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LUNACY ON PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE
by Shawn Carlson

[Physicist and BAS board member Shawn Carlson has incurred the ire of astrologers world-wide with his study, which was published in that most prestigious scientific journal, "Nature". In that definitive study, Shawn demonstrated that astrologers cannot do what they say they can do, pure and simple.

Shawn's efforts for the cause of rationality are a boon to our purposes. People in the media are taking note of him and seeking his analyses and comments. -- Ed.]

What is it about California anyway? Does all this year-round sunshine and fair weather make people crazy? Perhaps the Chamber of Commerce, in an attempt to add color to our lives, takes ads in asylums across the country offering all certifiable kooks eternal happiness if they migrate here and multiply. How did California, once renowned for its industry and prestigious universities, become the international smorgasbord of lunacy?

First it was Shirley MacLaine telling us of her torrid trysts with spirits from Atlantis. Then last August came the Harmonic Convergence, which involved, among many other silly things, throngs of New Agers, crystal gazers and time-warped, tie-dyed, mantra-chanting hippie people seeking God on the slopes of Mt. Shasta. And now, just when the Golden State is bracing itself for a fall -- again -- into the ocean, we learn that our own Nancy Reagan regularly consults a California occultist about the President's agenda.

Don't laugh too hard. Millions of Americans take astrology very seriously. Some people use astrologers as psychotherapists. Others decide whether to get married, to enter into a business deal, or when to have children on the basis of astrological counseling. Others use astrologers to discover where on the earth the astrological influences would be better for them and then move, even emigrate, to a prescribed location. Still others seek out astrologers to advise them about medical conditions, and even about treatment. Yes, astrology, that ancient inanity that was part of the "dark" of the Dark Ages, is alive and well in the 1980's.

Despite the fact that most astrologers who give psychological counseling have no training in counseling and most who advise on medical issues have no medical expertise whatsoever, astrologers are

usually well compensated for their advice. A typical session, lasting about an hour, can cost between \$50 to \$1,000. In fact, astrological counseling is estimated to be a 100-million-dollar-per-year industry in the United States alone. And when one considers the enormous revenue generated from the sales of hundreds of thousands of astrology books and magazines one thing becomes clear: Astrology is big business.

Surprisingly, many people who secretly snicker at astrologers don't overtly object to their trade. After all, they reason, what harm could these dopey prognosticators possibly do? I have professionally investigated the business and practice of astrology for some years now, and the answer is plain: Plenty! The scientific evidence is direct and overwhelming. Astrology is nonsense. But if people take this nonsense seriously; if they uproot and relocate to where the astrological influences are supposedly more favorable; if they delay getting urgently-needed medical treatment; if they put their faith in an occult counselor's ability to discern their problems they clearly risk serious personal, emotional and financial injury. And if you don't accept that astrology is a danger because you can't believe that anyone could really take this stuff seriously, I have letters from believers who have responded to articles like this I have had published.

But what about this mysterious mystic whose occult advice has clandestinely influenced our illustrious President? Joan Quigely describes herself as a scientific astrologer, touts her work as "highly technical," and makes much of the fact that she is a Vassar grad. This class-of-'47, art/history major is author of "Astrology for Teens" which, as the name suggests, is neither technical nor scientific. Another book, "Astrology for Adults", requires perhaps a ninth-grade education to read. This one ain't so technical either. In fact, the only technical aspect of a modern astrologer's livelihood is the use of a computer to calculate horoscopes. Loading pre-written software, keying in someone's birth date and pressing the return key does not a technologist make.

I am annoyed. Particularly with astrologers who promote their malarkey by rubbing shoulders with science while shirking what science has discovered about their craft. I'm annoyed at mystics who seduce a credulous public with their oh so scientific-sounding jargon and who awe the uninformed with such torrents of astro-babel as to dull even the sharpest mind into thinking that there may be something to this nonsense.

Sorry Joan, but no one could be scientifically competent, knowledgeable of the evidence and still think that astrologers can perform the service for which they receive their large fees.

