross Blocher:** Hello Scientologists! Yeah, well—jeez, they'd come for Tory more than they'd come for me. Yeah. Which, again, is sometimes the advantage of being the smaller fry. I came kind of later in the Scientology critique, so a lot of other people like Tory got far more the brunt of their wrath. And now they've just got too much to manage. But I am listed on their rogues gallery. So, if—like, we have that Scientology of the Valley just down the street here. If anyone wants to go there on break or something, if you're with me, they will recognize me. They will turn me away. They are trained to recognize me and Carrie.

Melissa Scott, this was a fun one. So—

*(An audience member sneezes.)*

Some of you—gesundheit—may remember Gene Scott, who was a TV personality for years. And he'd give these like arcane lectures on the pyramids and biblical—

**Audience Member:** He's smoking a cigar and talking about his racehorses.

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah, talking about his racehorses and bringing in young pornographic actresses and penthouse pets and have them ride topless on his horses. But he's a bible preacher. It was the weirdest thing. So, one of those topless ladies ended up becoming his wife and now is Pastor Melissa Scott, and running the vestiges of his church in Glendale, the Faith Center. And they make you get tickets in advance, and we got tickets at the last possible minute, so they wouldn't have time to look us up. We showed up once, and by the time we showed up again, they were ready for us. And there are—geez, how many people in suits? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine—oh, that person's just filming us. Nine and a person filming us who are like ready and waiting for us to come back and turned us away.

**Audience Member:** Like secret service.

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah, they look like—yeah, they're wearing earpieces, a lot of them. It's crazy the security on this place. And let's get to attack. So, then they went online. They created a new Facebook group called “*Oh No, Ross and Carrie! the Podcast, Critical Review*”. And a lot of people join it just thinking like, “Hey, I'm a fan of the show! This is where I'm gonna go talk about the latest episode.”

*(Laughter.)*

And then they get like a dull response, or someone's like, “Oh, those people! I don't know. I don't trust them.” And so, initially, they would write all these little negative reviews of our podcast. And then they got tired, and now the page is overrun by, you know, like spam ads, which is fine by me. But they also created this website called [TheTruthAboutPastorMelissaScott.com](http://TheTruthAboutPastorMelissaScott.com). And I'll just point out, Pastor Melissa Scott is PMS.

*(Laughter.)*

You'd think she would find a... better way to come up with initials. But they had like articles about us and our site and why we're just unfair people. You get the idea. So, attack can come in the form of an online response like that. Takedown requests, we get those a lot. Being threatened with lawsuits. Just to talk about takedown requests real quick. Shakuntali, Carrie did an interview with her. Super awkward discussion. And next thing you know, not only are the episodes that we posted about her getting takedown requests over iTunes, but then she's like making individual requests on her Facebook page. And you know Facebook. We've all been in Facebook jail. Like, they'll take down the content first and ask questions later. Or they won't ask questions, and it'll take a long time to get it back. Anyways, she created trouble for us that way. Similar responses from some of these others. There was this guy who was a numerologist, and we actually—we thought he was impressive as a cold reader. And we wanted to have him on the show.

[00:35:00]

And he agreed. And then he finally listened to the podcast; I thought he already had. And he was just so incensed. He was so angry, and he said, “My family are all lawyers. We're gonna come after you.”

And I said, “Oh, please! I mean, do! But also, don't, for you. Like, it's a bad idea. This isn't going to end well for you. But kind of do, because that would be fun for us.” Because we have had people threaten us with lawsuits. This is the Raëlians.

*(Someone “oh”s.)*

We've got another Raëlian in the audience. I attended your baptism—or demystified baptism. So, this is them—

*(Inaudible from the audience.)*

Yes, absolutely! Yeah, that's where a guy told me, "I'm sure it's all true," when I was describing what they believe. So, this is them telling us to cease and desist and remove all of the media that we've published, and then our lawyer replying very cleverly, and cogently and then completely backing down. Which is great. Rythmia was an ayahuasca retreat center in Costa Rica that we were invited to on their dime—except, you know, we bought the plane tickets. And so these are texts from a Gerry, first misspelling his own name—which is really weird. I was like, "That's weird, Jerry. I thought it was Gerry with a G." And anyways.

