

November/December 1987

The British & Irish

SKEPTIC

Volume I, No. 6

ASTROLOGY SURVEY
PREDICTIONS 1988
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MANCHESTER MEETING
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Nessie Hunt

Noah's Ark

Creationism in Australia

Magicians, Mediums & Psychics

The 'Royal Nonesuch' of Parapsychology

Science vs. Pseudoscience

THE BRITISH & IRISH SKEPTIC

Editor: Wendy M. Grossman

Editorial Board: Toby Howard, Peter O'Hara, Karl Sabbagh

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VIDEO/AUDIO LIBRARY

Video and audio tapes are available on loan from: Toby Howard, 49 Whitegate Park, Flixton, Manchester M31 3LN, to paid subscribers only. New additions are: "Is There Anybody There," a 90-minute documentary on why people believe in the paranormal, produced by Karl Sabbagh (InCA) for Channel 4, broadcast October 31, 1987; audio tapes of the 6 November Dublin meeting with Karl Sabbagh. Also available: Geller on the Wogan show; BBC documentary on the Spiritualist Association; Mark Plummer (CSICOP's Executive Director) interviewed on the Gay Byrne radio show; Denys Parsons and others debating the subject of dowsing on BBC Scotland.

E-MAIL

The skeptics' e-mail network is coordinated by Toby Howard (UK/Europe) and Jim Lippard (USA/Canada). Submissions: skeptics@BCO-MULTICS.ARPA (USA/Canada); skeptics@UK.AC.MAN.CS.CGU (Europe). Administrivia: skeptics-request@BCO-MULTICS.ARPA (USA/Canada); skeptics-request@UK.AC.MAN.CS.CGU (UK).

PROMETHEUS BOOKS

UK Distributor: Michael Hutchinson, 10 Crescent View, Loughton, Essex, IG10 4PZ.

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HITS & MISSES

CORRESPONDENTS

We exchange with a number of publications, including newsletters from CSICOP's satellite skeptics' groups and Magonia and The New Humanist. We have copies of skeptical newsletters from Australia, New Zealand, Spain, W. Germany, Quebec, California, etc. (the list is too long to print in full). We will be glad to lend back issues to interested, paid subscribers (particularly interested, paid subscribers who read German, Swedish, or Dutch and could attempt some translations for us). Further information from Box 20, Blackrock, Co Dublin.

Toby Howard writes:

In recent years there has been an enormous proliferation of Psychics and Mystics Fairs, which attract quite a range of paranormal types. My experience is that the majority of those who attend the shows are not paranormal experts, but mildly interested, ordinary people. No one bends spoons, levitates pencils, or squirts ectoplasm. In fact, there's nothing visibly "paranormal" going on at all. In October I attended a Psychics and Mystics fair held in Manchester's Grand Hotel. There were twenty-five persons there of various psychic persuasions, including tarot readers, palmists, mediums, and rune operators. Business was booming. Each stand had at least ten people waiting their turn. The going rate was £6 for a session which generally lasted about ten minutes. Given that the show was on for the whole day, I reckon each performer was going to make about £240--not bad for a day's work. One stand was selling "pyramid experimentation" kits, each labelled "scientifically tested and proved--it really works!" When I asked the stallholder exactly what scientific procedures this referred to, I was met with an uncomprehending stare. I saw that this was not the sort of thing you were expected to ask at a Psychics and Mystics fair, and I was chastised for "too much left-brain attitude." I eavesdropped on a few sessions, and a revealing moment came when a tarot reader asked her customer, "X has happened to you, hasn't it?" The customer replied, "Yes! Amazing!" Then the reader said, "Sorry, I got that wrong. I meant Y," to which the customer again affirmed, "Yes!" The trouble is, X and Y were direct opposites! Why not find out what's going on in your area--the larger cities often have "alternative" guides which cover these things.

Some upcoming dates:

Psychics & Mystics Fayre, Nov 20-22, Hammersmith Town Hall, London.

Christmas Bazaar, Nov 21, Battersea Town Hall, London.

Psychic, Health & Fitness Festival, Dec 5, Surbiton Assembly Rooms.

Huddersfield Psychic Festival, Jan 2-3 1988, Huddersfield Exhibition Hall.

Yorkshire Arts & Crafts Fayre, Mar 25-27 1988, Queen's Hall, Leeds.

York Psychic & Occult Festival, 15-17 April 1988, Merchant Adventurers' Hall, Fossgate, York.

Regular performers:

New World Psychics, Sat/Sun 12-7pm, Eden Park Hotel, 35 Inverness Terrace, London W2.

London Psychic Forum, Sat 12-8pm, Cora Hotel, 18 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1.

The Psychics, Sat, Whitehall Hotel, 2-5 Montague St., London WC1.

[Editor's note: if we get enough information coming in, we might start running a regular calendar. How can we investigate anything, if we don't know what's going on out there?]

FAITH-VETS

Dr Petr Skrabanek points out that the faith-healing experiment with sick horses, mentioned in Hits & Misses, B&IS 1.5, was written up in the New Scientist on 27 August. According to the article, the British Veterinary Association devoted a session of its annual conference last year to "the practice of alternative medicine for animals," considering it "to be 'another weapon in the vet's armoury'." The article reports success with acupuncture for relieving pain and mentions the the organization of the first congress of the International Association for Veterinary Homeopathy. The horse experiment is discussed: "Scientists working with the Confederation of Healing Organisations are now investigating the [radionics] treatment. Professor Lawson Soulsby of the veterinary school of the University of Cambridge is testing radionics as a way of controlling intestinal parasites in horses...Major Gordon Smith conducts the radionics 'at a distance'...He is involved in a similar trial in Mexico. Smith treated one group by radionics, and the other achieved [sic] conventional worming drugs at regular intervals. There was no untreated control group..."

Dr Skrabanek wrote to the New Scientist in reply to the article: "Dr Birke in her entertaining article (New Scientist, Aug 27, p34) mentioned that a Cambridge professor is conducting a study in which the effect of distance dowsing on intestinal parasites in horses is measured. It would be interesting to have

SPECIAL REPORT: Nessie Hunt

Steuart Campbell

A board game with the above title, designed by Tony Harmsworth, curator of the Loch Ness Exhibition at Drumadrochit, offers players a 'nail biting hunt on mysterious Loch Ness;' from 9th to 11th October last a real hunt took place.

Operation Deepscan involved the use of twenty out-of-season cabin cruisers, each equipped with sonar apparatus. They were deployed in line abreast, so forming a sonar curtain, and this was then swept up and down the lake several times. The organizers did not mention that such a series of sonar sweeps had first been conducted by an expedition from the University of Cambridge in 1962.

Announcing the operation at a London press conference on 17 September, Adrian J. Shine (wittily described by the Independent as '37 1/2'), the leader of the Loch Ness & Morar Project for the last ten years, stated that it had four 'scientific objectives.' These included a study of fish distribution and water temperatures, but it was not clear that they included a hunt for Nessie. In fact, at various press conferences, Shine declared that he did not believe in what he termed the 'media monster' and naively asked, 'Nobody really believed in that anyway, did they?!' The operation would also look for debris, including the remains of Crusader, John Cobb's speedboat, which disintegrated (killing him) during a record attempt in 1952.

Boasted to have cost £1 million (a figure which must have been arrived at by totalling the cost of hiring boats and sonar equipment which in fact were not hired), the operation was sponsored by the Loch Ness Centre, Lowrance Electronics of Tulsa (Oklahoma), Caley Cruisers of Inverness, the local tourist board and the Highlands & Islands Development Board. The boats were crewed by young people from the London Docklands scouts project and the Drake Fellowship. Altogether about 150 people were involved.

All the sponsors clearly thought their expenditure well worthwhile. Lowrance were introducing new equipment to the European market and could not have chosen a better publicity stunt. All the local hotels were full, accomodating 250 journalists and

photographers (including 25 television crews) from more than a dozen countries! A Japanese TV team even abandoned the Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool for the far more interesting story at Loch Ness!

The results of Operation Deepscan were unclear. There were several press reports of a strong contact off Urquhart Castle, and another 2 miles (3.2 km) from Fort Augustus. However, subsequent reports indicated that one of these was debris. Some of the contacts were ephemeral, leading to speculation that they were echoes from moving (i.e. animate) objects. In fact they were more likely to have been side-lobe echoes (echoes from a nearby object which appears to be in mid-water but which is not). The sweeps certainly did not find the colony of monsters in which most buffs believe. They did not even find the remains of Cobb's boat. On 9 October the Daily Mail suggested that if Shine failed to find the monster 'sceptics may conclude [that] there is no Nessie.' In fact sceptics like me had already come to that conclusion and Operation Deepscan made no difference.

Although Shine thought that the ephemeral contacts were probably from large fish, others were less cautious. Harmsworth was still convinced that 'something big' was moving about in the lake and declared that Shine's sceptical opinion was as valid as anyone else's. Ronnie Bremner, owner of the Drumadrochit Hotel and its exhibition, predictably confessed his faith in Nessie, adding that he had seen her in 1984. The local tourist board appeared not to care whether or not anything was found, believing (with some justification) that tourists would continue to come from all over the world.

At the start of Operation Deepscan local 'seer' Sween MacDonald predicted that it would provide enough evidence for a follow-up expedition next spring which would finally prove that a creature ('or even a small family of them') exists in the lake. In fact it has not provided such evidence, but that will not prevent Shine, a London paper salesman, from appearing again next year. But whatever he is hunting for, it is not Nessie!

more details on this new science. Is it the professor, the horse, or the parasites whose faith is being tested? Or, perhaps, the reader's?"

So far, the letter has not appeared.

SPIRITS ON THE DOLE

The Guardian reported in July that a Mr Peter Froude from Bournemouth is receiving £40 a week under the Enterprise Allowance Scheme to "do 'psychic creative writing'." Froude claims that four spirits are writing a novel through him. "Britain's first state-sponsored psychic works himself into a trance using a pendulum. His hand then automatically writes from left to right (or right to left if the ethereal authors are feeling cussed) as the spirits dictate each chapter to his subconscious." The article says that Mr Froude is hoping for a place on the bestseller list.

CRYOGENICS

The London Evening News reported on 28 July that for £125,000 you can have yourself put to (anaesthetic) sleep, frozen, and jetted to LA (where else?) for storage until scientists figure out how to thaw you out and cure whatever ails you. We are eager to hear more about Alcor, the LA company, and its British agent, London property dealer Garratt Smith.

ASSAP

Reader Paul Quincey wrote in months ago asking for more information about ASSAP, mentioned in Toby Howard's Psychic Diary, B&IS I.2. Leslie Shepard, editor of the Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology, was able to supply us with details. ASSAP stands for The Association for the Scientific Study of Anomalous Phenomena, and was founded in 1980/1 by Hilary Evans and others. We wrote to ASSAP's chairman, Maurice Townsend, for information, and in return received a copy of the current issue of their biannual journal, Anomaly and a leaflet describing their work. The Association's objectives are: "To obtain, store, process and disseminate information concerning those areas of human experience and observed phenomena for which no generally accepted explanation is as yet forthcoming; to encourage and aid investigation and research into these phenomena, by the creation or co-ordination of investigative groups, and by the

provision of consultative resources, technical facilities, etc.; to provide a multi-disciplinary forum for the exchange of views and information concerning these phenomena; to educate, and promote an informed and enlightened attitude among the general public."

Under "Views and attitudes," they make the following statement about their investigative methods: "ASSAP expects its members to adopt a scientific approach at all times. It is recognised that such a concept is ultimately indefinable: while in matters of research and investigation there is general agreement as to what constitutes scientific method, on wider issues there is apt to be disagreement even among scientists. The necessity for experimental replication as validation for the existence of a phenomenon, for example, is seen as fundamental by one school of thought, and as unrealistic by another. ASSAP does not seek to impose any rigid interpretation of what constitutes a scientific approach, but rather looks to a general consensus. While this may from time to time result in efforts which fall short of scientific validity, this is considered preferable to a narrow interpretation which stifles initiative and inhibits positive research."

Articles in Anomaly include a report on a poltergeist case (investigated by four ASSAP researchers with the aid of two psychics); a research paper on the question of whether an ESP processor exists; an "Ouija Dream," a "UFO Dream" ("Did a UFO engineer a man's dream?"), a report of a haunting, and news and an interview about "psychic questing."

MYSTIC STONE--UPDATE

We reported in B&IS I.2 that Toby Howard had complained to the Advertising Standards Authority about a mystic stone advertisement, which claimed the stone "will bring you all the money, luck and love you desire." There were specific claims of amounts won in the pools, happy marriages, etc., all due to having purchased the stone. The ASA investigated the matter, and asked the advertiser (Edward Kind, Burton-on-Trent) to substantiate his claim. The results have now been made available: "Complaint upheld. The advertisers failed to substantiate satisfactorily the testimonials as required by the Code. The advertisers were requested to delete the references from future advertisements."

Kind's new advertisement is much more moderate and quotes people's beliefs that the stone has worked for them. "letters available for inspection."

SWISS UFO

On September 13, the News of the World Magazine cover story was a UFO. As this UFO was seen by Swiss citizen Eduard Meier, we sent a copy of the story and "amazing pictures" to the Swiss Convenor, Conradin Beeii. Conradin replies that his "opinion about Herr Meier has been published in the Summer 1987 Skeptical Inquirer in 'Psychic Vibrations' by Robert Shaeffer." Conradin adds that he first heard of Meier, who is plugging a new book about his experiences (Light Years, by Gary Kinder, Viking Press, £10.95), early this summer. Two of Meier's friends were interviewed on local Zürich radio, with Erich von Däniken sitting in as a specialist consultant. The News of the World mentions a piece of metal from the alien spacecraft, which scientist Marcel Vogel claims is made up of elements bonded together with technology beyond human capabilities. Conradin says that during the interview it was revealed that the aliens (from the Pleiades) contacting Meier, had telepathically levitated this piece of metal back into their possession.

CHARTSEARCH

Ernest Jackson writes from Hull about a firm named "Chartsearch" (offices at 11 Blomfield Street, London EC2M 7AY), enclosing one of their leaflets. The leaflet reads in part: "This time last year, we offered a specially commissioned Astrological Stockmarket & Gold Forecast for 1987. In it, the authors--two leading members of the Astrological Association--foretold the course of the London Stockmarket with startling accuracy." Chartsearch warns that the number of 1988 Forecasts they will sell is "strictly limited," but that they will put disappointed investors on the waiting list for 1989. No information is given as to how many Forecasts they actually print; purchasers are also required to sign an undertaking that they will not reproduce any part of the Forecast without "written permission from the publisher counter-signed by the joint authors."

Mr Jackson reported that he contacted the firm for further information. The person he spoke to on the phone said the firm will not allow copies of the 1987 report to be checked, they will not divulge the astrologers' names, the report is four pages long (price: £20). However, the firm will allow the 1988 report to be returned within thirty days if not satisfied. Mr Jackson points out that if one purchases the report in November, the thirty

days will be up before January, 1988, so there would be no opportunity to test it.

Wouldn't it be interesting to know if the 1987 Forecast predicted the stock market crash? Anyone want to spend £20 and track the 1988 predictions?

GELLER CLOSE-UP

Toby Howard writes from Manchester:

On Friday, 23 October, I had the pleasure of meeting Uri Geller at the press preview of Karl Sabbagh's then forthcoming paranormal documentary (broadcast 31 October on Channel 4). Geller painted himself whiter-than-white, and basically lectured the press for 10 minutes or so uninterrupted on his belief in the paranormal and his genuineness. (Oh, and his new Board Game, which will be out for Christmas!) I lost count of how many times he claimed to be a "multi-millionaire several times over." I honestly don't know if this is true or not, but he claims all the money has come from his success in dowsing for oil and gold. He then got into his act and did a spoon for us (there were about 30 people present). I got right next to him, and I was determined to keep my eyes glued to the spoon. But I'm embarrassed to admit he got me with his "first" misdirection. He asked the waiter for a spoon and was handed a small, 4" teaspoon, and he shouted over to Karl Sabbagh, "You can verify that this spoon has not been tampered with, can't you, Karl?" and shot him a glance. So naturally everyone looked at Karl for his reaction! Then I realised what Geller had done, but it was too late. A woman asked him several times to bend the spoon back again, but he sadly replied that he just couldn't do that! As the magician's maxim goes, never do the same trick twice in a row!

