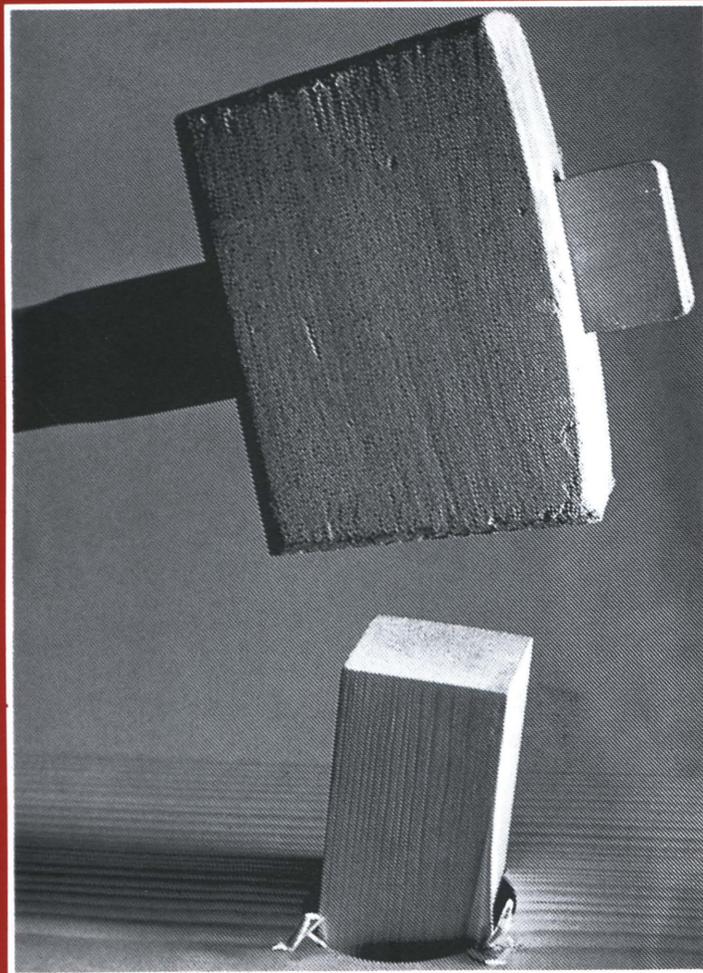


*The*

Volume 10 Number 3

# *Skeptic*



## *Why do people believe in the paranormal?*

Also in this issue

*Investigating the 'incorruptible Yogi'*

*Little grey aliens*

*Power cable hysteria*

*Meet a fake psychic*

*News • Book reviews • Comment • Humour*

£2

# Hilary Evans' Paranormal Picture Gallery



## Biblical english

**I**T IS SOMETIMES QUESTIONED, by those unfortunate enough not to be born British, whether God is an Englishman. However, this picture provides confirming evidence: you can plainly see that the Tablets of the Law which Moses is holding up are *written in English!*

An alternative explanation, that what we are looking at is the English translation, thoughtfully provided by God because the British needed the Commandments more than other people, is plainly ridiculous. Equally absurd is the suggestion that an English-language version was provided because we are notoriously bad at languages. For at the time of Moses, few Englishmen, if any, could read at all.

# Contents

## Editorial

At the moment it seems that you can't switch on the TV without finding a programme about the paranormal. And all is not well.

We're not talking about *The X-Files*, which is a fine example of escapist entertainment in the tradition of *The Twilight Zone* and *The Outer Limits*. Our complaint lies with the apparently 'earnest' programmes. The documentaries, semi-documentaries, pseudo-documentaries, chat shows and audience participation programmes. Among them, hardly a single well-balanced, intelligent, skeptical, look at the paranormal.

The quality of these so-called 'investigative' programmes does a disservice to the intelligence of the viewing public.

Skeptics, contributors to this magazine included, often participate in these programs, and, against all the editorial odds, do the best that they can. But they are often made to appear marginal spoil-sport figures, bizarrely raising their rational doubts about the manifest 'obvious reality' of the paranormal.

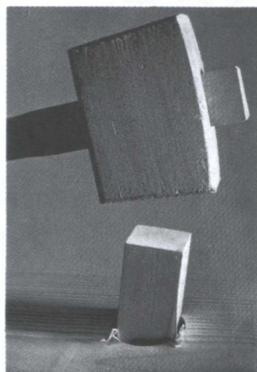
We have seen only one recent programme of note: the eminently disrespectful short series on BBC2 by *The Guardian's* Catherine Bennett. We don't have the audience figures, but we suspect they pale into insignificance beside those for the *Aspels* and the *Frosts*.

The British public deserves better from its broadcasters. If you agree, your letters to the BBC and ITV companies might help reverse the trend.

## Volume 10 Number 3

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Hits and Misses</b> .....                  | 4  |
| Steve Donnelly                                |    |
| <b>The Incorruptible Yogi</b> .....           | 6  |
| Leonard Angel                                 |    |
| <b>Little Grey Men</b> .....                  | 10 |
| Anson Kennedy                                 |    |
| <b>Sorting the Sheep from the Goats</b> ..... | 12 |
| Chris French                                  |    |
| <b>The Skeptic's Dictionary</b> .....         | 16 |
| Robert Todd Carroll                           |    |
| <b>The Media and the Pylon Scare</b> .....    | 17 |
| Neville Goodman                               |    |
| <b>Maybe I am Psychic!</b> .....              | 19 |
| Chris Willis meets Ian Rowland                |    |
| <b>Psychic Diary</b> .....                    | 20 |
| Toby Howard                                   |    |
| <b>Skeptic at Large</b> .....                 | 21 |
| Wendy Grossman                                |    |
| <b>Reviews</b> .....                          | 22 |
| <b>Letters</b> .....                          | 27 |

## The Skeptic



Published bimonthly from  
PO Box 475  
Manchester M60 2TH  
United Kingdom

Email [skeptic@cs.man.ac.uk](mailto:skeptic@cs.man.ac.uk)  
Web [www.cs.man.ac.uk/skeptic](http://www.cs.man.ac.uk/skeptic)  
Tel 0161 275 6274  
Fax 0161 275 6236

**Editors**  
Dr Steve Donnelly  
Toby Howard

**Finance Manager**  
Dave Martin

**Cartoons**  
Donald Room  
Tim Pearce  
Nick Kim

**Editorial Support**  
Jane Bousfield  
Angela Cernoculski  
Daf and Mike Tregear

**Special Consultant**  
Cyril Howard

**Special Projects**  
Chris Willis

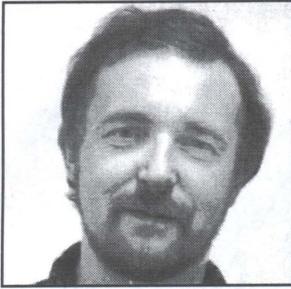
**Printing**  
Chapel Press, Stockport

ISSN 0959-5228

Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the editors.

Contents copyright  
© The Skeptic 1996

We welcome contributions.  
Please enclose a SAE.



# Hits and Misses

Steve Donnelly

## Ab-duck-tion

It's good to hear that psychic powers are being used for the important things in life. An article in the *Daily Telegraph* on 14 March reports that a psychic in Devon successfully used her psychic abilities to find four abducted ducklings. Equipped with only a single feather from one of the ducks which had gone missing from the property of Aline Holmes, clairvoyant Carol Everett gave sufficient information for the rare ducks (Swedish Blues worth £400) to be recovered from a neighbouring farm belonging to Adrian Williams. Mr Williams, who had been working on Ms Holmes' farm at the time of the disappearance, denied stealing the ducks and claimed that they had simply turned up on his land. Magistrates, however, found Mr Williams not guilty after the defending counsel questioned whether the bench should rely on identification made by a clairvoyant using a feather. A landmark decision.



Tim Pearce

## Academic rigour (mortis?)

Scientists sometimes have difficulty taking seriously material that is published in academic journals in other non-scientific areas. Physicist, Alan Sokal, from New York University became particularly irked by what he regarded as the 'proliferation of nonsense and sloppy thinking' in cultural studies – an area of academic research that looks for hidden meanings in various aspects

of a society's activities including science. According to the *Observer* on 19 May, he submitted a spoof article to the subject's leading journal, *Social Text* and, presumably despite passing through some kind of peer review process, the article was taken seriously and published in its entirety in the journal. The article was entitled 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity' and was structured 'around the silliest quotes about mathematics and physics from the most prominent academics'. It also contained meaningless footnotes on counterhegemonic epistemology (no, I don't know what this means either). Referring to the furore that followed the revelation that the paper was a piss-take, Norman Levitt, a professor of mathematics at Rutgers University feels that he does not want to claim that 'it proves that all social science professors are complete idiots, but it does betray a certain arrogance and a certain out-of-touchness on the part of a certain clique'. Maybe cultural studies academics will attempt revenge by submitting a spoof physics paper to a prestigious physics journal.

## SCE

A new phenomenon reported for the first time in May of this year appears to have mysterious links to the well-known phenomenon of spontaneous human combustion (SHC). In SHC, bodies of previously perfectly healthy people are found mysteriously burnt away to nothing but a pile of ash (and an occasional half leg) but with minimal damage to nearby fittings and fixtures. In the first manifestation of the new phenomenon – which should be known as SCE or spontaneous clothing explosion – an article of previously perfectly healthy clothing underwent a violent explosion whilst on the clothes line without causing damage to other nearby items on the line. Speaking to the *Sunday Independent* on 19 May, Mr Alan Fairless of Bristol explained that the garment that had exploded with a bang that '... sounded like our new extension falling down' had been, before its unfortunate demise, his favourite leisure garment. Unfortunately, all that remained of his green and white Lacoste shirt after the incident were 'a few bits of green cloth around the shoulders'. Mr Fairless firmly rejected the idea that his favourite shirt could have been the victim of a mob 'hit' or similar deliberate violent act, and checks with the Bristol Weather Centre revealed no atmospheric activity in the area that could have provided an explanation for the mystery.

Personally, I think it was probably just an act of a whimsical deity reserved for those people who describe their tee-shirts as 'leisure garments'.

## Merry wives of Windsor

The Royal ex-wives are still impressing us with their wise choice of medical and psychic consultants. According to the *Daily Express* on 28 April, Diana 'no longer gets the point of acupuncture – and colonic irrigation has been relegated to the bottom of her list'. Now she has taken up a more practical and down-to-earth therapy espoused by market gardener turned healer, Jack Temple. Mr Temple's therapies include getting patients to walk among coloured marker flags holding a glass of water, swinging a bottle of potion in front of them and – best of all – strapping homeopathic tablets to the back of their heads with white sticking plaster. This clearly avoids any disturbing side effects associated with actually swallowing homeopathic tablets. Mr Temple suggests that this technique works in the same way as a nicotine patch.

This has given me a great idea for a money-making scheme (anyone want to invest a few £100 000?): For people who want to lose weight, but have great difficulty because of an 'addiction' to certain specific, favourite foods, the new Donnelly Weight Loss Scheme (scientifically formulated and with ample testimonials from satisfied customers) consists of simply strapping a portion of the problem food to the back of the head with a (white) sticking plaster. On the principle of the nicotine patch, this will satisfy the craving without any calorie intake whatsoever. For practical reasons, foods such as ice-cream and chocolate will be dealt with during the winter months. I give you my solemn promise (and money back guarantee) that this will work just as well as (if not better than) all other miracle diets.



Tim Pearce

*I'm sorry but I've run out of the small-sized ones!*

## Sssh!!

United States watch out. According to the *Daily Telegraph* on 10 April, Professor Donald Tarter – a member of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Committee – is concerned that a rogue world leader such as Saddam Hussein could send messages to aliens and convince them that he was the legitimate ruler of the world – presumably enlisting their help in actually becoming ruler of the world. (And this would *really* play havoc with Bill Clinton's re-election campaign). However, the *Telegraph* on 19 May also reported a theory, developed as a science fiction novel, that explains why we do *not* hear any messages from ET and his tribe. Scientists Charles Pellagrino and George Zebrowski suggest in their book, *The Killing Star*, that any civilisation that develops interstellar space travel could use its space ships as missiles. According to the authors, a space ship weighing a mere 1500 tons, accelerated to 92% of the speed of light and fired at the earth would create a firestorm that could destroy all life on our planet. The authors argue that we live in a paranoid universe where species will wipe out competing civilisations to avoid their own destruction at the hands of species who use the same reasoning (if you see what I mean). If this hypothesis is correct we are in deep trouble, folks (and need not worry too much about Saddam's aliens) as our existence must already be known to any aliens within 50 light-years; a sphere that is increasing by one light year in radius every year.

## The acid test

Finally, for anyone who has seen wacky alternative remedies apparently working to alleviate real physical ailments, information enclosed with some non-prescription medicine purchased in the US recently may provide a convincing explanation for their efficacy. The product 'Pepcid AC' is now available over the counter but its active ingredient by the name of famotidine – whose purpose is to reduce excess stomach acidity – has been available on prescription for many years. The information sheet included with the product contains information that demonstrates the effectiveness of Pepcid in two sets of clinical studies (although no information is given on the number of patients involved in either). Amazingly, (assuming equal numbers of episodes/patients in each study) the studies reveal that, on average, 47% of heartburn episodes were completely alleviated by placebo pills compared with 68% by the genuine medication and that 55% of patients found that their symptoms were alleviated by the placebo pill compared with 74% by the genuine tablet. Given that the real tablets cost about 60 cents each and work only slightly better than placebo pills, the latter are certainly more cost effective, as a large packet of Smarties could provide a year's supply. I can't help wondering why the manufacturer includes this information. As with many other aspects of life in the US, it must have something to do with concerns about possible litigation – but litigation about what exactly, I have no idea. Answers on a postcard . . .

**Steve Donnelly** is a professor in the Department of Physics at the University of Salford.

# The Incorruptible Yogi

*With the publication of a new edition of Paramahansa Yogananda's Autobiography of Yogi (Rider, £8.99) Leonard Angel investigates claims for the incorruptibility of Yogananda's body after his death*

**M**ANY YEARS AGO, when I first became interested in yoga and mysticism I came across a book called *Autobiography of a Yogi* by Paramahansa Yogananda. My interest in yoga was both intellectual and personal. My personal interest was with reference to direct experience of whatever it was mystics were referring to. I was curious, and willing to practice meditation, and to investigate whatever there was to be investigated for myself. It was in this context that I became interested in the various accounts of the spiritual progress of yogis, and read Paramahansa Yogananda's book.

It is hard to describe my puzzlement on reading this book. On the one hand, I was attracted to yoga philosophy because it seemed to be experiential and empirical. The yogis claim to teach what they themselves know from first hand experience. And so much of Eastern mysticism – classic Taoist literature, for instance – seemed to be free of what I took to be superstition and uneducated, pre-scientific ways of thinking of the world compared to the Western spiritual traditions, with its stories of direct specific prophetic revelations, resurrections from the dead, clairvoyant prophecies and so on. Eastern mysticism purported to be in tune with modernity and scientific methods.

Yet here was a book, full of the most amazing tales of bilocation, materialization, clairvoyance, precognition, from someone claiming to have directly experienced all these things, and claiming that these phenomena are in accordance with a higher form of science than that known in the West! It was easy for me to dismiss Biblical reports of such things. The Bible was compiled so many years after the events from oral reports and traditional accounts that exaggerations, distortions and inventions could so easily have formed the basis of the miracle tales. But what to make of these contemporary reports made in a highly scientific age?

