

*March/April 1988*

The British & Irish

# *SKEPTIC*

*INTERVIEW: Paul Kurtz*

*S. G. Soal, Master of Deception*

*Doris Collins & the Sun*

## 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](mailto:skeptics@BCO-MULTICS.ARPA) (USA/Canada); [skeptics@UK.AC.MAN.CS.CGU](mailto:skeptics@UK.AC.MAN.CS.CGU) (Europe). Administrivia: [skeptics-request@BCO-MULTICS.ARPA](mailto:skeptics-request@BCO-MULTICS.ARPA) (USA/Canada); [skeptics-request@UK.AC.MAN.CS.CGU](mailto:skeptics-request@UK.AC.MAN.CS.CGU) (UK).

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# HITS & MISSES

## EUROPEAN CSICOP CONFERENCE

Plans are proceeding for the European Conference, to be held in Bad Tolz, near Munich, May 5-7, 1989. Conference languages are to include English, German, and Spanish, using volunteer interpreters. CSICOP and the Conference's hosts, the German skeptics' group GWUP, will be surveying European subscribers to the Skeptical Inquirer for suggestions for speakers and topics. Any ideas and suggestions should be sent to: Amardeo Sarma, Kirchgasse 4, D-6101 Rossdorf, W. Germany.

## MAGONIA CONFERENCE

Meanwhile, on 1-2 May of this year, Magonia magazine is celebrating its twentieth anniversary with a UFO conference for its readers, contributors, and editors. To be held in London at the Sheen Lane Centre, SW14, the conference "will be a fairly informal meeting with lots of time for questions, discussion and general socialising." The Registration fee is £7 for one day or £12 for two days, including buffet lunch both days, morning coffee, afternoon tea, and "full documentation" for the event. Further details, etc., are available from: Magonia, John Dee Cottage, 5 James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London SW14 8HB.

## URI GELLER, 2nd EDITION

Steuart Campbell writes from Edinburgh (with, he says, "deliberate mistakes"):

Considering how much money he can make from advising mining companies how to find hidden minerals and governments how to influence their enemies (according to him), it is surprising that Guller should bother with an appearance on morning TV! Nevertheless, there he was with his young son on 'Daytime Live' (12.00 pm, BBC1, 4 Feb 1988). Evidently young Guller is being trained to follow in Father's footsteps; he was able to tell the day of the week for any given date this year. Asked how he did it, he replied that he didn't know! Father Harry performed one trick in the studio (drawing a sketch identical to one drawn earlier and hidden by presenter Pamela Armstrong). Then he held a watch in his hand and invited the viewers to phone in if their own stopped timepieces restarted as he

'concentrated'. There were hundreds of calls. Guller declared that it was not a trick and that there really was a paranormal effect. He admitted that there were some who accused him of using trickery, but they could say what they liked so long as they apelled his name correctly!

Details in the next issue of how Geller Jnr. could have done the trick.

## CRYOGENICS--UPDATE

Discover magazine reported on "Cryonics: the chilling truth" in their February issue. Would-be immortals take out life insurance policies, the proceeds of which go into a trust. The first \$45,000 pays for the freezing operation, transportating and storage. Interest on the remaining capital pays for indefinite maintenance until such time as thawing techniques are perfected--so far, scientists have been unable to solve the problem of ice crystal formation, which damages the organs. "When and if a patient is revived, the principal is his to keep," reporter Shawna Vogel explains. The Society for Cryobiology (the study of the effect of cold on the human body) forbids its members to cooperate with the cryonics groups. So far, apparently "hundreds" have bought insurance policies, but only a few people have actually been frozen. Quoted is cryobiologist James Southerd: "I pay my money to the church for the hereafter, they pay their money to the Cryonics Society. But from a scientific point of view I don't think their claims are justified."

## NEW AGE

Time magazine ran a feature article in its December 7 issue on New Age beliefs, gurus, and therapies. The article stressed the wide variety of New Age beliefs and the lack of consensus among New Age practitioners as to the exact nature of the New Age. "There is no unanimity of New Age belief in anything..." Time describes the New Age movement as "an essentially harmless anthology of illusions."

## DEATH OF A NESSIE-HUNTER

Steuart Campbell writes:

On 14 December 1987, Nessie-hunter Tim Dinsdale died of a heart attack. He became

## SPECIAL REPORT:

# Doris Collins and the Sun

Wendy M. Grossman

In mid-January the Sun ran another in its series of psychic extravaganzas. In the past, these have included an amateur psychics' contest (readers were to submit six predictions for the ensuing six months, and the most successful won a prize of some sort), and an effort by Uri Geller to project his psychic powers over all of Britain. This latter project was notable because Geller was to have gone up in a hot-air balloon; the winds proved too strong, and he ended up going up in a helicopter to psychically project a drawing to all of Britain's population at a specified hour (see B&IS II.1 and I.5 for reports).

This time round it was Doris Collins' turn. At 8 pm on the date specified, readers were to spread out a large picture of Doris Collins, printed in the Sun, dim the lights, look into the eyes in the photograph, and then call the Sun to report what happened. Doris Collins would be on hand to interpret it.

As usual, all sorts of things happened which bore supernatural interpretations. What is of interest here, however, is something which happened that did not bear a supernatural interpretation--and probably was something Doris Collins and the Sun didn't count on, either.

South London businessman Gerald Fleming first called, and then wrote to the Sun on 16th January: "I will pay £250,000 jointly to the Sun and Doris Collins if she can successfully demonstrate her claimed abilities of psychic healing and receiving messages from the dead. Any demonstration has to be done under controlled scientific conditions agreeable to all parties.

"If Mrs Collins achieves positive results the payment will be made without further conditions as to how it is to be split between your newspaper and Mrs. Collins, although it would of course be preferable that it is

distributed to one or more charities of your choice.

"Although not mentioned in Saturday's telephone conversation, I would be interested to know if, in order to show the Sun's good faith in its continuing support of Doris Collins it will agree to pay £50,000 to any charity of its choice if Mrs. Collins is unable to produce positive results under controlled conditions."

On March 7 Fleming issued a press release which was sent to all the major newspapers. The Sun had never answered his offer, even though he wrote a month later to follow it up. In view of this, he said. "I now consider myself free to issue this public statement of the facts: that the Sun and its resident 'medium' have rejected a gift of a quarter of a million pounds on behalf of charity."

Fleming added. "The Sun is currently promoting Doris Collins, a self-styled "psychic." This newspaper has been publishing Doris Collins' alleged messages from dead people to its readers. Some samples of the offered communications: 'Dennis sends his love.' 'She knows you are upset.' 'Little Daniel is all right.' 'Mum understands.'

"I feel strongly that this kind of fraud should be exposed. Grief-stricken and recently-bereaved people are especially open to this kind of deception. The Sun's promotion of this so-called 'healer and medium' encourages vulnerable people to take the claims seriously, and to pay sometimes considerable sums of money to others in the same line of business, only to be duped again."

Fleming also points out that in the past Collins had refused an £10,000 challenge from magician Paul Daniels.

See "Skeptics in the News," p 18 this issue, for two press write-ups of Fleming's offer. And, no doubt, in six months' time, see the Sun for another psychic extravaganza.

famous in June 1960 when the BBC broadcast his film taken at Loch Ness in April of that year, which he claimed showed the monster. He wrote several books about that and subsequent hunts for Nessie, and he toured the world lecturing and showing the film. The film received quasi-official endorsement in 1966, when the RAF Photo-interpretation Unit reported that the object in the film 'probably is an animate object'. In 1986 I showed that the object was probably a powered fishing dinghy and that the RAF had made a serious error. I was informed that Dinsdale had drafted a rebuttal, but this was never published. In an obituary in Nessletter No. 85, Nessie-buff and TV newsreader Nicholas Witchell wrote that 'some scoffed' at Dinsdale's film and that 'they have their successors today'. Does he mean me?

### PSYCHIC MAFIA

Reader Gerald Fleming sent in a clipping from the South London Press from Friday February 5, 1988. In "Psychic mafia exposed," reporter John Fennessy tells of "spiritualist" Mike Sales, who "claims he found 51 fake mediums among the 67 he checked out in Battersea, Streatham, and Brixton last year." The article (see excerpts in The Press Gallery, pp 30-31, this issue) includes some good stuff on common "tricks of the trade," although the basis for its claims that the fraudulent psychics are organized into a "mafia" is unclear. Thanks to Gerald Fleming for sending it in.

### MARIE-SIMONE

Rachel Winston writes from Dublin:

After seeing Marie-Simone's ad in B&IS II.1 and in a couple of tabloids, I got curious. The ads said to write in for a horoscope, send some stamps if you could, but write even if you couldn't. I wrote--but didn't enclose any stamps.

I got back a 4-page leaflet, on green paper, printed in blue, red, and gold: "7-Element Trilogy Futurescope with 15,000 words of predictions [sic] and directions covering, by date, every single day of the year ahead, rising-sign, mid-heaven and birth moon-position researched, revealed and reported upon; 'star-cast lucky numbers'; Jupiter, the 'money-plant', log-book and the Great Tibetan 'money-magent' charm the famous 'Talli' on 24" golden necklace, with

full history of 'Talli'. The gist of the text seems to be that to me, as a Piscean, she will sell the above-mentioned stuff for £15.

I also received a small, mimeographed sheet labeled "From my personal office". The leaflet includes predictions for a few days in the near future. I didn't actually read the leaflet until after the dates had passed, and all the predictions are vague enough that they didn't ring any bells after the fact. I did notice that the "personal" leaflet did not include any references to specific signs, which leads me to suspect that she sends the same leaflet to everyone who writes within a certain period. The four-page one was obviously printed in bulk, and has my star-sign repeated all over it; one must therefore assume she has twelve lots of those. I also noted that the address on the envelope was printed by spirit-process machine, which leads me to expect I will hear more from Marie-Simone, even if I don't send her £15.

"To review you as a Piscean: one who is rational, intelligent, and intuitive. You should be broad-minded...but this could simply be a showing of indifference. You are loyal and faithful but your sometimes dispassionate nature can be a source of conflict. But again this can be quite different."

Are you a Pisces, too? Does this ring any bells? And, most important, does this read any differently to you when I now tell you I'm actually an Aquarian, and this is her Aquarius horoscope?

If anyone else wants to try Marie-Simone's service, for purposes of comparison, her address is Zodiac Lodge, 2 Lind Road, PO Box 57, Sutton, Surrey.

### SHROUD OF TURIN

A lot of controversy is being reported in the skeptical newsletters from around the world over the carbon-testing of the Shroud of Turin. The Vatican announced recently they were reducing the number of labs involved from seven to three, and it is thought this will create serious problems with the accuracy of the test.

### IN PASSING

"If God had meant us to vote, He'd have given us candidates."

--U. Utah Phillips

## UFOs

There has been an astonishing flurry of UFO stories in the press. There have been UFO sightings reported in London, Manchester, Sheffield, and Australia. Careful reading of the press reports suggests non-extraterrestrial solutions to most of these cases. UFOlogist Jenny Randles, writing in the Guardian on February 17, tallies the number of UFO stories in the British press since the beginning of the year at 160, and says this is "roughly five times more than in any similar period during the past ten years."

The Star, however, outdid all the other newspapers with a series of alarmist reports, claiming the aliens had landed (including a piece, "21 things you didn't know about the aliens"), stories of cars being taken away in UFOs, and, on February 15, claiming a "great stone face" had been discovered on Mars and "scientists are hysterical about it."

On February 16, The Liverpool Echo ran an article condemning the Star for "blatant sensationalism aimed at selling newspapers." Reporter Joe Riley pointed out that the photograph was twelve years old, reversed from the original, and enhanced. In fact, according to scientist Leigh Gold, who is quoted in the article: "Quite clearly this has been shown to be the result of bombardment by meteors..." Thanks to C.L. Torrero for sending in the clipping, and congratulations to the Liverpool Echo for a good job of skeptical reporting. Their final advice: "throw the Star into the fire--and call it the Sun."

## TV EVANGELISM

Yet more scandals are being unearthed in America's TV evangelist circles. The latest idol to fall off his pedestal is Jimmy Swaggart, who confessed unidentified sins in a tearful sermon from his TV pulpit in February. Swaggart was considered the most popular of the TV evangelists, and had personally been involved in the downfalls of fellow evangelists Jim and Tammy Bakker and Marvin Gorman last year.