So, at the time—this is not a story worth going into in detail, but we'd left our SD card with our recorded interview. And so, he's like, "Don't worry about it, man. It wasn't meant to be." They probably found the SD card, but they didn't want to give it to us. But I had a backup recording on my phone. So, I use that instead. And so, this is an email thread where he's saying, "Don't worry about it, brother." And he was totally playing like the, you know, "Hey, you're the guy in this establishment. I'm going to talk to you. Hey, bro. You know. It's fine. The whole trip was on us. Let's just not talk about it. It wasn't meant to be. That's okay."

But no, I said we're still gonna go forward. Carrie and I published our podcast. And they sent us lawsuits. They sued us in Costa Rica and LA. I got served at work by this guy who like came and freaked out my wife at our apartment by sneaking into the complex. Yeah, awkward stuff. But oh yeah, happy ending to that. They ended up—this is our anti-slap motion. They ended up owing our lawyer over \$10,000.

*(Cheers and applause from the audience.)*

Oops! Shouldn't have done that. Which is another point. Know your rights. So, oftentimes the lawsuit is just an intimidation tactic. Most people just step down, back away. Like, "I don't want a lawsuit! What do you do?" So, if you're doing what you're allowed to do, be bold.

Now this, I don't get this so much. This is like being called a shill, being called an operative. Susan's been called all kinds of things, like from evil mole rat?

**Susan Gerbic:** No, I have a group of evil mole rats! *(Inaudible.)* Dirty!

**Ross Blocher:** Oh, you have a group of—? Oh, so you're the queen, because they're like social insects but in the mammal kingdom.

*(Overlapping chatter in the audience.)*

**Susan Gerbic:** But logic doesn't make sense. Guys, it doesn't matter.

**Emery Emery:** That's just what they call them.

**Ross Blocher:** Are you saying they don't have queens?

**Emery Emery:** No, they're just couples.

**Audience Member 1:** No harems or anything?

**Ross Blocher:** Oh, okay. Alright, well—alright, I'm gonna need—

**Audience Member 2:** This is educational!

**Ross Blocher:** Tonight I'll be reading about mole rats! They're fascinating creatures, so it's not a bad comparison. But Brian Dunning of Skeptoid.com posts these all the time, of people saying things like, “Yes, the opioid epidemic was manufactured and profited by Big Pharma! You are a shill! For who, what, or why we'll probably never know! Your ignorant condescension is what makes me want to throw up in my mouth!”

*(Laughter.)*

“You know, you are a minion mouthpiece that isn't very good at your job!” I get a little bit of that, but I think it's because I'm not on Twitter that I don't get a ton of that. Because Carrie says she gets called a shill or a mason or whatever. Well, anyways. So, a variety of responses. We mentioned the Mormons. Sometimes, you get just a really good response. And I think that comes from a certain amount of security. If you know you're not in a fight for survival, then you can take some criticism. So, the Mormons, famously, they replied to the *Book of Mormon*, the play, by taking out ads in the playbills that would say, “You've seen the play, now read the book!” And they've got a happy, smiling Black person, as if the original book didn't describe the followers as “White and delightful”.

They wouldn't allow Black people to be in the priesthood until 1978. As the musical says: “In 1978, God changed his mind about Black people.” And you think, oh, priesthood, okay. Well, priesthood, that's kind of high up. No, in Mormonism, everything's inflated. So, just being a member of the church means you're in the priesthood. So, you couldn't even be a member of the church until 1978. And they're like, “Ah, don't worry about that.” But they are confident enough. They've got food stored up for generations. And they don't care what we say about them. And they actually had a really positive response. They kept us in the family. I still get letters from my local wards asking me to come like hang out, go to services. And they said that they didn't see it as negative coverage. So, you know, good for them. And then my favorite is positive engagement.

[00:40:00]

Occasionally, we've had people come on the show who we've covered, and maybe they start out angry, but they're willing to have the conversation. And so, this is me with a copy of the *Pisscabulary of Urine-isms* by a urine therapy practitioner who came on our show and is a bizarre guy, but a good egg. You know.

*(Laughter.)*

And so, we've had other people—like, David Stewart gave us this long series on the end times, and he really cared about what we were saying and our criticism. And you could tell it affected him deeply, and he was willing to talk about it. Some other great examples there.

