

Atheist

A Visit to the Cedar Hill Hell House

—by Mike Swift

On October 27, nine members of the ACA car-pooled up to Cedar Hill, TX to experience the “Hell House” that is put on there. More details about the Hell House can be found at this link: <www.darkrailhellhouse.com>

I suggest everyone check out the Web site, it’s highly entertaining.

We met at the Alamo Drafthouse on Highway 183 and took off at 2:30 p.m. It took us three hours to arrive. Once we got there we immediately got tickets, and then waited in line to get to the Hell House, in a different location than the wait line. When we arrived, the line wasn’t too long, and our wait time to get on the “hayride” that took us there was a little over an hour.

While waiting, we all made some observations. Most of the people there were young; I’d say that 80 percent were under 20, and most were also part of a church group. It seemed that if you were part of a church group there was a discount, or someone (maybe the leader of the group) got in free. I seriously

doubt the ACA could have gotten away with trying to be classified as a church group, but it may be worth a shot if we decide to go again sometime.

Before we got on the hayride, we were manually scanned for weapons, and one ACA member had to take his pocketknife back to the car. One ACA member said this was the first year they had started to check for weapons. Some of our group had a problem with that, but I thought it was a good idea. The Hell House really tries to get to people at an emotional level, and I would have hated to be “knifed for Christ.” Knowing there were no knives around was rather comforting.

Once we got on the hayride (which consisted of a truck pulling a cart with some hay on it), it took five minutes to actually get to the Hell House. Of course, when you get there you have to wait in line some more. We had to wait a half hour more to actually get into the first room. To give you a better picture of how it’s all laid out there are basically a bunch of trailers interconnected in various ways to



Above: Hell House advertisement and (below) the “Divine Mercy” that sends you there.



give a sort of flow from room to room.

There were 13 rooms total, and here is a breakdown of what they were.

The first room had a television that showed a grammatically challenged news report on a high number of teen deaths, mostly suicides and school shootings. The news report then says they just got word of a school shooting. Then you get carted into the next room.

A shooting—A kid’s father left, and his mother blamed him. The girl he thought liked him liked another guy instead. This was the room where I opened my big mouth and said, “Do it! Do it!” when the teenage boy finally decides to shoot himself in the head. I was

warned by one of the “devils” (Every room had these “devils” tempting and convincing the kids to do their bidding) that I would be asked to leave if I kept talking. Oh well, I was caught up in the moment.

The next room had three teenage girls sitting around a bedroom talking about one of the girl’s regretting having had sex. One girl suggested they try crystal meth, because, supposedly, it helped her sister. The other girls tried to convince her it was a bad idea, but eventually, with help from the devils in the room, they all took it in the form of a pill—which I’m not even sure is a possible way to use the drug. I think it would have had a better effect if they simulat-

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About ACA

ACA provides opportunities for socializing and friendship, promotes atheistic viewpoints, encourages positive atheist culture, defends the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, opposes discrimination against atheists, provides outreach to atheists in the greater Austin area, and works with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

ACA produces a live cable access TV show and Internet radio show, presents a monthly lecture series, maintains a library of Freethought books, protests in support of civil liberties, and participates in various community service activities.

ACA operates in an open and democratic manner to provide a community of like-minded people for social interaction and support.

ACA is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational corporation made up of volunteers. The membership is restricted to atheists, but does not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, or disability.

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Contact

Atheist Community of Austin

P. O. Box 3798

Austin, TX 78764

512.371.2911 (voice mail)

www.atheist-community.org

info@atheist-community.org

Austin Atheist Newsletter

Editors: Matt Dillahunty, Don Baker

Design/Production: Tracie Harris

editor@atheist-community.org

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Jan. _____	Dec. 1
Feb. _____	Jan. 1
March _____	Feb. 1
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July _____	June 1
Aug. _____	July 1
Sept. _____	Aug. 1
Oct. _____	Sept. 1
Nov. _____	Oct. 1
Dec. _____	Nov. 1

Hell House

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ed shooting up. Maybe there were time constraints? Immediately after they did the drug, all 3 asphyxiated and died—instantly. Of course, this is the way it always works; you take hard drugs, die instantly, and then go straight to Hell.

The next room had an orphaned girl trying to channel her dead mother in a magic stone while her occultist boyfriend instructed her. Her brother came into the room and tried to intervene. Of course, the occultist boyfriend had to strangle him instantly. We were then herded into the next room, and the boyfriend ties her up. I think he was going to sacrifice her to his devil buddies, but I wasn't sure. Then the girl slits her wrists. While the girl is screaming about her wrists, and probably babbling about Jesus, the boyfriend comes behind her and slits her throat. It was all just another fun day in the world of the occult!