## ATLANTEANS

Steuart Campbell writes:

The Scots Magazine for October, November, and December 1986 contained letters from me condemning belief in ley

lines, inter alia. After finding copies of these issues, in November 1987 Elizabeth Forrest of the Jason Healing Foundation in Thurlaston (near Leicester) wrote to me. She told me that those who work with and believe in Ley Lines (sic) 'know of their existence' and 'know that the time has nearly come when the purpose for which they were created will be made known'. She told me that 'the time is at hand' and that I would read and hear about them 'in and on the media'. She asked me to put her letter aside for a few weeks 'as very soon the medium from the group to which I belong The Atlanteans of Runnings Park West Malvern will bring the messages through on all subjects relevant to helping man to restore harmony balance and health to the Earth' (original punctuation).

Apparently Elizabeth Forrest is the only member of the Jason Healing Foundation (although soon there will be others). She claims to be a medium who hears 'voices' and can perform 'automatic writing' (she gave me a spirit message in a subsequent letter). She also believes that her power comes from the ley line under her house.

The Atlanteans of Runnings Park (Croft Bank, West Malvern, Worcestershire) is a group consisting of four families who, in 1981, sold their separate homes in Cheltenham to buy Runnings Park, a group of dwellings around a quadrangle and set in 17 acres (6.88 ha.) on the west slope of the Malvern Hills. Naturally it is believed to lie on a ley line. The Atlanteans have converted the building to provide hotel and conference facilities.

Prominent among the Atlanteans is Tony Neate, who has worked 'as a sensitive' for over 30 years and on whose philosophy The Atlanteans was founded. Forrest says that he is now head of all healing groups in the UK. He is one of the founder/tutors of the College of Healing (also at Runnings Park), a council member of the College of Psychic Studies and, following the retirement of Sir George Trevelyan, Chairman of the Wrekin Trust. Neate sells vitamins and dietary supplements and is committed to a holistic approach to the treatment of cancer.

The Atlanteans publish a bi-monthly magazine (The Atlantean), edited by Ann Neate. The issue I have seen contains articles on the Chakric healing system, initiation and rituals, meditation, astrology, ley lines, near-death experiences, diet, and psychic sensitivity! Atlantean philosophy offers 'a sensitive and compassionate approach to life on all levels based on the principles of love, tolerance and

understanding'. It attempts to explain man's existence and 'his role in relation to nature and all forms of life within the cosmos' and is based on the concept of universal consciousness, the existence of an Ultimate Force (sic) and 'an evolutionary pattern in which the natural process of spiritual expansion eventually leads all creation back to its fountain source, the Godhead!' You have been warned.

### DOWSING

Denys Parsons sent a clipping from The Lancet, November 14, 1987, in which he had the following letter published:

"SIR--Dr Eastwood (Sept 19, p676) claims that a pendulum rotates clockwise when he holds it over the south pole of a magnet and anticlockwise over a north pole; that, using a pendulum, he found "small magnets" in the face, upper abdomen and limb joints; that rods held by him converge when pointed towards the earth's magnetic pole and diverge when pointed towards the south; and that he can detect the magnetic meridian through 360° by raising his outstretched arm. None of these tests were done under double-blind conditions. Were he to arrange to conduct double-blind tests of his claims he would find that the results present a fine testimonial to the laws of chance.

"Vogt and Hyman<sup>1</sup> concluded: 'We don't have to resort to prejudice to dismiss waterwitching [the American term for dowsing] as invalid; the evidence for it, when assembled and examined, is not merely insufficient according to current scientific standards, it is appallingly negative.'

"Eastwood refers to work by others on dowsing stimuli associated with high-tension cables. In 1979, under the heading Dowsing Works. That Much is Certain, New Scientist published an article by Anthony Hopwood<sup>2</sup> who claimed that he could reliably detect the presence or absence of a voltage in an overhead wire. His tests were done solo, but Hopwood readily agreed to double-blind tests by a team of three scientists. In 250 trials with his dowsing rods Hopwood gave 121 correct responses and 129 incorrect responses--ie, no better than chance.<sup>3</sup>"

1. Vogt EZ, Hyman R, Water witching USA. University of Chicago Press, 1979.
2. Hopwood A, New Scientist 1979; Dec. 20/27: 948.
3. Cherfas J, New Scientist 1981; Oct 22: 262.

### LEGAL CASES

The Ithaca Journal reported in February on a local case involving a child suffering from a terminal illness whose parents refused orthodox medical treatment. The parents believed firmly in alternative therapies; social services in the area applied for a court order to prevent the child's death for the parents' beliefs.

In the Meantime, in the Irish Times on March 10, a report is made of a suit against hypnotist Paul Goldin. Six people are claiming that his six-day course failed to cure their stammering, and subsequently he failed to honor his money-back guarantee. On behalf of the defendant, three witnesses testified that his course had cured their stammers. We await further reports of the case. Thanks to Peter O'Hara for bringing it to our attention.

We should note further that Paul Goldin continues to advertise his services in the Irish Times and elsewhere.

INSTITUTE OF PSYCHOPHYSICAL RESEARCH  
118 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6JU

#### Appeal for Cases of Ostensible Psychokinesis

The Institute of Psychophysical Research is launching an appeal for first-hand accounts of incidents in which a physical object appeared to behave in a way which seemed inexplicable in terms of the current laws of physics.

The behaviour in question may involve the motion of an object, or a deformation or breakage, or the disappearance or appearance of an object.

The behaviour may have been observed while it was actually in process, or it may have been found to have occurred without being observed while happening.

There is evidence to suggest that incidents of this kind are more common than is generally thought to be the case. While it is not clear yet what the explanation might be for such events, it may be of considerable interest and importance to find out more about this phenomenon.

All letters received will be treated in strict confidence and correspondents' names will not be used in any published material. Please write to the Chief Research Officer at the above address.

RADIO TIMES 27. II. 4. II. 88

# EUROPEAN REPORT

## THE NETHERLANDS

Volume I, Number 1, of the Dutch group's magazine Skepter has just arrived, and it looks great--the sort of print quality you don't expect from a group until it's been going for a while. (By comparison, the B&IS looks like a poor relation.) With it we received a short English synopsis.

According to the synopsis, the magazine includes articles by Prof. C. de Jager, the chairman of Skepsis (the Dutch group), Bert van Gelder, Skepsis secretary, and Prof. Dr. C.M. Braams, research coordinator for Skepsis, as well as reviews of Randi's The Faith-Healers and Susan Blackmore's Adventures of a Parapsychologist. The articles focus on the distinction between science and para-science, the scientific method, and the nature of skepticism.

J.W. Nienhuys, Jr., sent in his own synopses of the articles, and sums it up this way: "Everything indicates that the Skepsis foundation prefers balanced, low-keyed subject treatment; subjective remarks only at the end of exposés, phrased in such a way that doubting or hesitating readers cannot be offended."

Nienhuys writes that van Gelder stresses in his article the need to avoid the kind of animosity with which CSICOP has been attacked. Van Gelder suggests ways to avoid attracting this kind of animosity: be as diverse as possible, try to avoid polarising people, and attract experts of a wider variety of fields.

Skepsis already has fifty volunteers to research paranormal claims, and they are forming a subcommittee to prepare guidelines for these activities.

Thanks to J.W. Nienhuys for doing the translating, and congratulations to Skepsis for producing such an impressive first issue.

## SPAIN

Luis Alfonso Gamez Dominguez sent us a large batch of Spanish clippings from Bilbao. Several of these have to do with Uri Geller: La Alternativa Racional (the Spanish group) are reported to have claimed Uri Geller's methods are those of illusionists; the group were objecting to having been refused permission to participate in Geller's November television appearance. These articles were based on a press release issued by La

Alternativa Racional a las Pseudociencias.

Other articles include a skeptical article about the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin, and a long article from Algo, a Barcelona magazine, about James Randi's investigations of Peter Popoff and other charlatans, as well as his £10,000 offer.

It is obvious that the Spanish group are having some success at getting the skeptical point of view represented in the Spanish press. They are also expanding considerably from the small group we met last summer. As of 12 March, they are now a nationally registered non-political organization. They now have representatives in nine Spanish cities. Congratulations to them.

The latest copy of La Alternativa Racional, March 1988, has arrived, and it contains articles on Occam's Razor; Paranormal Phenomena; the Majestic-12 case; the Catholic religion, the Devil, and pseudoscience; as well as book reviews, an editorial, etc..

## AND ELSEWHERE...

It's not Europe, we know that, but interesting things have been going on in India and China. Five representatives of CSICOP (Paul Kurtz, James Randi, Philip Klass, James Alcock, and Kendrick Frazier) are touring China to learn about Chinese science, technology--and pseudoscience.

In one of its recent mailings, CSICOP enclosed copies of cuttings from Mark Plummer's visit to India this summer. The chairman of the Bangalore skeptics' group, B. Premanand, was written up in Imprint magazine in October, 1987. Premanand shows reporter Minnie Vaid-Fera "Five ways to become a godman"; Vaid-Fera sums up the difficulties Premanand faces: "...not merely exploitive godmen, whose nefarious deeds can be easily detected, but an entire system in which people want to believe in miracles." In 1986, Premanand took Said Baba to court for violating the Gold Control Act. The petition was dismissed. The Bangalore Science Forum (as the skeptics' group is called) have published a book including many articles from the Skeptical Inquirer.

# IN PROGRESS

## RENEWALS

Most people renewed their subscriptions promptly, and the B&IS looks in good shape for 1988. A few sent in donations, and we thank all of you, especially Gerald Fleming.

## HELP WANTED

We need help. First and foremost and most immediate, we need to find a reasonably-priced printer to produce the B&IS. Our most consistent problem has been poor print quality. We will be grateful for any suggestions. In addition, we are still looking for someone who could draw cartoons or illustrations for us. And finally, Wendy M. Grossman would like to be replaced as Editor. The Editor, who founded the B&IS, at the moment: attracts articles, writes Hits & Misses, and the Press Gallery, and In Progress, and occasional reviews, etc., where needed; typesets and pastes up the pages; gets the magazine printed (through this issue on a home photocopier); collates, staples, and folds it; maintains the mailing list; stuffs magazines in envelopes and then takes the whole load to the post office and then deals with the correspondence. It is presumed that a new Editor would not be so foolish. What we really need is a committee. Volunteers, please!

## SALES

Toby Howard in Manchester has been selling single issues of the B&IS through the University of Manchester Bookshop and through the e-mail network. We can't afford to try too many new places at once, but we would be glad to hear from anyone who knows of a good outlet for us to try.

## IN FUTURE ISSUES

Thanks to all of you who keep sending in articles, reviews, clippings, etc. To those of you who don't, we'd be glad to hear from you. In hand we have: Part Two of the Paul Kurtz interview; an article on science and pseudoscience by Sven Ove Hansson (the Swedish chairman); a review of hypnotist Peter Casson by Michael Heap; a piece on

Findhorn by Stuart Campbell; a reply to Gordon Gray's Telepathy: A Mechanism by Stephen Donnelly.

Our last few issues have all been 40 pages each; this one is only 32. Partly, this is because we are going to have to switch to commercial printing, and we want to be sure we can afford to print six issues this year. And partly, this is because the editor is finding it hard to keep up with everything. See "Help Wanted" above.

## CLIPPINGS

A couple of people have asked what happens to all the clippings that get sent in. Some of them get written up in this august publication; some of them get sent on to CSICOP; at least one copy of each clipping gets put into the files here, so they will be available for researchers, etc.

# INTERVIEW: Paul Kurtz

Wendy M. Grossman

## Part One

[Paul Kurtz is chairman of the Buffalo, NY-based Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), editor of the humanist magazine *Free Inquiry*, President and editor-in-chief of Prometheus Books, and a professor of philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is author of 27 books, the most recent of which is The Transcendental Temptation (reviewed in B&IS I.2). I interviewed him at his home on September 21st, 1987.--wg]

WG: It seemed to me that the three general areas that would be of most interest in Britain and Ireland would be, first of all, the connections you have to Britain and Ireland--the organizations you're involved with--and second of all, the kinds of things you would like to see the British & Irish skeptics accomplish, and third of all, particularly in Ireland, the relationship that you see between skepticism and humanism. In Ireland that's very much an issue. It even came up at Mark Plummer's public meeting--what is your attitude toward God, what do you think about religious miracles. And what we said was, anything that can be investigated now is fair game. But still, I think it would very interesting to hear you talk about it.