It seemed there were only two alternatives: either Yogananda was a fraud, a cheat, a deceiver, a hypocrite;

or else events of the most amazing apparently miraculous nature could indeed take place, and have indeed taken place within our own century, and not only in India, but also in North America. What to make of it? My twenty-year old mind was boggled! At times I would conclude that it was all some kind of scam. But then I would read a poem written by Yogananda which breathed the air of purity, of light, had a quality of simplicity and inspiration, and it seemed utterly impossible that he

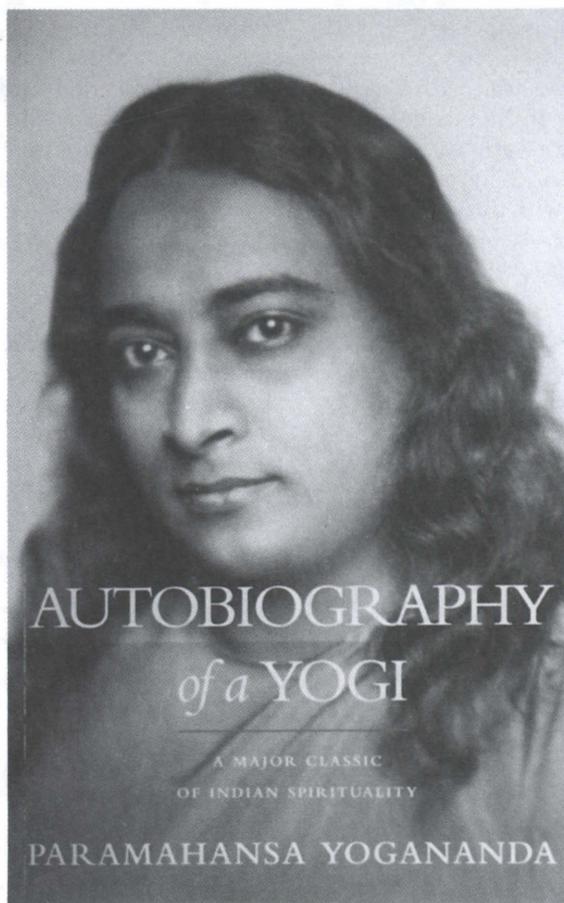
would be a hypocrite, telling false tales of what he himself had seen and done and experienced. At other times I would dismiss the reports thinking that he had decided that to sell his autobiography and his yoga system, he decided to spice it up with fabulous but not strictly true stories.

But then I would read an account of one or another miracle reported where, it seemed, there could be no duplicity on Yogananda's part, such as the miraculous incorruptibility of the body of Yogananda after his death, attested to in a notarized letter from the mortuary director, and I would be baffled again. How could I doubt what had been apparently confirmed by an expert in the field willing to put his professional reputation at stake by signing a notarized letter concerning these matters?

Reports of these strange phenomena must have some truth in them, I concluded. And anyway, why shouldn't the world have phenomena that

couldn't be explained by normal science. Wasn't science constantly changing? Couldn't it be that in a hundred or five hundred years we will be able to understand the natural laws underlying such phenomena as bilocation, and clairvoyance?

I continued this way, of two minds for a time, and continued also in my meditation practice. It was the latter which brought me to the meditation discipline of Zen Buddhism, and I began to study under a Zen Master named Joshu Sasaki Roshi who came to Vancouver twice a year to give week-long meditation retreats. Now Zen Buddhism, as is well known, is free of all doctrine alto-



## Claims for the incorruptibility of Yogananda's corpse

(From back cover, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, 1956 edition; and *Paramahansa Yogananda: In Memoriam*, SRF 1958.)

“ Paramahansa Yogananda entered mahasamadhi (a yogi's final conscious exit from the body) in Los Angeles, California, U.S.A. on March 7, 1952, after concluding his speech at a banquet held in honor of H E Binay R Sen, Ambassador of India. The story of the beloved yogi's passing was reported in *Self-Realization Magazine* (Los Angeles) May 1952 issue; and in the national news weekly *Time*, August 4, 1952.

The great world teacher demonstrated the value of yoga (scientific techniques for God-realization) not only in life but in death. Weeks after his departure his unchanged face shone with the divine luster of incorruptibility. Mr Harry T Rowe, Los Angeles Mortuary Director, Forest Lawn Memorial-Park (in which the body of the great master is temporarily placed) sent *Self-Realization Fellowship* a notarized letter from which the following extracts are taken:

'The absence of any visual signs of decay in the dead body of Paramahansa Yogananda offers the most extraordinary case in our experience . . . No physical disintegration was visible in his body even twenty days after death . . . No indication of mold was visible on his skin, and no visible desiccation (drying up) took place in the bodily tissues. This state of perfect preservation of a body is, so far as we know from mortuary annals, an unparalleled one . . . At the time of receiving Yogananda's body, the mortuary personnel expected to observe, through the glass lid of the casket, the usual progressive signs of bodily decay. Our astonishment increased as day followed day without bringing any visible change in the body under observation. Yogananda's body was apparently in a phenomenal state of immutability . . . No odor of decay emanated from his body at any time . . . The physical appearance of Yogananda on March 27th, just before the bronze cover of the casket was put into position, was the same as it had been on March 7th. He looked on March 27th as fresh and as unravaged by decay as he had looked on the night of his death. On March 27th there was no reason to say that his body had suffered any visible physical disintegration at all. For these reasons we state again that the case of Paramahansa Yogananda is unique in our experience.' ”

gether, and stresses direct insight and experience. Accordingly, the teaching I received from Joshu Roshi neither affirmed nor denied paranormal phenomena. All such reports were strictly irrelevant to koan study, zazen practice, and living one's ordinary daily life – the three main elements of Rinzai Zen discipline. So the whole issue of the truth or falsity the claims in Paramahansa Yogananda's book faded into the background.

Recently, however, after about twenty years of immersion in Zen studies and Western style philosophical pursuits, I became somewhat more preoccupied by the matter of the truth or falsity of these extraordinary psychic and paranormal claims, and have been investigating them afresh. For several reasons, I'm glad I postponed the investigation. For one thing, the exemplary work done by the various rationalist organizations such as CSICOP is of great assistance in carrying out individual investigations. Also, had I discovered some of the negative results in investigation of psychic phenomena as have been turning up, I might have concluded that meditation practice was not worth pursuing, and that, to me personally, would have been a great loss.

### Towards an investigation

It is readily apparent that there would be enormous difficulty in objectively verifying any of the accounts which took place in India. There are one or two which might be amenable to investigation from within India. However, a close study of the text in Yogananda's accounts shows not only implausibilities, but also that he is extremely vague on the details needed to track anything down. Even from within India it might prove impossible to locate independent records of these events.

Aside from the events located in India, the vast ma-

majority of miraculous phenomena reported by Yogananda are suspiciously impossible to investigate. They took place in the presence of Yogananda and his guru, but no one else (Chapter 15). Or they took place in the presence of Yogananda, but he was all alone at the time (Chapter 19). These are hardly the sorts of stories the scientist is in a position to investigate.

On reviewing the various narrations of the paranormal in *Autobiography of a Yogi*, it seemed to me that there was really only one account which is truly amenable to independent investigation and confirmation for a scientist living in North America. The alleged paranormal powers were displayed in the United States, and are attributed in official Yogananda literature to Yogananda's yogic powers. I am referring to the miracle which is reported in almost every Yogananda publication, often in a most prominent position, such as filling the back cover of the publication, or near the title page in a special page highlighted by some graphic feature such as a square frame surrounding it.

The paranormal event concerns the 'phenomenal state of immutability of Yogananda's body after his death' (see box, above) and is presented in publication after publication put out by the Self Realization Fellowship (SRF), the society founded by Yogananda to propagate his teachings. The phenomenon certainly sounded impressive enough. I proceeded to investigate.

The first step I took was to write to the Los Angeles Department of Vital Statistics to see if I could obtain a copy of the Yogananda's death certificate. I did this for several reasons. For one thing, in the description of Yogananda's death, it wasn't made absolutely clear whether he collapsed at his hotel and survived a few days beyond that, or actually died in the medical sense on the day of the collapse. It was possible, given the

ambiguous 'mahasamadhi' reference in the advertisement of the miracle, that Yogananda had only died in the medical sense closer to the 27th than the advertisement would have us believe. A death certificate would establish the actual date of death in the medical sense. Also, the death certificate might contain relevant information, such as precise cause of death, and so on.

Many authorities will not issue copies of death certificates to non-relative inquirers, but the access to information laws of the State of California are liberal, and it was not at all difficult to obtain a copy of the death certificate. The certificate shows that Yogananda did indeed die when the devotees said he died. My suspicion that the word 'passing' in the description of the miracle was being used imprecisely was decisively refuted.

However, upon reviewing the death certificate more closely, I noticed an odd notation. Box #21 of the certificate contains the signature 'Kenneth I Johnson', and the number 2641. Above it are the words 'Signature of embalmer'. *Signature of embalmer?* Does this mean that the body was embalmed? And box #23 indicates that this certificate of death was received by the registrar by March 11 1952. Apparently, Yogananda's body was embalmed on or before March 11 1952, within a couple of days of his death.

Surely, this fact, if it was a fact, would prove to be of crucial importance in assessing the claim of a miracle. Clearly, I needed to obtain a full copy of the notarized letter of Harry T Rowe, mentioned in the SRF publicity.

As it turned out, this, too, was easy enough to obtain. The full text of the letter is included in a little booklet put out by SRF, entitled *Paramahansa Yogananda, In Memoriam*. If I had any uncertainties about whether I had read the information properly from Box #23 of the death certificate, these were quickly put to rest. The complete text of Harry Rowe's letter includes the following information in paragraph #5:

Paramahansa Yogananda's body was embalmed on the night of March 8th, with that quantity of fluid which is customarily used in any body of similar size.

### What was the miracle?

The question now remained as to what exact miracle was supposed to have taken place. Everyone knows that embalming is a procedure which preserves the body of a corpse from decay. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* defines 'embalm' as: 'preserve (corpse) from decay orig. with spices, now by means of arterial injection'. If Yogananda's body was embalmed at Forest Lawn, which was famous for its 'memorialization' of the bodies of the beloved, using what we can presume was the best 1952 technology, would it be unusual that there was an 'absence of any visual signs of decay in the dead body of Paramahansa Yogananda'? Is it miraculous that 'no physi-

cal disintegration was visible in his body even twenty days after death'? Is it contrary to the laws of chemistry to find that 'no indication of mold was visible on his skin, and no visible desiccation (drying up) took place in the bodily tissues'? Is it any cause for astonishment that 'no odor of decay emanated from his body at any time'?

According to the full text of Harry Rowe's letter, the astonishment was only due to the fact that the funeral home staff had not used any creams in addition to the embalming fluid. This, it turns out, is the sum total of the miracle claim: no creams were used in addition to the embalming fluid to help preserve the body and skin tone.

To find out whether embalming fluid alone, that is, without the application of creams, could account for the preservation of a body without desiccation for twenty days, I consulted two embalmers with local Vancouver funeral homes. To select the consultant embalmers I simply looked up funeral homes in the Yellow Pages Business Directory, selected the first large advertisements that caught my attention, Kearney Funeral Homes, and Hamilton Mortuary Ltd., and dialed the numbers. At Kearney Funeral Homes, the receptionist transferred my call to Ellen Kearney Crean.



Yogananda, shortly before his 'mahasamadhi'

I told Ms Crean that I was researching the miracle claim associated with the death of Yogananda, read out the quoted claims, informed her that the body had been embalmed the day after Yogananda's death, and asked her if the claims might be accounted for in normal ways through the embalming procedure. Her response was immediate and unambiguous: 'I'm sure we've had bodies for two or three months with good preservation. This is not unusual. Creams are not necessary. The preservation of the body without creams all depends on the skill of the embalmer, the formula of the embalming fluid, the temperature at which the body is kept, and the medications given the person prior to death'. I asked Ms Crean concerning her credentials and experience. She was licensed through the Washington State Embalmer's License, also is a Certified Funeral Service Practitioner, and assured me that she had many years experience as an embalmer.

At Hamilton Mortuary Ltd. I spoke to Ian Eliot, who is the Assistant Manager, and is a qualified embalmer through the Saskatchewan Funeral Services Association, with a University of Saskatchewan certificate of Qualification, and Licensed from the Alberta Funeral Service Association. He also has two continuing education certificates from State University of New York at Canton N.Y. Agricultural and Technological College. His response to my questions concerning the degree of normalcy in the events reported by Mr Rowe was equally clear and emphatic:

Preservation for 20 days through embalming is not unusual. We can keep a body a month or a month

and a half without interval. We use an embalming fluid with lanolin base which will have humectant which prevents dehydration, which is the major concern. Also a heavy glass lid as is described by Mr Rowe as being present on the casket, would prevent a great amount of air circulation, and that in itself would prevent most desiccation, so that would account for it. In California at that time they would have had refrigeration units, I would expect, and the body could have been kept cold during the night at least. The letter of Mr Rowe is certainly misleading because of its failure to discuss the effects of the glass lid and makes no mention of the temperatures at which the body was being kept, and so on. Also if the person had been using creams on his skin prior to his death, this might have helped. There is nothing unusual about a body being embalmed with fluids in use in 1952 without creams and being preserved for 20 days in good condition.

Thus, the first two embalmers I spoke to flatly contradicted the claim made by Mr Rowe that there was cause for astonishment in the fact that Yogananda's body was preserved by embalming fluid alone 19 days after embalming in a good condition. There is no 'demonstration of yogic powers' here at all, but only a misleadingly written letter by Mr Rowe for his client, even more misleading selections of which were then used in publication after publication as a promotion for the organization with the crucial facts concerning the embalming of the body entirely left out!

### A proper conclusion

I now had enough information to draw a proper conclusion. However, to be fair I wanted to give the SRF leadership an opportunity to comment on the supposed miracle. They say that the 'phenomenal state of immutability' of Yogananda's body was:

a miracle (which) appears to have taken place through the grace of the Heavenly Father, that men might know the goodness of Yoganandaji's mission on earth. The beautiful phenomena attending Paramahansaji's death have aroused world interest in the soul-revealing possibilities of yoga.

To the end of allowing SRF an opportunity to respond to the findings of my investigation, I wrote to the SRF Mother Centre, asking what the 'miracle' associated with Paramahansa Yogananda's passing is alleged to have been, in light of the fact that his body was embalmed the day after his death, and creams are not necessary for good preservation for several weeks in many normal cases; and also why the embalming information was deleted from the statement of the claim as found in the mass circulated *Autobiography of a Yogi* and similar main sources. The reply from the SRF is reproduced here.

**Leonard Angel** is a professor of philosophy at the University of British Columbia.

*This article originally appeared in The Rational Enquirer, the newsletter of the Canadian BC Skeptics, and is reprinted with kind permission.*

## The SRF responds

We spoke with Mr Gary Olson, Vice President at Forest Lawn, about the assertions in your article. He commented that Mr Harry T Rowe, Mortuary Director at Forest Lawn Memorial-Park at the time of Paramahansa Yogananda's passing, was a first-hand observer of the events that took place at the time, that he wrote a detailed description of those events in his notarized letter dated May 16, 1952, and that Forest Lawn stands by that letter. We too stand by that letter, and suggest that you publish it in its entirety in your article, which we feel would otherwise be misleading.