Most of the reporters there weren't convinced, neither with the spoon act, nor with Geller's announcement that he will shortly be conducting experiments to see if he can influence the AIDS virus. When I suggested to him that if it were found that he could influence viruses to good, he'd be morally and ethically bound to devote his entire life to that, he got very indignant that his personal life must not be compromised at any cost!

Then he and Shipi Shtrang were carried off in a UFO and they all disappeared in a puff of green smoke...

E-MAIL

A skeptics' e-mail exchange has begun, coordinated by Toby Howard in Manchester and

Jim Lippard in Phoenix, Arizona. The E-mail addresses for submissions are:

(Europe) skeptics@UK.AC.MAN.CS.CGU

(USA/Canada) skeptics@BCO-MULTICS.ARPA
and the E-mail addresses for administrivia:

(Eur) skeptics-request@UK.AC.MAN.CS.CGU

(USA) skeptics-request@BCO-MULTICS.ARPA.

We'll try to keep readers posted on the lively discussions going on in the e-mail network--perhaps someone on the network could write us an "E-Mail Digest" from time to time?

NAME THIS NEWSLETTER CONTEST

The B&IS Editorial Board voted to retain the name "The British & Irish Skeptic." Thanks to all who submitted titles, and particularly to Redge Lewis, who wins a free one-year subscription for his subhead, "A Publication Dedicated to Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal." The Board also voted to continue spelling "skeptic" with a "k". Sorry, folks.

IRISH COMMITTEE

Jacqueline Helme writes from Dublin:

The first meeting of the Irish Committee took place on the 10th October in Monkstown. Present were: Peter O'Hara, Wendy Grossman, Frank Chambers, Jacqueline Helme, David Berman, Michael Farragher, and Johanne Powell. A number of interesting topics for future discussion and investigation were put forward by the members, including weeping statues, hauntings, flying saucers, astrology, and unorthodox healers.

It was agreed by the members that we would be careful not to adopt an anti-religious attitude in the skeptics and that any attacks on sensitive areas of belief were unnecessary and unwise. It was felt that there were many areas of investigation, like weeping statues, which could be treated as isolated phenomena without offending the views held by religious believers.

Much interest was shown in the future investigative possibilities of claims made by faith healers in Ireland and suggestions were made as to how this could be carried out using proper scientific methods.

The meeting discussed ways for publicising the activities of the Irish Skeptics in order to increase our membership, support our aims for a broader public awareness of skepticism and to attract experts from various fields who would be willing and able to contribute their consultative skills.

It was agreed that we would hope to arrange a public meeting with Karl Sabbagh, producer of "Is There Anybody There?" for Channel 4.

The committee were aware of the need to carefully consider the most convenient venues for future meetings, both for committee members and for future public meetings. Several members of the committee had travelled great distances in order to come to Dublin and we wondered whether it might be convenient in the future to occasionally hold meetings in other areas of the country.

It was a most stimulating and productive meeting for this lively new group.

[Editor's note: the meeting with Karl Sabbagh was arranged, and took place on 6 November, the week after the programme was broadcast. The meeting was (audio) taped, thanks to Leslie Shepard, and the tapes are available on loan from Toby Howard (see p 2). In response to requests, we hope to run a partial transcript of the meeting in a future issue of the B&IS.]

NEWMAN'S PERPETUAL CAR

The New Scientist reported that Joseph Newman, whose electric motor has been written up in the Skeptical Inquirer, applied for a patent not only in the US, but also in Britain and across Europe. We wrote to the British Patent Office requesting details, and in return were sent a copy of the entire application. Newman applied in the following countries: Australia, Brazil, Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the Soviet Union, and the USA. In America, Newman has taken the Patent and Trademark Office to court for refusing his application.

According to a long article in Discover magazine, May 1987, Newman theorizes that the universe (and his motor), can be explained by tiny gyroscopic particles. Discover's reporter David Noland says, "Newman says he has found the Holy Grail that has eluded physicists for decades--a unified field theory that integrates the fundamental forces of the universe (gravity, electromagnetism, and the weak and strong nuclear forces). Newman's theory also explains electric charge, inertia, matter, light, heat, quantum mechanics--you name it." Noland quotes CSICOP Fellow Al Hibbs, a retired physicist from Caltech, "His theories make no sense to me. His motor has all the appearance of a perpetual motion machine."

We hope to publish a further report on Newman's theories in a future issue.

EUROPEAN REPORT

GERMANY

The German group had their official founding meeting on 11 October, following a small conference the day before. The group has decided to change their name to Gesellschaft für die wissenschaftliche Untersuchung von Parawissenschaften, abbreviated to GWUP. The name, translated, means "Society for the Scientific Investigation of Para-science." The group also elected a board, whose members are: Prof. Irmgard Oepen (President), Prof. Robert König (Vice-President), Amardeo Sarma (Secretary), Dr. Hans Joachim Schugk (Public Relations), Gerald Huber (Treasurer), Martin Mahner (Protocolist), and Gerhard Maierhöfer (Newsletter Editor). GWUP reports they now have 25 full members and a number of supporting members and subscribers to their newsletter, Der Skeptiker, the second issue of which arrived recently. The contents include: a German translation of Ray Hyman's "Proper Criticism," from Skeptical Briefs (this article also appeared in the B&IS, I.4); a review of the April 30 meeting with Mark Plummer and Wendy Grossman, and articles on "Water-plus" (we'll have to get this translated to find out what it is!) and "Poltergeists and Professors."

Also recently arrived is a letter from CENAP, the West German "Central Investigation Network on Aerial Phenomena." This group, which was formed in 1976, is affiliated to but independent of GWUP (formerly known as ASUPO), and publishes a monthly journal called CENAP-Report. They ask that we forward to them information (in English) about local UFO incidents and investigation reports. They plan to translate this material for publication in their journal, and hope to enlist our help, and the help of other CSICOP-satellites, in forming a world-wide contra-UFO network. We are sending them what information we have, and asking for more information about their past activities.

THE NETHERLANDS

Paul Kurtz, Mark Plummer, and others from the Free Inquiry/Skeptical Inquirer office(s) recently travelled to Utrecht for the IHEU Conference. While there, they hosted the founding meeting of the new Dutch Committee, at which a committee of twelve was elected. The meeting was covered in the Dutch press, and CSICOP forwarded to us a couple of the print write-ups (in Dutch). Covered in these write-ups (judging from the

pictures) were James Randi's Alpha Project (when two young magicians convinced laboratory scientists that they were psychics) and the Dutch committee itself. The new Dutch Chairman is Professor Dr Cees de Jager, a prominent astronomer, and the secretary is Bert van Geider, a sociologist at the University of Amsterdam. We wish them the best of luck, and look forward to hearing from them about their activities.

SPAIN

We recently received the November '87 issue of La Alternativa Racional (no. 7), along with a couple of press write-ups the Spanish "Alternativa Racional a las Pseudociencias" (or ARP) received in May and September. The September article (from Correo del Lector), written by the group's secretary, Luis Alfonso Gamez Dominguez, talks about the lack of skeptical books in the Spanish language. After a listing of Prometheus Books (with their titles translated into Spanish), and a description of CSICOP and the Skeptical Inquirer, the article goes on: "The Spanish association, ARP, is a non-profit cultural entity which maintains a loose collaboration with CSICOP and other similar organizations in the rest of the world and has permission to publish the aforementioned authors' works in La Alternativa Racional."

The current issue's contents include original articles on: "The Myth of the Universal Flood," "The Extraterrestrial Hypothesis," "Paranormal Phenomena." In addition, there are a couple of book reviews, a report on the meeting held in San Sebastian in May to meet Mark Plummer and Wendy Grossman, and a Spanish translation of the Skeptical Inquirer article about modern ghostbusting. In "Paranormal Phenomena," Luis Alfonso Gamez Dominguez reports that the Spanish daily newspaper El Pais commissioned an opinion poll on 12 April which showed that 57% of the 1200 people asked believed in creationism, with the remaining 43% favorable to evolution. The newspaper "observed 'profound differences according to the religiosity and educational level of those interviewed.' So, among those partial to creationism were a majority of practicing Catholics and among the evolutionists abounded non-practicing Catholics, the indifferent, and the non-believers. Equally, creationism was the majority choice by people of the lowest educational level."

FROM THE EDITOR

As we near the end of our first year, I want to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has contributed articles, clippings, time, tapes, and money to the B&IS. The unsung heroes include: Peter O'Hara, who keeps the bank statements, has contributed articles and time, and had to print and post B&IS 1.4; Toby Howard, for his column and his energy; Chris Wright, Andrew Tomlinson, J.A. Remfry, Stephen Moreton, and Stephen Cox have all been extraordinarily generous in sending large packages of newspaper clippings. J.A. Remfry also has been sending us tapes of London broadcasts, which are now available on loan from Toby Howard. Leslie Shepard has contributed information, offprints from his Encyclopedia, and copies of other articles; he also took photographs and taped the Dublin meetings. Other contributors of note include Steuart Campbell, David Alexander, Frank Chambers, Leslie Shepard, Lewis Jones, Hilary Evans, Mike Hutchinson, Redge Lewis, Stephen Moreton, and Gerald Fleming. Thanks are also due to Martin Bridgstock for co-organizing the first Manchester meeting while spending a semester researching at the University of Manchester. I hope I haven't left anyone out. We also would like to thank the CSICP for paying for posting and printing the first issue.

About orthography: we publish articles by authors of varying nationalities. Our policy is to retain their own national styles, e.g., "skeptic" instead of "sceptic." I feel this is the written equivalent of hearing someone speak with a different accent. If you notice inconsistencies, this is the reason.

About correspondence: I have neither the time nor the funds to contact everyone who writes me a letter to ask if it's all right to quote from it. ALL LETTERS ARE CONSIDERED FAIR GAME FOR QUOTATION AND/OR PUBLICATION UNLESS LABELLED PRIVATE.

(The B&IS Editorial Board, minus Toby Howard, at the Dublin meeting on 6 November. Left to right: Karl Sabbagh, Wendy Grossman, Peter O'Hara. Photo by Leslie Shepard.)



COPY DATE FOR NEXT ISSUE:
JANUARY 15, 1988

IN PROGRESS

PREDICTIONS

We got a reasonable response to our request for Predictions for 1988 (see the results on pages 20-22), with a remarkable range of styles. It's not really a large enough sample for a serious test, but nonetheless, comparing the number of 'hits' to those of the psychic practitioners will be interesting.

To enable us to do this, we will have to collect as many published predictions as we can. We already have a copy of Old Moore's Almanac, which is reknowned in some places for its predictions. We reprint here a sample.

January: "Two main trends are expected: a healthy overall improvement in the home economy, also unsettled political stirrings following a major disagreement between parties. Trading sectors most likely to benefit from current improvements are industrial building, aided by a good take-up of factory space and agriculture--the latter benefiting from a revised government policy recognising need for forward planning and aid in crucial endeavours. Internationally, news will be very bright, with co-operation between super-powers increasing and leading to a continued relaxation of tension as well as a start of a co-ordinated policy for the Middle East. Nevertheless, in the latter sphere, an act of piracy concerning American nationals will cause a setback."

The Almanac continues through the rest of the year, month by month, in a similar vein.

Also on hand are various newspaper cuttings detailing predictions which we are following: the "X-Ray" couple, Anne and Peter Owen, were featured in an article in N.O.W. magazine on 9 August 1987, in which they talk about the pictures they receive of Terry Waite, Suzy Lamplugh, Lord Lucan, and the Brinks-Mat Bullion; the Sunday Mirror reported on 26 July that "clairvoyant Stephen Alexander" predicts that Jeffrey Archer will be the next British Prime Minister; the Star Sunday Sport reported that American clairvoyant Brenda Elliot predicted that Princess Diana would be kidnapped at an unidentified date; and the Sun published a prediction, said to be by "top American mediums," that Princess Diana and Prince Andrew would "jet off to the Caribbean together for an illicit, intimate holiday," before Christmas.

Reader J.A. Remfry asks, "Does the skeptic who gets most hits receive a prize?" Uri Geller's magnetic socks or tie--perhaps!"

ASTROLOGY SURVEY

The Australian Skeptic published an astrology survey several years ago. They collected as many horoscope columns as they could throughout the country on a certain date, and turned them over to one of their members, Philip McKerracher, to analyze. Fortunately, Philip is now in the UK, and he has agreed to do a similar survey for us.

In order to make things easier, we decided to pick January 1 (or the week thereafter) as the target date. This is when the newspapers will be printing predictions for the entire year, as well as horoscopes for individual days, and we hope to get a wide range of material to work on. Philip says that some of the most interesting horoscopes came from the local, country newspapers. So, please, keep an eye open!

IN FUTURE ISSUES

David Alexander's third article in the series, "Mediums, Magicians & Psychics;" a two-part interview with Paul Kurtz; an article proposing a biological mechanism for telepathy; an article on "Witchcraft, the BBC, and Responsibility," (Michael Hutchinson); more of Peter O'Hara's series "Science vs. Pseudoscience," and more...

Most subscriptions expire after the next issue. Feel free to renew early and give us confidence that we will survive into next year!

HOW TO FIND TREASURE IN YOUR HOMETOWN

Sun
Vol. 8 - No. 42 October 20, 1987

Man's amazing
mouth is worth
a big \$30,000



REVEALED: REAGAN'S SECRET TALKS WITH OUTER SPACE ALIENS

Psychic says he'll make planets part of U.S.

10 wives meet
for 1st time at
hubby's funeral

Magic doll speaks
& tells the future

Woman's arthritis
cured by ghost of
Voodoo queen



HE WINS SO MUCH
MONEY THAT CASINOS
WON'T LET HIM PLAY

Giant porcupines
invade town &
stab 12 people

Tot eats mom's
wedding rings
worth \$1,400

DAVID BATTERS GOLIATH

Australian Skeptics and Creation 'Science'

Martin Bridgstock

Around the world, most Skeptical activity is small-scale, usually consisting of one-off exposés. Taking on a half-million-dollar-a-year corporation with political influence and thousands of supporters seems a little out of character. Beating such a monster seems impossible, yet that is the feat of the Australian Skeptics. Down Under, the Skeptics have about 500 subscribers, with active groups in most major cities. At any time, a number of investigations are usually underway, and journalists often know who to phone for a skeptical opinion. I have been asked for views of the Pope's visit and Fergie's wedding (both declined, obviously). In 1985, the Skeptics took on a huge opponent: Creation Science.

Creation Science is part of the vast Fundamentalist movement. They argue that the Bible-read literally--should be taught in schools as science. Ideas supported in Creation Science are: that the Earth and the Universe are less than ten thousand years old and were created in six days, that Noah's Flood laid down most rock strata and fossils, and that the Tower of Babel dispersed humanity into many races and tongues. Creation Scientists are often excellent speakers, and scientists have been worsted--or humiliated--in debates. The major tactic is to quote passages or information from scientific publications, seeming to show that absurdities like evolution and an ancient Earth are not scientifically tenable. When these ideas are supported by masses of howling fanatics, the impact can be devastating. In Australia, Creation Science has had great effect in one state, Queensland. By 1983, the Brisbane-based Creation Science Foundation had a turnover of \$500,000 per year, employed about 20 people, and circulated glossy

magazines to every school in Queensland. A fundamentalist Education Minister declared his support for the Creation Scientists, and things looked grim.