PK: Well, my interest in the British Isles is longstanding, and particularly having been a young GI in the Second World War and having served in the US Army and being based north of London. I don't remember now exactly where--the Midlands--during the war. And I used to go to London every weekend I could. And so that went on for several months before we went over to the Continent--I was shipped there during the

Ardennes battle. And then, I've always remembered how much Hyde Park influenced me, because I wandered into Hyde Park and I couldn't get over the fact that here were these people standing on soap boxes and in particular there were pacifists who were arguing that they should not oppose the Nazis. And I went from place to place. You had communists, socialists, anarchists, reactionaries, every point of view expressed, and that sense of freedom of speech and commitment to democracy at that time enormously impressed me. But I've been back to Britain practically every other year since, although there was a hiatus after the war. I have always worked closely with British colleagues, because I think that Britain is vital in the intellectual world, in science and philosophy and the arts and literature, and has a very important role in influencing American thought and conduct. And I've been to all the far reaches of the empire, from Canada to South Africa to Australia to India and have always been impressed by the impact of the British on the world. Now, I've not really had the same close affinity with Ireland. I've never been to Ireland, actually.

WG: Well, we'll have to change that. I'm always amazed because Britain is so small, and yet it's affected the entire world.

PK: Astounding, the impact. When I grew up as a young man, they said, the sun never set on the Empire, and the Colonial Empire was really quite a sight to see. And who would have imagined that a few short years after the war that would totally disappear--that's quite a change, from Britain at the center to Britain returning home, more insulated and

insular. But my relation to Britain is ever since, because I've been Vice-President of the Rationalist Press Association, and I've been member of the British Humanist Association, and the National Secular Society. And then we've got a publishing arrangement between Pemberton Books and the Rationalist Press Association and Prometheus. They import our books and we import theirs. Over the years we've co-published many books. The key point is that in psychical research the British are vital--the Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882, and the intense interest of British scholars in the whole area of psychical phenomena is fundamental. And then I've been so influenced by British philosophy, particularly by the empiricists that I feel that Britain is my second land. Locke, Bacon, Berkeley, Hume, John Stuart Mill was a commanding influence on my thought, Bertrand Russell, down to the present, so that we are truly intellectual, cultural colleagues, British and Americans. And that's why I think it's terribly important that the skeptical critique keep alive in Britain. In fact, that's where I got my skepticism. My skepticism comes largely from Scotland, from David Hume, who was the greatest of the Scottish philosophers, the influence of Hume, and the Irishman Bishop Berkeley, too, who was a great philosopher in the 18th century. So that impact, and particularly the impact of David Hume--if you cannot find evidence or observations to support a hypothesis then you ought not to accept it. So I became committed to an empiricist or experimental program of testing knowledge.

WG: Sounds like Conan Doyle, too--he was Scottish as well.

PK: He said something similar?

WG: Well, Sherlock Holmes did--"when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth".

PK: Yes, but Conan Doyle was very naive about the paranormal. He accepted practically everything uncritically.

WG: It's fascinating, because Holmes was so rational.

PK: Holmes was, yes. But not Doyle himself, who was very naive. He even believed in the Cottingley Fairies, the Fox Sisters...



WG: Maybe he had a weakness for young girls.

PK: Maybe. That's a good point. Yes, maybe. When the Fox Sisters were claimed to be frauds because they were cracking their knuckles on the wooden floor, he said these may have been ectoplasmic rods coming out of their knuckles.

WG: I had an interesting conversation with Leslie Shepard--it was about the Cottingley Fairies women, one of them had said yes, the pictures were frauds, but they really did see fairies.

PK: I see.

WG: And he said, well, you know, that's a very interesting statement, and I said, Yes.

PK: How do you corroborate that, verify it? That's the whole problem. CSICOP is interested in objective inquiry, it wants to be fair-minded, open-minded, it wants to submit any claims to testing, it doesn't want to foreclose investigation, it doesn't want to be dogmatic, it doesn't want to turn skepticism into an 'ism' in the worst sense. That's why it's terribly important that the Americans keep in close ally with the British, and therefore, the kind of debate between British

and Irish skeptics and scientists with American skeptics and scientists is very crucial, and we must constantly leave the door open. That's why we welcomed the British & Irish newsletter that you've created, and the British & Irish committees. They're fundamental to this dialogue. It's interesting looking at the history of psychical research. I teach a course in philosophy in the paranormal and parapsychology at the State University of New York at Buffalo, in which I review the history of psychical research and spiritualism, and also the work of that famous society [the Society for Psychical Research] and of course its proceedings have always intrigued me, going back to the work of F.W.H. Myers, Edmund Gurney, Hogson, the Sidgwicks, and others, and their early efforts to test thought transmission, spirit communication and survival of the dead. It's a very fascinating history, and I think that those connected with CSICOP have a lot to learn by reading that rich literature. I've spent many months going through as much as I could of the Proceedings of the British Society for Psychical Research. We're all indebted to their early efforts and to many of the blind alleys they went down. You see their great enthusiasms and failures. But nonetheless I think the efforts of that heroic band of researchers to submit the paranormal to experimental inquiry are a very important contribution to knowledge and we're all grateful. The fact that they, in my view, have not achieved hard results, and that what they hoped they would find has not been confirmed doesn't any the less mean that the quest of the investigation was not intriguing, fascinating, and exciting, and I can go back and read that material, and it's really exciting to do so.

WG: One thing I've noticed, following some of the spiritualist mediums a little bit is that many of the spiritualist meetings are still held in churches in Britain.

PK: Oh, really? Are they still strong?

WG: I have never personally been to one. One of our subscribers, Gerald Fleming, goes around to quite a few of these meetings. He went to Doris Stokes' meetings when she was playing in little, tiny churches. And he says many of them are held in churches. There seems to be a strong connection. Many of the psychics say they believe in God-- Geller now goes on television and he talks all the time,

"I believe in God." "I take care of my spiritual side." "I am a happy person," and in his book The Geller Effect, he seemed to be suggesting that the skeptics were atheists and maybe Marxists, and perhaps very dangerous characters.

PK: Well, of course. I think those charges are very unfair ad hominem attacks, because whatever one's religious beliefs are is quite irrelevant to the effort of science to test these claims in a neutral and objective way. The charge of Marxism is, of course, a complete red herring. And in any case, whether one is a believer or a non-believer in religion is not pertinent to whether or not you can confirm precognition or psychokinesis or anything else.

WG: Or whether Uri Geller can bend a spoon.

PK: Yes, that's all quite independent.

WG: There seems to be an implication, though. Perhaps they think the audience will like them better or believe them more if they say that they believe in God.

PK: But you can believe in God and not believe in psychokinesis or not believe in God and believe in psychokinesis. There's really a testable hypothesis. So skepticism about the paranormal is not related to humanism or atheism. Skepticism is an honorable and noble intellectual posture, and it's held by a lot of people historically. It's a method of inquiry. All that it's emphasizing is being tough-minded instead of tender-minded in whatever field you investigate. And in regard to the paranormal, it's simply a demand for evidence and replication before a hypothesis is accepted, and that seems very sensible. So whether one is an atheist, an agnostic, or a skeptic is non sequitur.

WG: I think personalities come into it a great deal, too. People are testing individual subjects, and they want to like them, they want them to succeed.

PK: Personalities come into every field of investigation, no matter what it is, if you're a chemist in a laboratory, or a physicist or an economist, or a parapsychologist. But here of course the testing is with human subjects, that's true, but many other sciences test human subjects, in medicine, in biology, in psychology.

WG: But you're not quite so dependent on their telling you the truth and behaving honorably?

PK: Well, I think in a lot of fields you're dealing with human beings, I mean, what is political science about if not human beings, the context of power, making decisions in the state: economics is about wants, consumption, exchange, distribution, and the processes of production are all human. So in all the social, psychological, behavioral sciences human beings are involved. It's not unique to parapsychology. Surely psychologists are dealing with the same phenomena--namely, human subjects and their psychological dispositions, attitudes, beliefs, so I don't find anything specially separate or distinct about this. You still have to submit it to objective tests in the laboratory, overcoming purely subjective or introspective reports unless you can corroborate or confirm them.

WG: I just read Stephen Jay Gould's The Mismeasure of Man, where he talks about apparently objective scientific measurements. Somebody has to interpret them, and when they were interpreted, the interpretation coming from a racial bias.

PK: Well, it's true, bias enters into many fields. Look at the Piltdown Man. Look at Burt's work in IQ, Kammerer's work on the toad. You sometimes have bias in fields, and there may be subjective interpretation, but presumably science must rise above bias and neutralize it. And you try to develop principles of interpretation that your peer group within the science world will accept.

WG: Would you say that in the long run the scientific method triumphs? That as time goes on, an incorrect result gets modified simply by the force of...

PK: Not always, because scientists, after all, are human beings. But one would hope that there is this self-corrective process, and that by peer criticism eventually hypotheses or theories that are not sustained by the evidence or are less powerful in prediction or explanation are overthrown. That's a constant process of modification. But the trouble in parapsychology, the reason we're skeptics about parapsychology is that the so-called claims are never sustained under analysis. You go into one laboratory and you hear a parapsychologist who says he's been able to get above-chance calls, but you take the

subjects to another laboratory, and you don't find that. You can't duplicate the results. Often, when you analyze it, there's sensory leakage, bad experimental design, the statistics may or may not be called into question. In any case, the main thing is you cannot replicate it, so that's why we're skeptical. That's why many skeptics do not necessarily believe that ESP has been demonstrated in a laboratory. Of course if that's the case, I think the most important single case since the Second World War is the work of S.G. Soal. It was conducted in London at the height of the war and shortly thereafter. It was fascinating on this side of the Atlantic to read about it--this was precognition and telepathy confirmed. But Soal couldn't get any results in the thirties when he used Rhine's methods. The view was that maybe Britons don't have ESP, but then with Gloria Stewart and Basil Shackleton, Soal thought he had confirmed it. This convinced an awful lot of people who thought, oh, yes, at long last, rigorous conditions, using highly credible and distinguished scientists as observers. Soal at last had proven this. But what a shock it was to find that he had fudged the random-number tables that he brought, and most likely this work was seriously flawed and had to be rejected. So where we stand is we're still not certain that precognition, telepathy or psychokinesis or ESP has been confirmed in a laboratory. Even though there are always impending breakthroughs, under scrutiny what was thought to be a breakthrough is not sustained by the evidence, so that's why we're skeptics. I think that Susan Blackmore's book, The Adventures of a Parapsychologist best illustrates the false starts and blind alleys, and the failures that so many people have had in these areas.

WG: And great dedication as well.

PK: Great dedication to find results, but not able to do so.

WG: Perhaps she was too honest?

PK: Well, she was, she had an open mind, and she tried. She never got results. She attempted over and over again.

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In Part Two, in our next issue, Paul Kurtz discusses the role of imagination, and the Gauquelins and the "Mars Effect".

# STATE of the ART

by Frank Chambers

The Society for Psychical Research, established in 1882, is alive and giving an occasional kick. They have a registered office and library at 1, Adam and Eve Mews, off Kensington High Street, London, and the public can wander in and use the library on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons.

In the words of their own constitution, "...membership of the Society does not imply the acceptance of any particular explanation of the phenomena investigated, or any belief as to the operation, in the physical world, of forces other than those recognized by physical science..." However, it is clear that belief in the reality of psychic phenomena is assumed to be common to the membership. This is indicated by the titles of some of the pamphlets and lecture cassettes available for purchase:

Hints on Sitting with Mediums  
Trance Mediumship  
Tests for Extrasensory Perception  
and Psychokinesis  
Poltergeists and Allied Phenomena  
Animal Psi--A Reconstruction  
Reincarnation and the Historian  
Human Survival of Death--A Reading  
List

Zener cards are also available at £1.50 per pack of 25, and packs of 20 score sheets are 50p.