The essence if not the detail of Mr Rowe's letter appears in its first sentence: 'The absence of any visual signs of decay in the dead body of Paramahansa Yogananda offers the most extraordinary case in our experience.' The fact is that the professionals on the scene were astounded by what took place. Mr Rowe was not a member of Self Realization Fellowship and had no reason to bring the matter to our attention other than the fact of its extraordinary nature. Whether one calls such events 'miraculous' will depend on one's views. One who believes that miracles cannot occur will be unwilling to call any event miraculous, however extraordinary the facts may be.

The purpose of the excerpts from Mr Rowe's letter which appear in *Autobiography of a Yogi* and other publications is to give the gist of that letter – to present the essence and feeling of it. The full photographic reproduction of the letter appears in the booklet *Paramahansa Yogananda: In Memoriam* and has always been available to anyone interested in the subject.

You asked by telephone for two items of information: the scientific credentials of Mr Rowe, and the whereabouts of Mr Kenneth Johnson – the embalmer listed on Paramahansa Yogananda's Death Certificate. We asked Mr Olson of Forest Lawn for this information; after looking into it, he told us that as Mortuary Director, Mr Rowe would have had to have been licenced as an embalmer by the State of California. Aside from that, after these many years Forest Lawn has no record of Mr Rowe's scientific credentials. And they have no record of the present whereabouts of Mr Kenneth Johnson.

If you should require further information, please let us know.

Sincerely, SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP

Ananda Mata, Secretary

INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS: 3880 San Rafael Avenue, Los Angeles, California 0065 Cable Selfreal, Tel (213) 225-2471

The Reverend Mother Daya Mata, President in India: Yogoda Satsanga Society of India.

*We regret that space does not permit the publication of Mr Rowe's letter in its entirety. However, interested readers may obtain a copy on request by sending a large SAE to The Skeptic (address on page 3) – The Editors.*

# Little Grey Men

Anson Kennedy

*On flying saucers, Greys and things that go bump in the night*

**I**N JULY OF 1947, a flying saucer crashed near the small town of Roswell, New Mexico. The Army Air Force sent out a team to retrieve the spacecraft and the dead (or, in at least one case, dying) bodies of its alien crew. A security lid was clamped down, and everyone connected with the crash – civilian and military – were threatened, ordered, and otherwise coerced to keep their mouths shut about what they had seen.

The seal was so tight that it wasn't until some thirty years later, in the late '70s, that rumours of the 'event of the millennium' began to surface. By then, the United States government had entered into a clandestine agreement with the aliens (now commonly called 'Greys' because of their skin colour) to allow American citizens to be abducted and bizarre experiments, mostly sexual, performed on them. In exchange, the US received advanced alien technology, later incorporated into Stealth fighters and bombers. Only through the efforts of intrepid investigators, working in spite of the obvious risks to life and limb, have these revelations come to light.

No, this isn't the plot of some bad sci-fi movie, although it could be. Instead, this is the core of a belief system. It is the One True Faith of Ufology, that eclectic religion which seems to accept any wild claim, perhaps out of fear that to reject one might call into question one's own story. From the alien abduction 'Case of the Century' of Linda Cortile (a pseudonym) in New York some years ago, the fervid picketers who chant 'Yo, yo, UFO! The public has a right to know!' outside the Pentagon and selected Senators' home offices, to the 'crashed-saucerites' who will not hesitate to regale you with stories of the Roswell Crash, the Kecksburg Crash, and on, and on . . .

This patchwork quilt of conspiracies (JFK's assassination even figures at some point), wet-dream stories (semen samples taken at night by Greys), and even the occasional sighting of an actual flying saucer (although these seem to be on the decline nowadays) make up the worldview of the UFO Believer. This person is always

ready to tell you that the government will come clean about UFOs 'by the end of this year.' Such claims have been made nearly every year for decades. The person's fundamental faith, however, is in the Greys, a schizophrenic species who abduct humans and steal foetuses on the one hand, and will soon reveal themselves and solve humankind's environmental problems on the other.

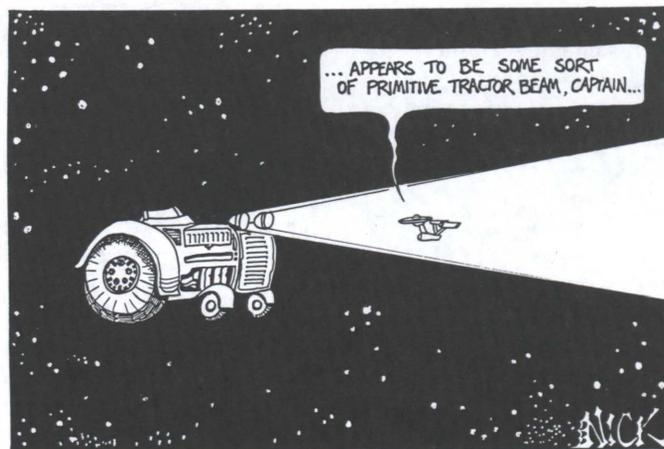
The Greys – now there's a creature from out of some grade B sci-fi movie. Maybe *I Married a Monster From Outer Space*, or *Killers From Space*. Roughly four feet tall with an overdeveloped cranium and teardrop shaped

'wrap-around eyes', the Greys, we are told, come from the star Zeta Reticuli. Or, some say, they come from our own far future to revitalize a human gene pool decimated by disease and war. Or, others say, they are both and neither. Whatever the case, the Greys are both the heroes and the villains of Ufology; its God and Satan rolled into one – a Holy Duality of the UFO. They are devils to Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs,

authors of some of the Holy Books of the religion, and gods to John Mack, the Harvard psychologist whose book *Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens* is the challenger as the new Gospel of the Greys.

Greys come as thieves in the night, to fly their sleeping victims (through walls and closed windows if need be) to UFOs hovering outside. Funny how these waiting spacecraft are never seen by neighbours or passers-by – save in that spectacular 'Case of the Century'. It was witnessed by no less a personage than the Secretary General of the United Nations, but we're told he won't talk. Once on the ship, the still-sleeping victim is subjected to an examination which includes probing every orifice and the extraction of 'genetic material' (semen from men and unfertilized ova from women – the procedure may be less uncomfortable for the men than the women).

The 'experiencer', to use the correct religious term, is then returned to his or her bed. Apparently this 'harvested' material is combined with the aliens' genes and the fertilized hybrid eggs implanted in women on subsequent abductions. But these developing foetuses are never



allowed to come to term, not in their mothers' wombs anyway. A few months after implanting, they are again 'harvested' by the Greys.

So much for the devilry perpetrated by these little bad guys. They also reveal their angelic side to the experiencers, warning of impending environmental cataclysms and promising to save the world before they happen. Some experiencers claim to be 'enhanced'. These chosen ones are called 'prodigies' by some researchers. Some 'prodigies' find themselves suddenly able to understand the most complex theoretical physics and mathematics, still others to possess vastly widened consciousnesses. Unfortunately, none of them have actually produced any tangible and significant advances in any field (except that of ufology perhaps).

So why would any non-experiencer care about this odd subculture? The growth of belief (and the sustained suspension of disbelief) carries with it a strange fascination: how do these things form? The quest for the answer to this question is what draws many of us. The religious imagery is clear.

The world of the UFO Believer is a study in the development of myth and religion, a fact which has been apparent from the fifties right up to the present. From Leon Festinger's *When Prophecy Fails* published in 1956 to Curtis Peebles' recent *Watch the Skies!*, this question has intrigued researchers.

So now we have a Holy Grail of the skeptics: the search for an explanation. In this sense we are not unlike the UFO Believers, who also look for answers but find them in the higher power of the Greys. Unwilling, or unable, to believe, we look for the reasons why people see a flying saucer when only Venus is in the sky, why they tell stories of alien abductions when no evidence of the events exist, why stories of things that go bump in the night are so beguiling.

We may never find the answers, but often it is the case that the quest itself is its own reward. And if we do find the answer to one of the questions, we'll always have another to take its place.

Anson Kennedy is an Electrical Engineer in Atlanta, USA, and a member of the Georgia Skeptics.

## The Numbers of The Beast

*Whatever else people might say about the Internet, it remains a miraculous source of truly awful humour. Thanks to our tireless Internet correspondent Lovell Brown for passing on this particular ribald gem.*

All skeptics will know that 666 is the **Number of the Beast**. But did you also know about these numbers:

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| £665.99       | Special discount price of the Beast.                          |
| £782.54       | Price of the Beast including VAT.                             |
| £869.95       | Price of the Beast with all accessories and replacement soul. |
| 0891-666-0666 | Live Beast Action! Only 66.6p/min. Adults only.               |
| M666          | Motorway of the Beast.  |
| 666F          | Oven temperature for roast Beast.                             |
| 666K          | Colour temperature of the Beast.                              |
| 6.66%         | Monthly interest rate for BeastCard.                          |
| i66686        | Computer of the Beast.  |
| 666i          | BMW of the Beast.   |

Send your Internet clippings to [skeptic@cs.man.ac.uk](mailto:skeptic@cs.man.ac.uk)

### Advertisement

#### IN SEARCH OF THE PARANORMAL

Tuesdays, 7.00 pm – 9.00 pm

Autumn and Spring Terms

Goldsmiths' College, University of London

This course takes a critical look at the evidence relating to a wide range of paranormal claims, including telepathy, psychokinesis, precognition, psychic detectives, psychic healers, UFOs, astrology, past-life regression, out-of-body and near-death experiences.

The course tutor is **Dr Chris French**, a psychologist with a special interest in paranormal beliefs. Fee: £90. Further details from: **Continuing and Community Education Office, Room 105, Goldsmiths' College, University of London, London SE14 6NW.** Tel: 0171 919 7200.

**SPRITE**



# Sorting the Sheep from the Goats

Chris French

*A look at some of the psychological factors that might explain the widespread, but unjustified, belief in the paranormal*

**A**CCORDING TO Matthew the Evangelist's account of the Last Day of the World (*Matthew 2:31-33*), when the world ends and Christ comes to judge all nations, he will separate one from another 'as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats'. Thus, in parapsychology, believers are referred to as *sheep*, disbelievers as *goats*.

The question of whether or not paranormal phenomena are genuine is far from resolved. Critics of parapsychology argue that no sound evidence of a replicable parapsychological effect has yet been produced, and point to numerous problems which have plagued the field in its quest for scientific respectability, such as poor methodology and occasionally fraud by subjects or experimenters.

The fact remains, however, that belief in paranormal and associated phenomena remains high amongst the general population. A precise definition of the term 'paranormal' is philosophically problematic, but it is usually used to refer to alleged phenomena which cannot be accounted for in terms of current scientific theories. Strictly speaking, only psychokinesis (PK) and extrasensory perception (ESP; subdivided into telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition) are the proper subject matter for parapsychology, the study of paranormal phenomena. In practice, the term 'paranormal' is used much more loosely to refer to a wide variety of alleged phenomena including alternative medicine, UFOs, ghosts, astrology, the Bermuda triangle, fire-walking, and so on.

Opinion polls reveal high levels of belief in such phenomena. This presents a problem for those skeptical of such claims. If the scientific evidence is inconclusive, why should so many people believe in the paranormal so passionately? The obvious answer is that their belief is not based upon an appraisal of the scientific evidence at all, but rather upon personal experiences, perhaps supported by the reports of trusted others and the general cultural acceptance that such phenomena are indeed genuine. Several studies have reported a positive correlation between belief in the paranormal and claimed personal experiences of it.

The fact remains, however, that there is little convincing empirical evidence to support such claims. This raises the possibility that 'personal experience' of paranormal events might be based upon cognitive biases within our information processing systems leading to the misinterpretation of certain kinds of situation. Such situations may wrongly be perceived by the observer as only being interpretable in terms of paranormal forces where in fact normal physical and psychological explanations may be

quite adequate.

It would be extremely naïve to hope that any one factor could be identified as underlying all aspects of paranormal belief, given the wide variety of alleged paranormal phenomenon. Belief in the paranormal is not a unidimensional entity, and it is likely that different biases would underlie different types of belief. For example, belief in ESP could arise due to a failure to appreciate the probability of coincidences arising purely by chance and might thus be associated with biases in probabilistic reasoning. Such a bias would be unlikely to be associated with, say, belief in ghosts.

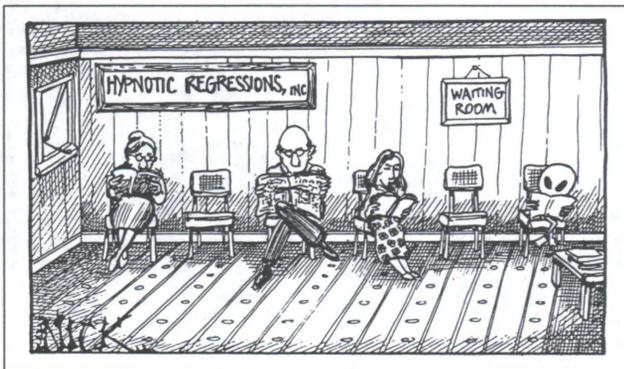
A number of potentially relevant cognitive biases have been investigated, and here we discuss ten of them.

## 1: The illusion of control

This refers to the tendency that people have to perceive a random process as being potentially under their control. This tendency is increased if the situation seems to incorporate elements of skill. For example, subjects rate their chances of success in a raffle as higher if they pick their own raffle ticket rather than just having one allocated at random, even though the objective probabilities are identical. Perhaps not surprisingly, numerous studies have shown that sheep (believers) are more prone to the illusion of control than goats (non-believers). In both ESP and PK experiments, they are more likely to report that they were able to influence the outcome even though in fact they performed at a level no higher than that expected by chance.

## 2: Judgements of probability

Psychological research has also shown that people are very poor at estimating probabilities. For example, if asked 'How many people would you need to have at a



party to have a 50:50 chance that two of them share the same birthday (ignoring the year)?', most people are surprised to learn that the correct answer is 23. It follows that if people do not appreciate how likely a particular event is on a chance basis alone (such as a precognitive dream 'coming true'), they may be reluctant to accept an explanation which says that it was just a coincidence and prefer instead a paranormal explanation.

In fact, we would expect numerous reports of apparently 'precognitive' dreams every year purely on the basis of chance. For the sake of argument, let us suppose that we define a dream as 'apparently precognitive' if the chances of the dream matching some future event in one's life are as low as one chance in 10,000. Surely, all of us would be impressed if we were the person who had such a dream. Again, we will simplify matters by assuming that each person has one dream per night (in fact, we all have a lot more). The probability that any one dream will not be apparently precognitive is high (.9999). The probability that over a whole year, one will not have a dream which appears to predict the future is given by:

$$(.9999)^{365} = .9642 \text{ (approximately)}$$

In other words, even over a whole year the chances are that you will not have such a dream. But around 3.6% of the population will have at least one such dream! This amounts to 9 million people in the USA alone. Furthermore, any single person, over a 19-year period, will have a slightly better than even chance of one such dream. Even if you think that 1 in 10,000 is too high, and opted say for odds of 1 in 100,000 before classing a dream as 'precognitive', you would still have 900,000 reports per year in the USA without any need to invoke psychic powers whatsoever.

In fact, of course, it is likely that other non-paranormal factors are often involved in people having ostensibly precognitive dreams, for example dreaming of an elderly relative dying when one already knows that they are ill. Research has shown that sheep generally perform worse than goats on probability estimation tasks.

### 3: Concepts of randomness

A related cognitive bias that is of relevance is our poor intuitive appreciation of randomness. Clearly, if we do not recognise randomness when we see it, we are likely to read significance into patterns of events when we should not do so (for example, chance coincidences between random predictions in daily horoscopes and events in our lives). One well-established example of this bias is demonstrated in subjective random generation tasks.