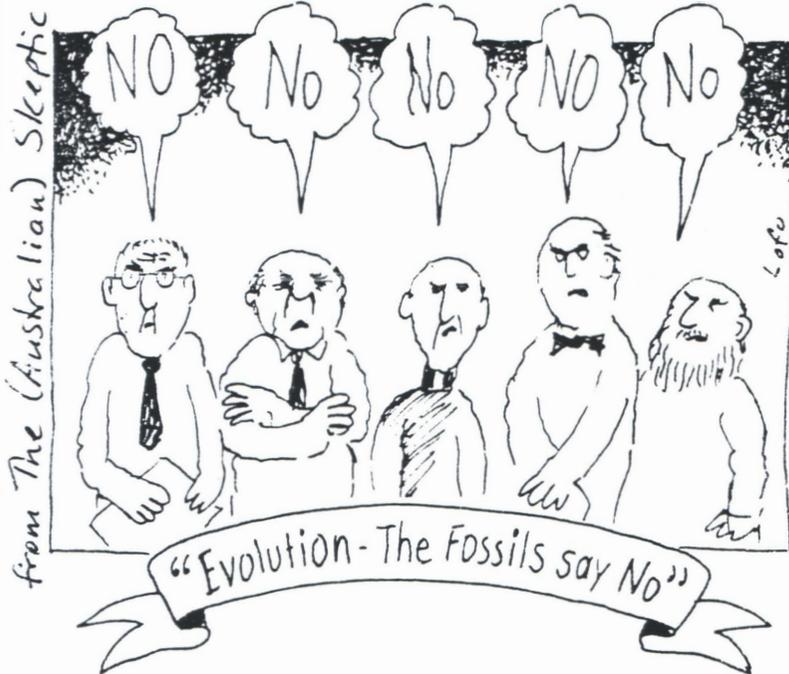
My research, in late 1984, showed that Creation Science's use of evidence was appalling. About 90% of their references to science were gravely wrong; quotes were altered and evidence wrongly interpreted. I published these results in assorted teachers', librarians' and scientific journals. The Creation Scientists ignored some, "answered" others (with more errors), and threatened to sue both editors and me. Other people spoke out with me. We were having some effect, but more was needed. Early in 1985, the Queensland Skeptics sponsored a meeting on Creation Science. A series of speakers tore Creation Science to shreds, to thunderous applause from a large audience. The Skeptics' national committee then made a bold decision: they would commit a large chunk of their annual budget to a book on Creation Science. Ken Smith, a mathematician at Queensland University, and I were to edit the book. We began writing and collecting articles from experts. Then the equivalent of an atomic bomb was dropped into our hands. Tony Wheeler, the Queensland Skeptics' secretary, and I studied the Creation Science Foundation's finances. We found that massive amounts came to them from donations, and that they had lost over \$90,000 without telling their supporters: apparently the losses were due to "failed investments".

This information was integrated into the book. On Mark Plummer's advice, we decided to launch the book in January, 1986--just as the Creation Scientists were running their annual conference in Sydney! We held press

Martin Bridgstock is a sociologist, who lectures in the School of Science at Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia. Until January, 1988, he is researching in the Department of Science and Technology Policy at the University of Manchester.

conferences in several cities, giving details of the book and arguing that the Creation Science Foundation should tell where the money had gone. Apparently their phones ran hot for days! Amid the confusion, the first signs of victory appeared: the Education Minister backed away from Creation Science. All he wanted, it seemed, was some mention of "possible alternatives" to evolution. Later that year, three of the Foundation's seven directors resigned. More significantly, the two leading lights of the Foundation detached themselves. One has set up his own organisation, and the other has gone to the USA for an extended stay.

In the USA, the Creation Science movement has also suffered reverses. Two key court cases have gone against them, and it seems clear that Creation Science violates the constitutional prohibition on mixing Church and State. In both the United States and Australia, it looks as though the Creation Scientists are turning away from the world and inward to the Fundamentalist community. The latter itself seems in trouble from the "PearlyGate" revelations. The Skeptics have always been careful not to involve themselves in religious matters; Creation Science is only a target as long as it claims scientific status. The book is now in its third edition. At the same time, a whole range of other investigations have continued in Australia. I am rather proud of the whole episode, and grateful to the Australian Skeptics for their backing and support. The book, and copies of their lively quarterly magazine, *The Skeptic*, are available from The Secretary, Australian Skeptics, PO Box 575, Manly 2095, New South Wales, Australia.



In science, "fact" can only mean "confirmed to such a degree that it would be perverse to withhold provisional assent." I suppose that apples might start to rise tomorrow, but the possibility does not merit equal time in physics classrooms.

Stephen Jay Gould

MANCHESTER MEETING

DECEMBER 9, 1987, 7-9:30pm

Friends Meeting House
Mount Street

Speakers include: Martin Bridgstock, Frank Koval (science writer & magician)
Also attending: Wendy M. Grossman, Toby Howard

This meeting sponsored by the British & Irish Skeptic and the Manchester Committee of the British & Irish Skeptics (Interim Convenors: Toby Howard, Martin Bridgstock); not by the Friends. Open to the public. For further information, contact Toby Howard, 061-748-4628.

NOAH'S ARK

Founders on the Facts

Stephen Moreton

People are sometimes surprised to learn that there still exist today individuals who sincerely believe the earth to be flat and to lie at the centre of the universe. Genuine flat-earthers really do exist and are based in California. Also based in American's most crank-ridden state are the devotees and promoters of a far more popular but equally ludicrous set of beliefs--the self-styled "scientific creationists."

According to organisations such as the San Diego-based Institute for Creation Research, the earth is only 6000 years old, fossils prove nothing, and the Genesis account of creation is the literal truth. Being fundamentalists, they are compelled to accept every story in the Bible as historical truth, thus Jonah really did get swallowed, the sun really did stop for a day, and the first woman really was formed from Adam's rib. In their attempts to prove tales which ought to be taken with a pillar of salt, the creationists resort to gross distortions of fact, ignore mountains of contrary evidence, and use the most absurd fallacies and sophisms. Here I shall examine in detail one of their favourite "theories"--Noah's Flood--which is also one of the easiest to disprove.

As historians and archaeologists have long known, the ancient Sumerians living in the Tigris-Euphrates valley were subject occasionally to disastrous floods, one particularly severe flood giving rise to the flood story in the "Epic of Gilgamesh" and, after centuries of exaggeration, the story in Genesis. The creationists do not want to know. They believe that the flood took place in 2348 B.C., and the fact that Egyptian history carried on through that period is of no consequence: the Egyptologists have got it wrong.

The creationists tell us that prior to the flood the planet was surrounded by a huge water-vapour canopy which maintained a tropical climate over all the earth. In reality, such a canopy would require conditions like those on Venus to maintain it, and the humidity would have been suffocating. One is also left wondering how all the organisms adapted to extreme cold or dryness survived or even why they were so adapted. Imagine polar bears, cacti, and penguins living together in the conditions of a sauna!

A divine meteorite disrupted this impossible canopy and caused massive precipitation. Fortunately, the earth's topography was not the same then. There were no very high mountains, so the amount of water needed was not too great. The mountains were thrust up later as the ocean basins opened up to allow the water to drain away afterwards. The creationists ought to learn about plate tectonics.

The "evidence" for all this consists of a few fossil graveyards where whole communities of living things have been wiped out suddenly and the fact that flood tales are common around the world. It does not occur to them that sudden burial and fossilisation can be achieved quite simply by local, natural floods. Nor does it occur to them that most ancient civilisations lived in fertile but flood-prone river valleys--hence the preponderance of flood myths.

Naturally, the geological record contains no record of any world-wide flood. The creationists' answer is that the geological record is itself the record of the flood! All the rocks from Cambrian times onwards and all the fossils within them were laid down during and by Noah's Flood. This "flood geology" is supposed to explain the ordering

of fossils in the strata. Organisms dwelling on the sea-floor were the first to be buried and so appear at the bottom of the record. Fish are next, then slow-moving land animals, then more mobile ones, and finally the birds, as they can fly and so evade the rising waters the longest. Regrettably for the creationists, the fossil record is hopelessly at variance with this. Whales occur above equal-sized marine reptiles; corals should only be present in the lower levels whereas they occur continuously from the Ordovician to the present day; plants, being rooted to the spot, should all occur together, yet giant tree-ferns and mosses clearly precede flowering plants, and so on.

It is not just the order of fossils that contradicts flood geology. The Permian rock-salt beds of Cheshire formed by evaporation of sea-water, the Carboniferous Fossil Grove in Glasgow with its still upright tree-stumps, or the giant fossil coral reefs over a mile across in the Silurian limestones of northern Indiana all occur in the middle of the sequence of rocks that creationists tell us were laid down during and by Noah's Flood. The mind boggles at how seas can evaporate, trees grow, and huge coral reefs form during a planetary flood.

The creationists are fond of telling us how the Ark would have been big enough to take on board all the animals, and they reckon it was about the size of H.M.S. Invincible. However, they tend to underestimate just how much living matter had to go on board. An article in Nature in December 1986 put the total number of species at between 1 1/2 and 30 million, probably over 10 million. One wonders how a family of eight can, for about a year, look after a floating menagerie of several million sea-sick animals, including dinosaurs!

It is not just land animals that would have had to go on board. The mixing of salt and fresh water together with vast amounts of sediment would have made the oceans intolerable for most aquatic organisms. Presumably Noah somehow managed to cram on board the 90 or so species of Cetaceans, though I am not sure how the various pairs of whales were supposed to survive off a single pair of krill, or how the krill managed. Plants, too, pose problems. A large supply of fresh plant material would be required for food. Where it was all kept is not clear. Seeds (in hermetically sealed containers to prevent premature germination or decay due to the damp) of every species would be needed, as plants and their seeds would

perish under miles of water just as surely as any animal. Those animals requiring specialised food would have a problem. The single pair of ants would not have lasted the pair of anteaters long, and pandas will eat nothing but fresh bamboo.

It doesn't end there. How did diseases survive the flood? Did Noah and his family all carry smallpox, diphtheria, malaria, polio, syphilis, and all the other diseases of mankind? If so, then why did they not die, and if not, then how did the diseases survive? Were the bacteria and viruses kept in little phials in the fridge, perhaps?

Thousands, possibly millions, of creatures are utterly dependent upon the Amazon rain forest for their survival. As any ecologist knows, such jungles take millenia to grow or to recover from damage. What did all those poor creatures do while waiting thousands of years for their habitats and food-supplies to regenerate?

Finally, I would like to finish with just one more little fact for the creationists to ponder. In some parts of the world, where lakes form around the foot of melting glaciers, one gets a seasonal variation in the sediments deposited in the lake. The sediment deposited in the summer is coarse, being washed in by the meltwater, and is rich in organic matter from the stagnant, algae-rich water of the lake. In the winter the sediment is the very fine clay left in suspension from the summer and is poor in organic remains. The result is an alternation of layers, each pair of layers representing one year's deposition, and they can be counted back just like the rings of a tree. These sediments, called varves, can contain up to 12,000 pairs of summer/winter layers and, because they contain carbon, they can also be dated by the carbon-14 method, which correlates with them as far back as 12,000 years.

Do those varves show any sign of a break at around 2348 B.C.? Not at all. The sequence is completely unbroken. These simple muds, on their own, are better evidence against the Biblical flood than all the creationists' half-geology, semi-meteorology, and pseudoscience in general can ever counter.

GUARDIAN MAY 87

**GHOSTS OR
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MAGICIANS, MEDIUMS & PSYCHICS

by David Alexander

This issue, as promised, we will explore the methods used by mediums to produce spirit manifestations. However, before we get down to the nuts and bolts of the various phenomena, I believe it is important to examine the mental set of the sitters and the setting they are in. This is the key to understanding how and why the generally crude methods of the medium pass muster in the séance room.

First of all, the sitter is in a highly receptive and suggestive state. Their belief systems have them primed to see and experience "spiritual" and "psychic" phenomena. Virtually anything that occurs in a séance can be laid at the feet of the spirits. Most séances are conducted either in total darkness or under a very dim red light. Having sat in more than one pitch-dark séance room, I know how disorienting and disconcerting it can be.

In order for the medium to do his or her job properly, there is almost always a cabinet in which they sit. This cabinet is usually just a curtain drawn around an area, usually eight feet by six feet, to make a closed-off cubicle. Occasionally, the cabinet is simply a curtain drawn across the corner of a room. This is usually the case if the séance is in a private home.

The use of the cabinet is explained as being necessary as a sort of condensing chamber for the psychic force and ectoplasm (the mysterious substance drawn from the medium's body) which enables the spirits to materialize. Of course, what it is really used for is a place for the medium to do his or her dirty work without being seen. The fact that many mediums allow themselves and their cabinets to be searched means absolutely

nothing. Most mediums have a "cabinet attendant" who is, in reality, the medium's bodyguard and a person who can pass the necessary material to the medium when needed.

The cabinet attendant is explained as being necessary to protect the medium from malicious individuals who would grab ectoplasm, thereby endangering the life of the medium. Sitters are constantly told horror stories of mediums whose spirit manifestations or ectoplasm was grabbed and of the resulting injury and/or death to the medium. Of course, these are merely convenient stories to prevent people from grabbing the ectoplasm and getting a handful of luminous chiffon or worse, a handful of medium.

While the assembled sitters sing hymns, the medium, supposedly in the cabinet in a trance, rapidly dons a black outfit and then slips several yards of luminous chiffon and gauze out of a hiding place and proceeds to manipulate it in various ways. What the sitters see is amazing: a tiny ball of ectoplasm sending out shimmering tendrils which gradually grow into a fully formed materialized spirit. This figure could disappear in the same manner it appeared, or it could grow, shrink, expand, or instantly vanish. While it sounds crude, the effect is quite remarkable.

During such séances any number of different things can happen. If the sitters are regulars and well known to the medium, he may "apport" something for the sitter. Many mediums will move about in the dark and remove small items from women's purses. The owners are carefully noted and the item filed away, reading to be apported back to the owner days, weeks, or months later. If the

David Alexander has been a professional magician and a private investigator. Currently a publisher and editor, he recently edited James Randi's new book The Faith-Healers. He is a Special Consultant to the Committee for Scientific Examination of Religion (CSER), and has participated in several major investigations of faith-healers.

medium has access to the individual's house on a social occasion, it is relatively easy to remove some small piece of jewelry from the bedroom and bring it back "via the spirits" at a later time. This is very effective if the person actually requests the object and it appears seconds later. Boy Scouts aren't the only ones who know the value of being prepared.

Many séance regulars are people well known to more than one medium. They have regular files, usually quite detailed, that are shared from medium to medium.

Other "manifestations" that occur are voices out of a floating trumpet that answer questions. Well, the trumpet floating is no big deal. The usual trumpet is like a large megaphone with a luminous band painted around the large end. Using his hand or a collapsible reaching device, the medium is able to make it "float" all over the place. Whispering in the end causes distortion and projection of the voice and gives the impression of "spirit" voices. I've heard of some mediums manipulating several trumpets simultaneously.

One medium was especially clever. He was challenged by someone claiming to be a magician and psychic expert. The challenge was to cause voices to come out of a trumpet after the trumpet was dusted with a powder that would cause stains on the hand. The medium accepted the challenge, the lights were turned out, and voices came out of the trumpet. The medium accepted the challenge, the lights were turned out, and voices came out of the trumpet. The medium had a piece of stiff cardboard rolled around his leg. Under cover of darkness, he removed it, formed it into a megaphone, and produced his phenomena.

This same medium had a stunt that caused all sorts of consternation even among his fellow mediums. He was offered thousands for the secret, but exposed it himself after he went straight. He was able to produce spirit voices from a trumpet while it was being held by a sitter. Imagine the effect! No miniature radios were used, and the trumpet could be thoroughly examined. The secret is quite simple: dressed completely in black and moving through the darkness like the old radio character The Shadow, the medium had another trumpet, painted black. It was into this trumpet that he spoke, aiming it at the trumpet held by the sitter. From a distance of three or four feet, he could cause the spectator-held trumpet to vibrate, giving a perfect illusion.

To materialize different spirits, the combination of simple masks and the luminous chiffon mentioned earlier works wonders. I remember reading of one medium, many years ago, who materialized the face of a very life-like baby. I understand she had it painted on her rather ample bosom.

Turning the lights on and exposing what is going on seems to have little effect on the true believers. Back in 1960, the spiritualist world was shocked by what became known as the Great Camp Chesterfield Exposé. Two researchers who were sympathetic to the spiritualist cause, Tom O'Neil, editor of the Psychic Observer and an ordained spiritualist minister, and Dr Andrija Puharich (in his pre-Uri Geller manager days), equipped a dark séance room with infrared lights and a snooperscope, a night vision device, for the purpose of filming the materialization of a ghost. The medium they were filming was Edith Stillwell. Her cabinet attendant was Mable Riffle. Both of these women were professional mediums with many years' experience and very tough customers.

Unfortunately for them, they had little understanding of what the devices the researchers were using could do. The experiment was a disaster for the spiritualists. Looking through the snooperscope, Puharich saw that what were supposed to be spirit forms of shimmering ectoplasm materializing out of thin air, were actually figures wrapped in chiffon entering the séance room through a hidden door from an adjacent apartment.