In their Statement of Origin and Purpose the SPR note that hypnotic suggestion and multiple personality, two of the phenomena attracting considerable attention at the time the society was formed, "...have already been incorporated into the general scheme of organized knowledge." They go on to say that "the original scope has been widened to embrace new forms of phenomena, such as paranormal metal-bending..." The authors of the lectures are mostly Professors or Doctors, although I am glad to see that none of the cassettes are actually about metal-bending.

The Society has a number of publications; a Proceedings which is published irregularly when suitable material becomes available, a Journal published four times a year, a

Newsletter, and a Newsletter Supplement. The last accepts reports of "experiences of psychic phenomena on an informal basis without the detailed investigation which has been and remains the society's standard procedure for reports elsewhere." Contributors to the Supplement can remain anonymous but must certify "that their accounts are true and accurate to the best of their knowledge." It should be emphasized that this laxity is not permitted in the other publications.

I was glad to see a copy of the Skeptical Inquirer on the reading room rack, but was bemused by the contents of some of the other magazines and pamphlets.

The list of past presidents is a roll-call of well-known names to anyone who has done any reading in the subject: Professor Henry Sidgwick, Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, Sir William Crookes, Frederic W. H. Myers, Sir Oliver Lodge, Lord Rayleigh, Professor C. D. Broad, G.N.M. Tyrell, Professor Gardner Murphy, S.G. Soal, J.B. Rhine, and Louisa E. Rhine are some of the outstanding ones. The current president is Professor D.J. West, MD, Litt.D., MRC Psych.

Anyone interested in applying to join the society should write the Secretary at 1, Adam and Eve Mews, Kensington, London W8 6UG for a membership application packet which will include a sample newsletter, etc. The current fee for associate membership is £31.

What is one to make of these serious, studious, educated persons who are still talking about Madam Blavatsky, tables moved by "cantilevers of solidified ectoplasm," pieces of wood materializing out of thin air and floating silently to the ground, staple removers apportioning out of locked drawers to the accompaniment of a smell of rotten eggs, and the like? I am sure it must have been said before, but I can only say that if spirits exist and wish to communicate with us, they could certainly save a lot of trouble and be much more convincing by simply writing on unmanned typewriters. My word processor is available.

# S.G. SOAL: Master of Deception

## Chris Scott

The philosophical world was startled in 1944 by the publication by the head of the Cambridge philosophy department of an extraordinary paper: a 15-page discussion in the journal *Philosophy* on "The Experimental Establishment of Telepathic Precognition."

Of course this was not the first time that a respected thinker had expressed belief in a fringe science. Newton himself was a devotee of alchemy, Alfred Russell Wallace was a firm believer in spiritualism, Sir William Crookes believed in the séance room materialization of the dead. But this time it really looked different. To begin with, the author had a reputation as a supremely cautious man. Head of a faculty which included Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein and Moore, his intellectual standing was beyond dispute.

Broad was not writing about his own experiments but about those of another academic, S.G. Soal, a mathematics lecturer at London University. Soal was a sceptic about psychical research. In the mid-1930's he had collected over 120,000 card guesses with no sign of above-chance results. He had become openly scornful of J.B. Rhine's celebrated card-guessing experiments in America and Rhine's claim to have demonstrated extrasensory perception (ESP). Yet it was these very results of Soal's, apparently totally negative, that had led to the new findings. A colleague had urged Soal to look again at those discarded data and try the effect of scoring the guesses, not against the target card at which they were aimed, but against the cards just before and just after. As Soal later recounted, with much reluctance he made the check and found, to his surprise, two persons who had scored indisputably above the chance level on this new criterion. One of these subjects, Basil Shackleton, was then followed up by Soal in a new series of experiments and it was these that yielded the remarkable findings now signalled by Broad.

Soal's experiments, unlike many others in the new field of "parapsychology," appeared to be models of scientific rectitude. Extreme precautions were taken to eliminate normal

means of communication, recording errors, cheating by the participants, and even fraud by the experimenters. The experiments continued over a total of 40 sessions. A large number of witnesses were brought in. Copies of the score sheets were made by hand at the end of each session, witnessed, and posted in the presence of witnesses to Professor Broad in Cambridge. The originals were stated to have been deposited in the archives of the Society for Psychical Research. Shackleton scored consistently above chance throughout, but his success was with the card one ahead-the one to be looked at next. When the calling rate was doubled, his scoring shifted to the card two ahead. In some of the experiments the choice of each target card was made only at the moment of guessing, by taking a counter blind from a bag. This condition seemed to require precognition as the only explanation; it also ruled out any possibility of normal communication through some undetected channel. Finally, the statistical significance was overwhelming (over  $10^{55}$  to 1) so that chance as an explanation was clearly ruled out.

Over the years that followed, the Soal-Shackleton series was constantly cited by parapsychologists as a model; they saw in this work the conclusive evidence they had long awaited. Repeatedly it was said that only a person ignorant of the evidence could now rationally deny ESP. This theme was taken up by less committed but more influential writers, notably in England by C.E.M. Joad, the popular philosopher and broadcaster. Many openminded people must have been led to see ESP as just another of the marvels, along with relativity and quantum theory, which modern science required them to believe in.

The full story of how these uniquely rigorous experiments were reduced to ruins is too complex to relate here. The process took thirty years and involved many independent researchers. We quote only the highlights.

In 1955, G.R. Price showed that several methods of fraud were possible if collusion

were assumed between Soal and two other participants.

Between 1955 and 1960, C.E.M. Hansel developed a hypothesis of fraudulent card substitution by the agent (the person whose thoughts were supposedly being read by Shackleton). For this, Soal would need only one fraudulent collaborator in any given session. Over the whole series three different persons had operated as agent, selected by Soal. Some statistical features of the data seemed to lend some support to this hypothesis, though far from conclusively. Soal scornfully rejected Hansel's reasoning; he successfully showed that the hypothesis could not account for all of the results.

In 1956, pressure from sceptics requesting the records for study obliged Soal to reveal that, contrary to the published report, the original records were not available because he had lost them. The handwritten duplicates that had been mailed to Broad were still in existence, held by the Society for Psychical Research.

In 1960, further pressure from sceptics obliged Soal to publish a more serious admission which had been known to some of them by hearsay. During the experiments one of the participants, Mrs G. Albert, had reported seeing Soal improperly "altering the figures"--specifically, changing 1's into 4's and 5's. A full contemporary report had been kept by his collaborator Mrs K.M. Goldney but Soal had up to that point refused to allow publication, using the threat of a libel action.

In 1971, R.G. Medhurst reported a computerized attempt to identify the sequence of target digits that Soal had used. He was unable to trace the sequences in any relevant sources and concluded that Soal's account of the way in which the targets were prepared must be incorrect.

In 1973-4, C. Scott and P. Haskell showed that there was strong statistical evidence in the experimental records supporting the allegation that Soal had "altered the figures", changing 1's into 4's and 5's in such a way as to turn misses into hits. The effects found were both highly significant statistically. They appeared in just 3 of the 40 sittings, and in particular in the one in which Albert had reported observing the manipulation, and they could account for the whole significant ESP-effect in these three sittings.

This damning evidence seems to have had little effect on the community of parapsychologists. Almost without exception

those who commented rejected the fraud interpretation, despite the highly specific confirmation of Albert's observation, and reaffirmed confidence in Soal.

The coup de grace came in 1978 when B. Markwick published the results of an astonishingly tenacious pursuit of the line opened earlier by Medhurst. She first showed that the target digits contained many runs of consecutive digits that were repetitions of runs used in earlier sessions, and that this could not have arisen by chance. This in itself was not particularly serious. However, she also showed that in many such cases the repetition was not exact but there were intrusions--digits inserted in the sequence--and that these intruded digits were nearly always hits. The implication of improper manipulation seems almost inescapable.

After Markwick's publication parapsychologists generally gave in and admitted that the evidence against Soal's honesty was overwhelming. Many, however, continued to discuss the possibility that some of the data in the Soal-Shackleton series were still due to ESP. And most said that, despite their new-found belief in Soal's duplicity, they had been right at the time to reject the Scott-Haskell evidence.

Clearly the views of parapsychologists are highly resistant to infection by unfavourable evidence. The total collapse of the strongest experimental series ever produced has not visibly diminished their belief in ESP. They simply cite different experiments now.

Recently parapsychologists have argued that frauds have been identified in many branches of science without thereby discrediting the field of knowledge concerned: why should parapsychology be treated any differently? they ask. They overlook a crucial fact: in ESP research it is the very existence of ESP that is at stake. The only serious evidence for ESP comes from experiments, like Soal's, in which guesses are aimed at random targets in conditions where normal communication is supposedly ruled out. But every one of these experiments has been less carefully controlled than the Soal-Shackleton series. The Soal débacle is the clearest possible demonstration that believers in ESP are over-ready to accept defective evidence. To continue to accord the same value to the remaining experiments even after this demonstration implies an unshakeable faith impervious to counter-evidence.



## Toby Howard's PSYCHIC DIARY

When experience shows that the claims of paranormal phenomena which have been subjected to rigorous investigation crumble from the supernatural to the natural, often mundanely so, it's very easy to slip into a frame of mind where paranormal claims provoke derision instead of a truly balanced sense of rational enquiry. For many skeptics this is a never-ending problem. Recently I was shocked out of my own complacency when I came across several instances of people experiencing genuine personal distress, and who attributed their discomfort to paranormal agencies. There is no question that to some people apparently supernatural events can be frighteningly real. Near my home lives a woman who investigates local accounts of hauntings and other paranormal experiences. She is by no means a skeptic, and firmly believes in the reality of the paranormal, maintaining that it can be a very dangerous business. Recently we discussed together some reports she had collected of local strange happenings. All were anecdotal, and many were the kind of trivial mysteries destined to become family legends. But one case made a particular impression on me. A woman was in great distress, reporting often violent visitations by her late husband, who had died in tragic circumstances. As we talked, it seemed essential that rather than allowing the woman to continue to believe that she was the centre of psychic disturbances, she should be encouraged to visit her doctor, and perhaps consider seeking professional psychiatric help. The psychic investigator disagreed. For her it was an open-and-shut case: an unhappy spirit was at large, and since the problem was inherently paranormal, what could modern medicine possibly do? The same attitude is often apparent in the agony-aunt columns of publications such as Psychic News and Prediction. A recent example involved a person seeing "brown-looking human shapes" materialising in the house, turning on gas taps, and disturbing sleep. What advice was given? Again, there was a lot of talk about psychic energy, telepathy, poltergeists, and the spirit world. Who can say how much further harm results from this kind of reinforcement of the paranormal explanation? If ever there was an argument for rationalism, this is it.

Mae West, Cary Grant, and Nat 'King' Cole have returned to Hollywood recently, but

haven't been so much walking the boards as floating above them. They've made their come-backs through the mediumship of police sergeant turned psychic Peter Close. Miss West appeared at a Los Angeles Spiritualist Church, resplendent in high heels and "one of those revealing clinging white dresses," bearing a message for a member of the audience. What did this world-famous sex symbol, extraordinary character of stage and screen have to say? No, not "Come up and see me sometime..."--instead, her message was delivered in the conventional non-sequitur spiritualist style: "your investments will prove to be very profitable." Beulah, peel me a grape...

Doris Collins has wasted no time slipping into the niche recently vacated by the late Doris Stokes. It's almost as if Mrs Stokes never left us--they even look the same! In a few months Doris has become the household-name medium, and has enjoyed huge media coverage, particularly with her daily column in the Sun. In January the newspaper arranged a brilliantly simple "psychic experiment" (see this issue, p 5 for a report). Recently Doris has been keen to emphasis her role as healer, and there were many reports of success--all begging for the serious follow-up investigations that will no doubt never take place.

I've always had a soft spot for the kind of strange gadgets that Flash Gordon might clip onto his belt, and they don't come much stronger than one advertised in the latest catalogue of the Metaphysical Research Group. The Cameron Aurameter is hailed as "one of the world's most sensitive radiesthetic detectors," and appears to be a cross between an electric torch, a mangled coat hanger, and a lipstick. It was designed (if that's the word) by the Reverend Verne L. Cameron, and in the true tradition of "black boxes" comes with the mandatory polished wooden handle. With this gizmo you can tune into the etheric wavebands for just £40.

Canadians who fancy a few extra days paid holiday each year might consider taking up Wicca, the cult of ancient earth magic. Prediction magazine reports that Wicca has just been given the status of a recognised religion by an arbitration board in Ontario.