What Joan lacks in scientific competence she certainly makes up for in business acumen. She has parlayed her astrological expertise into an extremely successful enterprise. The Nob Hill soothsayer reportedly receives \$5,000 per horoscope -- not bad for ancient superstition -- and she acknowledges that the First Lady pays for her services. Now my

deep-seated cynicism makes me wonder.... Donald Regan says that every day on the President's calendar, 365 days a year, was marked by the First Lady's direction according to how astrologically auspicious it was. Marking out each day for the President must have required Joan to do an awful lot of horoscoping. Now let's suppose that Nancy consulted her astrologer only once a month. At \$5000 a pop, that's \$60K a year and almost half a million dollars since Reagan took office. Who's paying for this meandering excursion into rubbish anyway, Nancy Reagan or us?

Nancy Reagan is in the enviable position of having the greatest experts in the world no further than a phone call away. But did our intrepid First Lady bother to talk to any scientists before setting sail into the arcane? Did she find out that the forces on a baby from the planets at the moment of birth are dwarfed by those of the doctor, the hospital building and passing buses? Did she learn that many prestigious astrologers have been tested numerous times under scientifically controlled conditions -- and always failed? Did she discover the fact that astrologers' track records are abysmal? No. Nancy Reagan did not avail herself of this nation's scientific expertise. She chose instead to ignore all the evidence, abandon reason and indulge in astro-fantasy. "Time" paints her as an "astro-junky" who needed the security of her regular astrological fix in order to perform her role in the White House. Nancy insists that she isn't embarrassed by these recent revelations. She should be.

Such trysts with idiocy won't matter a year from now when the First Lady is plain-ol' Nancy Reagan again. But now, like it or not, her husband is still the leader of the Free World. By indulging Nancy's obsession, and thereby tacitly endorsing the occult in Government, Ronald Reagan is shirking his public trust to govern this land responsibly. Those who govern must make decisions based on reason and understanding, not soothsaying. To fulfill his oath of office he must have the respect of Congress and world leaders. That takes dynamic leadership, not reliance on omens and signs. Occult practices simply have no place in governing a modern democracy.

What I find most upsetting is the message that this whole affair sends to our young people. The Reagans are role models whom our future voters, leaders and entrepreneurs must be able to respect and emulate. When Gallup polls show that more than 55% of high school and college students think that there is something to astrology, the recent disclosures about astrology in the White House can only enhance public credulity. When voters are asked to make informed and intelligent decisions about complicated issues, encouraging occult irrationality does little to serve the public good. The White House has sent the message that it's OK to let occultists help run your life but the scientific evidence is clear: Astrology has nothing to say about your character, temperament, personality or future. Acting on astrological advice is likely to be a prescription for disaster.

Nancy, next time an occultist offers you and Ron advice do us all a favor... Just say no.

KOKO SMOOCHA WANT

by Robert Sheaffer

As the 1980s draw to a close, more women than ever before are uneasily listening to their biological clocks ticking away loudly, and for Koko it is quite the same, even though she is a gorilla. At age 17, she is approaching a gorilla's middle age, nearing the end of her reproductive years. However, what sets Koko apart from just ANY old gorilla is her alleged mastery of inter- and intra-species communication using a modified sign language, although this has not been demonstrated in a way which is convincing to knowledgeable critics such as Drs. Herbert Terrace, Thomas Sebeok, and Norm Chomsky, all of them experts in the field of communications and language, and has not been sufficiently validated for acceptance by refereed scientific journals. (Those scientific journals are always SO closed-minded when wonders such as this are reported. They want to see evidence which is tangible and conclusive!) It is therefore left to the popular press to inform the public about such miracles, a responsibility in which they have not been remiss. The loquacious Koko can allegedly tell us, in her own words, just what is on her mind, provided that her trainer, Dr. Penny Patterson, is on hand to translate for her.