The infrared motion picture film confirmed Puharich's observations. Caught on film, dressed in gauze, were the familiar faces of Camp Chesterfield mediums, impersonating departed spirits.

O'Neil raged against this in his spiritualist newspaper and quite a scandal developed in the spiritualist community. Unfortunately, O'Neill died not too long after. His paper's circulation had declined seriously as the spiritualist churches which had provided most of its subscribers and advertising revenue boycotted him, rather than rally to his support. Some said he died of a broken heart.

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GUARDIAN MAY '87

SCIENCE vs. PSEUDOSCIENCE

by Peter O'Hara

PART TWO: THE NATURE OF PSEUDOSCIENCE

In my last article, we saw some of the difficulties and controversies in the demarcation of science. The corresponding process of defining pseudoscience is even more difficult. Let us start by splitting up the world. The dictionary defines "pseudo-" as "false." Thus we could say that a pseudoscience is something that presents itself as a science on first appearance, but which lacks one or more of the necessary characteristics of science. On first appearance, a science must provide some general statement, which could be one of two types: firstly, that some type of event takes place, e.g., "meteorites fall from the sky," or secondly, describing the relationship of one variable (varying quantity or event) to another variable, e.g. "the acceleration of a body is proportional to the force causing it" (Newton's second law of motion). Beyond first appearances, a science must have 1) some evidence in favour of the claim it makes, 2) a way of obtaining such evidence that reduces error, and 3) an absence of evidence contradicting the claim, despite genuine, substantial efforts to look for such contradictory evidence in appropriate places. But the most important characteristic is 4) that the claim is framed in such a way that it is conceivable (no matter how unlikely) that evidence could disprove it. (Popper, 1959, 1963). These four characteristics are the substance of science behind the appearance. In my first article, I concentrated on the second of these characteristics.

First Appearance and Substance: Some Examples

Newton's theory of gravitation claims to describe the movements of the heavenly bodies and the fall of lesser bodies near the surfaces of the former. This is a general statement of

the second type, connecting a body's motion with its distance from other bodies. Behind the "appearance," the motions of planets, artificial satellites, and earthly bodies support the claim. The motion predicted by gravity has been separated in experiments from air resistance and from electromagnetic forces. Repeated observations have failed to find motions contrary to the theory of gravitation. As an illustration of the fourth characteristic, although we do not expect an apple to fly spontaneously upwards (see quote from Stephen Jay Gould on p 13 of this issue), such an observation is conceivable and would disprove Newton's theory. Thus Newton's theory has my four substantial characteristics.

By contrast, a pseudoscience lacks one or more of these characteristics. Newspaper column astrology could be said to have evidence in its favour, as many readers find the advice helpful. It lacks my third characteristic, as efforts to look for contradictory evidence have been very successful: advice given for one star sign is also very helpful to people of any star sign. However, if the initial claim is taken as simply providing advice that is of use to the people to whom it is directed, then newspaper astrology fails the fourth test, because any possible outcome is consistent with its claims. In one way, it seems to predict everything, but viewed from the opposite direction, newspaper astrology does not predict very much at all.

Classical star-sign astrology is different. It claims that the positions of heavenly bodies at the time of a person's birth predict his or her future adult personality. As the twelve standard zodiacal personality descriptions are distinct from each other and contradict each other at least to a some degree, this claim is testable according to my fourth characteristic (Popper's refutability). However, properly conducted tests have contradicted star-sign/personality astrology. Another example of a

pseudoscience that is empirically testable and that has been shown to be false, is biorhythms. Many other pseudosciences persist in spite of proper refutation. There are some that have waned after refutation; an example is phrenology, the idea that bumps on the head are linked to personality characteristics.

Pseudosciences Fail in Different Ways

As I have shown, two different versions of astrology fail two different tests. I will now roughly classify pseudosciences according to the characteristics they lack, but with a warning: often it is difficult to determine which of the four characteristics a particular pseudoscience lacks. For example, while creationism looks for evidence that the world is only six thousand years old, and fulfills the refutability characteristic, some creationists say that the world was created 6000 years ago with the appearance of an age of thousands of millions of years--their version lacks the fourth characteristic. This "moving of the goalposts" is another, though not universal, characteristic of pseudoscience.

The first class of pseudoscience is cast in a form such that no conceivable experimental evidence can contradict it. This is pseudoscience as defined by Popper (1959, 1963). It includes some brands of creationism and similarly some versions of UFOlogy, where even after all available instances have been prosaically explained, the proponent still believes there are UFOs "somewhere out there." Popper saw astrology as irrefutable, but we have seen that that is not true of all versions. Similarly, belief in local or national monsters may persist despite the existence of prosaic explanations for all the evidence.

The second class have refutable hypotheses, but lack my third characteristic; that is, there is either abundant contradictory evidence or failure to look for it. They also lack either the first or the second characteristic (sometimes both), but it may be hard to decide which. Let us pick ghosts; let us be generous, and accept that the anecdotes constitute some evidence in favour. Then the method of collecting the evidence is clearly poor. Alternatively, if the investigation tries to separate evidence for ghosts from everyday phenomena (the second characteristic), then the evidence is seen to be weak. Some pseudosciences have made this transition in recent decades: dowsing has a long folk reputation of success, but proper controlled experiments by Randi (1979) and Martin (1983) avoided the major errors and refuted the claim. It is important to remember

that a refutable hypothesis which has some evidence in its favour, but which has not been tested under controlled conditions and for which contradictory evidence has not been sought, may in time become a genuine science. However, if someone presents such a theory as true for a long time without proper testing or attempted refutation, then you can at least say that the proponent appears to be a pseudoscientist. The probability that his theory is a pseudoscience is high, but you won't know until you have made a controlled test or found contradictory evidence.

The majority of pseudosciences are refutable, but sometimes after an actual refutation their supporters change the hypothesis so that it becomes irrefutable. Some of these split into two camps, from the point of view of this article, some of the proponents presenting the original hypothesis (ignoring the contrary evidence), the others retreating into irrefutability.

There are other articles listing many more characteristics differentiating science from pseudoscience, for example, Bunge (1984). These characteristics include: that pseudosciences rarely have general laws and don't try to find any (sciences do); and that sciences change over time while pseudosciences change little.

Conclusion

After reading all of the above, the reader may not feel that, on reading of a pseudoscience or seeing it on TV, he or she will be able to recognise it as such. It sounds all right, and it would take a lot of research to discover if there is substance behind it. The next article in the series will sort out the clues that lead one to suspect pseudoscience. I will also deal with the word "paranormal," which is even harder to define.

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A man whose name begins with P
Makes claims about a victory.

Great floods in northern parts are found
With loss of life, and ruptured ground.
A church falls down, a beetle calls.
And lights are seen on ivied walls.

In Afric's heat, some time in June
A strange and wondrous crescent moon.
Ere long an army tumbles low,
And governments do ebb and flow.

Great art destroyed when Sirius shows;
But new lives rise as tempest blows.
With T and N and G and 4.
A nation gazes through a door.

At year's end, creatures roam the town
Till hatted guards close plazas down

From east and north new leaders come
As countries split and then reform.
The red bear smiles; the uncle growls
While from the prisons, anguished howls.
(Karl Sabbagh)

1. The US stock market will recover, and the dollar will regain some of its strength; however, the City will suffer long-lasting repercussions from the recent crash.
2. A British Royal pregnancy will be announced.
3. Martina Navratilova will regain her ranking as the women's Number One tennis player.
4. The Sun will feature a front-page paranormal stunt on August 25th.
5. Democrat Mario Cuomo, currently New York State Governor, will be elected US President.
6. The Thatcher government will privatize the BBC.
7. Attempts to implement the poll tax will lead to civil unrest in Scotland.
8. A new stride toward peace in Northern Ireland will be announced.
9. The British government will find itself embroiled in a political scandal which will cost them millions to keep secret.
10. We will reach two hundred subscribers to the British & Irish Skeptic.

(Wendy Grossman)

PREDICTIONS 1988

1. The dramatic failure of a major structure in the Eastern hemisphere will cause a rethink of building techniques.
2. The death will be announced of possibly the "greatest name in entertainment this century." The "pride of the US," he will not however have been born in that country.
3. Towards the end of the year, a female member of the British Royal Family will make the headlines after being admitted to the hospital.
4. A toxin discovered in a popular food substance will cause the government of at least one European country to take emergency measures.
5. A tragedy will mar a major sporting event.
6. A work of art by one of history's most famous artists will be found to be a forgery.
7. One of Britain's popular daily papers will be forced to cease publication.
8. In science major breakthroughs will be announced in the fields of genetics and planetary evolution theory.
9. Adverse weather conditions will continue throughout next year, the East coast of the US being especially affected.
10. The greatest scandal since Watergate will befall the White House.

(Andrew Tomlinson)

1. Ronald Reagan will NOT die in office, breaking the pattern for Presidents elected at the start of a decade.
2. The new President will have a name beginning with one of the letters A to J, continuing the pattern A-J followed by K-Z for all elected Presidents since Truman.
3. The new President will be a white, male Republican.
4. The Tories will regularly get between 45% and 50% in opinion polls.
5. Charles Haughey will remain Prime Minister of the Irish Republic.
6. At least one new Quark, additional to the six already known, will be discovered.
7. The Gulf war will end (with a cease-fire, at least).
8. A deal will be made to halve the number of long-range nuclear missiles.
9. There will be additional regulations introduced to protect the Ozone layer.
10. Big-time psychics will continue to get far more money than they deserve!

(Madawc Williams)

All in Britain, unless specified otherwise:

1. European politician of top rank killed by terrorists.
2. River overflows its banks--hundreds die but thousands saved (Britain).
3. Ship runs aground near ancient Christian site.
4. Royal wedding/engagement.
5. South American school devastated in Earthquake.
6. Sports star charged with bigamy!
7. Worst cereal crop harvest for a decade.
8. Door key--sensational clue to major murder mystery.
9. Ancient ship seen ploughing through London streets.
10. Rare animal found to be essential for cure of disease.

(J. Alan Remfry)

1. Newspapers will contain at least one UFO headline.
2. No scientific evidence for extraterrestrial visits will be found.
3. There will be reports of Royal Marriage problems.
4. There will be no Royal Divorces or Marriage break-ups.
5. There will be forecasts of a summer heat wave.
6. Summer weather will be average.
7. There will be forecasts of world recession.
8. The world banking system will survive.
9. There will be major political conflicts between the world powers.
10. Progress will be made towards world peace.

(Chris Parker)

1. The price of gold will reach \$1000 per ounce.
2. Ronald Reagan will die peacefully in hospital.
3. I will invest in a new typewriter ribbon.
4. Nessie will farrow an enormous litter which will leave the lake, march overland leaving a trail of death and destruction, and overrun Edinburgh during the Festival.
5. California will fall into the sea this year. Previous prognostications to this effect had the date wrong.
6. Female suffrage will be recognized world-wide, even in the US. where it will become illegal for a husband to tell his wife how to vote.
7. Birth control through pills taken by the male will become accepted by the Catholic church.
8. The United States will be purchased by Japan.
9. Atheism will be proclaimed to be a religion.
10. The first orbital garbage scow will be launched by the mayor of New York City.

(Frank Chambers)

1. An assassination attempt made on Gorbachev will be successful.
2. Jackson will be offered the possibility of becoming the vice-presidential candidate for the Democratic Party in the United States.
3. It will be confirmed that at two sites in Ireland gold is to be commercially mined.
4. Another oil strike and gas strike will be confirmed in the waters off the south Irish coast.
5. It will be confirmed that Ireland will be considered part of the European Defense zone for military affairs, Europe, and will be expected to contribute to its defense.
6. Bush will win the United States Presidential election, just...
7. Iran/Iraq war will continue. The Iranian leaders will start a world-wide campaign of terrorism against everyone it considers its enemies. This will backfire.
8. Exports of Irish material will continue to grow by leaps and bounds; graduates, emigrants, money, and expertise will lead in this export market, with the home market having another poor year.
9. A scandal of political pull being used for criminal activities will be exposed within the government of the day (national).
10. Dixon will claim again that her predictions are 80% accurate for the past few years...

(Charles Miller)

1. A flying saucer will not land in Hyde Park/Red Square/Square of Heavenly Peace/name your own public place easily seen.
2. The Temple of Poseidon in Atlantis will not be found.
3. A ghost will not be seen during the televised proceedings of the House of Lords (but how can you be sure?).
4. The Maharishi will fail to fly or walk on water in public.
5. The Loch Ness Monster will not be caught by Bigfoot or anyone else.
6. Uri Geller will succeed in bending the truth.
7. No interesting facts will be received from beyond the grave.
8. Astrologers will accurately predict the past.
9. People with deep psychological trouble or need to believe there is hope for incurable ills will continue to be preyed upon by unscrupulous tricksters.
10. There will be continued confusion between the phrases "open mind" and "nothing between the ears".

(Ernest Jackson)

Redge Lewis tells the following story of how his predictions came to him while he was vacationing on the shores of Lake Okeechobee, Florida:

...Soon a shimmering apparition materialised, which disappeared if I looked directly at it, but returned to be seen at the perimeter of vision when I looked away. No speech passed between us, but its intelligence made itself known to my inner consciousness... I was now told that my mind was being controlled by one Siweledger, offspring of a Swedish father and a Seminole Indian mother, an expert in the study of Tsalpotsale, which had always dominated this part of the world and requires total adherence to Simredipe, which envelops the entire living world. Then I was warned not to attempt to profit from the knowledge of the future with which I was about to be entrusted and that the meaning of the information would be revealed as soon as I returned to my native land. A feeling of superconductivity then entered my being and I immediately became aware that:

1. In January or February next a new discovery in Physics connected with Quarks, String Theory or the Anthropic Principle would be announced.

2. In the Spring a Political Defection will take place.

3. In April an International Financial Scandal will receive great publicity.

4. May/June will see an unprecedented Stock Market fluctuation.

5. June/July will record the death of a leading world personality.

6. July/August will record an airline disaster.

7. Spring/Summer will be the time of a record Atlantic crossing.

8. Summer/Autumn will be the time of a major Medical discovery.

9. In October "Forbes" will announce a new American Billionaire.

10. In the last Quarter of 1988 great publicity will be given to the possibility of Extra-Terrestrial Communication or communication with the psychic world.

Naturally I had no idea why all this information had been given to me until I read the back page of the current B&IS and I now hasten to acquaint you with the facts in maximum detail and hope you will treat the information with the objectivity it deserves.

[Redge plans to visit the USA again next October, when he will return to the shores of Lake Okeechobee to consult Siweledger.]

A LOAD OF MERLIN

Madawc Williams

Everyone must have heard of Merlin--a name of mystery and power. There was even a "Merlin Conference" last year, and another one this year. Merlin is the most famous of all the legendary magicians. But what, if anything, lies behind the legend?

For a start, the name "Merlin" is definitely an invention. In the 11th century, the Welsh had stories about King Arthur and his warriors, and a magician called "Myrddin". These stories were taken up and adapted by the Normans, who had conquered England. The stories were good: they also made good propaganda, since the invading English (Saxons) had been Arthur's enemies. But the Normans, who took up the stories, made some changes. Arthur's warriors were transformed into medieval knights. And since Myrddin sounded far too like "merde" (French for dung), he was re-baptised as Merlin!

And who was Myrddin? It's doubtful that Arthur and Myrddin originally had anything to do with each other. In the earliest surviving tales, they are separate. (And the Holy Grail is separate from both.) There is a tale of a lonely hermit called Myrddin. An ancient poem mentions two difference individuals called Myrddin. In the Mabinogion, many legendary figures are listed as being at Arthur's court. Manawydan and Talyessin are both there--but not Myrddin (or Merlin)[2]. The truth is so obscure that we'll probably never know it. But at least we know who Myrddin was not. He wasn't Merlin in any of the forms in which we think about Merlin today. "Merlin" is essentially a fiction. He is no more an historic figure or an authentic myth than Batman or The Incredible Hulk!

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1. Triad 125, "The Triads of Britain," Wildwood House, London, 1977. Note that Welsh spelling varies quite a lot. My own name can also be spelt "Madawg," "Madog," or "Madoc."
2. The Mabinogion, Penguin Classics 1976, p142.

