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# Rumor industry on last legs? - 'Rumor World' magazine ceases publication - Comment

Chief Executive, The , March, 1994 by Joe Queenan

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Recently, with little fanfare, Rumor World magazine closed its doors forever. Founded in 1932, Rumor World once enjoyed a circulation of 1.7 million and a readership said to number in the tens of millions. Established by a pair of disbarred life insurance salesmen, Rumor World was one of those rare publications that actually enjoyed several heydays, flourishing first in the 1930s, when it abounded with outlandish rumors about illicit extramarital affairs among movie stars who supposedly were happily married; then again in the 1950s, when it achieved perhaps its greatest notoriety with lurid stories accusing various celebrities of being Communists; and yet again in the 1980s, when it teemed with implausible reports about Elvis sightings, impending corporate mergers, movie stars' deviant lifestyles, and the imminent firings of powerful magazine editors at publications such as Vanity Fair, The New Yorker, and GQ.

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"We basically were a victim of our own failure," explains Darren Wyncotte, publisher of Rumor World since 1953. "It doesn't matter if you put out 20,000 idiotic rumors, so long as one of them happens to be true. It doesn't matter if you put out 50,000 absurd rumors, so long as one of them happens to be true. But in the past three years, not one of the 22,345 vicious rumors we circulated in the pages of our magazine turned out to have any substance whatsoever. The public eventually caught up with us, finally reaching the point where it would not believe anything we printed. Frankly, I think the rumor industry as we know it could be kaput."

Among the scurrilous, baseless, or completely idiotic rumors the magazine helped to

disseminate in the past three years were the following:

- \* Dan Quayle is about to be dropped from the 1992 GOP ticket.
- \* The Federal Reserve, the Trilateral Commission, the Council on Foreign Relations, and the KGB are all in league with Satan to topple democracy in this country.
- \* Hillary Clinton had an affair with Vince Foster, culminating in his suicide
- \* Elvis has been spotted at the foot of Jim Morrison's Parisian tomb.
- \* IBM and Apple are about to merge.
- \* Sharon Stone was on that plane stalled in the Los Angeles airport last year and the White House cooked up the \$200 haircut story to cover Bill Clinton's tracks.
- \* Nancy Reagan once had an affair with Frank Sinatra, even meeting him for sordid liaisons at the White House.
- \* IBM is about to be taken over by Sony.
- \* Adolf Hitler is alive and well and living in a garish hacienda in Paraguay.
- \* Quebec is about to secede from Canada.
- \* John Kennedy has been spotted entering a spaceship manned by tiny green aliens.
- \* Jimmy Hoffa is buried beneath the goalposts at Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, NJ.

With the passage of time, it has become evident that not one of these rumors contains even a scintilla of truth, ultimately causing the magazine to lose its last shreds of credibility, even among its notoriously gullible readers.

"Obviously, we knew from the start that Quayle had no chance of being dumped from the GOP ticket, that Hoffa had been turned into gator chum down in Florida years ago, and that all that stuff about Hillary and Bill and Sharon and Elvis and Jim Morrison was pure nonsense," Wyncotte says. "But we really thought we might be on to something with JFK and the little green men. Those photos were s convincing."

Wyncotte notes that Rumor World also was hurt by stiff competition from such glossy, upscale magazines as House & Innuendo, Backstabber World, Car & Hearsay and Mature Liar. "House & Innuendo didn't hurt us that much, because it appeale to a more upscale readership, the kinds of people who like to read vicious rumors about Richard Gere and Leonard Bernstein and Malcolm Forbes," says Wyncotte. "Our demographic base was always out there in ElvisLand--they preferred vicious rumors about Dolly Parton. But when Mature Liar started up in 1982, it really ate into our subscriber base, because it was targeted at senior citizens likely to believe the FBI killed John Kennedy with the aid of the KGB and the little green men. As we fought to hold on to our twenty-something readers with the Jimi Hendrix rumors, we lost the seniors."

Two disastrous attempts to diversify only added to Rumor World's problems. Its magazine for credulous schoolchildren, entitled Gullible's Travels, folded in 1989 after one issue. An even more devastating failure was a 1992 attempt to launch a special CD-ROM edition of Rumor World, which provided readers armed with at least a 486-chip PC the opportunity to sample 600K of fresh nonsense every month. RUMORS on ROM failed primarily because people who believe that Joh Kennedy may have been abducted by space aliens not to own sophisticated compute equipment.

"Rumor World is a throwback to an earlier, simpler time when you could get the American public to believe just about anything," Wyncotte sighs. "But today's magazine reader is not that easy to fool. He doesn't really believe Elvis has a good shot at being the next chairman of Motorola. He doesn't really believe Jimmy Hoffa is buried under the goalposts at Giants Stadium. He doesn't really believe all the resources of the U.S. government are united in a humongous conspiracy to strip him of all his money, redistribute it to deadbeat bureaucrats, and turn him into a pauper. He's much too sophisticated for that."

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