While Koko is no doubt the center of attention at The Gorilla Foundation, a converted trailer on a fog-swept mountain ridge in Woodside, at the summit of the Santa Cruz Mountains, life is nonetheless bittersweet for her there. She has everything a gorilla could want, except one. "Want gorilla baby," Koko is now telling all and sundry, especially if they happen to be reporters; the San Jose "Mercury News" carried two different stories on Koko's heartache this spring. Desperately striving to keep alive the oral tradition of clever apes (the manual tradition?), Koko seems so concerned about passing on her linguistic skills to her offspring that she is now said to spend much of her time practicing teaching signing to her dolls. She has also been complaining for some time about the chilly and often damp climate of the mountain forest, but Patterson's pleas of Koko's plight has thus far failed to bring in sufficient funds to move the entire operation to hopefully more permanent quarters someplace warmer.

The oddest thing about the dilemma is that Koko lives with Michael, a perfectly healthy male gorilla, who unfortunately shows no sexual interest in her. This might not seem too strange -- it has been suggested that they perhaps regard each other as brother and sister -- but you would think that somebody could EXPLAIN the situation to Michael. For Michael, you see, is ALSO a clever ape, perhaps not as accomplished linguistically as Koko, possibly because he spends a good deal of time under physical restraint owing to his unpredictable and sometimes dangerous behavior. Nonetheless, Michael's purported signing has also been cited as proof of simian loquacity. It would seem that Ms. Patterson could take advantage of the communication skills she has developed in her charges and ask Michael for his

cooperation in this matter. It is, after all, a proposal not without some benefit to him. Perhaps she could sign for him some appropriate passages from Masters and Johnson, or possibly the Kama Sutra. They have already tried showing Michael X-rated gorilla films, in which he seems to show no interest. Perhaps a smutty story in sign language might be more appropriate.

Failing that, one would think that Koko should easily be able to explain her longings to him, frank communications being no less important among gorillas than any other modern couple. Koko seems to understand the mechanics of the reproductive process well enough; she lifts her doll to her nipples, points, and reportedly signs "drink there." Why she has not been able to convey a similarly direct anatomical suggestion to Michael, instructing him as necessary in the matter of birds and bees, is a mystery that no mere human can understand. We shall have to wait for the gorillas to explain it to us.

HYPOTHESES VS. SPECULATION

by George O'Brien

A year ago I attended a meeting where a proponent of psi made a comment that he was not claiming that psi exists, only that he treats it as a working hypothesis. He made it sound so reasonable; it's just an hypothesis, right? Wrong!

It's one thing for laypersons to misuse terms like "hypothesis" or "theory" when they mean speculation, but for someone with any pretense of being a scientist, the term hypothesis has a very special meaning. I will go so far as to suggest that the easiest way to spot pseudoscience is to determine if there really IS an hypothesis. (By the way, this is speculation.)

An hypothesis is a statement which conforms to specific rules. While there may be circumstances where one or two of the rules are absent, the violation of most of these rules is a signal one is dealing in speculation rather than an hypothesis.

-- Proper definition: A proper definition has a genus and a differentium. A genus is simply a criterion which shows what is included in the definition, while the differentia exclude what is not within the definition. For example, if "man" is defined as a "featherless-furless biped" (a classic Aristotelian definition), the genus would be all bipeds and the differentia would be "featherless-furless." A man covered with fur from head to toe or a plucked turkey would be exceptions to the definition. If exceptions to the definition can be found, it must be revised.

-- Logical: For an hypothesis to be logical, it must be internally consistent and must follow from the assumptions given (see below). It is not necessary for an hypothesis to immediately make sense or to be reasonable, since new ideas often seem strange. However, if a

statement is internally inconsistent, it will never make sense.

-- Explicit assumptions: An hypothesis may require modification of several aspects of currently accepted theory, so the nature of those changes will have to be defined for the hypothesis to be accepted. Pseudoscientists often seems willing to throw in all kinds of speculation and assumptions after the fact whenever they are challenged.

-- Basis: An hypothesis does not come from thin air. There needs to be some evidence or at least some logical inference from other evidence as a starting point. A statement that there are little green men on Mars does not qualify as an hypothesis until there is some evidence from which to start. An hypothesis can be rejected if the basis from which it was formed is demonstrably erroneous.