# REVIEWS

## CONFERENCES

### PSYCHIC FESTIVAL

Redge Lewis

Psychic Festival, 23-24 January 1988,  
Belgrave Hotel, Torquay. Admission £1.50.

Early the 24th I phoned Mrs. Ede, the organizer of the event, and told her I was not a believer, but wanted to attend with a view to being convinced or otherwise. I told her I had listed 21 questions on facts about myself and hoped it would be possible to put these questions to a medium. I told her I was prepared to give a reasonably substantial sum of money either to the medium or to any chosen charity upon receiving proof of an acceptable percentage of correct answers (if any medium could score 14 or more 'hits' I think it would be evidence which should not be lightly disregarded). Mrs. Ede immediately told me in no uncertain fashion that she was not running a cabaret entertainment, that my proposal was insulting, and that any such suggestion regarding money would prevent any reputable medium from having anything to do with me. I was able to pacify the lady and she gave me the names of three mediums who would be present, any one of whom she was sure would satisfy any doubts I might have. Albeit with misgivings, I went.

It wasn't exactly exciting. There were about a dozen small tables arranged around the perimeter of one of the hotel lounges, each displaying the business matter of the person sitting behind it, mostly women.

I went in search of the medium who might deal with my questionnaire and while waiting for her got into a discussion with a hefty, tattooed man who looked like a buccaneer and rejoiced in the title of Reverend Michael Bromley (brother of the Healer Gordon Bromley, of whom more later), who candidly told me that he couldn't attempt to deal with my questions but advised me to discuss them with the clairvoyant medium Vanessa, who providentially returned to her table at that moment. After a preliminary five-minute chat, she suggested we should retire to a more private corner of the larger lecture room next door. She wasn't in the least put out by my suggestions of the 21 questions and agreed to attempt the test.

There was no mention of any money at all. She attempted twelve questions, and got two right. She did guess that my father was born in London and that I had been married twice. When she knew that I had four children (living), she guessed one of their forenames as David--not an uncommon name, possibly statistically a four-to-one chance? She admitted the results did not merit serious consideration. Vanessa then suggested that another medium, her friend 'Belle', might do better.

Belle, a much more experienced and senior lady, was put on the spot by Vanessa--I don't think she would have done more than pass the time of day with me otherwise. Anyway I established a rapport (I think it could have been her compassion for my age) and she looked at my list of questions and hemmed and hawed and said she had never been asked to do anything like this before, but it was a CHALLENGE and she'd have a go. She managed to tell me that I had a child in the spirit world called Michael or James, asked me whether I knew a Mr or Mrs Stone or had any knowledge of a house or cottage numbered 14 at some time which had an unkempt garden owing to lack of time for its upkeep. Did I or any of my family at any time have anything to do with a dressmaker and was my mother's name Elizabeth? Need I tell you that though 38 years ago my then wife gave birth to a still-born child in Australia, it was never named, and the names Michael and James had nothing whatever to do with me or my immediate family. I knew no Stones and had no connection with a No. 14 any place, with or without a tidy garden, have never known any dressmakers, and my Mum's name was nothing like Elizabeth. Otherwise, the test came out pretty well.

#### QUESTIONNAIRE.

- |     |          |                                    |
|-----|----------|------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Father's | Family name                        |
| 2.  | "        | Forename (s)                       |
| 3.  | "        | Date of birth - day and month      |
| 4.  | "        | Date of death - day month and year |
| 5.  | "        | Place of birth - town and country  |
| 6.  | Mother's | Maiden name                        |
| 7.  | "        | Forename                           |
| 8.  | "        | Date of death - day month and year |
| 9.  | "        | Place of birth - town and country  |
| 10. | Wife's   | Maiden name                        |
| 11. | "        | Forename (s)                       |
| 12. | "        | Date of birth - day month and year |
| 13. | "        | Number of brother (s)              |
| 14. | "        | " " sister (s)                     |
| 15. | "        | " " previous marriages             |
| 16. | Self     | Forenames                          |
| 17. | "        | Nickname at school                 |
| 18. | "        | Previous marriage (s)              |
| 19. | "        | Date of birth - day month and year |
| 20. | "        | Number and sexes of children       |
| 21. | "        | Names and ages of children         |

Belle then asked to see my palms and provided some inconsequential blather, during which it transpired that both Vanessa and Belle had witnessed poltergeists in action. Not actually SEEN them, but Belle saw a cup and saucer jump off the table and smash themselves to pieces against a wall, and Vanessa witnessed a door opening and shutting. Vanessa also told me that though she had tried for years, she had never been able to make contact with her own mother, who should be enjoying the best of health in the world beyond. At this point the show closed down until the evening session at 7:30. To be fair to both Vanessa and Belle, they both refused to consider accepting any fee for their quite lengthy consultation as they felt their results didn't justify it.

At 7:30 (Big Bang Time), Gordon Bromley (brother of 'Reverend Michael'; International Tarot/Psychic Lecturer, Teacher and Healer; and, I believe, husband of Eve Bromley, Clairvoyant and Medium) was the MC. He promised demonstrations and question-and-answer sessions. The first speaker dealt with Auras, and explained that everyone has one--the strength varies, as does the colour, in accordance with the mood and health of the subject. The Aura can be photographed--particularly by means of Kirlian photography. Animals and plants have auras, too. If you place a microphone close to a flower or plant and amplify the sound to a VERY high degree, and you threaten the plant, it will scream, and you will be able to hear the scream through the speaker. But you must amplify it VERY much--you will need special and very expensive equipment. Well. Deal that one if you can. There were various innocuous questions and answers, but I couldn't think of anything to ask. I mean, would you have been able to? Kirlian Photography? Screaming Plants!

Then it was a clairvoyant's turn. She told various members of the audience (whom she picked on) that they had pains in the lower back, but not to worry, and that their Dad, Mum, Sister, Brother, Cousin in the Spirit World were all having a wonderful time and not to worry. I heard of no one in the hereafter who was fed up or whose roof leaked or who had a pain in the lower back. She wouldn't even look at me, though I was right at the front and willing her with all my might to tell me something uncanny.

Next came the piece of resistance. TWO MEDIUMS AT ONCE--TWICE the CONSTANT of AURANIC Perception. The mind boggles; anyway, mine did. One was Vanessa, who

steadfastly refused to see me (bearing in mind my whiskers, girth, and florid complexion, this was no mean feat), and the other was Eve Bromley, a lady whose Aura dimmed all others in the vicinity. It was obvious that she wasn't going to brook any nonsense from this little gathering. She dominated the proceedings, which then went with a swing. She pulled spirits from limbo to the English Riviera, and they told her all sorts of interesting things and exciting trivia. Nothing unimportant, mind you, like was Maggie immortal, or would Russia declare war on the Kremlin, or would the AIDS virus be brought under control this year. But rather, important matters, like not to park the car (to one frightened bod who took it all to heart) near the exit to a car park where it would most likely get its back bashed in, and how some disembodied, departed shade was cuddling a small dog (presumably also a spirit) and urgently wanted someone in the hall to know that it was all right. I couldn't make out whether it was the dog or its cuddler who was all right, but the message seemed to comfort some poor soul there.

Eve was also in communication with a spirit character who had apparently worn a somewhat battered trilby in this life (he'd found he couldn't take it with him), which immediately elicited the response from one of the believers at the back that it sounded as if it was her Uncle Fred, who always wore a dented and tattered tribly. The main purpose of this particular visitation seemed to be the well-being of the hat. But it seemed to give genuine pleasure. This sort of thing went on for some time under the controlled vigour of Eve until she suddenly decided it was time for its cessation. There was much applause. Did people really believe? It seemed to me that they did.

After this, there was a short talk on graphology, and the possibility of an altered style of handwriting altering the personality of the writer.

The last item on the agenda was a talk on Healing, given by Gordon Bromley. He had a hard job following Eve. I got the impression that he was sincere, but I didn't want to stay for the demonstration. My skepticism and aura undimmed, I exited from the Psychic Forum to place the facts before you without delay.

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## MEDIA

### NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

Steuart Campbell

---

'QED/Glimpses of Death', BBC 1, 9:30-10:00 pm, 27 January, 1988.

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The experiences discussed were of three types: 1) The Out of Body Experiences (OOBE), where a patient describes views of his own apparently unconscious body and its environment from some higher viewpoint, 2) The Tunnel of Light, and 3) The Heavenly Experience, a description of what appears to be Paradise. Several case studies were described, usually by the patient him- or herself. Some of the patients had been declared dead, but there was no indication of tests for brain death.

Dr Peter Fenwick, a clinical neuro-physiologist from St. Thomas Hospital in London who is interested in the phenomenon of consciousness, explained the second and third types of experience as hallucinations due to lack of oxygen in the limbic brain, stimulation of which is known to produce feelings of ecstasy and strong light. Due to heart failure, many of the patients were likely to have suffered lack of oxygen to the brain. That non-Christian patients described scenes from their own religious imagery supports the hallucination hypothesis. However, Fenwick could not explain OOBES.

Dr Michael B. Sabom, Assistant Professor of Cardiology at Emory University (USA), described his work in comparing what patients say happened to them while they were 'unconscious' and what the medical team actually did to them. Originally he was sceptical that the patients could have learned anything that they could not have learned in other ways. However, he found such a high degree of accuracy in the patients' accounts that he has had to accept that they really did have the experiences they describe. He found all the usual explanations inadequate. He is the author of a book (Recollections of Death) describing over one hundred such experiences.

Fenwick suggested that 'if we can really show that evidence can be gained about the structure of our outside world by the human mind when it's not in the body (*sic*) then this raises questions for our whole scientific understanding of the nature of consciousness'. He concluded that more research was needed

(well, he would, wouldn't he?) and asked 'if near-death experiences are true, what are they for?' He thought they might be a preparation for an after-life (or oblivion), but he did not examine the possibility that they are an artifact of the brain, an accidental by-product of other processes.

I noted that the credited organizations included the Alistair Hardy Research Centre and the International Association for Near Death Studies (UK).

## BOOKS

### TV AND FAITH

Wendy M. Grossman

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The Faith Healers, by James Randi.  
Prometheus Books, 1987. £16.95

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My admiration for the effort and ability James Randi has put into assembling a truly extraordinary wealth of material is equalled only by my frustration with this book's disorganization. This is a valuable and vitally important book; it should have been a great one.

On the plus side, Randi has here put together more incriminating evidence against America's major TV evangelists/faith healers than has probably ever been seen in one place. He explores the unholy marriage of television and evangelism. He includes details of the wealth amassed through the "electronic pulpit" and the way it has been spent; he tells of electronic and mnemonic devices enabling the preachers to "call out" people for healing of specific illnesses, and he makes a good show of explaining how people are hooked--and kept that way. Randi's investigations also bring out the fascinating fact, not explored further, that a number of the best technical people (camera men, editors, letter writers, etc.) have worked for several of the major TV evangelists in turn.

On the negative side, there is no index, which is inexcusable. In addition, the middle chapters of the book are just disorganized enough to make the lack of an index infuriating. This is a book with a large cast of characters--and you can't look anyone up to refresh your memory of what they've said or who they are. Rumor has it this deficiency may be remedied in the next edition.

One other difficulty is that Randi seems

to have been unable to decide what kind of book he was writing: an exposé, the story of how he personally investigated a series of multi-millionaire faith healers, or the story of the history and practice of faith healing in America. The book should have been rewritten to unite these three disparate elements.

I found the in-depth chapters on the major faith healers the most confusing. The later chapters--curiously enough, those where Randi deals with a number of different, less-known healers--are more in the tradition of Flim-Flam, where Randi showed his ability to write short pieces on a variety of subjects.

Carl Sagan writes in his forward that Randi is an angry man. Randi seems to be proud of this. Unfortunately, some readers who might otherwise be most interested may be offended by his self-righteousness. Ray Hyman said in his article "Proper Criticism" (B&IS I.4) that it is best to let the evidence speak for itself--and this is just what Randi seems unwilling to do. It is fair enough that he included a chapter at the end to explain his personal views on religion and miracles; but then why editorialise further?

It is infuriating that such an important book, with such a spectacular wealth of exclusive information should have been published in a form which undercuts its value. I am an ardent admirer of Randi's work; it was that admiration which led me to start the B&IS. From anyone else this would be an extraordinary book. But Randi is the top professional in the field of investigating paranormal claims. This book should have reflected that professionalism. It doesn't. But read it anyway. It's the only one of its kind.