Madawc Williams is a Welshman living in London, and a Computer Analyst with a degree in Zoology.

THE 'ROYAL NONESUCH' of PARAPSYCHOLOGY

by H. B. Gibson

That great psychologist Mark Twain described in fictional form, in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, a situation which shows his profound understanding of human motivation. The event is described humorously, but in referring to it I mean no disrespect to parapsychologists, for indeed this moral tale refers to us all. It aptly reveals the dilemma in which some research workers in parapsychology find themselves, and which may go some way to explaining their continued activity in the field in spite of severe discouragement.

Mark Twain describes how two rascallions, the 'duke' and the 'king', entered a small town and advertised a dramatic performance entitled 'The King's Camelopard or the Royal Nonesuch', representing themselves as famous tragedians. Charging fifty cents admission, they attracted a large audience on the first evening, whom the 'duke' raised to a pitch of high expectation by describing the wonders of the tragedy to be performed. But when the curtain was raised there was no such performance, only the spectacle of the 'king' painted all over and capering about in a grotesque manner. The curtain was then lowered and the audience were told that the show was over, and would they please tell their friends to come along on the following evening. The audience, realizing that they had been fooled and had paid their fifty cents for nothing, were naturally enraged and were at first inclined to attack the hoaxers, but one of their number stopped them saying: 'We are sold--mighty badly sold. But we don't want to be the laughing stock of this whole town, I reckon, and never hear the last of this thing as long as we live. No. What we want, is to go out of here quiet, and talk this show up,

and sell the rest of the town! Then we'll all be in the same boat. Ain't that sensible?' So next day the show was marvellously praised around the town, and the house was packed again.

I was reminded of this moral tale at a recent conference when a postgraduate student read a well-delivered paper. She had spent the last two years on the not very exciting task of getting subjects to attempt to acquire knowledge of the identity of cards by means of 'telepathy'. Her experimental methods appeared to have been faultless and the results showed not the slightest deviation from chance scoring. After these two years of dreary work in which the normal obstinately refused to give place to the paranormal, this girl had apparently not lost her faith in 'psi'; she was abandoning her old experimental procedure, and was looking around for some more interesting means by which the existence of 'psi' could be demonstrated.

I suggested, as tactfully as possible, that what she was really after was to get value for the 'fifty cents' which she had expended, as had been the audience who praised the non-event which Mark Twain described. Indeed, after having viewed the parapsychological field for many years, it has occurred to me that the mainspring which keeps parapsychological research going is precisely this very human tendency to try to get one's 'fifty cents' worth after one has been misled--not by wandering bogus tragedians, but by an unkind fate which has led one into an immense expense of effort in a blind alley.

Let me hasten to declare that I do not regard all researchers in parapsychology who have ploughed this unrewarding furrow for

many years as being cynically concerned to 'talk up' a non-event so that others will be fooled as they have been fooled. The simple townfolk of Mark Twain's story were capable of being consciously dishonest in lying to their fellows, but all that we know of most sophisticated intellectuals tells us that they--or at least most of them--are incapable of such blatant dishonesty. But again, all that we know of human motivation and perception (even without invoking the Freudian unconscious) tells us that it is this very incapacity for the crude and straightforward lie which makes many of them--or should I say many of us--specially prone to pursue a devious line of conduct in which the mainsprings of action are obscured. Many people will find this view distasteful precisely because it undermines our confidence in our own free-will, and may be held to degrade us, the believer and the sceptic alike, somewhat to the level of Skinner's pigeons. We do not like to think that our own belief systems and actions are controlled by the reinforcement schedules that fate has devised for us.

All science is an attempt to explain the unknown in terms of the known, and thereby to extend the latter. Thus as Boring (1969) points out, we have the paradox that to succeed in parapsychological research we have to fail. The early investigation of the clairvoyant ability of bats to avoid collision with wires in complete darkness eventually led to a discovery of their echo-location mechanism--a success for normal science but a failure for parapsychology. Boring refers to the philosophical dilemma in which parapsychologists are involved: 'To prove that ESP exists requires confirmation that communication can and does occur by no known sensory channel. It is easy to establish one's own ignorance of the channel, but not of the universal necessity for the ignorance, which may suddenly evaporate as it did in the case of the bats. A universal negative of this sort cannot be proven. Ignorance is too plentiful. Unexplained communication always remains inexplicable until at last it is scientifically accounted for. It seems quite probable that the world of intellectual debate may never be completely without the persons who feel that they have gained something of value in failing to discover, for some case of communication, a natural means of transmission.'

The confusion into which parapsychologists are often led hinges round the difference between what is 'unexplained' and what is 'inexplicable'. Henry Sidgwick, when elected to the presidency of the Society for

Psychical Research, declared that: 'We must drive the objector into the position either to admit that the phenomena are inexplicable, at least by him, or to accuse the investigators either of lying or cheating or of a blindness or forgetfulness incompatible with any intellectual condition except absolute idiocy' (Sidgwick, 1882).

Here Sidgwick not only confuses the 'unexplained' with the 'inexplicable', but makes the assumption that investigators of acknowledged reputation simply cannot be suspected of lying and cheating. We would all like to make such an assumption, but we have suffered a number of rude shocks in more recent years which have undermined our confidence in this comforting assumption. Hansel (1966) published a critique of parapsychological research in which he showed that in many of the well-known parapsychological studies on which general faith in the subject has depended, deliberate cheating could have been the factor responsible for the strange and unexplained results.

Burt's long and elaborately defensive review (Burt, 1959) of Soal & Bowden's (1959) book on the 'telepathic' Welsh boys, Glyn and Euan Jones, makes bitter reading today. At that time critics were demonstrating that the phenomenally high scores might be due to various methods of cheating employed by the boys: no-one liked to suggest, at least in print, that the experimenters might also have been engaged in fraud. Now we appear to have lost our innocence and the dictum de mortuis nil nisi bonum has been singularly outraged recently in the case of Burt himself. Markwick (1978) has published a brilliant paper in which she demonstrates not only the fact that S.G. Soal practised fraud in his well-known experiments with Shackleton, generally known as the 'Soal-Goldney Experiments', but the method by which the fraud was executed.

I have no wish especially to denigrate the memory of the late S.G. Soal, but his case is surely illustrative of the fact that parapsychology is not simply a harmless if eccentric field of study, but that it can be actively corruptive of research workers. In the 1930's Soal spent some years in the fruitless task of trying to replicate card-guessing experiments which had seemed to be so successful at Duke University. At last, encouraged by Whately Carington, he reanalyzed all his records which showed random guessing, and what had seemed to be years of wasted effort and failure were now alleged to have been a grand success. Some

subjects had not been shooting at the target there today, so to speak, but at the one that would be there tomorrow, or even the next day! Or perhaps at the target of yesterday or the day before! It seemed that Soal had emerged from the honest wilderness of the normal to a land of milk and honey where Shackleton and others could override the limitations of space and time, and Soal became the grand old man of British parapsychology.

It is to Markwick's credit that she charitably advances two hypotheses which might explain Soal's fraudulent conduct. In the first she notes that Soal was known to be '...a strange personality: obsessive, absorbed, secretive and subject to bouts of dissociation' (Markwick, 1978, p 273). In some of his bouts of dissociation he appeared to have a secondary personality known as 'Mr X', and Markwick suggests that while Soal in his proper personality might be preparing bona fide record sheets, '...it would be easy enough for "X" to slip in a digit or two of his own.' If her supposition is correct, perhaps it was this 'Mr X' who winked in wicked connivance when the naughty Welsh boys got up to their tricks and sometimes scored twenty-five hits in twenty-five guesses.

Markwick's second hypothesis does not envisage a Jekyll and Hyde personality for Soal, but attributes the fraud to conscious 'data massage'. She writes: 'Having embarked on the Shackleton series, one may imagine the scoring rate begins to fade...Soal, seeing the chance slipping away of gaining scientific recognition for Parapsychology, a cause in which he passionately believes, succumbs to the temptation of "rectifying" a "temporary" deficiency' (Markwick, 1978, p 275). Again her charity does her credit, for she suggests that the dominant motive was gaining scientific recognition for parapsychology, whereas a less charitable person might suggest that gaining scientific recognition for S.G. Soal might have been the dominant motive.

It has generally been alleged by genial critics such as Gardner (1957) that many of the early positive results in ESP research at Duke and elsewhere were the outcome of a mixture of enthusiastic hopefulness and sloppy experimental methods. Indeed, one cannot help but be indulgently amused when one reads that the early Zener cards were so heavily printed that in certain lights one could read the symbols from the backs (Kennedy, 1938). When poor methods of experimentation were in vogue it seems that naive characters like Rhine could keep the cake of their

intellectual honesty while enjoying a meal of experimental success. In these modern days of our lost innocence such unquestioning assumption of personal integrity is being abandoned. In a review of Targ & Puthoff's Mind Reach (1977) the reviewer (Wagstaff, 1978) makes the point that: '...some of the main experiments appear fairly impressive in their use of controls and one seems to be left in the position of either accepting the validity of some of the phenomena or having some doubts about the integrity of certain participants in the research. If the authors' statements are accurate, then the usually suggested artefacts, such as unintentional experimenter bias and non-verbal cues, do seem to be ruled out' (emphasis added).

While most serious investigators have not troubled to conceal their disbelief in the factual credibility of many statements by such fringe 'scientists' as the late Harry Price or Ron Hubbard of Scientology fame, in general, accusations of deliberate fraud are not made about living parapsychologists. As mentioned before, Hansel (1966) merely demonstrated how fraud could have been employed to get results in certain well-known studies. It may be, however, that Targ & Puthoff, by the very enormity of their claims coupled with details of strict experimental controls, have given the kiss of death to parapsychology. One of their star collaborators, Swann, makes a significant link between this research and the Scientology movement (Swann, 1974), and serious scientists appear to have few illusions about this movement (Evans, 1973). It may be irrelevant to make too much of this guilt-by-association argument; rather the kiss of death which Targ & Puthoff give to parapsychology is that of throwing down so definite a gauntlet. Either we must affirm our belief in the most monstrous of alleged phenomena, or else as serious scientists we must apply the principle of Occam's Razor and come to the conclusions that Wagstaff (1978) suggests.

It has long been a feature of parapsychology from the days of its early involvement with the activities of spiritualist mediums, that while it was not denied that certain individuals had been shown up as bare-faced frauds, perhaps some of the phenomena they exhibited were due to genuine psychic powers. This is still true today and hence Mark Twain's insightful tale is still relevant. Markwick ends her highly skillful exposition of Soal's fraudulent technique with a statement of personal faith which is obviously genuine and somehow touching. she writes: 'In the final analysis personal experience is the

crucial factor. Experience alone, however impeccable, does not convert the sceptic--and understandably so. Yet once the sceptic's eyes are opened by experience no amount of revelation of faked experiments can undermine the conviction that there remains something to be investigated. One hopes that open-minded scientists will continue to investigate that something, seeking to establish its true nature, be it fact or fantasy' (1978, p 275).

The present author would say that the 'something' consists of the human propensity to deceive oneself and others, and that no amount of experimentation along parapsychological lines will further this investigation one iota. West (1962) ended his book on psychical research with a plea for parapsychology to be integrated still closer with orthodox university research and be given 'massive endowments' of funds which it had hitherto lacked. To some extent West's hopes have been realized in the years since the publication of his book. It is the argument of the present author that not only have such research funds been wholly wasted and the time of able young researchers mis-employed, but that a deleterious element of fraud and counter-suspicion has been fostered in the whole scientific research field, and it would have been better if parapsychology had been left to be the plaything of amateurs and had not trespassed on the legitimate field of scientific research.

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I MADE LOVE TO AN ALIEN!

♥ A Surrey farmer claims to have had an extra-terrestrial experience of an intimate nature. Brian Astley, 29, says he was abducted by a female alien on December 2nd at about 12.30 in the afternoon. ♥

▷ "I was powerless to resist, held in the grip of some invisible force. I was beamed aboard the alien ship,



which was disguised as a first floor flat above the Kai Fong chinese take-away in the high street" ▷ Inside the ship, Mr Astley claimed he was offered a drink called Moose-head which he found difficult to describe.

▷ The close encounter of the

fourth kind took place at about 1.15pm. He was then manhandled out of the ship and left stark naked in the high street. Mr Astley was taken to the police station and made a full report. A police spokesman said,



"I know it sounds far fetched, but ▷ WOULD ANYONE INVENT A BEER THAT'S BREWED AS AN ALE, GOES DOWN LIKE A LAGER AND COMES FROM CANADA?"

GUARDIAN 6 V 87

SKEPTICS in the NEWS

Statues on move: beware the sceptics

According to C4's Halloween offering, *Is There Anybody There?*, 59 per cent of the population believe in ghosts, and 30 per cent are convinced that the dead can send us messages. On these figures, the SDP has nothing to worry about.

After a slow start, the psychologist Nicholas Humphrey did a timely and excellent debunking job on the kind of paranormal rubbish which is all the rage in the British gutter press. The probability is, as he showed us, that the Enfield Poltergeist was a disturbed, attention-seeking adolescent; the Suffolk UFO was a combination of lights from a lighthouse and a police squad car; the miracle at Knock was a magic lantern slide projected by an unscrupulous priest; and the moving statue of Mary at Ballinaspittle is a phenomenon invented by various tricks of eye and brain; and so on.

So why do people continue to try to make claims for the paranormal? Nicholas Humphrey suggested that humans have a deep urge to tell a good story, that the notion of an after-life is an attractive one, and that our wishes and preconceptions often colour the way we perceive things.

Much the same points were made 250 years ago by David Hume, discussed last Sunday by John Passmore and Bryan Magee in *The Great Philosophers* (BBC2). Hume pointed to the centrality of our imagination even when perceiving what is generally acknowledged to be commonsense reality. He also, though a kind-hearted man himself, never underestimated "the knavery and folly of human beings".

Perhaps Nicholas Humphrey was right to conclude that "the human mind balks at reality." Nevertheless, readers of the tabloid Press have just as much right as investigators of the paranormal, philosophers and indeed Soviet citizens, to know when they are being deceived, how, by whom and why.

SUNDAY TELEGRAPH
11 XI 87

THE IRISH PRESS 12.X.87

THAT well-known animal, the Irish begrudger, has found a new companion at last... the Irish sceptic.

As if to prove that we are indeed a cynical race, a new group, the Irish Sceptics, has been formed to take a long hard look at the claims made by water-diviners, faith-healers, astrologers and clairvoyants.

But one of its first priorities will be a sceptical examination of phenomena, such as moving and weeping statues, and rosary beads which are said to turn to gold.

"We don't expect to change the whole country, but we know there are people out there who are a bit doubtful about these things," said Peter O'Hara.

The group is an off-shoot of a worldwide network which investigates the claims of people like Uri Geller, and others who say they have paranormal powers.

The movement started in the United States in 1976. It's called the Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, and has its headquarters in Buffalo, New York.

Its founder, Paul Kurtz, was concerned that people believed that ESP, astrology and other areas of the paranormal were real science.



Dr. Peter O'Hara

Having Investigated claims in areas like water-divining and clairvoyancy, the organisation says it discovered that much of what had been published as fact was more a matter of coincidence or based on flawed statistics.

It also found that experiments had not been conducted scientifically. "We would hope to pick up on some of these kind of things which worry people in Ireland, and conduct some sort of examination," said Peter O'Hara.

They are planning to interview people in connection with the various statues, which allegedly had been weeping or moving at shrines all over the country.

"We will be there for people to call on if they're worried about this kind of claim." Aspiring sceptics can write to Peter O'Hara at 1 Queen's Court, Queen's Park, Monkstown, Co. Dublin.

Sceptics eye Irish mystery

A NEW organisation called The Irish Sceptics is to investigate unexplained phenomena—beginning with reports of moving religious statues.

Secretary of the Dublin-based group Dr Peter O'Hara said today: "We don't expect to change the whole country, but we know there are people out there who are a bit doubtful about these things."