-- Falsifiable: This is the favorite of skeptics; an hypothesis must be subject to tests which could mean the hypothesis fails. An hypothesis may be modified to take into account the circumstances of a failure (removal of various external factors, etc.), but the new hypothesis must also be falsifiable.

-- Independent verifiability: It should not be necessary to take someone's word about the evidence.

-- Positive statement: An hypothesis is a positive statement, meaning that the person making the statement has the burden of proof. It is not enough to attack an opposing position (as is the case with scientific creationism) or to insist something is true because no one can prove the hypothesis wrong.

This is not to deny the validity of various speculations. Philosophy and much of social science ends up being speculation because of the nature of the subjects being investigated. However, by virtue of their very claims, pseudoscientific topics must be subject to the rules of scientific inquiry.

If a scientific claim is to be treated seriously, the first step is to make a real hypothesis.

RAMPARTS

Ramparts is a regular feature of "BASIS", and your participation is urged. Clip, snip and tear bits of irrationality from your local scene and send them to the Editor. If you want to add some comment with the submission, please do so.)

Is there a modicum of sanity in the Pentagon? All that talk we hear of how they are spending our millions chasing that wil-o'-the-wisp "psi" has resulted in something any of us could have told them for half the price: it don't work, boys.

Evidently, the Army, frustrated by defeated efforts, employed psychics to help find General James Dozier in 1981 when the Italian Red Brigade kidnaped him. The exercise was a minor disaster and generally embarrassed the generals.

Never to learn from their mistakes, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent on such new-age nonsense as Project Jedi in which marksmen tried to learn to shoot, a la Han Solo: without looking! Another fiasco resulted with the Ultimate Spy research which was launched when the military thought that the Russians, as learned from defectors, were developing remote viewing. The generals wanted to have our people shuck their trench coats and go on out-of-body forays into the Soviet Union and just snoop wherever their out-of-bodies wanted to go.

This whole thing was probably started by those clever commies as a way for us to waste time and money on perfectly harmless drivel.

The newspapers are still cranking out tons of stuff about the new presidential star wars. And most of it has been highly critical of the administration and therefore indirectly critical of astrology in general. In what is some of the more penetrating observations of the state of state, Ellen Goodman of the "Chronicle" reflects, "In general, these [aversion to science] attitudes fall on friendly American turf, because most of us today share not only a touch of superstition but a bushel of [anti-]science skepticism.

"But at the outer edges, this skepticism about science easily turns into a kind of naive acceptance of non-science, or even nonsense. The same people who doubt experts can also believe any quackery, from the benefits of laetrile to eye of newt to the movement of planets. We lose the capacity to discriminate, to make rational -- scientific -- judgments. It's all the same."

Congratulations, Ms. Goodman.

A reader, perhaps too ashamed to send his or her name, mailed sections of the "NEWS", a supermarket tabloid of phantasmagoria, about the alleged capture of bigfoot and a crashed UFO, both events occurring in Russia. (No need to be so reticent; we all pick through those things at checkout time.)

It seems this good stuff always comes down in the Soviet Union, safely distant and locked behind an iron curtain. The captured cousin to Yeti is only 5 feet tall -- a little big foot. The story has a Dr. Shalnev, a Soviet zoologist, saying, "Frankly, we're just a little bit disappointed in these findings."

"BASIS" was a little more than disappointed -- we expected to run a photo of this mini monster for you, but the best the "NEWS" could do

for us was an "artist's conception." We guess it is not surprising since it would be so hard to smuggle photos out of Russia.

So how did they manage to spirit out the photos of the Soviet surgeons, operating on the crew of the saucer that crashed in Siberia? The published photo from the O.R. was taken from about two feet off the floor. Too bad the photog couldn't have lifted the camera just a little so we could take a peek at the specimen on the table. Probably was taken by a Don Adams' hidden-shoe camera so the film could be secreted to the West.