When asked to generate strings of random numbers, people tend to avoid repeating the same digit twice even though such repetitions do feature in true random series. Once again, it has been shown that believers in ESP show this bias more strongly than disbelievers.

### 4: Reasoning errors

It has also been claimed that believers are worse on logical reasoning tasks and critical thinking, and are more dogmatic than non-believers. However, these studies have been criticised on methodological grounds and other investigators have failed to replicate the effects.

### 5: Bias in evaluating evidence

A number of studies suggest that sheep are prone to perceive evidence as supporting the reality of the paranormal even when it does not. For example, Jones and Russell [1] exposed subjects to either a 'successful' demonstration of ESP or a 'failed' demonstration.

In the former case, the experimenters used a marked deck of cards to ensure 60% accuracy, whereas performance was at the chance level of 20% in the latter demonstration. Results showed accurate recall by disbelievers regardless of whether the results supported their belief, but a strong tendency for believers to remember both demonstrations as successful.

### 6: Ignorance of conjuring techniques

Singer and Benassi [2] report a series of studies in which an amateur conjuror performed various tricks in front of introductory psychology classes. The majority of subjects thought that the performer was genuinely psychic. When asked if magicians could perform similar stunts, nearly all subjects agreed. They also agreed that the majority of people who did such tricks were likely to be magicians or fakes, not genuine psychics. However, when subjects were asked to reassess the performance in the light of their own subsequent statements, they again claimed that the magician was psychic.

One is reminded of an incident involving James ('The Amazing') Randi as witnessed by psychologist James E Alcock [3]:

The Amazing Randi was giving a performance in which he did all the well-known Geller feats, explaining that what the audience saw was done by trickery but that Geller, when doing the same things, tells his audience that paranormal powers are at work. In the midst of Randi's extremely skilful presentation, a spectator (who as it turns out was a university professor) jumped angrily to his feet and loudly denounced Randi as a fraud. To this attack, Randi replied that he was indeed a fraud, that everything he had done, as he had several times stated, was done by trickery. But his accuser was not easily quieted; he proclaimed that Randi was a fraud because he really was using psychic powers, but was keeping this fact from the audience!

### 7: Population stereotypes

Another situation which is commonly misinterpreted as involving paranormal powers, but in fact does not, is the demonstration of population stereotypes. If a group of subjects are told that a number, say, between one and ten, is to be telepathically transmitted to them and that they are to write down the first number that comes into their minds, their responses will be far from randomly distributed. In fact, '7' will be by far the most popular response regardless of the number that the 'sender' had in mind.

Similar effects are found using other types of target (e.g., for 'a simple line drawing,' many subjects will draw a house). It is unclear whether sheep are more prone to produce stereotypical responses than goats.

## 8: Perceptual biases

Perception itself can often be influenced by our expectations, particularly in less than perfect observational conditions. Obvious examples include the tendency to see threatening ghostly forms in dark spooky houses. Some people might more readily conclude that they had seen something in such viewing conditions, whereas others might be more cautious and withhold judgement.

Again, we might expect differences to be found between sheep and goats in this respect and, indeed, several studies would support this expectation.

## 9: Ignorance of 'cold reading'

Cold reading is a very powerful technique that you can use to give the impression that you know all about complete strangers. Obviously, this technique can be exploited to convince people that you have psychic powers. There are many cues that can be used to predict a lot about people before they even open their mouths – age, sex, clothing, jewellery, hairstyle, and so on. The cold reader, be they psychic, astrologer, palmist, or whatever, has a keen eye for such details.

Once the consultation begins, however, the cold reader is apparently able to quickly 'zoom in' onto the area of concern and tell the client all kind of things that they apparently could not possibly know without psychic powers.

In fact, the cold reader makes use of subtle cues from the client, such as changes in posture, tone of voice, and breathing rate, to skilfully home in on areas of greatest interest to the client. By a subtle mix of intelligent guesswork and feeding back information which was actually supplied by the client in the first place, a powerful illusion can often be created that the reader is indeed in touch with some psychic source of knowledge.

It is a moot point to what extent self-proclaimed psychics deliberately exploit the techniques of cold reading as opposed to using them unconsciously and actually believing that they really do possess a special psychic gift. What is absolutely certain, however, is that the technique can be used very effectively by those who make no claims whatsoever to such gifts. Surprisingly, as far as I am aware, no-one has performed the obvious experiment of comparing sheep and goats in terms of their susceptibility to the technique.

## 10: Ignorance of the 'Barnum Effect'

One aspect of cold reading which has received a great deal of attention from psychologists is a phenomenon known as the Barnum Effect. This refers to the tendency for people to accept vague, ambiguous and general statements as descriptive of their unique personalities. This

typical Barnum profile illustrates the power of this technique (imagine you were being given this description of yourself by a psychic or an astrologer):

You have a great need for other people to like you and admire you. You have a tendency to be critical of yourself. You have a great deal of unused capacity which you have not used to your advantage. While you have some personality weaknesses, you are generally able to compensate for them. Disciplined and self-controlled outside, you tend to be worrisome and insecure inside. At times you have serious doubts as to whether you have made the right decision or done the right thing. You prefer a certain amount of change and variety and become

dissatisfied when hemmed in by restrictions and limitations. You pride yourself on being an independent thinker and do not accept others' statements without satisfactory proof. You have found it unwise to be too frank in revealing yourself to others. At times you are extroverted; affable and sociable, while at other times you are introverted, wary and reserved. Some of your aspirations tend to be pretty unrealistic. Security is one of your major goals in life.

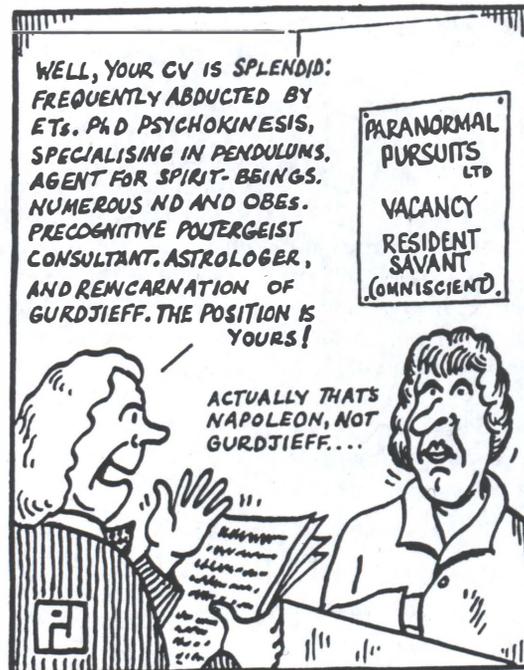
Although it is certain that the Barnum effect can be effectively used to create the impression that psychic forces are at work, it is unclear whether believers are

more susceptible than non-believers.

## Woolly thinkers

In conclusion, it is clear that cognitive biases do exist which would lead to people misinterpreting certain situations as involving psi when in fact perfectly acceptable non-paranormal explanations are available. The fact that such situations exist does not of course prove that psi does not exist but it supports that possibility. The question of whether believers are more prone to such biases than goats cannot be answered with certainty, but the limited evidence available suggests that this is a real possibility.

The overall picture which emerges from these studies is one of sheep as distinctly 'woolly thinkers', if you will excuse the pun, while their cousins, the goats, are less prone to the cognitive pitfalls that await the unwary. This may have more than a little to do with the fact that most of the research reviewed has been carried out by largely skeptical psychologists. The impression that this body of research creates is that belief in things paranormal is a deviation from the rational norm, but a moment's reflection will reveal that this is not so. The norm is not one of rationality. In general, the cognitive biases described apply universally. It is simply that in those



experimental situations reported, they seem often to be slightly stronger in believers than disbelievers. But it is quite possible that there may be some situations in which sheep would appear to be less biased than goats. Apart from being of interest in its own right, does this area of study have any wider significance?

It is very easy, for scientists in particular, to dismiss paranormal beliefs as trivial and not worthy of serious consideration. I believe that this would be a serious mistake. Paranormal beliefs are found in various forms in all cultures of the world. They are clearly based upon some universal human tendencies. I doubt that the types of cognitive bias that I have been discussing will offer anything like a complete explanation for the development and maintenance of paranormal beliefs, but they may be an important component. Why should these biases have developed in the first place? Surely it would be better in evolutionary terms if our cognitive systems were not prone to such biases at all?

The universality of the biases suggests, on the contrary, that they in fact bestow some advantage upon the human species in terms of our survival. A cognitive system which is quick and usually right is probably of more value than one which is much slower but right slightly more often. It would make sense in evolutionary terms for humans to develop cognitive systems that can readily detect patterns and regularities, causes and effects, in the environment.

The fact that people claim to detect regularities even when confronted with true randomness, or that people often perceive causal relationships where none exist,

may be a small price to pay from an evolutionary perspective.

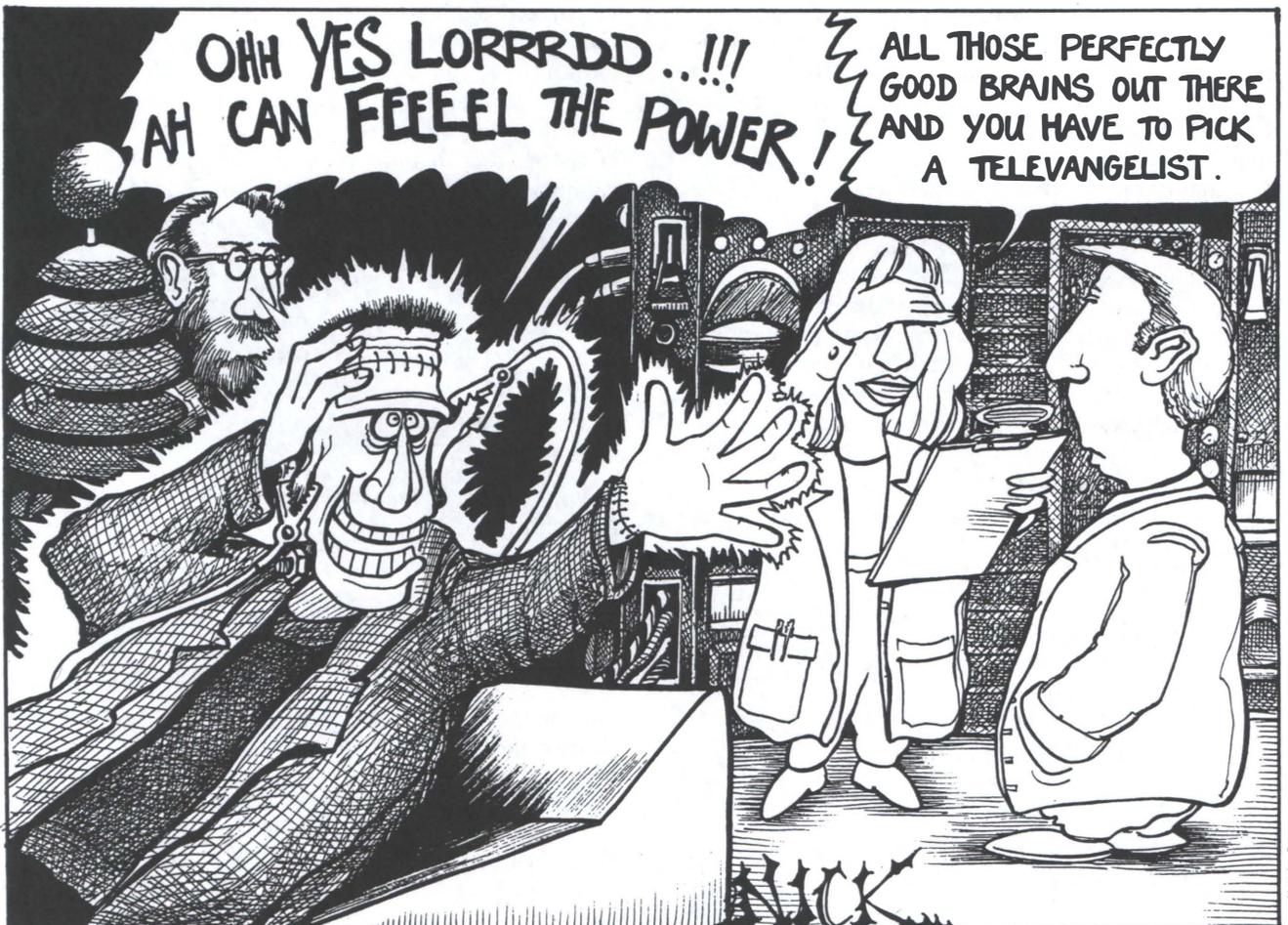
If such speculations are correct then the study of the biases underlying paranormal beliefs, possibly the greatest of all cognitive illusions, might help to cast considerable light upon the true nature of our species.

**References**

1. Jones, W H & Russell, D (1980). The selective processing of belief disconfirming information. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 10, 309-312.
2. Singer B, & Benassi, V A (1981). Occult beliefs. *American Scientist*, 69, 49-55.
3. Alcock, J E (1981). *Parapsychology: Science or Magic?* Oxford: Pergamon.

**Chris French** is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Goldsmiths' College, University of London, where he teaches a course on psychology, parapsychology and pseudoscience. He frequently appears on TV and radio providing a skeptical perspective.

*This article was originally published in The Ethical Record, the journal of the South Place Ethical Society (25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL) and is reprinted with kind permission. It is a summary of 'Factors underlying belief in the paranormal: Do sheep and goats think differently?' (The Psychologist, 1992, 5, 295-299). The latter article, which includes more detailed references, is available from the author at the Department of Psychology, Goldsmiths' College, University of London, New Cross, London SE14 6NW.*



# The Skeptic's Dictionary

Robert Todd Carroll

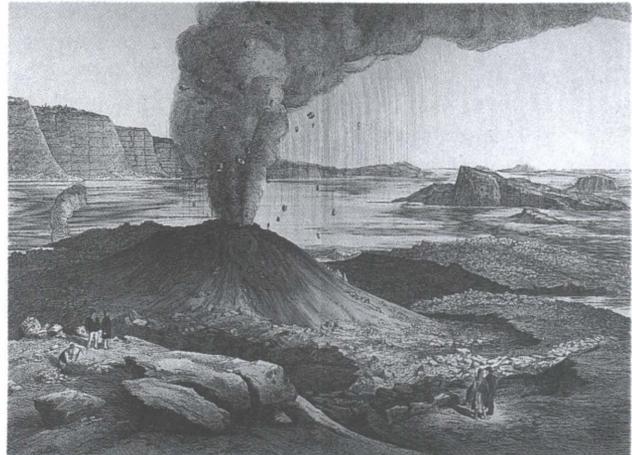
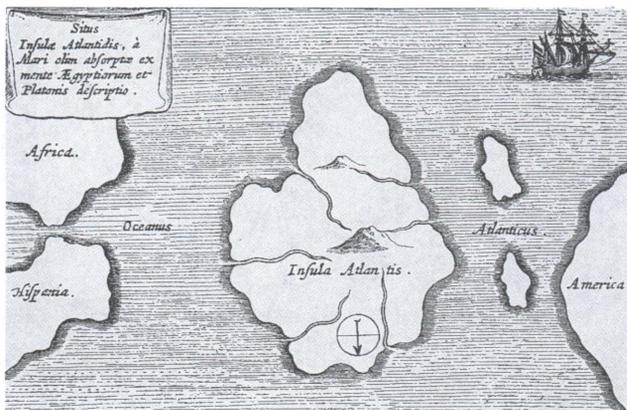
## *The enduring fascination of the mythical land of Atlantis*

**A**TLANTIS IS A LEGENDARY ISLAND in the Atlantic west of Gibraltar, said by Plato to have been a utopia which sank beneath the sea during an earthquake.