But! Sorry, I've thrown off the schedule a lot, but I'll wrap up just by saying: don't stop. The important thing is that we keep doing this. Because maybe your target will never know what you did; you're like a gnat on the giant. They don't care. But people standing around may hear it, and they may not get—that may slightly stem the tide of new people coming to join them. Or maybe they will know about it! And it'll just make them angry and get under their skin. Maybe it'll change their practices, and they'll be a little different about how they let people in. Maybe they'll be a little less welcoming, because they know that people might actually be listening to what they're saying and thinking independently about it. And at some point you might just break through. And it won't always be with the organization. It won't always be with the members who are the most diehards. But we get emails all the time from people who say, “I was in Mormonism, and thank you so much for your series. It started me—”

Like, we'll have people saying, “I avoided listening to this particular investigation for years, but I loved everything else you said. And finally I said, okay, let's see what they had to say about it, and I'm out of it now. Thank you.” It happens.

*(Applause.)*

So—thank you! So, just keep doing it, because you have to apply that constant pressure back, because otherwise they'll keep towing the line and moving forward and at least hold the position. And it's also a good reminder for us that this also applies to us as well. When we have criticism of our own approaches and beliefs, we should be willing to be open minded to that criticism and not close off to the idea that maybe we got something wrong. So—

**Wendy:** No thanks.

**Ross Blocher:** No. Wendy disagrees.

*(Laughter.)*

And that's the great thing about SkeptiCamp. We don't have to agree. I love it. Thank you. That is—

*(Cheers and applause.)*

*(Scene change.)*

Alright. Well, that was it, Carrie. Now everybody knows the variety of responses that we get.

**Carrie Poppy:** Yes. Yes! Now everybody knows, and they can't go back.

**Ross Blocher:** They can't go back!

**Carrie Poppy:** Once you know, you can't undo knowledge. You can't put knowledge back in the bottle, Ross.

**Ross Blocher:** So, I was the host of this event, or the MC. And after I gave my opening talk, I realized I never explain the title! Because I call it *Testing the Perimeter Fences*. The subtitle is more on point, talking about how people respond to criticism.

**Carrie Poppy:** The explainer.

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah, “testing the perimeter fences” is just a reference to *Jurassic Park*. I always think about the velociraptors. And in the movie, the game warden, Muldoon, is talking about this one velociraptor who takes over and kills off the other ones. And he says, “She had them all attacking the fences when the feeders came.”

And Ellie says, “Well, the fences are electrified, right?”

“That’s right. But they never attacked the same place twice. They were testing the fences for weaknesses systematically. They remember.”

So, I think of us as the velociraptors being the ones who test the perimeter fences by offering our criticism. And I always think about that when we interact with Scientology again—that we’re just testing the perimeter fences to see if they still have us on their rogues gallery, or if they mind me running around with a Purification Rundown outfit that you bought me.

**Carrie Poppy:** Monitoring the monitors.

**Ross Blocher:** Kind of apropos of the end of the talk, you know, it’s our job to keep doing this and just sort of probing that response and making sure that they do have some critics out there commenting on their process, be it positive or negative.

**Carrie Poppy:** As you were speaking just now, I started thinking, ooh, I wonder if the next step in Ross’s thinking about the subject matter will be predictive. Like, if you’ll start to have little theories and hypotheses about “Oh, this subject that we’re encountering, I expect them to react this way. They’ll be more like subject H versus subject K.”

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah. Now we have the beginning of a taxonomy. And I feel like we do often play that game in our minds, like how people will react to this. And usually I think we peg it pretty well.

*(Carrie agrees.)*

But you’re reminding me, actually—another friend of ours who was there, Brian Hart, who has been practicing as a psychologist, he was intrigued by this talk to write a paper about it. So, he’s working on that and yeah.

**Carrie Poppy:** Oh, great!

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah! So, I’ll be curious to see how this kind of forms in his mind as he talks about the variety of responses.

*(Carrie agrees.)*

Also, I want to mention, just quick follow-ups. One thing I didn't mention about Shakuntali's response to your coverage of her was that she also changed her name!

**Carrie Poppy:** Changed her name. *(Laughs.)*

**Ross Blocher:** To make it hard to Google her. That is another tactic, which is pretty clever.

[00:45:00]

She changed it to Madonna. And boy, is that hard to find specific information about.