And who donated blood for the operations? What anatomy course did the intrepid surgeons take to know that the object they thought was a clot, and removed, wasn't really the hapless creature's heart? Seems like it would be like 15-year olds operating on us.

It's for sure the rescued spacemen will be grateful to their saviors and will repay the Ruskies handsomely with some high tech that will put SDI to shame.

We don't have a chance, so you just as well start learning Russian.

APRIL MEETING

by Ivan Linderman

ARCHAEOLOGY AND REMOTE VIEWING: Good-bye Columbus

Mr. Marco Maniketti was introduced rather hurriedly, but I gathered he was an underwater archaeologist associated with the Institute of Nautical Archaeology and teaches at the California Academy of Science. Mr. Maniketti is also a magician.

A good portion of his presentation discussed the history of Columbus' voyages and included nearly 50 slides illustrating the Institute of Nautical Archaeology's search for the wreckage of Columbus' fourth voyage to the Yucatan in 1502. At that time Columbus was marooned in present-day Jamaica in an area he previously discovered on his second voyage to the New World. Two ships (the Capitana and the Santiago) were abandoned in (now) St. Anne's Bay, Jamaica, formerly Santa Gloria. The ships were believed to have been abandoned in the "Blue Hole," a mysteriously dark and deep area behind a protecting reef.

By this time, Columbus had fallen into disrepute due to his failure to find a passage to the Orient on his previous voyages. Conditions were unpleasant for the marooned sailors and Columbus used his ability to predict a lunar eclipse to convince the local natives to feed him and his crew.

Diego Columbus later founded a city near the area where Christopher Columbus had been marooned, and ruins of this city still remain. Later, the English settled the area which is now full of ruins from several occupations.

In 1981, the Institute of Nautical Archaeology began searching for the remains of Columbus' abandoned ships. After four years without much success, the Mobius Society of Hollywood was contacted to help locate the wreck.

The Mobius Society has reported success in locating various archaeological ruins using "remote viewing." The President of the Mobius Society, Steven Schwarz, documented some of their successes in a book "The Alexandria Project". "Respondents" (psychics) are interviewed and then given, for example, a map of the area to be searched. They then indicate on the map areas where they believe the item can be found -- without going to the site. Results from various respondents are compiled and correlated in "field appraisal equipment," i.e., a computer, and by consensus, the area to be searched is narrowed.

After predictions were made, three respondent came to the site to further refine predictions. They included a photographer from the "L. A. Times", the psychic used in the Atlanta child murders, and a French psychic and musician.

Unfortunately, although the Institute of Nautical Archaeology requested the Mobius Society send maps showing predicted search areas prior to their arrival on site, this was not done. Instead, map were prepared two days after arrival.

In January 1988, the Mobius Society presented their results at a colloquium on archaeological techniques and claimed 72% "elegant hits" on the hull of the wrecked ship even though the ship was never discovered! An "elegant hit" was defined by the Mobius Society as a prediction which can be verified precisely and is verified.

Mr. Maniketti summarized that of the 3,000 original statements made by the respondents -- varying from "I see a golden pendant with certain initials" to "look for rays" to "holes that are tunnels or bottoms that are not bottoms" -- 2,000 were reasonable, 500 - 800 were capable of being verified, about 150 could be field tested and some 35 were indeed verified. The varied statements however, were of a general nature (e.g., "I see palm trees" or "ruins," etc.). The fact remains that neither the Institute for Nautical Archaeology or the Mobius Society discovered Columbus' wrecks.

One of the important tenets of remote viewing is that if an object has high emotional content, it "radiates" more strongly and has a greater likelihood of being discovered. However, when some respondents were taken to "Bloody Bay," the scene of murders and massacres (unknown to the respondents), they registered nothing unusual.

Mr. Maniketti concluded remote viewing, and the Mobius Society, was no more useful in discovering Columbus' wreck than are magnetometers, common sense, local legends, etc.