Some controversial theories have equated ancient Thera with Atlantis. Thera is a volcanic Greek island in the Aegean Sea, which was devastated by a volcanic eruption in 1625 BCE. Until then it had been associated with the Minoan civilization on Crete.

The man who gave us the Bermuda Triangle and Noah's Ark (*The Lost Ship of Noah: In Search of the Ark at Ararat*, Putnam, New York, 1987) has also given us Atlantis: Charles Berlitz. The reader might want to check out Berlitz's *Doomsday, 1999 AD* (Doubleday, Garden City, NY, 1981). It comes complete with maps and drawings by J Manson Valentine. But the serious investigator of the myth of Atlantis must read Ignatius Donnelly's *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World* (1882). He starts with the claim that Plato's myth is true history and 'does little more than enumerate supposed evidence' [Feder, p124]. Nevertheless, Donnelly still has a following. Some of them have written to me telling me that this is the greatest book ever written on Atlantis. Others, such as Kenneth L Feder, have ripped it to shreds. Naturally, I recommend the latter.

Atlantis is not just a lost continent. According to some, it was a place of advanced civilization and technology. Lewis Spence, a Scottish mythologist who used 'inspiration' instead of scientific methods, attributes Cro-Magnon cave paintings in Europe to displaced Atlanteans [Feder, p130]. Helena Blavatsky and the theosophists of the late 19th century invented the notion that the Atlanteans had invented aeroplanes and explosives and grew extraterrestrial wheat. The theosophists also invented Mu, a lost continent in the Pacific Ocean [Feder, p131]. Then, of course, there was Edgar Cayce, who



*Eruption of Santorin, possible site of Atlantis*

Illustrations: Mary Evans Picture Library

claimed to have psychic knowledge of Atlantean texts, which assisted him in his prophecies and cures. And now there is J Z Knight's channelled spirit from Atlantis, Ramtha.

Unfortunately for the New Age Atlanteans, there is no archaeological or geological evidence for either Atlantis or Mu. To paraphrase Whitehead, the belief in Atlantis, the ancient and great civilization, is just another footnote to Plato.

### References and suggested reading

*Atlantis*, Isaac Asimov, Martin H Greenberg, and Charles G Waugh (Eds), New American Library, New York, 1988.

de Camp, L Sprague, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme* Ballantine, New York, 1975.

Feder, Kenneth L. *Frauds, Mysteries and Myths*, Mayfield Publishing Co., Mountain View, California, 1990, ch. 8.

Gardner, Martin. *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* Dover Publications Inc., New York, 1957, ch. 14.

Pellegrino, Charles. *Unearthing Atlantis - An Archaeological Odyssey*, Random House, New York, 1991.

Vitaliano, Dorothy B. *Legends of the Earth: Their Geologic Origins*, Indiana University Press, 1973.

**Robert Carroll** teaches philosophy at Sacramento City College, California. © Robert Carroll 1994-1996. For the full text of the *Skeptic's Dictionary*, visit <http://wheel.dcn.davis.ca.us/~btcarrol/>.

# The Media and the Pylon Scare

*With scant hard evidence to go on, the idea that overhead electric power lines might cause cancer has sparked off endless media stories. Meanwhile, scientific reports on the lack of any proven association go mysteriously unreported. Dr Neville Goodman tracks the shocking history of power cable hysteria*

**I**N MARCH 1988, a BBC *Panorama* programme investigated the health risk from the electromagnetic fields of power lines. Eight years on, the answer to the question of whether this risk is real remains as elusive as ever, but electricity pylons are too powerful and sinister an image for the media to leave alone.

In October 1988, a *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* editorial, 'Living under pylons' was subtitled 'If electromagnetic fields are carcinogenic the effect is weak' [1]. Channel 4, just one week earlier, showed *The good, the bad and the indefensible: currently at risk*. In this programme people described how power lines were causing headaches, palpitations and clusters of suicides, aborted calves and addled eggs. 'An ill wind blows over power lines' cried the *Observer* in January 1989. The *BMJ*'s 'Electromagnetic radiation in homes', in December 1989 [2], concluded there was no firm evidence for or against.

In common with just about everyone who has written on this vexed subject, the author asked for high quality epidemiological studies. Channel 4, the previous year, had described the 80,000 people living near power lines as 'the raw data of future medical surveys, with more unwitting volunteers being added week by week'. I suppose it makes research rather less messy if the answer is assumed before the question has been properly posed, but it is unhelpful when the media choose to misrepresent epidemiology so completely. And I really do believe they have the choice, but prefer to be sensational.

The next buzz of activity followed a report from the US Environmental Protection Agency in June 1990. The pattern from studies, the authors concluded, 'suggests, but does not prove, a causal link'. This sparked off a series of headlines: 'Electrical cancer findings diluted' (*Guardian*); 'Agency backs electric field link in cancer'

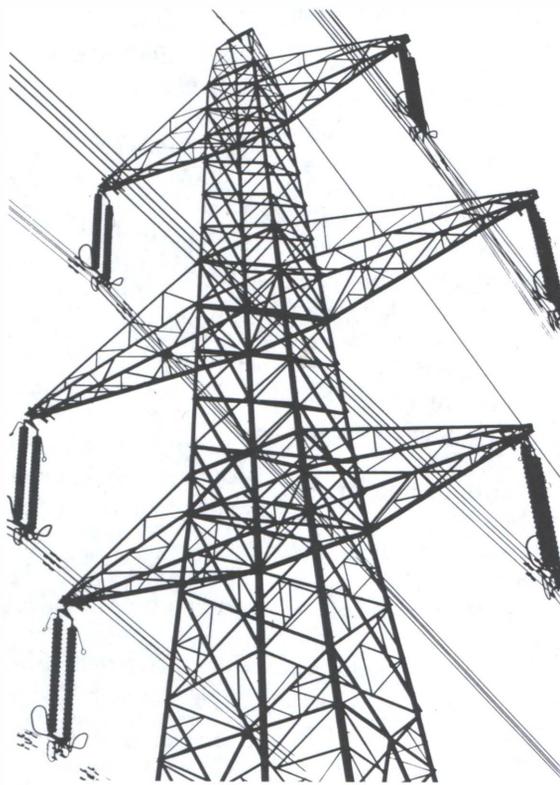
(*Hospital Doctor*); 'Child cancer probe to focus fears over electricity' (*Observer*). In August 1990 a study linked male breast cancer with electromagnetic radiation, prompting: 'Electric jobs "carry high cancer risk"' (*Guardian*). A letter in *The Lancet* in October 1990 [3] pointed out that most of the articles in the media came from a small number of scientists and journalists convinced of the health risk but that the views of others, who disagreed, never made it to the pages of newspapers.

The *Sun*'s doctor had no doubt in January 1991: 'people who live or work near electricity supply lines are more likely to develop diseases such as brain cancer or leukaemia'. This conclusion came from years of 'monitoring . . . information and research studies from scientists around the world'. The *Sun* may have been certain, but *Nature* wasn't: 'EMF cancer link still murky' [4]. *Nature* has a high citation index and impact factor, but it doesn't have a circulation of over 4 million in the UK.

August 1991: 'Under the hissing sky' (*Guardian*). April 1992: 'Hisses and grumbles under the pylons' (*Independent*). The *Independent* quoted an engineer saying that cancer cells grow more quickly near large magnetic fields. But they don't. June 1993: 'Health fears over pylons' (*Irish Times*). August 1993: 'Parents sue over "deadly power fields"' (*Guardian*). 'Something nasty in the air' (*Sunday Telegraph*).

A new batch of Scandinavian studies prompted another *BMJ* editorial in October 1993 [5]. Together with all the 'evidence' presented by the media in the meantime, perhaps at last it was time to admit this disgraceful hazard to health. Not so. A solution was no nearer: 'No causal relation has been established . . . [we await] results from the large case-control studies'.

1994 started with an extraordinary story about a



public house: 'Power lines above pub spark concern over health' (*Independent*). Media coverage neglected to point out the risks to health from alcohol and tobacco. The year continued with 'Children win right to fight Heseltine over "cancer" cables' (March, *Times*); 'Electricity shocks, but can it give you cancer?' (April, *Guardian*); 'Leukaemia boy's parents sue power company' (May, *Times*); 'Childhood leukaemia linked to power lines' (June, *Daily Telegraph*).

Late in 1995, the Council of the American Physical Society issued a statement, described as the strongest position ever taken by a major scientific society on the issue. It said there was no consistent scientific link between electromagnetic fields and cancer; and no plausible biophysical mechanism. They worried that the high costs of avoiding this unproven risk, and of attempted litigation by supposed victims of it, would reduce the funding and public attention needed for more serious environmental problems.

If the Council's statement provoked splash headlines, then I missed them. This year, 1996, it is business as normal. A team including Professor Henshaw of Bristol University published a paper in a respected scientific journal in February [6] showing that electric fields increase the concentration of radon and its breakdown products: 'Evidence that high voltage electricity can cause cancer' (*Bristol Evening Post*). The *Guardian's* watching brief for Channel 4's *Dispatches* programme was: 'for years scientists have been trying to explain the high incidence of cancers among people living near overhead power lines'. But Henshaw's team was careful not to make any direct claim; and the *Guardian* had actually published an article by me in January with a subtitle indicating that I was warning 'against jumping to conclusions about the causes of cancer'. Coincidentally with Henshaw's paper, a short report in the *Lancet* claimed 'Radon in the home not linked to cell damage' [7]. Neither did Henshaw's plausible mechanism go unchallenged: 'Cancer link to power cables "exaggerated", say critics' (*Nature*) [8].

Among the epidemiological experts quoted in the media after Henshaw's paper was Mrs Williams of Ayrshire: 'There have been so many cases of cancer in this small bit of housing that there just can't be any other explanation'. Mrs Cran agreed, 'We know the pylons cause cancer, we just know.' (*Observer*).

In March, the *Daily Mail* declared that, 'A bedroom TV may boost child cancer risk' after getting access to so far unpublished findings from another group of scientists. Would a newspaper be so keen on pre-publication if this study had been one of the many with negative or equivocal findings?

Media distortions of this degree would be laughable if the possible consequences were not so serious. A spokesman for a power company estimated that action to reduce exposure to the levels demanded would add £300 to the average electricity bill. In the recent TV programmes there were repeated references to other countries being 'more advanced' because of their maximum permitted exposures. At the present level of knowledge, this shows only that their authorities are more easily swayed by pressure groups. It is not evidence of danger.

The Council of the American Physical Society, being

honest, had to admit, 'it is impossible to prove that no deleterious health effects occur from exposure to any environmental factor'. Aye, there's the rub . . . this immensely complicated, messy affair, in which even the physicists are unclear quite how to measure the fields (and indeed what sort of field is the important one to measure) has enough 'convinced' people, enough grieving parents, and enough hopeful lawyers to keep feeding the media with selective evidence for years to come.

There is an excellent site on the Web from which up-to-date information on this subject can be accessed [9]. The site is maintained by John Moulder who ends his fact sheets with the following sad truth:

Public controversy about electricity and health will continue either until future research shows that the fields are hazardous, or until the public learns that science cannot guarantee absolute safety.

I wonder whether it is a lesson that the public has any interest in learning?

## References

1. Aw T-C. Living under pylons. *BMJ* 1988; **297**:804.
2. Lowry S. Electromagnetic radiation in homes. *BMJ* 1989; **299**: 1517-1518.
3. Jauchem J R. Electromagnetic fields: is there a danger? *Lancet* 1990; **336**: 884.
4. Pool R. EMF-cancer link still murky. *Nature* 1991; **349**: 554.
5. Draper G. Electromagnetic fields and childhood cancer. *BMJ* 1993; **307**: 884-885.
6. Henshaw D L, Ross A N, Fews A P, Preece A W. Enhanced deposition of radon daughter nuclei in the vicinity of power frequency electromagnetic fields. *Int J Radiat Biol* 1996; **69**: 25-38.
7. McNamee D. Radon in the home not linked to cell damage. *Lancet* 1996; **347**: 384.
8. Masood E. Cancer link to power cables 'exaggerated', say critics. *Nature* 1996; **379**:571.
9. <http://www.cs.ruu.nl/wais/html/na-dir/powerlines-cancer-FAQ/.html>. The site is maintained by John Moulder (jmoulder@its.mew.edu).

**Dr Neville W Goodman** is a consultant anaesthetist at Southmead Hospital, Bristol.

*This article first appeared in HealthWatch Newsletter, and is reproduced with kind permission.*

### Clipping contributors for this issue

We welcome clippings from newspapers, magazines, the Internet - anywhere! Please mark clippings with source, date and your name, and send to the editorial address (see page 3). Our thanks for this issue go to: Andy Brice, Steuart Campbell, John Clarke, Jock Cramb, Chester Faunce, Mavis Howard, Richard Hudson, Earnest Jackson, Yilmaz Magurtzey, David Martin, Stephen Moreton, Austen Moulden, Alan Remfry, Donald Rooum, Tom Ruffles, Mike Rutter, Gillian Sathanandan, Ross W Sargent, Ian Saunders, H Sivyer, Brian Slade, J Thompson Jnr, Chris Torrero, J G Watson, Chris Willis.

# Maybe I am Psychic!

*Chris Willis meets Ian Rowland, a self-confessed professional psychic faker*

**F**ANCY A CORPORATE FIRE-WALK or a psychic dinner party? Ian Rowland is the man to organise it. A writer and entertainer, he has made a career of reproducing paranormal phenomena by distinctly non-supernatural means. The results are intriguing, baffling and extremely funny.

In his one-man *Psychic Show* Ian presents 'spoon bending, ESP and other 'psychic' stuff presented live on stage, all accomplished by 'fakery, cheating and similar naughtiness'. In a range of unlikely venues from student unions to pub theatres, Ian baffles his audiences with lively and irreverent reproductions of 'psychic' phenomena interspersed with comic patter. Audience members are invited to let him read their thoughts and see him display a range of apparently supernatural talents. Psychic? No. Ian assures the audience that he is 'as psychic as a teapot'. To hammer the point home, he ends several of his routines with the comment 'Maybe I am psychic,' having already told the audience that the only acceptable response to this claim is the loudest possible shout of 'Rubbish!'.

Ian recently performed part of his *Psychic Show* on Channel 4's *Break the Science Barrier with Richard Dawkins*. And on *Heart of the Matter* he gave a tarot reading under test conditions and was judged to be '99.5% accurate', a figure many 'genuine' tarot readers would be proud of. To his surprise, he has even been asked to give demonstrations of spoon-bending on the radio – not the easiest of tasks.

Ian told *The Skeptic*: 'Everything I do is based on genuine psychic research. The show proceeds from my own genuine interest in, and involvement with, this subject over the past few years'. He first became interested as a child, 'then when I moved to London in 1989 I met Mike Hutchinson of the UK Skeptics and that was that – he opened a million doors into this area and I owe him a huge debt of gratitude'.

After performing with Eddie Izzard at the Edinburgh Fringe, Ian decided that he enjoyed writing and performing comedy. 'But it didn't have any sort of context I could get my teeth into', he says. 'Now I fuse my psychic interests with the performing side and I enjoy the whole thing much more. I believe in what I do, and I think it's genuinely different from anything else on offer'.