LONDON

EVENING STANDARD

12.X.87

Toby Howard's PSYCHIC DIARY

Since readers of a skeptics' magazine might not normally read the pro-paranormal alternatives, I decided recently to see what psychic literature was available in the local paper shop. Browsing the magazine shelves at one newsagent turned up Horoscope, Your Future, The Unknown, Prediction, The Supernatural, Destiny, Old Moore's Almanac, and Beyond Science. One thing stands out: looking through the advertisements, you begin to wonder why there is any hardship at all in the world when there are so many different "guaranteed" ways of going about getting yourself luck, money, love, health, and happiness. For example, there are the Mystic Stone (£10), Katrina's 4-leaf clover (£5-15), a lucky number pendant (£10), a golden rabbit's foot (£10), a "Diamond and Ruby Miracle Crucifix" (£17), a good luck horseshoe pendant (£8), a Buddha you rub for money (£10), a "luck-key" (£8), and should all these fail, you might try "Patsy, the one and only lucky Cornish Piskey" (£10). I suspect someone is being lucky with money: all but one of these gimcracks are sold by companies operating from the same London address. But there is a serious point here. It's easy to imagine there must be many people in genuine distress who yearn for the good fortune they see dangled before them in pages which state again and again without justification that the world of the paranormal is real. Is it right, or even fair, to promise so much, however non-committally worded, on receipt of a cheque?

Michael Sales is an "intuitive occult scientist" and operates a London psychic consultancy. Alarmed by reports that people were being conned and that fraudulent psychic practitioners were giving his craft a bad name, for the past year Mr Sales has been making it his business to confront and expose fraudulent psychics and mediums. He found that charlatans can easily gather information by such strictly earthly means as checking voting lists and birth certificates ("do the initials M.G. mean anything to you?"), or, given an address, visiting the area where someone lives ("I see a large house...a red door...near a school...lots of trees"). Used together with cold reading, such information can very easily seem miraculous to an unwary customer.

In my last column I mentioned how crystals and their accompanying paraphernalia were becoming big business. Not one to pass up a fad, Uri Geller has announced his interest in the powers of crystals to influence people and

"attract certain forces in the universe." Psychic News reported that at a recent auction Geller snapped up, for just £5720, a two-foot stump of rock crystal mounted on a four-foot pedestal. One rather hopes it was sodalite, advertised in the Crystal Research Foundation's latest catalogue to "help the mind to think rationally and intellectually and to arrive at logical conclusions."

Alongside the astrological phone line, "Dial-a-Sign," we now have media astrologer Russell Grant's "Zodiac Line," and Webster's Audio Publishing are running one on "alternative therapies" which includes information on paranormal therapies such as radionics, radiesthesia, and Kirlian photography.

Meanwhile, the shock waves generated by Ian Wilson's debunking of the late Doris Stokes continue unabated, many emanating from fierce opponent Michael Roll. Mr Roll sets out his beliefs in his self-published pseudo-scientific thesis The Scientific Proof of Survival After Death of our Physical Bodies. This makes for extraordinary reading, especially when the author talks of the time he met seven people from the unseen universe, brought into physical form by a materialisation medium. On one occasion in 1983 he actually embraced his father, who had died in 1967. Mr Roll subscribes to the conspiracy theory of a Roman-Catholic-organised cover-up to ensure that certain scientific truths are never released to the general public. These include the existence of the spirit world, which, according to Mr Roll, has been conclusively proved by the discovery of subatomic particles such as the neutrino and the anti-proton. Unfortunately he omits the details of the proof.

Finally, two recent items from Psychic News. The American trance clairvoyant Edgar Cayce (the Sleeping Prophet) had a lot to say about Atlantis, notably that its secrets would be revealed in a hoard of documents hidden in an underground cavity near the Sphinx. Such a place has been recently found, and the Egyptians are now considering whether to allow excavation. With Cayce's claims in mind, the results should be interesting.

It seems Lord Lister, champion of carbolic and the discoverer of antiseptic surgery, is keen to change the shape of modern medicine once more, and has for some years been guiding Hertford healer Ronald Wright. With such eminence backing him, surely Mr Wright can do no wrong.

THE PRESS GALLERY

In Ireland there has been some controversy about alternative medicine: the Irish Medical Times reported in October that the Irish Medical Organisation has voted to issue guidelines on how IMO members should "view practitioners of fringe or alternative medicines." It was reported that the Department of Social Welfare was accepting social welfare certificates from people who were not medically qualified," with the Carlow Department being specifically cited as accepting certificates from bonesetters.

Ian Wilson's new book The After Death Experience (review, anyone?) contained damning revelations about the methods of the late Doris Stokes. Debates about Wilson's information have gone on in the Guardian, the London Evening News, and other newspapers. On 30 September, the London Evening Standard summed up the debate: "For some [Stokes'] failure to spring to her own defence from beyond the grave is proof enough that there's no such thing as life after death."

Meanwhile, the News of the World ran an article on 20 September entitled "Son in fury over spirit 'cheat' Doris." Terry Stokes reportedly claims he is in constant touch with his mother: "She talks in my right ear, which is now redder than my left because it's psychic."

The London Evening News features a letter column with Anne and Peter Owen every Monday. The "X-Ray Eyes" couple use their "paranormal powers to help YOU exclusively in the London Evening News." Anyone can write for their advice to: X-Ray Eyes, London Evening News, 118 Fleet Street, London EC4A 2EQ. The London Evening News also reported on 5 October that a New Cross's Salma Tandoori restaurant is haunted by "the Poppadom Poltergeist." The poltergeist's presence was felt on the restaurant's opening night when "most of the guests were friends." And on the same day, the same newspaper reported on a "new craze sweeping London," called "rebirthing." The article says a "consultant heart specialist at London's Charing Cross Hospital explains that rebirthing is a form of hyperventilation." People interested in rebirthing are advised to contact the British Rebirth Society, 49 Chesholm Road, London N16 0DS.

Hypnotism has featured in several places: the Star reported that Dr Gil Boyne, a hypnotist in Hollywood, claimed to have

helped Sylvester Stallone, Dolly Parton, and Tracy Austin. The Sunday Telegraph magazine ran a feature article on Andrew Newton, a stage hypnotist. The article quotes Newton on his use of hypnotism in his everyday life, but points out that both Newton and his wife say, "It doesn't work for us."

Two new biographies of L Ron Hubbard have been published, one in the US and one in the UK. In both cases, scientologists have tried in the courts to stop publication. The Guardian published several stories about the British case, finishing up with a "Law Report" summarizing the whole affair. The Guardian reported on 23 October: "Summing up, Lord Justice Fox said, 'It is desirable for the public interest that these doctrines and assertions of fact should be exposed to public criticism.'" The Church of Scientology was refused leave to appeal to the House of Lords.

The New Scientist have run several articles of interest in the last couple of months: a short article about CSICOP's statement that the Majestic-12 papers (this was the story that papers had been found showing that scientists had found four dead aliens which they had studied and about which they were suppressing their findings) were forgeries; a review of Hilary Evans' UFOs: 1947-87 written by CSICOP Founding Fellow Philip Klass; a critical review of Frena Bloomfield's Ginseng: The Divine Herb; and two items in the "Ariadne" column, one a follow-up to a previous article about JAL Flight 1628, the pilot of which was supposed to have seen a UFO, and a report on Calgary's "Creation Evidence Museum, Phase 1". The former piece refers to having summarized the Skeptical Inquirer's analysis of the JAL UFO, and the latter quoted an ordained deacon and geologist critiquing the museum's various exhibits.

The South Wales Echo has been running a series called "The Unexplained." Topics covered include spiritualism, with features on a couple of different mediums, magic, an exorcism, a herbal healing of a child with Downs' Syndrome, all written credulously by Jenny Longhurst.

And, according to the Radio Times, numerologists claim "your car could be giving off bad vibes." Ivan Strafford, the numerologist who supplied this useful information, is featured on Radio Lincolnshire.

REVIEWS

MEDIA

WAS ANYBODY THERE?

Two contrasting reviews of "Is There Anybody There?" broadcast October 31 1987 on Channel 4. Produced by Karl Sabbagh, InCA (Independent Communication Associates). Directed by Chris Hale; written and presented by Nicholas Humphrey.

Leslie Shepard:

As the first really sceptical television presentation of the paranormal, this production is of considerable importance. There are great dangers in uncritical popular beliefs in the supernatural, but there are also dangers in tendentious propaganda for materialism. Enlightened scepticism demands a genuine impartiality and openness to new ideas.

In general, the programme was original and stimulating, but deceptive in its stance of objectivity. The presenter was clearly biased in favour of materialism and determined to debunk any claimed phenomena that did not conform to his preconceived view of reality. Such a stance is not impartial, and should not have been concealed by selective treatment of statements from believers and unbelievers in general.

On the credit side, the programme was excellently filmed, and the production team deserves great credit, in particular for the brilliant presentation of the Rendlesham UFO story. My main criticisms are as follows:

1) Since this is really a highly personal discourse by Dr Nicholas Humphrey ('psychologist and writer') expounding his viewpoint and manipulating material to support it, we are entitled to know a little more about the presenter! Who is Nicholas Humphrey, and what are his credentials as a pandit in this field? What kind of psychologist, and what has he written? And need he be so lugubrious about the whole business? Surely debunking the paranormal need not be so joyless and arid a task. The introduction of a Canadian psychologist (James Alcock) similarly implies authority without credentials.

2) The title of the programme is highly misleading, since questions of survival evidence are not examined at all. Logically a more appropriate, although less whimsical, title would be "Is There Anything Out There?" The clear intention to discredit the whole field of the paranormal resulted in a superficial mention of such topics as survival or apparitions, without any examination of the evidence. The statement by James Alcock that the kind of evidence that has accumulated over a hundred years is so weak that any reasonable person with a little knowledge of methodology would not believe anything like that is misleading and betrays an absolute ignorance of the accumulated evidence for such phenomena. Typical of the sweeping rejection of the presenter is the elementary error of referring to the famous nineteenth century medium D.D. Home as 'home' and not 'Hume', which is the well-known correct pronunciation. The reference to the Fox sisters, pioneers of nineteenth-century spiritualism, was similarly misleading. Although Margaret Fox and Kate Fox both made 'confessions' of fraud in 1898, Margaret retracted a year later, and explained the pressures which caused her and Kate to 'confess'. This complex story is discussed in my Encyclopedia. (Incidentally, though I provided considerable research material and valuable contacts for this programme and recommended that the Encyclopedia be consulted for background information, I did not receive the courtesy of a 'thanks' credit, which appears to me highly ungenerous on the part of InCA.)

3) The presentday craze for the paranormal in California, involving 'channeling' and high fees for dubious phenomena was also superficially covered. If InCA could sponsor a US visit, they should have done better than covering the very ordinary Magick Emporium of Nelson and Anne White. We have similar occult stores in London and Brighton. The choice of Taryn Krivé to illustrate the channeling craze was certainly entertaining, but the big names are J.Z. Knight and Shirley MacLaine. Perhaps they were too expensive to approach?

4) The detailed discussion of the Ballinspittle moving statue was intelligent, but somewhat tactless. Humphrey and his team are admittedly non-Catholics and non-believers, but it was surely tactless in the extreme to film Humphrey perched nonchalantly high up in the Ballinspittle grotto, almost in the Virgin's lap, explaining that the whole thing was an optical illusion! It may well have been, but it could have been presented with

much more respect for the religious susceptibilities of Irish Catholics.

5) The subject of Yeats and the occult was presented picturesquely, but not examined in any detail, being merely used to introduce the theme of whether it is possible to have both science and poetry in civilization. I would hope that some time we can have a proper programme on Yeats and the occult, preferably in consultation with Professor George Mills Harper, who is the supreme authority on the subject. The Yeats theme introduced a quotation from W.H. Auden about poets telling 'lies'--a colourful phrase taken out of context to lead in to a pontifical statement by the presenter 'but if we are going to live by lies, by interesting possibilities, I for one want to know if and how and when I am being deceived.' Is he condemning poetry as well as the paranormal?

6) This tendentious use of other people's quotations or statements is really a way of scoring debating points against the paranormal. A brief examination of Newton's beliefs and a quotation from Sir Thomas Browne are used via the theme of 'worlds within us' to conclude 'and isn't that essentially where so much of the paranormal starts, whether it's UFOs, a moving Virgin, or a misunderstood young girl? It's their imagination that's furnishing the paranormal world...' In fact, Newton was referring to the illimitable vistas of knowledge and science, while Browne's point was a philosophical one, better discussed in the context of Bishop Berkeley's Idealism. Again, Rupert Sheldrake, who is better known as a biochemist than a 'writer on Mysticism,' is allowed to make a short statement, which is then interpreted and refuted by the presenter without reference to Sheldrake himself, who should have been given an opportunity to respond to Humphrey's use of his themes.

7) My main criticism is the presentation of the story of the famous nineteenth-century apparitions at Knock, Co. Mayo, Ireland. The presenter puts forward a highly speculative theory of fraud by the parish priest, Archdeacon Cavanagh. Clearly Humphrey has no real understanding of the life and character of people in an obscure Irish village of the nineteenth century, and his theory of a pious fraud will simply not stand up. The Claremorris meeting at which Cavanagh was reported by a spy as criticizing rebels took place in May, 1879, reported back 3 June, 1879. The first apparitions on the church gable took place on the evening of 21 August, two months later. Is Nicholas Humphrey seriously

suggesting that a parish priest, widely respected as a saintly man (even if his political views were controversial) should have suddenly decided to answer his critics by buying a magic lantern (presumably from Dublin), installing it secretly in the church and cleverly working out how to use a mirror to project images on the church gable? How could Cavanagh have spent over two hours operating a magic lantern in his church (presumably with a long-lasting illumination source), and then rushed back to his house without being observed, so that he would be at home when his housekeeper arrived with news of the apparitions? Cavanagh's housekeeper was visiting the widow Byrne and there was no guarantee that she would even see the apparitions and be delayed by them so that Cavanagh would be home (with an alibi, so to speak) when she returned. The house is some distance from the church, and with the comings and goings of villagers viewing the apparitions, Cavanagh would have found it impossible to avoid being seen entering and leaving the church unless he also possessed the paranormal gift of invisibility. He would also have had to be extremely agile to continue to produce illusions during the presence of a commission of enquiry, newspaper reporters, and scores of pilgrims. In a village like Knock, the possibility of concealing a magic lantern in the church and spiriting it away again without detection is untenable. The theory of deception by Cavanagh, ostensibly planned and executed in barely two months, is preposterous and will not stand up. It is utterly out of character as well as implausible. The fact that Humphrey can produce a passable magic lantern illusion on a gable in Cambridge in 1987 is irrelevant. It has no relationship to the conditions of village life in Knock in the nineteenth century, when everybody would have known what anybody else was doing. It is one of the simplistic fallacies of dogmatic sceptics that because a stage magician or skilled operator can apparently duplicate claimed paranormal phenomena, the paranormal is therefore either fraud or illusion. I have no better explanation of the Knock apparitions than the generally accepted belief in a miracle, but I see no stigma in being open-minded about it.

In summary, I think we certainly need enlightened scepticism about belief in the paranormal, but it should be impartial and unprejudiced. This programme was neither. It had some worthwhile and stimulating material, but was seriously flawed by its prejudice. Curiously enough, the most acceptable statements

were those of the sceptic Carl Sagan and the believer Kathleen Raine, both of whom were humane and sensitive. In many ways, they shared common ground. Wherever the paranormal touches upon questions of religion or philosophy, mere cleverness must give way to kindness, understanding, and preservation of the best of human values.

Leslie Shepard is Editor of the Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology (3 vols., Detroit 1984-5, and supplements).



Lewis Jones:

Television has its superstitions just like the rest of the media, and one of these is that nobody will understand a documentary unless it is hung on a news hook. So we had to wait till Hallowe'en to see this 90-minute programme on the paranormal.

Nicholas Humphrey, who wrote and presented the programme, ensured our early disagreement by characterising supernatural events as "things that have baffled scientists and philosophers for centuries," and the field of the paranormal as a world that can keep its secrets "hidden from objective physical investigation."

The programme never sat comfortably under its title. "Is there anybody there?" leads us to expect a trip through Doris-Stokesville, and the question form presupposes a serious attempt to provide an answer. In fact, we got very little direct evidence of the spirit-message racket apart from the lady who performed trance-channelling--"Victorian spiritualism in a new guise, even down to the Red Indian guide."