The next room had a pregnant girl obviously upset about her situation. The boyfriend comes in and, of course, blames her for this, as if he had nothing to do with it. He demanded that she have an abortion. I must admit that these

two kids may have a future in acting, as they played their parts well. The guy was especially brutal and mean. Being a good Christian though, I can't be sure if that's just his normal demeanor or if he was a good actor. After the boyfriend convinced her to abort we went into the next room—an abortion clinic. The girl is strapped to the table while the nurses operate on her. The boyfriend chastises her and finally leaves her while the nurses continue. The nurses pulled out really gnarly looking gobs of bloody flesh, which were supposed to be the fetus. While this was going on, they played videos of aborted fetuses and dead babies. This was interspersed with happy children swinging in the park. It was rather nauseating. This room brought a lot of teenage girls in the audience to tears. After about a minute the girl getting the abortion passed out and we heard the flat line sound as if she had died. They tried to revive her but of course she was a goner. Go directly to *Hell*; do not pass go; do not collect \$200.

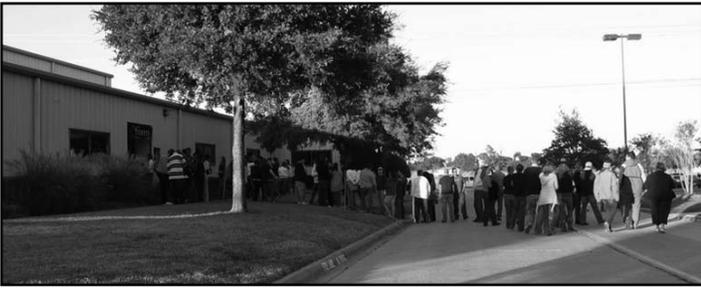
No Hell House would be complete without having a room dedicated to a father molesting his teenage daughter! So in the next room we had a girl who was molested after her father had been drinking and watching porn. As everyone

knows, drinking and watching porn will eventually lead to you having sex with your children! Feeling bad about it all because she blamed herself, she called her sister for help. She found out that by talking to her older sister (who had come over) that she, too, had been molested in the same way. Who would have thought? This makes them both mad, especially the older sister, because she had hoped the younger sister would have been spared the same fate. This was a cue for the old man to walk into the room. They all started fighting and then the older sister grabbed the dad's gun during the scuffle. Accidentally, she shot the father and the younger sister. The next room shows the older sister in her bedroom blaming God for the troubles. A few seconds later that daddy, who you thought was dead, wasn't and came in and kills her before she can make amends with the big guy upstairs. Where do you think she goes? I'm sure by now you can guess.

The next room was some sort of newscast again, with something about how it was going to be when you die. Each of us was put into a faux coffin with four other people. I guess it was to let us imagine what it's like to be dead. They left out the small technicality that you wouldn't actually be conscious



Trinity Church in Cedar Hill, Texas



while you were dead, but that would have lessened the effect, I guess.

The next room was the "Heaven Room." White cotton crap surrounded high definition TVs played scenes from *What Dreams May Come* while they postulate what Heaven is like. Mel Gibson's fun time movie (*Passion of the Christ*) started playing and showed the part where Jesus is brutally beaten while they attempt to lay a guilt trip on you about his death. I noticed a bunch of girls crying when that started playing. Poor, poor Jesus.

Since there is a heaven, there must also be a Hell, and the next room was there to portray it. While the people in Heaven people got to watch high definition televisions, Hell only had low-tech black-and-white monitors. It's almost enough to make someone convert! I was kind of disappointed at how they portrayed hell, however. It was just

a bunch of teenage guys dressed up in devil costumes making hissing sounds. I would have been more impressed if they would have lit someone on fire and had them burn alive screaming. That would have left a bigger impression, in my humble opinion. I guess liability insurance wouldn't allow it.

Last, but not least, we had the room where you were supposed to give yourself to Jesus. I really can't recall the exact speech but it was a hard sell because you never know when your number may be called. You do *not* want to be called if you aren't saved! At the end they offered a chance to go into the next room to get saved, and, of course, about 80 percent of the people in our group made a beeline to the door. All of us in the ACA and a few others stayed, just to see what would happen. Once the others left the guy made a last attempt to get us to go, but we

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Above and left: Lining up to go to hell.

Below: ACA members prepare for torture.



Above and left: Some of the ACA attendees.



Fantasy Worlds...

—by Matt Dillahunt

While I enjoy theological discussions that address both the orthodox and personal beliefs of the religious, it's all just window dressing. The real questions are ones that apologists ignore and theologians dismiss. Religions pretend to offer answers to life's big questions but even the most inexperienced critical thinkers recognize that the answers offered by religion are, in fact, non-answers. Religion attempts to allay the frustration of a mystery with an appeal to a bigger mystery and, traditionally, those who refuse to accept the pat answer averred by religious authorities are the ones most responsible for discovering how the world really works. Progress has been made, despite religion—not because of it. But the bigger question is; Do any of the god-concepts make sense?