Peter O'Hara adds:

The book's eighteen chapters fall into three categories, although this is not specified on the contents page. The introduction includes Randi's reasons for studying the matter (the same as why he has investigated paranormal phenomena) and a general theory of why faith-healing appears to work. The first group of five chapters cover the history of faith-healing and the financial and postal operations common to all major present-day US healers. These are fairly well organised.

Chapters 6 to 14 cover individual healers in depth.

The last four chapters review the quality of the evidence for genuine healing by the faith-healers. The appearance of improvement after faith-healing is covered in more depth.

There are numerous examples of "healings," many by healers not covered in the middle group of chapters. Some of these "healings" have clear explanations that nothing of note happened, but in other cases Randi could not get the relevant expert to release the important evidence. Sometimes the "healed" person would not cooperate: Randi feels that this often means they could accept that the healing was phoney. There is also a legal chapter, where Randi regrets that the law seems not to be strong enough to prosecute parents belonging to fundamentalist sects who let their children die because their religion tells them to call a minister of religion rather than a doctor. In this, and in the matter of the religious status accorded to the faith-healers by the tax authorities, he feels the US Constitution is being misinterpreted.

## ANTI-CREATIONIST AMMUNITION

Stephen Moreton

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The Other Quote Book, by A.G. Wheeler. Published by the Queensland Committee of the Australian Skeptics. A\$5.00 incl. p&p from the Queensland Skeptics, 18 Noreen Street, Chapel Hill, Queensland 4069, Australia.

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Australia's Creation Science Foundation Ltd. was described in B&IS I.6 (Nov./Dec. 1987). During its heyday, the CSF published The Quote Book as a supplement to the October 1984 issue of its periodical "Ex Nihilo". This was a collection of quotations wrenched out of context from the writings of scientists to make it seem as if they rejected evolution or supported creationism. Often the quotations were made to give the opposite impression to what the authors actually intended and, if that was not enough, the sources were frequently given with incorrect dates, volume numbers, or page numbers, making it difficult or impossible to verify the quotation. Whether this was through design or incompetence is not known.

In response to this chronicle of distortions, Dr A.G. Wheeler of Queensland University has produced The Other Quote Book, in support of evolution, a list of over 200 quotations from books and articles by scientists and theologians in support of evolution and against creationism. Those quoted range from Isaac Asimov to the Pope. The quotations are arranged according to subject, thus there are quotes on the nature of science, the religious nature of

creationism, the supposed conflict between religion and science, the qualifications of creationists, and so forth. Many of the specific arguments and favourite beliefs of the creationists--Noah's flood, fossil record, etc., are dealt with, and the young earth idea is given a sound thrashing. Modern radio-isotope dating is supported, the declining speed of light fantasy of creationist Barry Setterfield is refuted, and the Paluxy footprints exposed.

The book not only serves its function of discrediting the creationists, it also is informative to the lay reader. The quotes contain many facts in support of evolution and explain just what a scientific theory is and how this differs from the sterile dogmatism of the creationists. The discoveries of molecular biology are explained, the fossil record described with examples, and interspersed with the quotes are drawings illustrating such things as homologous organs, geographical distribution of species, and the evolution of man.

Some space is given over to making it quite clear that many religious believers see no conflict between their faith and evolution. This should appeal to religious readers who are undecided about evolution, perhaps believing it to be necessarily atheistic.

Of course no book is perfect or can include everything, and I can think of some quotes that would have been particularly appropriate. In discussing Paluxy, Texas, where creationists imagine there are human footprints alongside those of dinosaurs, I think the author should have included the views of John B. Morris, son of America's leading creationist Henry Morris and himself a former devotee of Paluxy, who has admitted that many of the Paluxy footprints previously thought to be human have now turned out to be those of dinosaurs. In fact, Morris has conceded that "it would now be improper for creationists to continue to use the Paluxy data as evidence against evolution" (*Impact*, January 1986), and this from a creationist!

The main failing of the book is without doubt its failure to actually give examples of out-of-context quotations. It is no good just saying that creationists have been quoting scientists out of context, as the author does in the introduction. Without specific examples, few are going to be convinced that this really has been happening. To be fair to the author, it could well be that they have been dealt with elsewhere, and Martin Bridgstock's article in B&IS I.6 would seem to suggest that this is so. Even so, just a few examples

would not have gone amiss.

The use of out-of-context quotations by creationists is an important issue and needs to be dealt with by detailed explanations and refutations, otherwise the creationists' protestations of innocence are effectively uncountered. Creationists are well aware of the charge and simply deny it: "With only rare exceptions, however, creationists always are meticulously careful to quote accurately and in context. Evolutionists have apparently searched creationist writings looking for such exceptions and, out of the hundreds or thousands of quotes which have been used, have been able to find only a handful which they have been able to interpret as misleading. Even these, if carefully studied, in full light of their own contexts, will be found to be quite fair and accurate..." (Henry Morris, 1982, *Creation and its Critics*, p 19).

Without actually looking for misquotes, as Morris suggests evolutionists do, I have come across quite a few whilst reading creationist literature. The following is one I found while reading the fantasies about overthrust faulting of John Whitcomb in his book *The World Perished* (1973). The author sought to demonstrate the impossibility of overthrust faulting on account of the friction involved. He quotes (on p 88) geologists M.K. Hubbard and W.W. Rubey as saying that overthrust faulting was a "mechanical impossibility". Having at one time studied geology, I knew that this was just not so, so I decided to investigate. The source Whitcomb gave was *Bull. Geol. Soc. America*, Feb. 1959, and he gives the page numbers 122 and 126. Since the quote actually occurs on p 127, he was not too far out. The sentence containing the quote goes as follows: "Consequently, for the conditions assumed, the pushing of a thrust block, whose length is of the order of 30km or more, along a horizontal surface appears to be a mechanical impossibility."

The "conditions assumed" did not include the role of water in the rock pores. The authors go on to demonstrate that when this is taken into consideration (the water reduces friction and exerts a buoyancy effect), then it is far from impossible; This is the point of their paper; the title should have given it away--"Role of fluid pressure in mechanics of overthrust faulting". In their summary and conclusions on p 162, Hubbert and Rubey write, "...we now have a simple and adequate means of reducing by the required amount the frictional resistance to the sliding of large overthrust blocks". They conclude with: "...great overthrusts...would no longer pose

the enigma they have presented heretofore." That Whitcomb could have failed to see all this is inconceivable. Hubbert and Rubey clearly do not believe that overthrusts are a "mechanical impossibility"; it is only by quoting them out of context that this can be made to appear so. It is little wonder that I regard such wilful misquoting as tantamount to telling lies.

It is exposures like this that Dr Wheeler's book lacks. The above example was rather tame compared to some of the violence creationists do to evolutionists' words, and I am sure Dr Wheeler could have found space for a few examples. Even so, it is a worthwhile book that should do some good in combating the creationists. For those interested in misleading quotations, some examples are to be found in Philip Kitchers' book Abusing Science: the case against creationism (1982), p 181, and the Skeptical Inquirer, Vol IX, No. 4, p 364.

Finally, it is hard to resist giving the creationists a dose of their own medicine, so here is Henry Morris out of context: "creationists deliberately use partial quotes or out-of-context quotes from evolutionists...to confuse the issue." (Creation and its Critics, p 19).

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Stephen Moreton has studied geology and chemistry and lives in Edinburgh.

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## FORTY YEARS OF UFO REPORTS

Steuart Campbell

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UFOs 1947-1987: The 40-year search for an explanation, compiled and edited by Hilary Evans and John Spencer for The British UFO Research Association, Fortean Tomes, London 1987. 384 pp/ £14.50 inc. p+p, £12.50 to BUFORA members. Softbound, no index.

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As a celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the first UFO (then 'flying saucer') report, this book is itself evidence that UFOs do not exist and that whatever causes the reports it is not the antics of delinquent aliens. What visitors to Earth would flit about like fireflies for forty years, avoiding overt contact? Nevertheless the UFO myth still flourishes, at least in the confused minds of most of the contributors to this book.

Excluding the editors, there are thirty-seven separate contributors, some collaborating. In addition the preface acknowledges the contribution to UFO

research of forty-nine others.

Most of the contributions are unoriginal accounts of UFO events, often from secondary sources. Usually the author has no special knowledge and he brings no new approach. For example, Kim Moller Hansen, a Danish schoolteacher, tells us about thirteen cases from all over the world, but not one from Denmark! Most of the contributions are flawed by their assumption of the reality of UFOs (rather than the reality of UFO reports). Some contributors contradict each other (e.g. Willy Smith's advocacy of UNICAT is countered by Claude Maugé's claim that statistics based on selected cases are necessarily biased). Even the editors contradict themselves; on p. 323, after claiming that they 'know that UFOs exist,' they allow the possibility that they might have 'no basis in physical reality'!

Plainly the work is a tour de force by Hilary Evans, whose preoccupation with the mysterious and antagonism to science are evidence not only in the editorial sections but in the choice of contributors. Many claim either that science cannot explain the UFO phenomenon or that it does not take it seriously (mutually exclusive claims!).

However, despite Evans' prejudices, a few sceptical contributions have been included. These are by Claude Maugé on UFO statistics, Chris Rutkowski of the Tectonic Strain Hypothesis, and Michel Monnerie on 'The Case for Scepticism' (spelled 'skepticism' in the contents list). Monnerie is a thorough-going sceptic and the author of two books on the UFO phenomenon (in French). Scepticism (sic) is honoured by an argument against it by (Dr) Willy Smith, although his arguments consist of little more than abuse (e.g. 'self-appointed debunkers, the perennial skeptics, such as Phil Klass, Ian Ridpath and a few other misguided souls'). There is also a good review of the psychological phenomena that account for all or part of many UFO reports by Mark Moravec, who also compares the 'true sceptic' with 'the debunker [who] has a preset attitude against the existence of UFO phenomena'. Commenting on sceptics, Evans claims that CSICOP has never attempted any balanced assessment of the UFO evidence and criticized the work of Donald Menzel ('alternative explanations--often ludicrously inadequate') and Phil Klass ('some kind of negative obsession with a phenomenon in whose existence he does not believe'). He also claims that UFOs constitute a scientific enigma of the greatest interest and accuses scientists of minimal interest and uninformed

(PSYCHIC DIARY, cont. from p. 19)

derision.

Compared with foreign ufologists, British (no Irish contribution) ufologists are a dull lot. In this book, including the editors, only eleven appear. None are academics, and only three are known to have a university degree (and then none in science and none above first degree level). Foreign contributors are mostly much better qualified, although that does not necessarily make them more rational. A photograph of each contributor is accompanied by a sometimes too brief biography, a note of recent publications, and (most useful) an address.

Presentation is spoiled by some glaring errors (e.g. the misspelling of 'hypnopompic' three times of p. 299). Some of the articles have been translated rather poorly and/or the English of some foreign contributors is not very good and should not have gone uncorrected.

This is undoubtedly a milestone in UFO publishing; unfortunately it is on the wrong road!

Stuart Campbell is a free-lance writer living in Edinburgh, and a frequent contributor to the B&IS.

This means that Wiccan holy days now count as official holidays for believers.

When is a novel not a novel? When it's written by Whitley Streiber. His Communion, in which he describes his extraordinary contact with aliens, has been consistently listed in the non-fiction section of the Sunday Times' bestsellers list!

I was keen to find out some more about the Bureau of Psychic Investigation (B&IS II.1. "Hits & Misses"), but it came as a surprise when after my skeptical enquiry I was signed up as a practising member! That wasn't quite what I had in mind, but it was interesting to receive information about their first two cases. Each came with personal details of the individuals involved and a map of the immediate area of interest. Norman Knight, the organiser, responded courteously to my enquiries, and it is clear that the BPI is a very sincere group, convinced that their special powers can play a unique and useful role in solving criminal mysteries.

It appears that the British agents for the "Pulsor" device (see B&IS I.4--it looks after your body's bioplasmic polarities, amongst other things) have another New Age interest: "Healing Sex." If you enroll on one of their courses, not only are you promised "spiritual experience of Higher Consciousness and lasting Personal Transformation through Total and Continuous Orgasm, Pleasure and Bliss", but you are also in the running for "Love, Beauty, Harmony, Wealth, Health, Prosperity and Abundance." Phew!