For a more eyebrow-raising mediumistic claim, the programme reached back to the safety of the 19th century and the antics of Daniel Home. One's confidence in Humphrey's

familiarity with his subject-matter was not enhanced by his rhyming Home with "foam" rather than "fume," and his use of the fictitious middle name "Dunglas," which Home awarded himself in the hope of conveying connections with the aristocracy.

The programme chose to highlight Daniel Home's main claim to fame. "When conditions were right," Humphrey told us without qualification, "he was even seen to levitate." The graphics people were allowed to concoct a crude animation, in which we saw Home rising towards the ceiling while still in a standing position, while the surrounding spectators looked on in amazement at this astonishing feat performed in full light.

This jiggery-pokery was unforgiveable. A viewer would never have guessed that Home's performances took place in a dark room, in uncontrolled conditions among believing friends; or that all the evidence was anecdotal, with witnesses later contradicting not only each other but also themselves.

This dishonest visual ensured that the casual viewer would later remember that Home certainly rose into mid-air in full view, and that the presenter had confirmed the fact.

If you present side A of a case in specifics, and side B in generalities, you can be pretty sure that your audience will remember side A, and probably give that side its support. In this way, the programme unwittingly bolstered the psychics' case on more than one occasion.

The Enfield poltergeist was set into motion some years ago by the two young Harper girls. The Society for Psychical Research sent Maurice Grosse to investigate, and he was joined by Guy Lyon Playfair.

Humphrey told us, "An important feature of the investigation was the way everything was recorded using objective, scientific means." But again, this was a claim that went unsupported by what appeared on the screen.

We became quite accustomed to shots of the spool turning on the tape-recorder, but this merely gave us the voice of someone talking. There were also some stills of young Janet Harper photographed in mid-jump as she bounced off the bed.

Grosse gave us some remarkable specifics. "Heavy furniture started to fly around...The girl was seen to levitate by people outside in the street...The baker saw the girl floating round her room in a horizontal position, with books and toys flying round after her...As I went into the room, the settee went flying past me."

Playfair told us that when he entered a room after hearing a noise, "The gas fire had sort of stepped out of the wall, bending this half-inch piece of brass pipe."

He also referred to Janet's "actual day of puberty" (maybe his coy way of referring to her first menstruation) "--the day she went through the wall if I remember rightly...the day she was floating around, stopped the traffic, and everybody saw her in the street."

The investigators' idea of getting at the truth of the matter was to call in the services of someone who would mesmerise Janet and then ask her questions. (The notion of hypnosis as a psychological version of the infallible truth drug dies hard.)

When asked who was responsible for the phenomena, Janet replied, "Me and my sister." This, said Playfair, seemed at first sight to be the end of the investigation, "but it was not like that at all."

His refutation of this apparent confession? "She was aware, in her altered state, that she was the cause of it." Would that all investigations by "objective, scientific means" could be so casually wrapped up.

It soon became tiresome to receive all the information at second- and third-hand. Why could we not have had the evidence directly from the girls? The voice of a "spirit" heard from a tape-recorder is a poor substitute for the real thing. And direct sound was not the only thing we missed.

Those who saw these two mischievous girls on an earlier programme from BBC Scotland will perhaps remember as I do the sheepish grin on Janet's face as she produced to order the gravelly voice that kids so commonly produce when imitating an adult male.

By way of pseudo-explanation, Humphrey put forward the psychologist's cliché--that Janet was probably "seeking attention." This is like explaining away a Paul Daniels effect in terms of the magician's drive for exhibitionism.

"However we react to the accumulated evidence," said Humphrey, "there can be no question that we ought to take it seriously."

Why?

We paid two visits to Ireland where, it seems, gullibility tends to be further confounded by religious superstitions. It's just over a century since a mysterious light was reported on a church gable at Knock, and today the place has over a million visitors a year and an international airport. Humphrey toyed with some interesting experiments in the use of a magic lantern and a shaving mirror to achieve the reported effects.

And in Ballinspittle, we were shown the statue that has been reported to move--not surprisingly in view of its unevenly lit features embedded in a background of surrounding darkness. The autokinetic effect has been around for a long time.

Humphrey himself was able to experience the illusion. But the TV camera (sensibly locked on to the statue as a control) saw nothing remarkable. It was a simple and therefore telling illustration of a point to be made by Humphrey later in the programme: "It's our imagination that's furnishing the paranormal world."

We were rightly reminded that the history of the paranormal (if one can speak of the history of a subject without proven content) is riddled with fraud, both confessed and unconfessed: the Fox sisters who invented spiritualism single-handed; the schoolgirl prank that became the serious issue of the Cottingley fairies; J B Rhine's colleague and S G Soal independently fiddling the books to achieve the results each thought he deserved; Susan Blackmore's hints that Carl Sargent's ESP experiments were rigged...

For me, some of the most enjoyable moments came from psychologist Ray Hyman, posing as a palm reader and then explaining how anyone could get away with it. It was the only event in the programme that gave any indication of the FUN to be had from following paranormalist arguments to their wacky conclusion.

Here in brief are Hyman's 5 basics for gaining a reputation as a seer:

1. Get the cooperation of the subject (tell him that success will depend on him as much as on you).
2. Use commonplace information ("You have a scar on your left knee.")
3. Flatter. (In difficult cases, use the ploy "You are immune to flattery.")
4. Exploit the subject's reactions. (In palm-reading, notice when his hand signals disagreement by pulling away, and agreement by moving towards you.)
5. Pretend to know more than you do. (NEVER act surprised.)

An opinion poll specially commissioned for this programme asked people about telepathy, ghosts, dreams of the future, reincarnation, and messages from the dead. It turned out that almost 9 people out of 10 believed strongly in at least one of these.

Poets come out badly in the rationality stakes--Yeats, Blake, Keats... And yet, as James Alcock pointed out, "The evidence for the paranormal over 100 years is so weak

that any reasonable person would not believe in it on that basis."

Somewhere along the line, the programme had lost touch with the question it began with: "Is there anybody there?"

It was Carl Sagan who was finally allowed to steer us back towards the issue. He saw no evidence for a spirit world of any kind. But it was not the believers he took objection to: their illusions were their own business.

Sagan himself admitted that he would very much like to have been able to communicate with his dead parents, if such a thing were possible. This, he recognised, made him vulnerable.

And that brought him to the aspect of the paranormal that he did object to: "a large body of entrepreneurs who prey upon people who are vulnerable on this issue. And that is a scam."

Lewis Jones is a writer and editor and a member of the CSICP

DIVINE CREATIONISM

A. T. Symon

"The Evolution of Man," a two-part feature article by Colin Wood (not his title), appeared originally in *Mensa Magazine* in June, 1986. Copies of the original article are available from Colin Wood, at "Mansion Cottage," Kenwood, Hampstead Lane, London NW3 7JR.

At last the secret is out. As many people have guessed, mankind does not share an ancestor with the apes, indeed he did not come about by the process of evolution at all. No, the evidence of human ancestry has been misinterpreted, and humanity actually sprang into existence fully formed at various points around the world at the end of the last ice age, put there by a higher intelligence as part of a vast cosmic plan. Or at least this is so according to Colin Wood, whose bizarre hypothesis was laid out in a two-part article in the *British Mensa Magazine* in June, 1986.

Opinion is currently divided fairly evenly on the issue of the origin of Homo sapiens sapiens, or modern man. Some palaeoanthropologists think that he evolved directly from Homo sapiens neandertalis, or Neandertal man, in Europe and the Middle East, and from other early forms of Homo sapiens in other parts of the world. Others maintain that modern man originated in a single location, probably

Africa, and then colonised the rest of the earth over the next few tens of thousands of years.

Neither of these theories impress Mr Wood. The first he dismisses on the grounds that there was insufficient time for the development of modern man from the Neanderthals, telling us that the apparently intermediate fossil remains found at the Mount Carmel and Jebel Qafzeh sites, among others, were obviously the result of interbreeding between the two types. The colonisation theory hardly fares any better--mainly on the grounds that Africa must have been such a nice, uncrowded place at that time that early modern man would have been daft not to stay put.

We are also told that 'throughout recorded history' tribal communities have been observed always to stay within specific territories, citing as an example, among others, the Zulus. Now, I had always thought that the Zulus had overrun an enormous area of Africa to establish a tribal empire that was still expanding when the Europeans arrived in the nineteenth century. Obviously I was wrong.

Mr Wood's ideas about what would be involved in the spread of modern man from Africa to Europe also leave me a little puzzled. He speaks of groups of early modern man travelling thousands of miles through deserts, mountain ranges and the like in their drive to colonise the unknown. The task in reality was fortunately rather less arduous. If Homo sapiens sapiens took roughly 20,000 years to colonise the rest of the world starting from Africa, then each generation would have to travel about five miles or so.

Another of Wood's objections to a single location for the origin of the whole of modern mankind is that the development of the various different races requires a degree of isolation that he is not prepared to grant given the fact that early modern human populations must have been sufficiently mobile to have migrated from Africa in the first place. Once again, Wood has the wrong end of the stick. The degree of isolation required for a species to develop significant regional variations is far from absolute--witness the American frog Rana pipiens, whose habitat extends from Canada all the way down to parts of Central America. No part of this population is actually completely isolated, and yet the species shows extensive variation from location to location, depending upon the prevailing conditions.

Many more criticisms could be made Mr Wood's understanding of the issues involved in the origin of modern man, but space dictates

that we turn to the hypothesis with which he would replace the theories presently being discussed.

Now as far as one can tell from the article, Wood's scenario is something like this: about 35,000 years ago, small populations of modern man appeared at certain points around the globe, each group being adapted to its locality. Thus the African group was equipped with protective dark skin pigmentation, the Eskimo group was given a heat-preserving body shape, and so on.

The purpose of all this was to establish a global 'crop' of human beings, and hence to obtain a 'harvest' of 'mental potential' which is released when an individual dies. In order to assure a good, continuing yield, we have also been equipped with an abnormally acute sex drive, just in case any of us should use our 'mental potential' to decide not to be procreating all day long.

Of course, Wood is much more expansive about his ideas, even though he keeps pointing out that he is keeping his reasoning 'simple' for the purposes of the article. This is borne out by the fact that the evidence for Mr Wood's ideas seems to have been lost in the simplification process. He is perhaps aware of this shortcoming when he warns the reader not to doubt the truth of his ideas 'merely because they've not been expressed before.'

So, according to Mr Wood, some amazing being or other, let us call him God for want of a better name, one day decided, for reasons best known to himself, to establish the human race on earth so that he could obtain for himself a nice, steady supply of 'mental potential'.

It was sheer coincidence that there already existed an almost identical race of people, the Neandertals, who had come into existence by the process of evolution. The big difference that existed between the Neandertals and these modern men, however, was that the Neandertals, poor things, didn't possess minds. It can only have been by some sort of bestial instinct that they domesticated animals, used fire, and buried their dead. No mind meant no mental potential, you see, and they had to be done away with, even though their brains were larger than those of the new model which replaced them.

God also wanted to make sure that there would be a continuing supply of these new, improved people, so that his supply of mental potential wouldn't dry up. So he gave them an enormous sex drive, erroneously thinking that this by itself would ensure their

reproductive success.

Why did he not make us have litters of four or five offspring at a time? Why model us on the already-existing human form at all, rather than something that reproduces really quickly, like rabbits? Above all, where is the positive evidence for any of this elaborate story? Alas, the answers are not forthcoming.

Evidence and reasoning form the yardstick by which the worth of real science must be measured, and the lack of both in Mr Wood's article sadly places him firmly with the Creationists from whom he is so careful to distance himself.

A. T. Symon is an aerospace engineer living in Bristol.

BOOKS

DEBUNKING

Frank Chambers

Extrasensory Deception, by Henry Gordon. Prometheus Books, 1987. 227pp. \$18.95

Henry Gordon, author of Extrasensory Deception, is characterized by the writer of the jacket bumf as "magician, debunker, and lecturer." He is a Fellow of CSICOP and Chairman of the Ontario Skeptics. The book is in fact a selection of short essays, most of which appeared in his weekly column in the Toronto Sunday Star over a period of three years under the title, "Debunking." A few appeared as feature articles in the daily Star.

The subjects range from prophecy through spiritualism, transcendental meditation, UFOs and aliens, to psychic surgery and faith healing. Nessie gets a hearing, but not the abominable snowman or other supposed undiscovered beasts. There are fascinating stories of the author's own experiences, and a good portion of exposures of techniques used to defraud.

This is not great literature, nor is it a scientific casebook. Gordon is writing for entertainment and he allows himself the weapons of humour, sarcasm, and sardonicism. If he has a fault, it is that he descends into the milieu of those he attacks by appealing to the emotions and failing to give proof of his statements. Like Martin Gardner, he seems to take it for granted that all supernatural

phenomena must be fraudulent. Perhaps this is the difference between a debunker and a skeptic: the debunker acts from the faith that all is equine byproduct; the skeptic acts from the desire to have scientific proof.

The introduction gets us off to a hilarious start with a description of the first public appearance in 1977 of the psychic Elkonen who, according to the posters, had spent years being tested for his paranormal powers in parapsychological laboratories at the Universities of Utrecht and Cornell and at the Stanford Research Institute. This hoax, for "Elkonen" was in fact Gordon, received a great deal of publicity in Canada at the time. The reaction of some members of the audience is instructive. One woman jumped up after the unmasking and shouted, "This is a fake. I paid five bucks to get in, had to pay a baby sitter, and wasted my evening. I want my money back!"

Woody Allen is apparently a dyed-in-the-wool skeptic. Gordon gives one of his essays over to quotes from two Allen books, Without Feathers and Side Effects. One quotation will serve to give you the flavour:

"On Aristonidis, the sixteenth-century prophet whose predictions 'continue to dazzle and perplex even the most skeptical': 'Two nations will go to war, but only one will win. (Experts feel this probably refers to the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-5--an astounding feat of prognostication, considering the fact that it was made in 1540.'"

Another provocative short essay is titled "It's not up to skeptics to refute psychic claims." Here Gordon quotes Randi, who is examining the claim made by someone, most likely Santa Claus, that reindeer can fly. "We may assemble one thousand reindeer atop the New York World Trade Center and push them off one at a time to prove whether they can fly." If all crash, "We have only shown that these particular subjects either could not fly, chose not to fly, or perhaps could not fly on this occasion. We have not shown that there are not eight tiny reindeer at the North Pole who, on one night of the year, can and do fly."

If there is any one practitioner of the questionable arts who seems to get under Gordon's skin the deepest, it is Shirley MacLaine. With her unthinking acceptance of the whole gamut of paranormal phenomena, and the fact that she is making good money out of them, she seems to irk him more even than Uri Geller does. Hardened as I am to

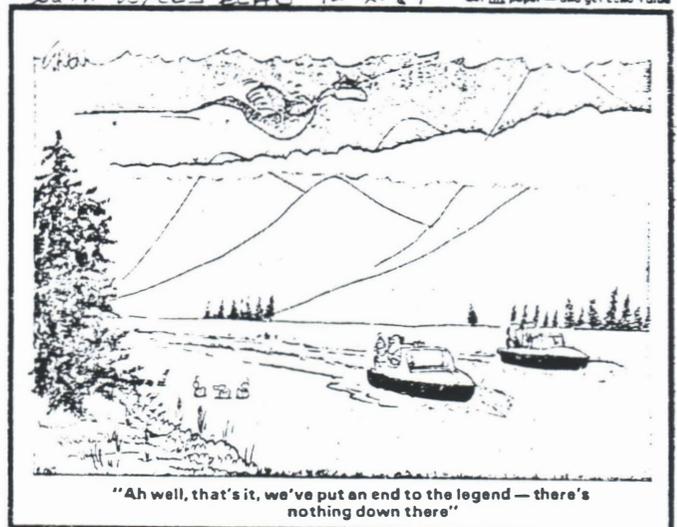
what some people will accept on faith, I found it hard to believe that anyone would buy the description in her book Dancing in the Light of visiting a Beverly Hills shop and laying down her purse only to have it suddenly vanish. Her explanation? Dematerialization.

Readers of this magazine, unless they are newcomers to the skeptic band, probably don't need this book. I found nothing in it which I hadn't read elsewhere previously. However, it is an excellent book to buy and give to or to recommend to an acquaintance who has been trapped into unquestioning belief in astrology, weeping statues, Gellerism, razor-blade sharpening through pyramidology, dowsing, and the rest.