If a science fiction or fantasy author wants the audience to be immersed in their make-believe world, they must take great care to ensure that this new world is internally consistent. They can create a world full of magic, fanciful creatures, extra-normal abilities and characters whose actions are divorced from the reality we're familiar with. If the rules are clear, and adhered to, fans will find themselves immersed in the story and connecting with the characters. But what happens when a mistake is made?

If you're a fan of a sci-fi or fantasy book or television series, the odds are very good that you can recall a point where the rules were broken and the tapestry of that fiction began to unravel. Perhaps a character did something completely foreign

to their established behavior. Perhaps the rules were changed in order to solve a particularly sticky dilemma. Perhaps the solution to a problem was made far more complex than necessary, given the rules of the world. This internal consistency isn't a limitation on fantasy, it applies to reality and any proposition regarding reality or a proposed reality—which is all fantasy really is. We expect the world to make sense and remain consistent: pigs don't occasionally generate wings and fly.

If we take a moment to consider the 'reality' proposed by many religions, there are a number of interesting questions that leap to mind; questions that expose the inconsistencies that plague these holy fantasies...

What does God want?

Some may respond that God wants nothing, he is perfect and internally complete—but this response not only fails to account for our existence (which they confusingly attribute to God), it directly contradicts it. If God was internally complete, there would be no impetus to act; no reason to create anything.

Some believers, particularly fundamentalist Christians, claim that we are God's special creation and that he created the entire universe just for us. Is this the act of a reasonable, intelligent being? He creates billions of galaxies with billions of stars and billions of planets so that he can pick one planet and populate it with millions of life forms—because one of them is part of a special project? And what is this project? What is it that God is trying to accomplish?

Many believers would say that God wants us to love, respect and obey him. That is an acceptable motivation, but there's a very difficult follow-up question: If this is God's desire, is he taking actions that allow him to achieve this goal? If you wanted your children to love and obey you, wouldn't you act in an open and honest fashion? Would you leave a note on the fridge, in someone else's handwriting, with confusing and nonsensical instructions backed up by promises of candy for compliance and the threat of a beating for failure? Would you leave your very existence and goals open to question? Is this the way a reasonable, intelligent being seeks out love, respect or obedience?

The God-character of the Christian fantasy world, to pick one common example, is internally inconsistent. He's portrayed as vastly powerful, if not omnipotent, yet he is thwarted by chariots of iron. He's portrayed as infinitely merciful, benevolent and loving, yet also as vengeful, jealous and

INSIDE THE ACA

Press Releases: Announcements to the World

—by Don Baker

When the Atheist Community of Austin does something great or issues an opinion, how does the world find out about it? We alert the press by issuing a press release. A press release is an official ACA communication directed at the media concerning some newsworthy position or activity of the ACA. When we issue a press release, it goes out to all the local news and print media in Austin as well as some local community groups that share our viewpoint.

Most of the press releases of the ACA have been about ACA's official reaction to a particular church-state separation event that impacts atheists in Texas. We have also issued press releases

concerning some of our activism events, which have also primarily concerned church-state separation. When the ACA reacts to a current event, we often have hours from the time we learn about the event to the time the press release is issued. News fades fast. While we can write opinions or comment on an event in our own media outlets, community news outlets are constantly on the move as new news comes in. If we're lucky, the press release urges the media to consider the atheist viewpoint when they cover a story. To facilitate this possibility, we provide contact information back to the ACA. We also consider it a good outcome if the press release causes the media to interview other sources

with viewpoints like ours. We try to avoid using press releases as simply a vehicle for self-promotion.

On the other hand, we try to issue press releases every few months as a way of reminding the media that we exist and that we have a viewpoint that can lend balance to their stories. The media tends to have a bias toward promoting religious belief; however different outlets have different perspectives. Over time, press releases are a way for the ACA to mark our place in the greater community. To view the ACA's past press releases, see <www.atheist-community.org/library/releases>. ■

thuggish. He's portrayed as vastly intelligent and wise, if not omniscient, yet he is flummoxed by the continued failure of his creations to meet expectations—to the point of repeatedly starting over. He bends the rules of reality to solve problems, he misses simple, reasonable solutions and he has a complete change of character in the second season—changing some rules and, confusingly, supporting the old

rules as well—despite the contradictions.