As well as his other activities, Ian lectures on subjects

such as psychical research, memory training and critical thinking, and arranges 'psychic dinner parties' in clients' homes. On a larger scale, he organises corporate entertainment involving what he intriguingly describes as 'hands-on psychic entertainment', cabarets and fire-walking. 'I've fire-walked several times', he says, 'and it's just an amazing experience. I think it's such a shame that so many people believe the stuff about mind preparation and mental training and chanting "cool wet grass", all of which is, of course, irrelevant to walking on fire. I now organise fire walks for companies and social clubs, in which I explain the whole thing properly and honestly, with none of the positive thinking flannel, and then lead everyone out to do their first fire-walk. It's one of those things that is more thrilling than you can ever realise until you do it for yourself'.

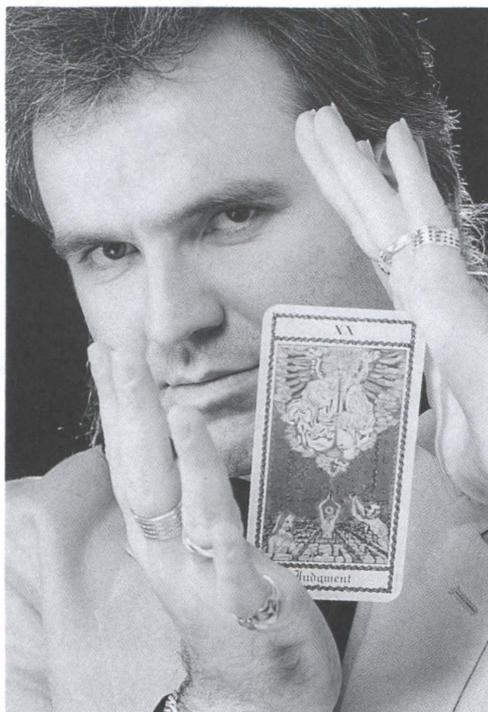
Ian is currently working on a book addressing his various interests, from metal-bending to cold reading. Despite his skeptical background, he says, 'it's not a debunking book, which I think would be pointless, and doomed to fail. My approach is that you *add* interest when you *add* information. Suppose you watch a psychic give a reading which produces all sorts of deadly accurate hits. I think you'd have to be very dull not to find this fascinating and intriguing. So you want

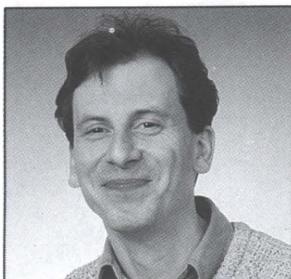
to know how it's done, and you're given the explanation "She is psychic". But this is a non-explanation. It doesn't tell you anything. It's also hard to reconcile with the fruits of over 100 years research, which informs us that psychic ability – even if it exists – cannot be demonstrated on demand. So I think it's *more* interesting, not less, to junk the bland "she's psychic" cover story, and to explain how it's really done'.

Although his work stems from serious research, Ian says, 'I don't see what I do as promoting a point of view or preaching about skepticism. I just want to do the best I can to entertain people well and give them a good night out'. He certainly succeeds. You don't have to be psychic to predict that we will be seeing a lot more of Ian Rowland in future.

**Chris Willis is a freelance journalist and researcher.**

*Ian Rowland is currently touring his Psychic Show while looking for a permanent London venue. For details of this and his other ventures phone 0181 664 6378, or e-mail [ian@rowlan.demon.co.uk](mailto:ian@rowlan.demon.co.uk).*





# Psychic Diary

Toby Howard

## Mind games and skullduggery

**P**HRENOLOGY, according to Ambrose Bierce in his *Devil's Dictionary*, is the science of picking the pocket through the scalp.

You may be surprised to hear it, but Phrenology – the art of discovering the details of a person's personality and character by examining the shape of the bumps in their skull – is still around, and some people take it very seriously indeed.

I am not wholly innocent. I have to confess to having recently purchased a Phrenological head from an antiques shop. As the nineteen pounds changed hands I thought: *Am I really doing this?*

But I am pleased with my Phrenological head, which is staring at me as I write. It is, I believe, one of an edition of one thousand in Coalport china produced a few years ago by the London Phrenology Company. As you can see from the photograph, it is certainly handsome. Its winsome, innocent expression offsets the grimace of the creaking PC which dominates my desktop. And that's worth £19 of anyone's money.

The 'science' (those quotes are important) of Phrenology was devised by the Viennese anatomist Franz Josef Gall (1758–1828) in the early 1800s. Gall believed that the brain was the seat of all mental faculties. An excellent idea, and good for Gall for abandoning the squelchy spleen, heart and liver as the seats of our emotions.

Gall was a respectable anatomist, remembered today as the first to scrutinise the tissue of the brain and identify neurons and ganglia, the fevered activity of which are responsible for the words you are now reading, and the fact that you are reading them. But, unfortunately for science (note the absence of quote marks), Gall went on to claim that our faculties and personality traits are neatly handled by very specifically localised regions of the brain. The importance of these regions may be measured by the size of the corresponding bumps in the bone of the skull.

Gall's reasoning developed by extension. If, as unfortunate accidents have revealed for centuries, such-and-such part of the brain is clearly responsible for seeing, and such-and-such part for hearing, then why not – 'quite logically' – extend the idea to emotions, to faculties, to thoughts and ideas.

The idea is appealing. 'I'm sorry I am such a bland person', one might say, 'But you see it's really not my fault. It's just that the Blandness Organ of my brain is rather highly developed'. So it's not *you* that's bland – it's some fickle biology beyond your conscious control.

This is, of course, wishful thinking. While it is true that certain parts of the brain are known to control particular physical processes of the body, a person's 'character' does not dwell in any biological structure smaller than the entire body. Character, personality, whatever you want to call it, is an *epiphenomenon* – a particular visible by-product of a huge number of poorly understood biological processes.

So the reason why the brain surgeon can't remove blandness with a scalpel is simply that there is no blandness, as such, to remove. Douglas Hofstadter in his *Gödel, Escher, Bach* (Penguin, 1984) illustrates the idea of epiphenomena with the example of a sprinter who can run 100 yards in 9.3 seconds. Where in the sprinter's body is the number 9.3 stored? Nowhere, of course. It's a ludicrous idea, but this is exactly the

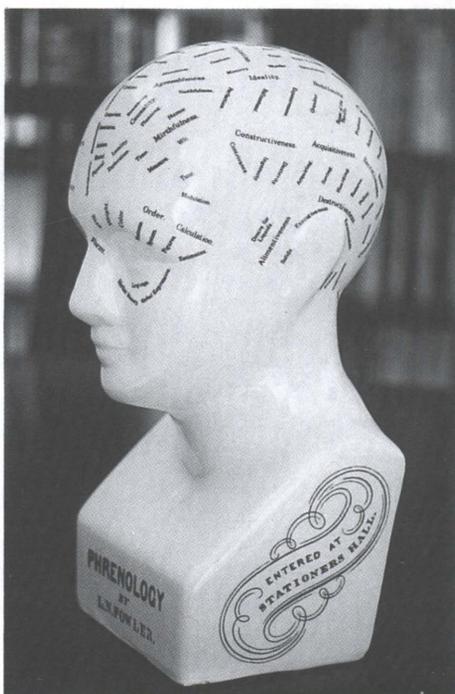
sort of approach that phrenologists are claiming for character traits.

Gall's theories were influential, and with the work in Germany and France of Johann Spurzheim, and the Scot George Combe, who became physician to Queen Victoria in 1838, Phrenology flourished. There were dedicated journals and learned societies. Incredibly, the British Phrenological Society survived until 1967. In Belgium, Professor Paul Bouts, author, inter alia, of *Modern Hygiene for Intellectuals*, continues to fly the Phrenological flag at the grand old age of 96. And Peter Van den Bossche, a modern supporter, defends Phrenology on his World Wide Web pages.

Phrenology is a pseudoscientific curiosity, nothing more. And if anyone tries to tell you different, tell them they need their head examining.

**Toby Howard** is a lecturer at the University of Manchester, and a freelance writer.

Peter Van den Bossche's Phrenology pages are at <http://www.wvub.ac.be/ond/etec/cit/phreno/home.htm>.



# Skeptic at Large

Wendy Grossman



## *Hacking into the biggest cover-up in the history of the world*

**S**O, LIKE THE THING IS, is that the paranormal is following me around. I'd like it to stop, if it doesn't mind, so I can spend a few months burrowing antisocially into cyberspace.

I will admit that the first conference was asking for it. This was the 20th anniversary CSICOP conference in Buffalo, which saw a number of British and Irish (hello, Peter!) turn up to watch Paul Kurtz and James Randi argue about whose asteroid was bigger. Someone, you see, did a deal with the naming committee, and there's probably soon to be an asteroid named Skeptic, after CSICOP, and another named after Randi. Now that Randi is involved in setting up an educational foundation (if you're on the Web, try <http://www.randi.org>), this may be a prelude to larger debates.

Anyway, if you go to a skeptical conference you have to expect silly jokes from late-night comedians (Dave Letterman, on the conference: 'I don't believe it') and strange stories from the assembled participants. I liked best the graduate student who told me he'd paid his way to the conference by selling 'Genuine Bigfoot tracks' over the Internet. Jokes aside, he is almost serious: his tutor has made quite a study of Bigfoot and, one gathers, believes it exists.

Then the following weekend I went to a hands-on science workshop for journalists at Cornell University. I was hoping this would be, as advertised, really hands-on, as in getting into the lab and peering down microscopes. I enjoyed dissecting that frog in school. But no: instead we saw presentations of work other people were doing, which was a bit disappointing although still interesting. The only thing was, an entire half day of the conference was on parapsychology, prefaced by an hour's critique of CSICOP and its works, in which the speaker, Trevor Pinch, erroneously included the Benveniste affair (that was the scientific journal *Nature*).

Still, I might not have minded if I could have actually run some experiments. As it was, the primary experiment was watching the reactions of the other assembled journalists. Most were somewhat impressed with the Ganzfeld evidence presented by Daryl Bem; many more were extremely impressed with his talents at magic. Bem had one journalist feeling so betrayed he was in tears even the next day.

But back to real life, where the modems are modems and the phone lines lead to the Internet. On the net, the paranormal is all over the place, but you can click away from it. Except you can't, always. I spent this past weekend at a hacker conference called 'Access All Areas' only

to discover that quite a variety of these guys were wearing alien T-shirts. I mean, pictures of the bug-faced alien on Whitley Streiber's books. One even wore a black T-shirt with the bug face and a dotted line around it with the legend, 'Alien imposter mask - cut here'.

And that's how I discovered that there is rumoured to be a strand of the hacker community that believes it has found evidence of a government cover-up of alien visitations. This is not a new rumour, it turns out, as by searching the Web I found references to it in a 1992 edition of the electronic magazine *Phrack*.

*Phrack* cited the appearance on NBC's *Dateline* program of a 'mystery hacker' named 'Quentin', who told the story. This is *Phrack's* retelling:

The story goes that this group of individuals decided to put their skills to work on a project that, if successful, would add legitimacy to the hacking process by uncovering information on what has been called the greatest cover-up in the history of the world.

The article concludes with a long list of people and institutions believed to be involved in the cover-up, if one exists.

I've been scouring the net, and so far that's all I've been able to find other than references to the 'Hackers 95' videotape, which includes an interview with one 'Psychosp'. It may well be that there is nothing more to find. But it may also be that the hackerly love of finding hidden information is being misdirected.

Now, I don't worry if a bunch of guys in black T-shirts want to spend time trying to gather evidence of a government cover-up. If they don't succeed, that would be one more piece of evidence that there isn't one (or that the government is far better at protecting its computers than the recently announced Pentagon survey of hacker attacks would suggest). If they do find hard evidence, that will at least be an interesting situation.

What worries me is the linkage of hacker knowledge with UFO conspiracy theorists. Is it possible that these guys have gotten so used to imagining a federal agent behind every pair of sunglasses that they're moving into less rational paranoia? It's unnerving to report, for example, that *Phrack* lists Whitley Streiber as someone on the 'government shit list' who has 'gotten close'. I mean, hackers are supposed to know more than the rest of us. Who's left to have faith in if even hackers are gullible?

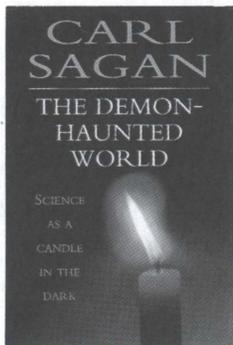
**Wendy Grossman** is the founder of *The Skeptic*, and a writer and folksinger.

# Reviews



## Sagan's sagacity

Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World* (Headline, £18.99)



The author is justly famous for explaining scientific ideas to the general public. In this book, subtitled 'Science as a Candle in the Dark', he celebrates the virtues of the scientific method and of scientific skepticism in the face of today's rising tide of pseudoscience and superstition.

Sagan describes a basic 'baloney detection kit' for

budding skeptics, which he proceeds to apply to a number of current 'New Age' and 'paranormal' topics including alien abductions and autopsies, astrology, Atlantis, channelling, crop circles, faith healing, and recovered memories.

With a background in the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) program, Sagan would love to encounter flying saucers, little grey men, or any other alien phenomena, but he stresses that most of the evidence put forward can be reduced to misperceptions, hoaxes, cover-ups of sensitive government intelligence data (not concerned with UFOs or the paranormal), or hallucinations.

'UFO Abductions' in particular frequently take place during sleep or long, monotonous car journeys, and are much more readily explained as hypnagogic imagery with associated sleep paralysis – at least until hard evidence to the contrary is presented. Sagan has compiled a list of questions to put to the highly-evolved 'Space Brothers' (or the supposedly enlightened 'channelled' spirits of long-dead Atlantean guides) relating to Fermat's Last Theorem and other areas of mathematical and scientific controversy; not surprisingly he finds that no convincing answers are ever forthcoming.

Sagan stresses that it is far too easy simply to denigrate unorthodox ideas, and describes how, in the 1970s, he refused to endorse an 'Objections to Astrology' manifesto on the grounds that it appealed to authority rather than empirical evidence. He goes on, of course, to give several valid reasons (including ambiguity over such matters as the precession of the equinoxes) for not believing in astrology.

He also points out that scientists can be just as fallible as the rest of us. He describes the (illusory) canals and 'face' observed on Mars, the radio signals received from quasars and pulsars that were initially (and wrongly) ascribed to Little Green Men elsewhere, and Wegener's theory of Continental Drift that was bitterly denounced – at least until Plate Tectonics made the idea respectable.

The key feature of scientific skepticism, Sagan argues, is that ideas are always subject to scrutiny and reasoned debate, especially when new empirical evidence becomes available.

The book ends with an plea for the continued growth of science education, and the promotion of skeptical thinking in politics and religion. Failure to achieve this may lead to religious and political persecution, and Sagan gives graphic examples of past abuses such as the witch-hunts and slavery.

This excellent and thought-provoking book has a full index, an extensive reading list, and references throughout to CSICOP, the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and to the standard skeptical authors. It deserves the widest success, amongst skeptics and New Agers alike.

— Mike Rutter

## Objects in the skies

Wendelle Stevens & August Roberts, *UFO Photographs Around the World* (UFO Photo Archives/Gazelle, £13.99)

A gentleman from New Zealand once sold me a photograph he had taken of an Adamski-type UFO swooping low at sunset over the hills of his native country; he gave me the date and location and described the circumstances in detail. As UFO photos go, it is pretty good; slightly blurred, but that is only to be expected, due to the force field with which, like Captain Kirk's *Enterprise*, they prudently protect themselves.