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## LETTERS

## DIVINE CREATIONISM

Mr. Colin Wood arrogantly asserts that "the fossil record is testament against evolution" but it is an arrogance born of abysmal ignorance. If this man knew anything about the subject he attacks he would know that while there are probably around 10-15 million species alive today there are only about 130,000 known fossil species. When 99% (probably a good deal more) of all the things that have ever existed have simply not been found as fossils it is hardly surprising that the record is full of gaps and sudden appearances! Mr Wood is just being unreasonable, but of course being unreasonable is natural for creationists as they cannot reason.

Despite its imperfections the record does strongly support evolution and Mr Wood simply does not know what he is talking about. He alleges that vertebrates followed invertebrates suddenly but ignores the evidence from living organisms (Amphioxus, sea-squirrels, etc.) of a link and does not seem to be aware that every major vertebrate transition (between fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals) is represented by more than one fossil intermediate.

Presumably it is only through some staggering coincidence that the entire fossil records shows an increase in complexity and diversity with time. Thus it is only by chance that single-celled life precedes multi-celled, that invertebrates came before vertebrates, or that vertebrates appeared in the order fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. (Presumably intermediates like the

fish/amphibian Ichthyostega or the reptile/mammal Therapsids are simply freaks that just happened to be intermediate in time and in form between their predecessors and their successors.) It must also just be sheer coincidence that flowering plants postdate non-flowering mosses and ferns which in turn appeared after simple algae. Likewise it must also be through sheer chance that in recent years palaeontologists have been finding a plethora of organisms in the late pre-Cambrian, some of which just happen to look awfully like primitive forms of the invertebrate phyla that were once thought to have appeared suddenly in the Cambrian.

When it comes to human evolution, what more could one ask for than the sequence from the Australopithecenes, with their upright stance but ape-like features and brain larger than any ape's but smaller than any human's, through Homo habilis, Homo erectus, and Homo sapiens? Why should brain size increase steadily, tool-making ability improve, upright gait be perfected and ape-like features diminish in a steady progression through time? Mr Wood's complaint about lack of fine intermediates in the sequence is sheer stubbornness. No doubt if someone did turn up an intermediate between H. erectus and Neanderthals, say, he still would not be satisfied and would demand further intermediates between it and H. erectus on the one hand and Neanderthals on the other. Should these turn up he would then want further intermediates and so on. This is how the minds of creationists work: whether Mr Wood

calls himself a creationist or not, he behaves exactly like one. They are not really interested in the evidence and will never be swayed by any amount of it, no matter how convincing it may be to reasonable people.

Before finishing, I would like to draw the ignorant Mr Wood's attention to two papers that appeared in Nature recently. The first was in the 10-16 December 1987 issue, p 561. This reveals that eight separate lineages of Ordovician trilobites, over a 3-million year period, evolved into different species and in one case into a new genus. In each case every single intermediate fossilised form was found in sequence showing gradual change from one species to another without a break. If this does not convince you, Mr Wood, please tell us what will.

The second was in the 4th Feb. issue and announced the discovery in Spain of early Cretaceous fossil feathers and the skeleton of a reptilian bird. The classic reptile/bird fossil Archaeopteryx is older (Jurassic) and is truly intermediate between reptiles and birds--so much so that there have been arguments about whether to classify it as one or the other. The new find is of a creature aintermediate between Archaeopteryx and true birds. Explain, please, Mr Wood.

Finally, I have one more little fact for Mr Wood. The earliest known whale fossils exhibit many features transitional between primitive carnivores and modern whales. One of these is the possession of vestigial hind legs. If whales did not evolve from walking ancestors, then I challenge Mr Wood to explain why on

earth their earliest fossils have the remnants of hind legs-if he can.

Stephen Moreton

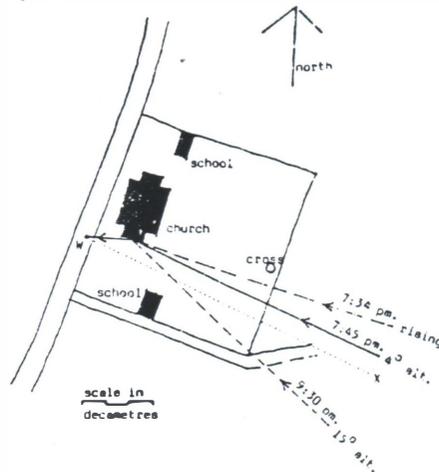
## KNOCK

David Berman's latest article on the Knock apparition of 21 August 1897 is (surprisingly) identical to one published in the December 1987 issue of *New Humanist*. My response will appear in that journal in due course.

Berman's 'new evidence' in favour of the lantern hypothesis amounts to nothing more than an allegation that the local priest might have had a motive for arranging the incident. In fact, the evidence for this is not convincing and appears to be special pleading. For example, it is hardly reasonable of Berman to conclude that Archdeacon Cavanagh was 'capable of deceiving people' simply because he had refused to remove a very large glass stone (inside the church) which had caused reports of a vision when sunlight was reflected from it. As Berman admits, much of the evidence he presents is 'hearsay'.

If it is hard to believe that Cavanagh had a motive for creating the apparition and that he was prepared to do so, it is even harder to believe that he could accomplish it. In the television 'documentary' to which Berman refers, Nicholas Humphrey showed how a slide could be projected out of a window onto a wall below the window by means of a shaving mirror. It was implied that at Knock the window in question was that in the south gable of the church. The fanciful illustration exhibited by Berman does not show this window in its

correct proportions or position (see accompanying illustration). Previously, the lantern hypothesis had involved projection from the nearby school building (see plan).



A plan of Knock churchyard as it might have been in 1879 (enlarged from a 1917 survey on which the shape of the church does not appear to be correct; see photograph. The direction and altitude of Jupiter are shown for various times. Also shown is the direction of a single reflection at 7:45 pm for one witness standing on the road. W-X represents the direction in which this witness ought to have had direct sight of Jupiter.

This new version of the lantern hypothesis demands that either the window was capable of being opened or it contained at least some clear panes (or one was broken). Berman's illustration shows that the window consisted of many small, fixed, leaded lights. If these were coloured or translucent (and none were broken), no image could be projected through the window. Also essential to the hypothesis is the ability to mount a projector high inside the church over the altar and to secure a shaving mirror outside the window. It is very difficult to believe that Cavanagh could (or would) arrange for all this and that no-one noticed any of the apparatus or the light emerging from the window. It is also hard to believe that no-one noticed the presence

of the apparatus in Knock or its movement into and out of the church. Frankly, the hypothesis (in any form) stretched the imagination too far, and I have to agree with Francis Lennon (quoted by Berman in 1979) that it is 'highly improbable, indeed, I may say, morally speaking impossible...' In addition there is a curious feature of the original reports that the lantern hypothesis can never explain.

As I have mentioned before (B&IS I.4) at least two of the witnesses reported that the apparition moved when they moved. A picture projected by a lantern does not move as the observer moves: its position is static. This feature of the eyewitness reports (hardly one likely to have been invented or imagined) is a strong clue to the correct explanation. Among the various hypotheses one in particular would allow the images to move with the observer. I refer to the hypothesis that it was a reflected light. A reflection moves with the observer, and in the same direction! If the apparition moved with the witnesses, and in the same direction, then it must have been a reflection (or a very distant light source). If the apparition was seen on the gable of the church, then it must have been a reflection on the gable.

Berman's illustration shows the witnesses grouped opposite the gable, looking squarely at it from the south. However, there are grounds for believing that the witnesses were all located on the road to the west of the gable. Rynne states that the 'figures' were seen 'to the west of the gable'. This cannot mean that the apparition itself was located to the west of the gable: we

know that it was seen on the gable. However, such a statement might mean that the witnesses stood to the west of the gable, looking east! On the road they were not looking squarely at the gable, they were looking at it obliquely such that they could have seen a reflection on it of a source to the east or east-south-east. I have already proposed that the object in question was the planet Jupiter, which rose at 7:34 pm, almost in line with the gable (see plan). I have to point out that the reflection(s) cannot have been seen on a dry gable; they must have been off a film of water deposited on the gable by rain (it had been raining and the wind was southerly). It appears that the gable was rough rendered in mortar, giving a smooth but irregular surface that can have produced several reflections of various shapes and sizes. I have no doubt that it was these various shapes that were misinterpreted as heavenly beings, etc.

Berman's latest article demonstrates the extraordinary length to which some sceptics will go in attempting to find rational explanations for reports of supernatural events. In his 1979 article Berman stated that even if the lantern hypothesis were highly improbable it would be more rational to believe it than its miraculous alternative. It would, but not much more! The lantern hypothesis is almost as hard to believe as a supernatural one. A sceptic should not adopt an unreasonable hypothesis simply because he cannot think of a reasonable one. In particular I am surprised that a philosopher should not have needed the injunction of

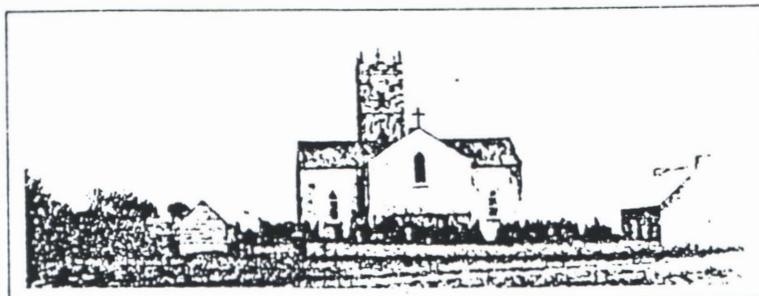
Occam's Razor.

Leslie Shepard should note that I am not proposing that there was a mirage on the gable of the church (impossible unless the wall were very hot). I propose that the apparition was a reflection or several reflections of Jupiter's light (whether or not that light came via a mirage). Shepard also persists in describing the event as 'unique', yet subsequent reports show that it was not unique. All that was unique was the interpretation put upon the observation and the subsequent publicity. That there were subsequent reports of lights on the same gable proves only that it was capable of producing such appearances given the right conditions and constant observation. That does not

make it unique. Other gables could probably produce the same effect.

Shepard claims that all the witnesses agreed on the subject and form of the apparition. A certain common interpretation is understandable. However, there was great variation in the details described and the only common feature is that it was a light. Patrick Walsh reported only a light. I have already shown that Shepard's claim that the images were 'static' is false; one witness reported seeing the fluttering wings of angels! The reported movement of the images (as the witnesses moved) is fatal to the lantern hypothesis and leaves the astronomical reflection hypothesis as the only reasonable explanation

Steuart Campbell



A copy of a photograph of Knock church at the turn of the century (from Tom Neary's Auld Acquaintance: A Guide to Knock Folk Museum, 2nd ed. 1980). At the time, the lower part of the south gable was boarded over to protect it; pilgrims were gradually removing the mortar rendering as sacred relics.

# THE PRESS GALLERY

## 'Cash or curse' con warning

# PSYCHIC 'MAFIA' EXPOSED

## 'Mediums' with a message of greed

PENSIONERS and involved relatives are being ripped off for cash and jewellery by an organized 'mafia' of spiritualists.

Spiritualist Mike Sales, who started tracking down suspected pensioners two years ago, claims he found 51 fake mediums among the 87 he checked out in Battersea, Strathmore and Braxton last year.

And Wandsworth policeman Jack Martin — who uses an assumed name after his family was threatened by fake mediums — claims the con centres around 30 families in London.

In one case, he said, a woman was tricked out of £7,000 cash and jewellery when a "medium" claimed she would die of a cancer curse unless she paid the money for an exorcism.

But he said, "The police cannot prosecute until we can prove that the psychics have obtained goods through deception because they promised to give them back to them."

"Even then it is difficult to get the courts

to take it to court and they ask me to approach the psychic and ask for their money back, which is what usually happens."

Mr. Sales, who has also been threatened, says he has successfully recovered victims' cash after confronting the fakes.

"I do it for the impressionable old ladies being conned out of £70 for a few hours rubbish," he said.

"The tricksters are using crude con you can easily spot."

And PC Martin added, "They work on their mark for six or seven sittings and on the final one ask them to leave money and jewellery to be blessed."