**Carrie Poppy:** Right. Which seems like, boy, kind of shooting yourself in the foot. But listener, have you ever made someone change their name? No? Alright.

**Ross Blocher:** *(Laughter.)* Maybe you need to rethink your life.

**Carrie Poppy:** Yeah, I'm just saying. I've changed my own name. I've changed other people's names.

**Ross Blocher:** Also, I gotta follow up. When I was quoting the verse from Proverbs, I said “the one who needs correction”. It's “heeds”. “The one who heeds correction.” Correct quote. So, I thought that was important enough to at least mention. And by the way, we did check on the mole rats later in the talk. This is from the Smithsonian website, speaking of websites. “Only one female in a colony of naked mole rats produces offspring. This female is called the queen. She mates with only a few of the colony's males, and these relationships can remain stable for many years.” So, I stand by my queen statement!

**Carrie Poppy:** I don't remember this mole rat thing coming up. This must have been a very momentary side note. *(Laughs.)*

**Ross Blocher:** We were talking about how Susan Gerbic has been called the leader of a group of angry mole rats, or evil mole rats. And I said, “Oh, so you're like the queen.” And Emery—sorry to throw you under the bus, Emery—but Emery's like, “No, they don't do that. That's not real.” And so, we had—so, to Emery's credit later on, he's like, “You know what? Actually, okay. They do have one breeding female. Okay.”

**Carrie Poppy:** *(Laughs.)* And you, too, can be part of this environment at the next SkeptiCamp!

*(They laugh.)*

**Ross Blocher:** I can't think of a better way to sum it up than that. We're a bunch of fun-loving pedants.

**Carrie Poppy:** If you find good company to do it with, that can be fun.

**Ross Blocher:** Absolutely. Alright. Well, Carrie and I have some really fun other investigations in the works and some other fun content to follow up on. So, we'll see you again next week!

**Carrie Poppy:** Next week!

**Ross Blocher:** Same bat time, same bat channel.

**Carrie Poppy:** Byeee! No, that's it for our show. Our theme music is by Brian Keith Dalton.

**Ross Blocher:** Our administrative manager is Ian Kremeeer!

**Carrie Poppy:** You can support this and all our investigations by going to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join), J-O-I-N.

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah, be a joiner! Thank you so much. We really appreciate everybody who supports this podcast and makes it possible. And I know Maximum Fun Drive is completed. But you can still get in. Get in on the goodness, become part of the family, support us. We appreciate it.

**Carrie Poppy:** And you can leave a review about the show. You heard about this?

**Ross Blocher:** Yeah! Yeah, do that. That's helpful. Tell a friend.

**Carrie Poppy:** Leave an honest, skewing positive review.

**Ross Blocher:** (*Chuckles.*) We can respond to criticism, but make the reviews positive.

**Carrie Poppy:** Aaand you can plant a tomato plant. I mean, it's like around that time of year. Orrrr...

**Ross Blocher:** Okay. What does that have to do with us?

**Carrie Poppy:** Oh, nothing! I was just down to suggestions at this point.

**Ross Blocher:** Sure. Yeah. Okay.

(*They laugh.*)

**Carrie Poppy:** Just like some stuff to do this week. I don't know!

**Ross Blocher:** I don't know if we have an "and remember" for this. I shared the whole talk.

**Carrie Poppy:** Yeah. Yeah. Good point. Well, okay. Bye!!!

**Ross Blocher:** Bye.

**Music:** “Oh No, Ross and Carrie! Theme Song” by Brian Keith Dalton. A jaunty, upbeat instrumental.

**Promo:**

**Music:** Sophisticated electronic harpsichord music.

**Travis McElroy:** Hi, I’m Travis McElroy.

**Teresa McElroy:** And I’m Teresa McElroy.

**Travis McElroy:** And we’re the hosts of *Shmanners!*

**Teresa McElroy:** We don’t believe that etiquette should be used to judge other people.

**Travis McElroy:** No. On *Shmanners*, we see etiquette as a way to navigate social situations with confidence.

**Teresa McElroy:** So, if that sounds like something you’re into—

**Travis McElroy:** Join us every Friday, on Maximum Fun or wherever you get your podcasts.

*(Music fades out.)*

**Transition:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

**Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

**Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

**Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

**Speaker 4:** Supported—

**Speaker 5:** —directly—

**Speaker 6:** —by you!