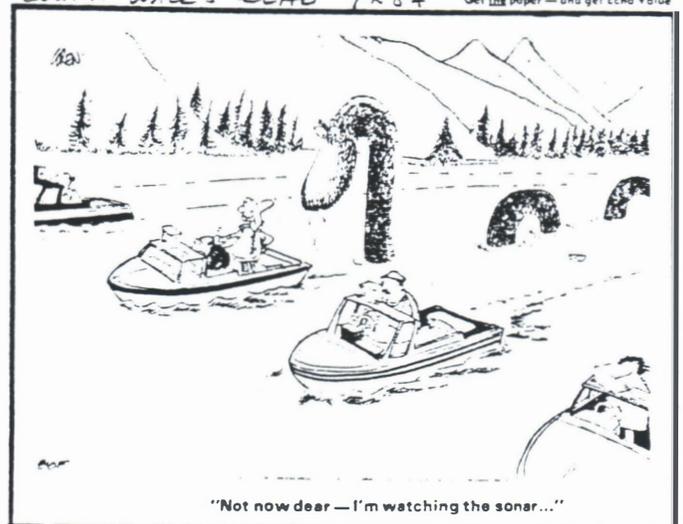
It is most unusual and commendable that the Toronto Sunday Star, a major metropolitan newspaper, saw fit to publish these essays. The editor, Gerry Hall, should be given credit for adopting and supporting the columns during his three-year tenure.

Frank Chambers is a retired engineer, a magician, and a member of the Irish Committee. Prometheus Books are available in the UK from Michael Hutchinson (see p2).

SOUTH WALES ECHO 12.X.87 Get the paper — and get Echo Value



SOUTH WALES ECHO 9.X.87 Get the paper — and get Echo Value



LETTERS

[We welcome letters from our readers. All letters received are fair game for quotation and/or publication unless specifically labelled private. Letters may be edited for space and clarity.]

Surely Karl Sabbagh (B&IS I.5, p32) has been the victim of an Noakes.

Nick Pope

After much deliberation I enclose my 10 predictions for 1988. Unfortunately, humble amateur skeptics probably lack the access to information (journalistic colleagues, knowledge of and time to study news publications, etc.) that professional big-time 'psychics' have. In an objective study, this could well taint the results in favour of the 'psychic.'

...the Nessie hunt outcome was quite clever. "They" have managed to steer myth into a new direction before the general public latches on to the implausibility of "Nessie the Monster." Next year the Loch should not only attract the tourist, but also the angler, both seeking "Nessie the very large fish." Once this concept begins to lose ground we'll still have "Nessie the fairly large fish," etc.

Andrew Tomlinson

KNOCK

From Stephen Moreton:

...I should, perhaps, have elaborated and would have done so had I known you were going to publish my remark about Ballinderris. I made inquiries at the tourist office in Knock where a local girl told me that there was a "Ballindorris" a mile down the Ballyhaunis road (that is ESE of Knock) and that a Walsh family lived there. This was the only place she could think of. I went down the road and after a mile there was a large old farm and little else. I did not get out of the car to ask if it was the right place as it was what the Irish call "a soft day"--i.e., raining cats and dogs--

and I had little time anyway. So, while it seems likely that the place Steuart is interested in is the one I was directed to, it is not absolutely certain. Even if it is and it is on the wrong side of the village, his theory is not dead. Accounts say that Patrick Walsh was on land half a mile from Knock. His home was one mile from Knock, i.e., he was not in Ballinderris at the time. It is perfectly possible that he owned some land on the other side of the village. It is regrettable that contemporary investigators did not see fit to record where a witness was standing.

Steuart Campbell:

I wish to respond to criticism of my astronomical explanation for the Knock 'apparition' of 1879.

Stephen Moreton's information...is unconfirmed. In any case, Patrick Walsh stated that he was somewhere on his land, half a mile (0.8 km) from the chapel. Therefore we do not know where he was in relation to the chapel. It might be asked, if it was (as he stated) 'very dark and raining' how he could tell that the light was 'on the southern gable end of the chapel'. Surely he could not have seen the chapel? He may have seen Jupiter and only associated it with the chapel after he heard reports from Knock. The light he saw might even have been Saturn, then 3° altitude in the east. Incidentally, Walsh claimed to live at 'Ballinderrig,' which Rynne identified as 'Ballinderris,' although she did not locate it.

Regarding the comments by John C Brown, I must say that I do not think it either helpful or polite for a scientist to describe the ideas of

another as 'ludicrous'. I am entitled to expect that any hypothesis I propose will be given serious examination. Brown asks for a prima facie case, but I have already presented that. He offers to 'make the relevant calculations' without saying what calculations he had in mind.

Since Jupiter was, at the time, about 150 million km away, its largest moon (Ganymede) must, ordinarily, have subtended an angle of about 0.12 min. arc. It is normally taken that the minimum angle of resolution is 1.0 min. arc, but the limit decreases with increased contrast and there is much variation in individual ability. If it is assumed that the limit on this occasion was 0.5 min. arc then Ganymede (and the other three large moons) should have been visible if the whole image was magnified four or five times. Such magnification can be expected in a mirage. However, modification of my hypothesis (see below) makes all this irrelevant.

I cannot explain why the Moon is not seen enlarged in mirage (unless it is due to the large size of the Moon as compared with all other astronomical bodies except the sun). The full Moon is only nominally 10,000 times brighter than Jupiter (on Pogson's magnitude scale); the surface of the Moon is not 10,000 times brighter than the surface of Jupiter. Incidentally, the Star of Bethlehem was not Venus, in fact it was not any real astronomical body. The Star was mythical, as also was the story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Venus at its brightest does not 'always' produce a spate of UFO reports; only rarely does it do so.

Leslie Shepard is rather confused. He refers to the

event of 21 August 1879 as 'unique' while at the same time imputing to me the suggestion that all the subsequent events had the same cause! I made no comment on the later reports and Shepard goes too far. Nor have I claimed that the principal event was unique; I suggested that a unique interpretation was placed upon observation of a natural phenomenon which must occur occasionally. Rynne emphasized that there was an official investigation only of the principal event and that subsequent reports remained uninvestigated and unsubstantiated. I did my best to explain the main event but if Shepard is challenging me to explain the subsequent reports then I accept the challenge.

What Shepard calls 'similar visions...on January 5, 1880' were 'a row of lights along the wall...fading and brightening' at about 2.0 am (0225 GMT) on 6 January 1880. They were seen by a Miss Anderson and sixteen to eighteen others. Miss Anderson also reported seeing a small figure near the ground. It is relevant to point out that a last quarter Moon (magnitude -5.1) rose at 1.59 a.m. in the E.S.E. (116°) and that the bright star Spica lay only 3° above the horizon in the same direction (113°). I do not know what Miss Anderson saw but she might have mistaken these astronomical bodies (or their reflections, see below). Miss Anderson also reported seeing lights on the night of 2/3 February, but the exact time has not been given.

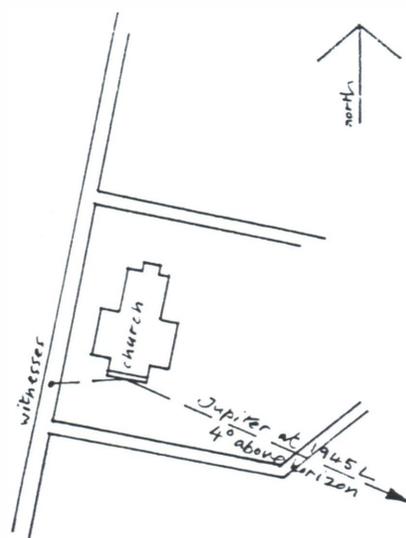
A certain John McCloskey claimed to have seen a light or a bright cloud moving in a slanting direction at about 3.30 a.m. (0355 GMT) on 10 February 1880. Again, I do not know what he saw, but at

3.44 a.m. Aitair rose (73°), followed at 3.54 a.m. by Antares (135°).

Rynne makes no reference to reports in March 1880, but she does note a report of 'extraordinary manifestations' in the church on 19 September 1880 (no time given). It is natural that after the publicity given to the main event there would be many subsequent reports based on misinterpretation of common stimuli. Mary Byrne, one of the original witnesses, told of seeing, three or four times at night, lights like stars coming out through the gable in a blaze and then disappearing. She also saw 'a beautiful light like a moon shining although the night was dark' (no time or date given). Archdeacon Cavanagh told of seeing several strange appearances at the gable. He had seen 'the light' and once, when standing at some distance from the chapel 'a most brilliant star [*sic*] flashing along the gable, leaving a train of radiance.' Sister Cusack, who became very sceptical of Cavanagh, records how what everyone thought was 'the light' turned out to be simply a very large glass stone which had caught the reflection of the setting sun! This was sometime in 1882 or 1883.

These subsequent reports suggest a modification to my astronomical hypothesis. Suppose that instead of looking directly at Jupiter (or a mirage thereof) the witnesses were looking at a reflection of it on the wall (hypothesis 2 in my original article)! I have altered my sketch (see below) to show how such a reflection could be seen by the witnesses if the wall was at all reflective (which is the more likely if it was wet). This modified hypothesis (which of course does accept

that the images really were seen on the wall, as alleged) can explain how witnesses at different positions could each see an image on the wall (although not all at the same place). Like my original hypothesis, it can also explain how the images moved with the witnesses. Variability in the wall's reflectivity and texture might produce multiple images and also many bright 'sparkling' points. As Jupiter rose and moved south its image must have remained visible on the wall provided the observers also moved south. One may wonder why the observers did not notice Jupiter itself and realize that they were looking at reflections. Could some object (trees perhaps) have blocked a direct view of the planet? This hypothesis predicts that the stone of which the wall was constructed was highly reflective in a variable manner (already indicated by Cusack) and that it was not, at the time, whitewashed. It would be helpful if this could be confirmed and the stone identified. It would also be useful to know if the wall has been altered in the last 100 years.



How the Knock apparitions can be explained as reflections of Jupiter on the wall of the chapel.

Seers saw nothing

*I have seen tempests,
When the scolding winds
Have rived the knotty oaks
And yesterday the bird of
night did sit
Ere it was noon-day upon the
market-place,
Hooping and shrieking.
—Caeser in Julius Caesar.*

WHO foretold of this week's disasters, and what do they portend? Old Moore's Almanac admitted yesterday to being "a little bit out" in failing to predict the Stock Exchange crash. "We did predict the 1929 one," said a spokesman. Instead, the 300-year-old pamphlet's current edition glimpses "a severe, global economic crash" next year. It did, however, warn of mid-October gales.

Nor did Prediction magazine quite capture the flavour of events in its outlook for October, a month of "underlying optimism".

For a more detailed exposition, turned to Olivia Robertson, co-founder of the Fellowship of Isis based at Clonbeg Castle, Co Wexford in Ireland. The fellowship's 3,000 members, who include Buddhists, Hindus, witches and the paramount chief of the Cherokee nation, believe in the psychic influence of astral bodies on the affairs of mankind. "It's why people go barmy when the moon is full," Ms Robertson explained helpfully.

She was "not in the least surprised" by recent calamities. "We can see financial empires are going to crash," she said with barely concealed enthusiasm. "The Establishment and the old order will fall. These upheavals will seem quite small compared with those to come."

The good news is that these disorders presage a new golden age as foretold by the Aztecs, who purported last August's "harmonic convergence" of planets as signifying the end of the five hells and the beginning of heaven, she said (Cortez's arrival marked the Aztecs' fifth hell).

"There is a thinning of the veil between the psychic realm and the physical," she continued. "What did that mean?" "People are becoming unbalanced," she replied, citing the Hungerford massacre as an early symptom.

There would be a rise in religious fundamentalism, spiritualism, vegetarianism and organic farming. "People are doing a flip from the left side of the brain to the right," she said. Scientific materialism would give way to the fight against pollution.

How long would the current phase of confusion last? "I should think things should be on a more even keel by the turn of the century," she said.

THE GUARDIAN 21.X.87

How stars tell City fortunes

London Evening Standard 30.9.87

Standard Reporter

FINANCIAL analyst David Pallant has an unusual line in market predictions.

He uses Saturn, Jupiter, Uranus and other celestial bodies to help forecast the fortunes of stocks and shares.

As an astrologer, Mr Pallant has turned the ancient science into a formidable tool which he claims can match and often better more conventional market predictors.

It took 12 years for the former finance market trader to correlate planetary and market movements and generate a heavenly guide on computer to the Bull and Bear markets.

Three years ago from his home in Cranleigh, Surrey, he offered his Astrotrade predictions to an unsuspecting and sceptical world.

"The reaction then was the same as it is now. 'They don't believe me,'" he laughs.

Guide

But Mr Pallant, 52, has marked up some notable coups and a couple of dozen City firms retain him as an adviser.

It's not something they are keen to advertise—certainly not to their clients.

But Mr Pallant's record speaks for itself.

One major London broker using his services said he felt like he was dealing on insider information.

American businessman Thorpe McKenzie, a former vice president of U.S. investment

brokers Kidder, Peabody and Company Inc. says that he is hoping to get Mr Pallant's work a wider recognition in the U.S.

Following Mr Pallant's advice last year he succeeded in getting a 400 per cent return on an investment.

Mr Pallant's Astrotrade coefficient accurately predicted the collapse of gold and silver prices in 1983.

In July last year he confidently announced the FT 100 would "break out" in January and despite the scorn of fellow analysts, it did.

Future

Examining the computer graphs at his home it is easy to become a believer when you see the market indexes closely tracking his Astrotrade predictions made up to a year earlier.

An analytical man who made a lot of money, lost it in property speculation in the early 1970s and now lays claim to a comfortable income, Mr Pallant remains contemptuous of more populist astrologers.

"A lot of astrologers cling to the old traditions, some sensible and some just plain nonsense."

He keeps future predictions under wraps, available on request for a maximum of £1,000 per quarterly prediction.

But he does have one dark and gloomy prediction. The end of 1988, beginning of 1989 will see a market crash comparable to 1929.



DANIEL PALLANT: Seeing stars.



OBSEVER 6 IX 87

EYE OF THE STORM: Practitioners of alternative medicine, mostly a tranquil, accommodating breed, are facing a bitter internal conflict worthy of the Social Democratic Party. But the row is not so much ideological as ideological, *Tim Walker writes.*

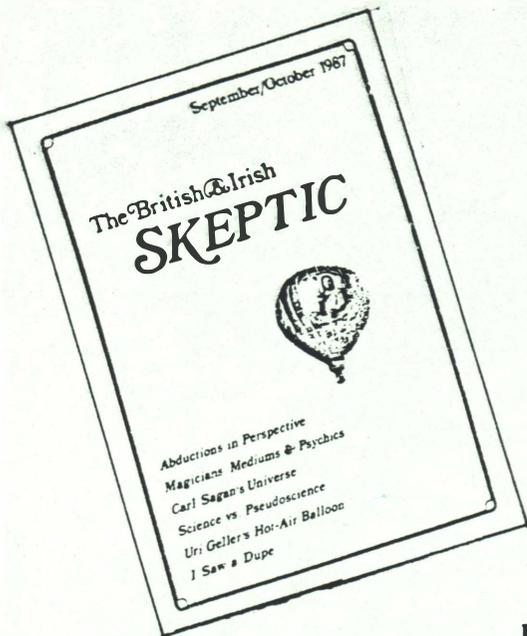
Iridologists believe that it is possible to diagnose present and future physical ailments by a detailed examination of the iris, the coloured part of the eye.

Now, a breakaway movement, led by Mrs Farida Davidson, director of the British School of Iridology, has taken the doctrine a dramatic step forward. The iris, she affirms, holds

psychological as well as physiological secrets.

It is on this that the rank and file cannot see eye to eye with her. Mrs Sheelagh Colton, a director of the National Council and Register of Iridologists, says: "It is fanciful mumbo-jumbo that is bringing the good name of iridology into disrepute."

Conventional medicine is, predictably, surveying the ruffle with detached satisfaction. Mr Emanuel Rosen, a consultant of the Royal Eye Hospital in Manchester, said: "There is a minuscule element of truth in iridology. But to interpret a man's health from his iris as comprehensively as this is absurd."



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