"If the victim does not comply they say they will be cursed. When the cleric returns a few weeks later to collect the valuables, nobody's there."

He said only two cases have been prosecuted in London since 1982, resulting in a £100 fine and two-year prison sentence.

EXCLUSIVE

by JOHN FENNESSY

THE MYSTIC MUGGERS p 8 & 9

## SCIENTIST 'EXPLAINS' AUSSIE UFO

AN Australian family's experience with what they claimed to be an unidentified flying object might be an unusual natural phenomenon — a dry thunderstorm, a scientist said today.

Faye Knowles and her three sons, aged 18 to 24, said yesterday that they were stalked by a UFO which lifted their car off the road and spun it around before dropping it back with a flattened tyre.

Professor Peter Schwerdtfeger, head of meteorology at Flinders University in Adelaide, said the details provided by the Knowles family were consistent with a dry thunderstorm in which charged dust particles create a pall of lightning.

# MYSTIC

## PSYCHICS HIT OUT AT 'CHEATS'

STRAIGHT psychics have hit out at the swindlers making cash from misplaced faith. Clairvoyant Collette Simpson warned, "You should never go to one advertised through a handbill or in a paper without asking for references." "A newspaper called Psychic News can sometimes check on psychics." Stella Mann (35), of Linden Grove, Peckham, (pictured below) said, "A lot of my psychic colleagues talk out of their hats. You don't get flashes from the sky."



And faith healer Martin Coombs (46), of Perry Vale, Forest Hill, said, "You cannot guarantee psychic powers. There are evil people living on other people's misery. It's a form of blackmail." The Rev. David Garlick, vicar of Lewisham Parish Church, said, "It's evil and of the Devil."

"It's sad that people get taken in by dubious activities." Lewisham Spiritualist Church secretary Alice French said, "Whereas we might charge £2.50 for a half-hour reading and give money to charity, the fakes ask £10 for 10 minutes of fantasy."



## Spirit spivs!

OUR own undercover investigation has exposed the methods of spirit spivs working from home to fleece the trusting. A reporter visited three psychics. Each sitting lasted about ten minutes and was an extended waffle about love, work and friends. Not one psychic spotted that a wrong name, address and occupation were given. A Peckham medium charged £10 for a Tarot reading and the reporter left he was given a talisman — a holy grip of rock with pen markings, she said would bring him luck. She spoke from behind an altar with religious statues and a crystal ball on top. When the reporter visited a

woman living in Herne Hill he said he had been unemployed for 16 months and was broke. Despite this she asked for £15 for a palm reading and asked for more money for 'a blessing.' He was told the more money he gave 'the bigger the blessing.' She said, "Some people give a little and others a lot" and demanded what was in his pocket. But finally she agreed he should come back to pay for the blessing another time. A Peckham woman asked for £6 for a Tarot reading. Before the reporter left he was given a talisman — a holy grip of rock with pen markings, she said would bring him luck. She spoke from behind an altar with religious statues and a crystal ball on top. When the reporter visited a

## GYPSY FORTUNE TELLERS NAILED FOR FOUR YEARS

A gang of fortune-telling frauds were nailed for cheating women all over the country nine years ago. The Williams' family were found guilty of frightening their victims into handing over cash in return for 'blessings' which would banish evil spirits. Kate Williams, of Ramden Road, Batham, and her daughter-in-law Shirley of Pauline Road, Brixton, each received four years. Mrs. Williams' sons, Danny and Robert, got two-and-a-half years each. Gloucester Crown Court heard at least 20 women were tricked in a massive con spanning several years and taking in thousands of pounds. The Williams' women denied charges of conspiracy to defraud. Blackmail and obtaining money by deception while the two men denied conspiracy to defraud.



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DAILY TELEGRAPH 1 II 88

## Turin Shroud experts study Merseyside mattress

A GROUP of world experts is due on Merseyside soon with the task of resolving a mystery as baffling as the famous Turin Shroud. When they arrive in about two weeks a mattress cover will be taken out of a bank vault where it has been stored for security reasons. The man who died on it left behind a perfect imprint of his body. So detailed was the imprint that even the crease lines from his hand were clearly visible.

Within a fortnight a team of international scientists will be carefully examining the Merseyside mattress. The event that caused astonishment among staff at the Jesper International hospice at Thornton near Crosby on North Merseyside happened almost seven years ago. The director and founder of the hospice Fr. Francis O'Leary said yesterday that he was as baffled today as he was when he first saw the mattress in 1981

after a 44-year-old cancer victim died on it. "When the team of scientists have examined it we may learn more. But at the moment I am keeping an open mind," he said. Prof. James Cameron of the London Hospital Medical School who worked on Rodolfo Hess's post mortem has already examined the mattress. The professor, an authority on the Turin Shroud, told Jesper staff that he was baffled by their mattress. One explanation might have been a chemical reaction caused by body fluids the pro-

essor told staff. But he admitted that there were a number of puzzling features. One of these was that the image of the dead man, a 44-year-old West Indian bachelor from Bootle, was transmitted to the mattress cover through his pyjamas, a bed sheet and in the case of his head through the pillow. Fr. O'Leary who knew the dead man said: "He was what you would call a very holy person, there was something charismatic about him."

# MUGGERS!

**POVERTY** and personal traumas provide the con psychics with easy pickings, claim their frontline opponents.

PC Martin, an assumed name, said, "Older people tend to be more superstitious and are being ripped off."

But victims also include the harassed, broken romance partners and the unemployed.

He added, "The most vulnerable are the petty in those people's hands. They are very clever, almost hypnotic people who are making thousands of pounds each year out of human misery."

Some of my colleagues are cynical about my work, but I think those practices are cheating more than honest robbery.

He has had a double on crystal-ball charts spanning 14 years and earned a one-net salary.

He said, "They work on two levels. There are those who are content to make a modest

"The psychic Mafia" is making thousands of pounds by preying on vulnerable people — particularly pensioners and the bereaved. Reporter JOHN FENNESSY today reveals the cons discovered by two real-life Ghostbusters, and on Tuesday he explains what happened when he visited three psychics.



## Tricks of the trade

THE psychic fakes use a number of cunning tricks to fool their unsuspecting clients. Common ruses include:

• Charging £20 or more for an astrological chart that can be printed in seconds on a computer given date of birth, time of day and place.

• A 'ghost' can be created from a 'reduction' created by shining strong light on a figure through a sheet of plastic glass.

• A table can be 'levitated' by feet underneath or by pressing down hard on one end to make the other end go up.

• An envelope of money is left on a table to be 'blessed'. The client takes it back but cannot open it for four weeks when he does he finds blank paper inside.

• 'Tar' readings are based on pre-recorded and foolproof questions. A psychic may say you are an astrologer on the outside and an astrologer on the inside and cannot see.

being by charging up to £20 for false readings.

"And there are the hit-and-run operators who have the country for America or Europe after a big sting of several thousands of pounds taken from a chosen target."

"At the moment I can say try to keep a cap on things."

### Despair

PC Martin helped genuine psychic Collyer Thomas over an assumed name from despair and disaster.

The woman was persuaded to part with £7,000 worth of jewellery, clothes and cash by a 'medium' who was a member of a secret system.

Mr. Fennessy told the South London Press, "This woman

was told she had been cursed and had cancer.

"The money was needed for cloths to dress seven or eight men for an occasion."

"Only when she was asked for a further £5,000 did she come to me, still frightened."

"She was in a terrible state — these things are very dangerous for people of nervous disposition."

Ghostbuster Mike Sales (39) of Beckenham said, "The spirit calling game is getting bigger and bigger and the merchandising is getting sharper and sharper."

"I have been threatened by people frightened of losing their racket. One group in Britain want some flags to my door to tell me to stay off their turf."

He has £12,000 a month from breakfast rums and claimed, "I have been called a terrorist and a rat."

He added, "I average two cases a week, except on Feb and am prepared to travel anywhere."

Mr. Sales and PC Martin normally get money back for the clients by confronting the psychics.

### Scared

Yet PC Martin admitted, "Clients are too scared or embarrassed to go to court. I have dealt with some appalling cases like the old lady who was asked to go to a university for some cash and an elderly couple who were asked to sell their house."

# IS ANY MONEY THERE?



Doris Stokes... she warned her husband from beyond the grave

## Riddle of dead Doris's fortune

By JAMIE PYATT

THE widower of medium Doris Stokes has made desperate attempts to contact her in the Life Beyond—to ask her where she left her £200,000 fortune.

World-famous psychic Doris, 68, earned up to £2,000 a night before her death last year.

But in her will, made public yesterday, she did not leave a penny to husband John, son Terry... or anyone else.

John, also 68, at first wondered if cancer victim Doris had proved you CAN take it with you.

### Seance

And he asked eight other mediums to contact Doris beyond the grave in a bid to unearth the truth.

Finally, the riddle was cleared up by Lancashire psychic Merrylyn Seddon.

During a four-hour seance at the Stokes's bungalow on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent, Doris told John through the medium: "There is money in the Channel Islands, but don't trace it, love. It'll only cause you trouble."

"But I can tell you this, I didn't put it there."

Doris also had a message for 45-year-old Terry, who hired a private eye to track down the "missing" loot.

She said: "Let it pass, son, you'll never trace it."

### Spend

Officially, Doris left an estate valued at £15,291. But there was nothing left: once funeral expenses and debts had been paid.

Last night, her ex-manager, Laurie O'Leary said: "She gave most of her money to charity."

"Her family have always been convinced there is a fortune, but she knew how to spend."

### RAT PACK RAID

A hundred white rats were stolen by animal liberation fanatics in a raid on a hospital lab in Beckenham, Kent.

# THE STAR UFO

THE NEWSPAPER THAT'S LIGHT YEARS AHEAD

22 FEB 1988 20p

Family car is plucked into the air by aliens

# HIJACK TERROR

## My work for CIA, by Uri Geller

SPOON-BENDER extraordinary Uri Geller claimed today that he used his apparently psychic powers to help the CIA and the Israeli Secret Service.

He Geller says his skills enabled him to get information from defectors.

"It was telepathy on defectors' minds and I only worked with them if it was ethically okay," he said.

Geller, who persuaded thousands of British TV viewers in the 1970s that he could bend cutlery and mend broken crockery, said he was careful to use his talents for the right purposes.

He once threw away about £17,000 he won after predicting winning numbers on a roulette table, for fear his powers could be taken away from him.

### Fraud

Geller said he was not hurt by claims that he is a fraud: "I have many reservations myself about the claims of some psychics."

"I don't believe in fortune-tellers but I do think major disasters can be foretold. For years I dreamed, foresaw my father's death."

"It haunted me until it happened exactly as in the dream. I do not really wish to see the future."

Geller told Woman's Journal he has made a lot of money in recent years, but insisted: "I could earn a great deal more."

### 'Offers'

"I have offers from companies all over the world. But I do not want yachts or private jets."

He now uses the security that wealth has given him to concentrate and restore his power, he said.

Geller has not always been too fussy about how he made his money.

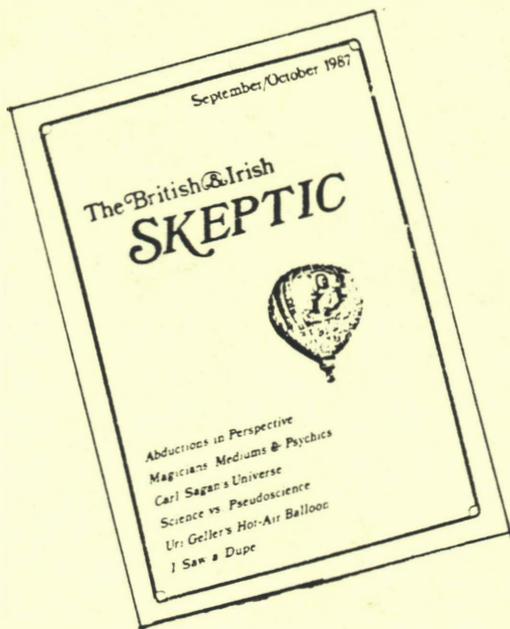
He said: "I always wanted to be rich. I had ambitions to become a gigolo."

"I was quite serious and intended to go to Italy and find myself an ageing countess. If I couldn't manage that, I wanted to be a horror-movie star."

28/02/88

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