I have to admit, though, that, despite my visitor's evident sincerity, I doubted his word. And my doubts were justified when, a few months later, I came across the same photo in an American magazine, attributed to another photographer, in another country, and at an earlier date.

That incident, more perhaps than any other in my experience, has coloured my views on the UFO phenomenon. For I am convinced that my visitor was not seeking to deceive me. (Nor was he trying to make a fast buck; he sold me the print for 50p). I think he had genuinely come to believe that he had taken that photograph.

Why? If we understood why, we would understand a great deal about the extraordinary behaviour of so many who are caught up in the UFO phenomenon. For whatever motivated my visitor was what motivated George Adamski, the proponents of the Roswell crash, the Gulf Breeze photos, the long procession of contactees and abductees.

The fact is that a truly authenticated genuine photograph of a flying saucer would be one of the most valuable things in the world. Not just in financial terms, though of course its possessor would make a fortune. Not only in prestige, though of course the photographer

would be an instant worldwide celebrity. But because it would be the ultimate demonstration that this most splendid of all man's myths – the myth of other-worldly beings – is rooted in fact.

In their efforts to come up with this demonstration, people have gone to all kinds of lengths. As is well known, a great number of UFO photos are proven fakes. Another large category comprises misperceptions – striking cloud formations, balloons and other artifacts. Once, investigating an island off the Welsh coast which was said (wrongly, I concluded) to be a secret flying saucer base, I took a photo which, when it came back from the lab, showed a very flying-saucer-like object swooping down to the rock. A sea-gull, caught in motion, can take on some very surprising shapes.

What, then, are we to make of the photographs in Stevens' and Roberts' *UFO Photographs Around the World*? Frankly, as evidence, damn little. Those that are clear look phony; those that could be genuine are so indistinct as to contain no usable information. Consequently we are thrown back on the integrity of the photographer: and unfortunately we know enough about the UFO phenomenon to know that, ultimately, no witness can be regarded as above suspicion, no matter how sincere and free from ulterior motives s/he may seem to be.

None the less, this is an admirable and valuable book. The authors are to be congratulated on having gathered together so many photos, each one accompanied by a wealth of documentation which would be hard to access elsewhere. Often there are several pages of notes informing us as to the who, where, when and how the pictures were taken.

As evidence for the existence of alien spacecraft, this collection is if anything counterproductive, so unconvincing are the photos; though indeed a few of the cases are intriguing and challenge off-the-shelf explanation. But as documentation of the lengths to which would-be believers will go, it is a fascinating compilation. For anyone seeking to understand the UFO phenomenon, this is an essential reference: the authors deserve our thanks for making the material available in so convenient and so well-documented a form.

— Hilary Evans

## Alien logic

Capt Kevin Randle (Retd), *Roswell UFO Crash Update Exposing the Military Cover-up of the Century*, Global Communications/Gazelle, £8.99).

Even if one were to ignore the arguments it makes, this would still be a pretty dreadful book. It is badly structured and poorly written. To make matters worse, the editing is appalling, with dozens of typing errors liberally scattered throughout the text.

The main problem with the book, though, is that it is written with the assumption that the reader has 1) read Randle's previous book and 2) read Karl Pflock's report 'Roswell in Perspective'. Because of this, Randle attacks and refutes evidence offered by witnesses without even bothering to explain precisely what that evidence is or from whom it came, leaving the untutored reader totally perplexed. To make matters worse, there is no index or bibliography, and virtually no references are offered.

Randle is clearly a very diligent researcher and has obviously spent a lot of time gathering evidence. He appears to be sincere in his belief that the crash occurred. The trouble is that he is very selective with what evidence he accepts and what he rejects, whilst at the same time criticising others for doing precisely that. He also happily believes second and even third-hand evidence that supports his theories, whilst rejecting at least one first hand account (Associated Press reporter Jason Kellahin) because, he claims, the witness has forgotten what happened. Who's being selective now?

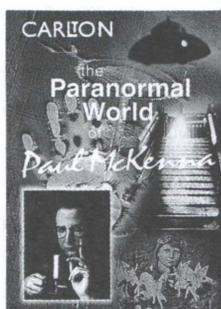
There is no point dwelling for very long on this awful book. But for those still in doubt, I must quote one example of Randle's logic.

On the day after the discovery of the UFO, Col William Blanchard, commander of the 509th Bomb Group, went on leave. Hardly a normal reaction if what had been found by his men really was a flying saucer with alien bodies inside. Randle's explanation is this: Blanchard was needed in Washington to monitor activities. (Why? Why not monitor them on the spot? Surely there were dozens of other colonels in Washington?) Therefore he was granted leave, on the grounds that the press and other researchers, discovering that he had gone on leave, would surmise that he would never have been granted leave if something important had happened. This left him free to continue to monitor the situation, whilst apparently not doing so. Well I'm convinced.

— Mike Walsh

## Paranormal pamphlet

Booklet to accompany the ITV series *The Paranormal World of Paul McKenna* (for a copy, send a large self-addressed envelope with a 57 pence stamp to The Paranormal World of Paul McKenna, Carlton TV, PO Box 101, London WC2N 4AW).



It would not be possible to review this booklet without briefly comparing it to the TV series which it is intended to accompany. Having taken part in a couple of the programmes in the series I was disappointed, although not entirely surprised, at the pro-paranormal bias of the programme-makers. To give just one of

many possible examples, one of the studio demonstrations of alleged psychokinesis involved getting the audience to will a particular image to appear on a computer screen. At the outset the computer had scrambled two images, one of an astronaut and one of a leopard. A random event generator would determine which image actually appeared and the audience had to will the chosen image, in this case the astronaut, to 'come through'. Given that there was a 50/50 chance of either outcome, a single trial could not really be taken as strong evidence either way. But in the event, the image that came through was the leopard. So what did the programme makers do? They simply tried again. Needless to say, the TV audience only saw a 'successful' trial.

By contrast, this little booklet is not that bad. Within

its 63 pages are eight brief illustrated chapters (each between four and eight pages long), plus useful sections on 'Sources of further information', listing names and addresses (including CSICOP), and 'Further Reading' (which includes a sub-section on 'Sceptic (sic) Analysis' listing books by Blackmore, Hoggart and Hutchinson, Wiseman and Morris, (Kendrick) Frasier (sic), Randi, Nickell, (Martin) Gardener (sic), and Klass). OK, so the proof-reading was less than perfect! Both *The Skeptic* and the *Skeptical Inquirer* are listed too. The chapters themselves, after a brief general introduction, offer commentaries on each of the seven programmes in the series (dealing with UFOs, ghosts, healing, psychic detectives, telepathy, superhumans, and psychokinesis). The booklet states right at the outset that:

The very nature of paranormal phenomena means that this is a highly controversial field, with many contrasting and strongly held views. The more sources of information you use, the more likely it is that you will get a good overview of current thinking in the areas that interest you. This booklet is not an attempt to prove or disprove any psychic phenomenon, but to give you, the viewer, some food for thought. What you believe, or disbelieve, is up to you!

The writer, one Katie Brewin, has generally remained true to this neutral stance. Claims are typically presented as claims and not as facts. Sceptical alternative explanations are usually offered (although it is often pointed out that many cases remain unexplained).

The booklet even ends on a fairly sceptical note. It asks:

Are you still unsure as to which phenomena are really genuine? – Do you still wonder if there really are UFO's (sic) and ghosts, people with amazing physical powers or truly psychic abilities? – Perhaps you think it might all be trickery or the result of some subconscious human desire to believe in mysterious things?

Given the bias of the TV series, we should be thankful that this booklet at least tries to redress the balance somewhat. I would say it was worth 57p of anybody's money.

— Christopher C French

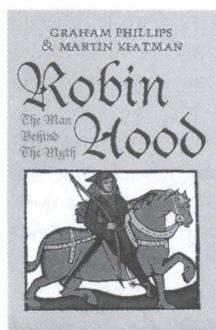
## The real Robin

Graham Philips and Martin Keatman, *Robin Hood: The Man Behind the Myth* (Michael O'Mara Books, £15.99)

(With apologies to the traditional ballad 'Robin Hood and the Tanner').

*Come gather around and list to my song  
With a hey down, down-a-down-down  
I sing of the bold Robin Hood  
It seems he did hale from the vale of Barnsdale  
And not from Merry Sherwood.*

*And mayhap he lived a lot later than thought  
With a hey down, down-a-down-down  
When Edward the Third had his crown  
Not Richard nor John had he gazed upon*



*When our outlaw first gained  
his renown.*

*But there's some that say he  
was firstly a god  
With a hey down, down-a-  
down-down  
Or baron, or bastard, or knight  
There's many a claim to his  
name and his fame  
And who is to know which is  
right?*

*Justice and freedom will e'er be his sign  
With a hey down, down-a-down-down  
He's a symbol of all that is good  
Prattle on though they may, he'll still have his day  
And we'll always have our Robin Hood.*

Reviewed by someone who, when she's not being Chair-entity of the New Zealand Skeptics, can be found on the field in archery combat as a member of the medieval Swift Flight Light Infantry Company. (It's true, you should see my bruises!)

— Vicki Hyde

## Curiouser and curiouser

Steve Moore (editor): *Fortean Studies Volume 2* (John Brown Publishing, £19.99)

Hamlet's claim that 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy' is taken very seriously by the editors of *Fortean Times*. Their latest publication, *Fortean Studies Volume 2*, claims to offer a 'lengthy and scholarly' examination of strange and unexplained phenomena. It is an idiosyncratic mixture, consisting of a dozen essays whose authors' viewpoints range from the skeptical to the open-minded. There is more variety in the content than in the contributors: to judge from the contents list they are all male.

Neil Nixon's essay on 'UFOs and the Media' is a refreshingly skeptical look at coverage of UFO phenomena, which Nixon suspects may not be unconnected with tabloid editors' desire to increase circulation and 'quality' newspapers' reluctance to give space to subjects whose main public showcase is in *Sunday Sport*.

Peter Christie's selection of items from *The Gentleman's Magazine* shows how the press covered such issues over 200 years ago. This highly browsable selection includes reports of a sea-unicorn, giant skeletons, mermaids, fireballs and mystery cures for a variety of illnesses.

I particularly enjoyed Nigel Watson and Granville Oldroyd's 'Snow on Their Boots', a humorous investigation of supposed Russian troop movements through Britain in 1914, which demonstrates the growth of an urban myth. In fact, there were no Russian troops, but plenty of people were sure they had seen them, including the (possibly mythical) individual, 'who saw Russian soldiers passing though a mainline station . . . and knew for certain that the occupants of the carriages of the train were Russian because there was snow on their boots'.

Michael Shoemaker's 'The Lightwheel Wonder' analyses the phenomenon of wheels of light which appear under the ocean without apparent cause. Shoemaker illustrates his article with no less than 12 statistical tables, which are less impressive when one considers the paucity of available material. Forty-eight 'wheel and probable wheel reports' do not provide a great amount of data.

Apart from its rather off-putting layout of two and three columns on a page just over six inches wide, *Fortean Studies* is well produced, with well chosen black and white illustrations and a higher degree of accuracy in proofreading than is evident in many more ambitious publications. My only reservation is the price. £19.99 may be inexpensive for an academic book, but the general reader is likely to demand more in the way of content and illustration for his or her money. Perhaps a cheaper edition would be a greater success?

— Chris Willis

## Acute Angels

Alma Daniel, Timothy Wyllie and Andrew Ramer, *Ask Your Angels: A Practical Guide to Working with Angels to Enrich your Life* (Piatkus, £10.99)



For the authors of this book, the world teems with multitudes of unseen heavenly beings all ready to help and support us with divine guidance and loving advice. All you have to do is follow the easy steps they outline and before you can say 'Bob's your archangel', your own personal divine guardian will be around to introduce him/her/itself and start setting your life in order. You need only bring your credulity, suggestibility and a willingness to interpret any accidental sequence of events as cause and effect.

Although the tone of the book is religious, it is unlikely to appeal to individuals of any orthodox persuasion, for these authors buy into just about every New Age idea going. They have filled their trolley from every shelf in the spiritual supermarket. In addition to borrowing extensively from the major religions, their world is crowded with the kinds of supernatural beings most of us abandoned in childhood: fairies, elves, trolls, gnomes. Tinkerbell really is out there.

We are offered Tarot, astrology, I-Ching, and 'angel oracle' cards (instructions for which are included) for seeing the future. Crystals and ley lines are here as well. Even Urantia gets a mention. Metaphor is unknown; everything is taken literally. This is a mind-set similar to that of conspiracy theorists but upbeat: not Reds under the bed, just angels over the pillow. Everything has significance. Simple coincidences do not exist; they 'reverberate with meaning and bring a sense that someone's out there with your best interests at heart'. Irony (unless the book is one great send-up, as I occasionally suspected) is totally absent.

The path to meeting your angelic guardian is charted in great detail. A series of exercises teach you to relax

and open yourself to the divine. Some of the exercises, like sitting quietly and concentrating on your breathing, are ordinary enough. Others, like practising unfurling your own wings, are pretty bizarre. A number of ways of contacting your angels are described including by computer – angels seem to be comfortable with technology.

Ultimately the goal seems to be self-acceptance and self-understanding, improved personal relationships and peace of mind, all mediated by your angel. Indeed, these ends seem entirely commendable. It is the means suggested that are so disconcerting.

— Marjorie Mackintosh

## A theory of psi?

Lawrence LeShan, *The Medium, the Mystic and the Physicist* (Arkana, £8.99)

Lawrence LeShan sets out to provide a scientific general theory for all paranormal experiences, including psi and faith healing. He starts with the fundamental assumption that strange events occur that cannot be explained by science, events impossible in the 'real' world. This does not mean that modern science is wrong; he believes instead that there exist a number of different realities, each with its own physics and rationality, of which our familiar 'Sensory Reality' is but one. Events that are impossible in our world can occur because they are possible in another, interconnected reality with different rules.

As evidence, he presents a wide range of confirming statements from the spiritualist world, mystics, and religious texts, and claims to have utilised the theory to become a successful teacher of faith healing.

He also cites modern physicists' explanations of complex counter-intuitive theories as validating the existence of different realities with different physical laws. The sayings of ancient and modern mediums and spiritualists do resemble alarmingly the wilder fancies of physicists, but without the context of the texts from which the scientists' words are taken, it is difficult to ascribe any authority to them. Physicists proposing the existence of alternative realities is proof neither of paranormal events, nor that these mathematical possibilities are the same 'realities' described by mystics. LeShan quite rightly says that modern physics is forcing us to rethink our view of the universe, but fails to show that the physicists' view justifies his own.

LeShan asserts that scientists resist the paranormal despite definite empirical evidence because they want to disbelieve it – the reverse of the sceptics' claim that believers maintain their faith by subjective selection of evidence. He maintains that providing more experimental evidence for paranormal events is futile, since scientists have an infinite standard of proof for 'impossible' events, and that the role of the paranormal researcher now must be to provide a theoretical basis for known paranormal facts.

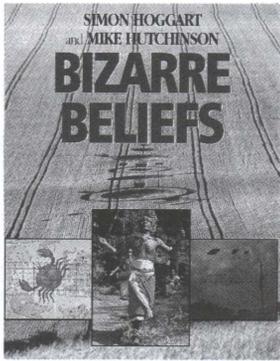
This is the essential weakness of the book; it starts with the assumption that the existence of paranormal events is a proven fact requiring an explanation. If you're already a believer, this is a well-sourced and well-considered theory; if not, this is wordy and unsubstantiated fantasy.