Why does God need a “soul-testing-scenario”? Why is blind faith a virtue, when every bit of reliable understanding comes by investigation and evidence? Why create species that go extinct? Why allow pregnancies that spontaneously abort? Does he take care to answer prayer at the exact rate expected by chance?

Hell House

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stood fast. At that point they let you leave through the exact same door. Walking through that door and down the hall, I was able to see the young, impressionable, and gullible children sitting there. I just had to say something to them; so, as I left through the door going outside, I said to them, “think for yourselves.” I said it loud enough for them to hear, but not so loud it was ob-

noxious. I was hoping that I was able to get at least a few of them to think rather than to make their decisions based on emotion.

That was it. We walked back to the parking lot and drove home. For \$10, it was good entertainment. If I lived closer I would go every year, but driving from Austin is not worth going more than once. If you haven't been it's a good way to see firsthand the manipulation and brainwashing that is done to these young participants. ■

Fans of sci-fi and fantasy series fall into two categories. Some are hyper-critical. They love these worlds and these characters but the slightest misstep can result in a backlash that can end a series. They enjoy the brief escape as long as their intelligence isn't insulted. Other fans are more forgiving. They're willing to rationalize away errors in order to continue clinging to the fantasy—because the fantasy has become

a way of avoiding harsh reality.

If Christianity were a TV series, it would have been canceled long ago. Yes, there would still be fans and they'd probably be writing letters, dressing up like Jesus and having conventions—but they wouldn't have any pull with the networks. ■



Upcoming Winter Solstice Celebration!



This year's ACA Winter Solstice Party will be on Saturday, December 15, 2007, from 6 p.m. to midnight at Mike Swift's house. Thanks to Mike for his hospitality! The party is for ACA members, spouses, family, and atheist-friendly friends. Kids are welcome. RSVPs are encouraged so Mike can gauge the size of the event. Also, e-mail him if you'd like to volunteer to help set up.

The early part of the evening will be a potluck dinner. Bring a dish to share, should you wish to participate. If you can, let Mike know what you plan to bring so he can ensure a breadth of dishes. Mike will provide snacks and beer for the later crowd. Mike has a game room, arcade machine, and pool table. ■



ACA CALENDAR

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1

• 2-3:30 p.m.: *Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show* (See Web site for details)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2

• 12:15-1:45 p.m.: *ACA Lecture Series* (Austin History Center) Speaker & Topic TBA. Free.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2

• 3-4:30 p.m.: *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (IHOP)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9

• 10-11 a.m.: *Board Meeting* (Romeo's (outside))

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo's)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9

• 3-4:30 p.m.: *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (IHOP)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15

• 11 a.m.-12 p.m.: *Adopt-a-street Clean Up* (Jack-in-the-Box, Burnet Rd. & Anderson Ln.)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15

• 2-3:30 p.m.: *Non-Prophets Internet Radio Show* (See Web site for details)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15

• 6 p.m.-?: *Winter Solstice Party* (Mike Swift's House) Log in to the web site for information

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo's)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16

• 3-4:30 p.m.: *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (IHOP)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: *Regular Sunday Meeting* (Romeo's)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23

• 3-4:30 p.m.: *Atheist Experience* (Channel 10)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (IHOP)

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 27

• 7 p.m.-?: *Happy Hour* (Dog & Duck Pub)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29

• 10-11 a.m.: *ACA Blood Drive* (Blood & Tissue Center)

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 29

• 2-3:30 p.m.: *Regular Sunday Meeting* (See Web site for details)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30

• 11 a.m.-1 p.m.: *Regular Sunday Meeting* at Romeo's (Romeo's)

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 30

• 5 p.m.-?: *Meet-up after The Atheist Experience* (IHOP)

REGULAR LOCATIONS:

- **Austin History Center**, 9th and Guadalupe. Building opens at noon. Lectures are free and open to the public.
- **Blood and Tissue Center of Central Texas**, 4300 North Lamar Boulevard, 512.206.1266.
- **Dog & Duck Pub**, North of the Capitol, 406 W. 17th at Guadalupe, 512.479.0598. Informal gathering; food available.
- **IHOP**, 707 E. Cesar Chavez St. (at I-35) downtown.
- **Mike Swift's house**, log in to the ACA Web site for details.
- **Romeo's**, 1500 Barton Springs Rd. South of Town Lake.

Unless otherwise indicated, events are open to all atheist and atheist friendly people, regardless of ACA membership status. Check the calendar on the Web site <<http://www.atheist-community.org/calendar>> for last minute changes.



Atheist Community of Austin
 P. O. Box 3798
 Austin, TX 78764
 www.atheist-community.org

ATHEIST EVE

CONCEPT BY SHILLING CADENA — ILLUSTRATED BY DESIGN ©2007



* Exodus 20:13
 * * Leviticus 19:19