— Alasdair King

## For the skeptic's coffee table

Simon Hoggart and Mike Hutchinson, *Bizarre Beliefs* (Richard Cohen Books, £12.99).

I must confess to a strong bias before presenting my review of *Bizarre Beliefs*: one of the authors, Mike Hutchinson, is a good friend. Of course, this alone would not prevent me from giving the book a bad review if I thought it deserved it, but having benefitted from Mike's



advice on many skeptical matters for a number of years, I have no doubt whatever that he is the most knowledgeable skeptic in the UK.

A book co-authored by Mike is thus inevitably going to be accurate and authoritative on any of the paranormal matters with which it deals.

As a second prejudice, I also have to confess to having been a fan of Simon Hoggart's writings in the *Observer* for a rather long time. (Does anyone else remember his quirky series of articles on the USA published many years ago in the *Observer* magazine?). It was a reasonable expectation that the collaboration of Hoggart and Hutchinson (H&H) would yield an interesting and useful book. And it has.

The book is a largish format paperback, is well printed on glossy paper and contains many colour and black and white illustrations. In that sense it is a good example of a reasonably-priced coffee-table book. However, unlike an awful lot of coffee-table books, even without the illustrations it would be worth paying £12.99 for the text alone.

*Bizarre Beliefs* covers 19 separate topics grouped un-

der four headings: The Outer Limits, Foretelling The Past, Matter Over Mind and Things That Go Bump. These include just about everything that one might expect to encounter in a book of this type (UFOs, crop circles, psychic detectives, astrology, dowsing, ghosts, the Loch Ness monster . . .) but do not include alternative medicine and related matters.

Although inevitably many of the topics have been treated in skeptical and non-skeptical books and articles many times before, H&H generally manage to provide either new information or a new slant on old information. In particular, much of the information in the section on psychic detectives was new to me. (By the way, any reader who discovers the one-word error in this section will get an honourable mention in Hits & Misses).

As Prometheus Books (for whom Mike Hutchinson is British representative) could no doubt testify, overtly skeptical books don't sell anything like as well as overtly paranormal ones. The total absence of any external signs of skepticism in this book led me firmly to the conclusion that the publisher is using subterfuge to put this book into the hands of believers – and good luck to him. But don't be misled by this. H&H look at the factual basis of the topics they cover and lead you to the inevitable, rational (and non-paranormal) conclusions.

All in all, I strongly recommend the book – particularly as a birthday or Christmas gift for any friends or relations who are neither committed skeptics nor outright believers in the paranormal.

Finally, I have one small personal grievance that I'll put directly to the authors: Mike and Simon, it really wouldn't have hurt to have put a one line reference to *The Skeptic* under the 'Magazines' section of the bibliography where only the *Skeptical Inquirer* is listed. There is even some white space that could have been usefully filled.

— Steve Donnelly

## Bookwatch

We mention some recent books of interest to skeptics; some titles are skeptical, some pro-paranormal. Watch for reviews of selected titles in future issues of *The Skeptic*.

### New Lands

Charles Fort  
*John Brown*, £9.99

A reissue of Fort's second book, a pre-psychedelic collection of wild anecdotes and ideas, served up in Fort's highly individual style.

### The Trouble With Science

Robin Dunbar  
*Faber*, £7.99

An excellent defence of science, scientists, and the scientific method, in the face of modern disillusionment and misunderstanding.

### New Age Thinking

M D Faber  
*University of Ottawa Press*, \$29

An exhaustive academic psychoanalytic critique of the growth of the New Age, seen as the search for magical solutions to everyday problems.

### The Unconscious Quantum

Victor J Stenger  
*Prometheus*, £28

Stenger, a professor of physics and astronomy, argues against the attempts of New Agers to usurp 20th century science to fit their own 'magical' thinking.

### Spaceships of the Pleiades

Kal K Korff  
*Prometheus*, £22

An investigation of the claims of Billy Meier, which Korff believes is the most elaborate UFO hoax ever.

### The History of the Devil

Gerald Messadié  
*Newleaf*, £20

A fascinating attempt to trace the historical development of the idea that the devil exists as the personification of evil. Blame the Zoroastrians of 600 BCE, says Messadié.

### The Tenacious Mars Effect

S Ertel & K Irving  
*Urania*, £9.95

### The 'Mars Effect'

Claude Benski *et al*  
*Prometheus*, £16.99

Two quite different books which analyse Michel Gauquelin's 'Mars Effect'. Ertel and Irving claim the effect is real and measurable; Benski *et al* claim it is a statistical artefact. The debate continues.

# Letters



## Infamous criticism

Antony Flew (*Letters, The Skeptic*, 10.2) quite rightly comments that two books have sought to clear Cyril Burt's name in relation to allegations of outright fraud.

However, when I used the word 'infamous' in my article ('Measuring the mind', *The Skeptic*, 10.1) I rather had in mind Burt's shoddy methods and dubious conclusions. Like many hereditarians he appeared to be using IQ research to bolster a previously arrived at view that intelligence is largely genetic (innate) and effectively immutable.

Flew also takes me to task about the quote from Lewontin. I agree that Lewontin may not have told the whole story, but his criticism has some merit.

A recent book called *The Bell Curve* makes use of Jensen's basic thesis, but here as well it is arguable about whether the authors have surveyed (and indeed fairly reported) all attempts at raising IQ and scholastic achievement.

Jensen's approach is to state that intelligence is mainly genetically determined and that some remedial programmes have failed, an approach that suggests a desire to place limits on human achievement from the outset rather than examine how to make improvements.

Even the authors of *The Bell Curve* acknowledge that such things as IQ can be improved by moving a child from a poor to a good environment, and thus Lewontin's criticism stands.

**Dene Bebbington**  
Reading

## UFO mirages

Martin S Kottmeyer's article about UFO speeds ('Blazing Saucers', *The Skeptic*, 10.2) is fundamentally flawed.

Kenneth Arnold did not report seeing objects travelling at 'incred-

ible speeds'; he reported them because he could not identify them. The report of 'incredible speed' came from a later miscalculated analysis – when it was believed that the object travelled between Mts. Ranier and Adams instead of two small peaks in the Tatoosh Range (just south of Mt. Ranier). The resulting speed turned out to be exactly that of Arnold's own aircraft, which is why I claim that the objects were in fact mirages of stationary mountain peaks.

Nor do Arnold's drawings (he made two) exactly resemble 'the Flying Flapjack', unless it was capable of flipping itself suddenly up on its side. He reported the objects changing shape from a broad, bright disc to a dull long lozenge. This is typical of mirages.

It is not true that Arnold gave the altitude of the objects as '9200 feet [2800 m] plus or minus 1000 feet [300 m]'. He stated that the objects' altitude could have varied by 300 m up or down from his own flight level (which was 2800 m). In other words, they were on the horizon, as one would expect of mirages of distant ground objects.

Kottmeyer's claim that the objects were probably a line of nearby swans is ludicrous. Does he think that an experienced pilot could not identify swans, which in any case, do not fly so high?

Kottmeyer's discussion is all the more surprising because he has reviewed my book (*The UFO Mystery Solved*) and must know of my analysis (praised by other reviewers).

He compounds this error by supposing that Arnold saw objects moving at supersonic speed – in fact they were not moving at all. Reports of the speeds of UFOs are entirely subjective and variable and do not appear to be culturally influenced.

**Steuart Campbell**  
Edinburgh

## Absurd beliefs

In your editorial (*The Skeptic*, 10.2), you invited readers to tell you about the areas of irrational human behaviour we are aware of. I think that won't be very difficult; I'm still waiting for areas of rational human behaviour to be found out. Anyway, here's a little personal suggestion about where to look for absurd beliefs and practices: diets.

**Sandro G Masoni**  
Cagliari, Italy

## The ten-percenters

Very interesting the *idée fixe* of us using our brains only at a level of 10%. In my opinion this is no surprise if we add the qualifier 'at any particular moment'. That is, we need all the brain capacity to be fully functional, but each function only a part of the time.

I have a number of resources at home: a toolkit, kitchen equipment, library, car, suits, shirts and so on. Do I use all this capacity 100% of the time? No way! The 10% utilisation should be understood in this sense. Take the car as an example: theoretically, at a 100% utilisation, I could drive, at 50 mph, a distance of 427,000 miles in a year (24 x 365 x 50). In fact I drive only 10,000 miles. This is a utilisation of 2.2%. What a waste of a resource! But would my car really make those 427,000 miles without falling to pieces? The brain is just like the car. It cannot be run at full speed with permanent damage. This is demonstrated by the experiments of sleep deprivation.

**Lassi Hyvarinen**  
Le Vésinet, France

Please send your letters to: **The Skeptic (Letters), PO Box 475, Manchester M60 2TH, UK; or email [skeptic@cs.man.ac.uk](mailto:skeptic@cs.man.ac.uk). We reserve the right to edit letters for publication.**

# Subscribe to The Skeptic

The *Skeptic* is published bimonthly; a year's subscription covers 6 issues. Please make cheques, postal orders (£ Sterling only), credit cards (MasterCard or Visa only) payable to The *Skeptic*. Email orders: skeptic@cs.man.ac.uk.

| Postal area  | Sub. (1 year) | Back issue* |
|--|---------------|-------------|
| United Kingdom:                                    | £14           | £2.10       |
| Europe (air mail) or Rest of world (surface mail): | £18           | £2.70       |
| Rest of world (air mail):                          | £30           | £4.50       |

(\* see below for our discount rates for multiple back issues)

From: The *Skeptic*, P.O. Box 475,  
Manchester, M60 2TH, United Kingdom

## Order back issues

### Volume 10 (1996)

- 1 The mystery of the self;** Investigating a haunted pub; Why your 'IQ' may be misleading; The Cottingley Fairies; Fraud in physical science.
- 2 UFOs today and yesterday;** Testing a 'psychic' guru; The *Skeptic's* Dictionary; How not to get rich quick; Lucid dreaming; Do we only use 10% of our brains?

### VOLUME 9 (1995)

- 1 Ritual Satanic abuse;** How *not* to win the national lottery; Tesla: eccentric or neglected genius? Psychic surgery in Britain.
- 2 How to become a charlatan;** The myth of the unicorn; The mystery of 'me'; Earthly origins of alien stereotypes-1.
- 3 Fighting Creation 'Science';** Psychoanalysis of books; Earthly origins of alien stereotypes-2; Catalogue of daft gadgets.
- 4 The social psychology of healing and therapy;** Quackery; Lies, damn lies and statistics; Arthur Conan Doyle: the unlikely Spiritualist.
- 5 Health-care for your Hi-Fi;** The triumph of alternative therapy; The Age of Aquarius; Spiritualism ancient and modern.
- 6 Is there anyone out there?;** Desperately seeking immortality; The myth of the flying saucer; The placebo effect; Patent medicines.

### VOLUME 8 (1994)

- 1 Crop circles: the full story, part 1 • SOLD OUT •**
- 2 The Creation: what really happened?;** Crop circles: the full story, part 2; Freud and the occult.
- 3 Animal rights: science or pseudoscience?;** Vivisection: the case against; Water, water everywhere; The saucer error.
- 4 Mysterious energies and martial arts;** Paranormal IQ scores; Alien abductions; Sitting in the dark; A matter of faith.
- 5 Can the hands heal?;** Fantastic archaeology; Don't point that comet at me!; The *Mary Celeste* revisited.
- 6 Alternative medicine special;** What's wrong with alternative medicine? Acupuncture: elusive or illusory? Qigong: Chinese pseudoscience; The Indian Rope Trick.

### VOLUME 7 (1993)

- 1 The truth about tarot;** Across the great divide; 1993 skeptical predictions; Obituary: Charles Honorton; A healthy dose of sarsaparilla; A test for reincarnation;
- 2 The myths of meditation;** Vicious circles; The Cyril Burt affair; What hath Carlos Castaneda wrought?; All that glisters is not gold; Skepticism - 1895 style; Equine pseudoscience.
- 3 Cold fusion heats up;** Rajneesh: the failed guru; Beyond the near-death experience (interview with Susan Blackmore); Meditation: skepticism or cynicism?; Spirit guides and after-images.



- 4 The face on Earth;** Neural networks and NDEs; Francis Galton: skeptical traveller; Cyril Burt reconsidered; It's all in the mind; The computer conspiracy.
- 5 The mysteries of creativity;** At the frontiers of science; A Supernatural IQ?; The Big Bang controversy; Write your own pseudoscience.
- 6 Science and nonsense;** The *Mary Celeste* 'mystery'; Who's that on the line?; Close encounters of the cult kind.

### VOLUME 6 (1992)

- 1 Paranormal trends in the USSR;** Faking an alien; Where do we file flying saucers?; Psychic questing; Sea-bands.
- 2 Brainwashing a skeptic;** Dianetics; Who invented the Loch Ness monster?; The medium, not the message.
- 3 Premanand: scourge of the godmen;** Women and the New Age; Do-it-yourself UFOs; Chapman Cohen: freethinker.
- 4 Physics and the New Age - Part 1 • SOLD OUT •**
- 5 Vampires in Cumberland;** Is light getting slower?; Euro-cerealogy; Physics and the New Age - Part 2.
- 6 Great balls of fire;** Quackupuncture; Cold comfort for cold fusion; The fasting woman of Tutbury; Skeptics and scoffers.

### VOLUME 5 (1991)

- 1 Paul Daniels interview;** Canals on Mars; Nostradamus and the Middle-East crisis; Potty training; The case for super-skepticism;
- 2 The New Age and the crisis of belief;** The *Mary Celeste* mystery; N-rays; Wet and dry skepticism;
- 3 Why not to test a psychic - 1;** Speaking in tongues; Another look at scientology; Sharp blades or sharp practice?
- 4 James Randi interview;** Why not to test a psychic - 2; The inside-out cosmos; *The Freethinker*: 1881-1991; Medjogorje; Dualism, ESP and belief.
- 5 The documentation of a miracle?;** Psychics and semantics; Smith and Blackburn: hornswagglers extraordinaire; Spirits at large.
- 6 The summer of '91;** Seeing is believing?; Assessing evidence; Alternative medicine in Europe.

### VOLUME 4 (1990)

- 1 - 5 • SOLD OUT •**
- 6 The man who invented UFOs;** The new demonology; Reflections on past life regressions; What is scientology?; Polywater.

### VOLUMES 1, 2 and 3 (1987-1989) • SOLD OUT

#### BACK ISSUES DISCOUNTS

Save £s with our discount scheme!

Order more than one back issue and deduct the following discounts from your order total:

Ordering 2 - 6 issues, deduct 20%

Ordering 7 - 12 issues, deduct 30%

Ordering 13 or more issues, deduct 40%



This document has been digitized in order to share it with the public through AFU's project, running since 2010, to share files donated/deposited with the AFU foundation. Please consider making single or regular monetary donations to our work, or donations of your files for future preservation at our archival centre.

Archives for the Unexplained (AFU) · P O Box 11027 · 600 11 Norrköping, Sweden · [www.afu.se](http://www.afu.se)

Paypal: [afu@ufo.se](mailto:afu@ufo.se)

IBAN: SE59 9500 0099 6042 0490 7143

BIC: NDEASESS – Nordea/Plusgirot, Stockholm

Swish (Sweden only): 123 585 43 69