SAI BABA SNOW JOBBA

by Don Henvick

I'm over in Berserkely at a meeting of the California Society for Psychical Study. They have meetings every month and often have interesting, if wacky, speakers. My kind of people. Tonight we're going to hear about the miracles of an Indian guru from one most qualified to investigate such things, an Icelandic psychologist. Guy's name is Erlendur Haraldsson, the pride of Reykjavik, and he's written a book called "Modern Miracles" about Satya Sai Baba, the pride of Bangalore. Seems that Sai Baba has for the last forty years been producing things out of thin air and for some reason Haraldsson's parapsychologist colleagues haven't given these miracles the attention they deserve, so E.H. decides to rectify that situation.

"Produces things?" What do you mean by "produces things"? Well, he might reach up in the air and come down with a handful of candy, or a nut, or a gold ring with his picture set in it, or a hot pancake. You know -- "things". Forty years he's been doing this, maybe twenty or thirty times a day. I mean this guy has built himself a rep in India.

So Erlendur decides to gather his professional credentials together and investigate Sai Baba. Off he goes to S.B.'s ashram and from the slides we're shown of the place, we know one thing right off the bat: Sai Baba may have been given miraculous powers, but he was hiding behind the door when they handed out good taste. He hangs out in this immense gothic-rococo, gingerbread nightmare done in garish pink, blue and gold. Does it mean something? Sai Baba doesn't say. E.H. tries to make an appointment. Sai Baba doesn't make appointments. The way to see Sai Baba is to sit outside his door with hundreds of others, look adoring, and hope that Sai Baba, on his twice-daily walks will judge your groveling to be sufficient to merit and audience. Apparently our fearless investigator is obsequious enough to earn the presence of the Great Man after only a few days of this waiting. Does Sai Baba have a good method of preparing people to be uncritical observers and singling out only the most uncritical to witness his miracles?

Anyway, the big moment arrives for E.H. -- he gets to ask Sai Baba to do his stuff under controlled conditions. Sai Baba declines. Why?

"My powers are not for show."

Lemme get this straight, now. He does his thing twenty times a day for forty years in order to gather one million followers and he doesn't do it for show? Indeed, it seems that's the ONLY reason he does do it, since E.H. is unable to find anyone, even Sai Baba, who can ascribe any meaning or significance to what he does, aside from that's what he does. At least Jesus would give you parable or moral along with the miracle -- Sai Baba just gives you a piece of candy and sends you on your way.

So, E.H. tells us, not only won't Sai Baba submit to controls, he

won't even say when the miracle is going to happen so E.H. can watch a little closer. The professor tells us that "We have no solid experimental evidence for the genuineness of the phenomenon."

I guess that wraps it up for the speaker tonight -- he doesn't have any real confirmation, so as a scientist he won't accept anecdotal evidence for the book he's written. I guess wrong. Apparently E.H. is not one to let lack of facts get in the way of revealing the Truth.

E.H. tells us he spent the next year and a half interviewing people who had witnessed miracles. You want miracles? We got miracles. Sai Baba disappeared in full view of a group of disciples and then reappeared far down the road. His car ran out of gas, so he changed a bucket of water into gasoline. Some people were hungry, so he produced a hot meal for them out of thin air.

Don't ask why, just eat.

E.H. does not rely on second-hand stories only, oh no. He's too good a scientist for that. He relates his own experiences of Sai Baba reaching into the air and producing a 14K gold ring set with a handsome portrait of Sai my-powers-are-not-for-show Baba. E.H. relates that his friend got a similar ring on an earlier trip but the portrait had fallen out. We are shown a picture of a finger wearing a ring with a missing stone: Evidence! Then we are shown a picture of the finger wearing a ring with the stone restored. Sai has conjured up a new stone, whooshed it on the ring and it fit perfectly. How about them apples?

Someone points out that the two gold settings look different. Well, E.H. explains, what Sai Baba actually did was ask for the old ring, make it disappear, and conjure up a new ring with a stone in it. Why didn't he just conjure up a new stone? Don't ask. E.H. didn't.

Most people in the audience are eating this stuff up but a few have questions. Does Sai Baba make this stuff out of thin air or is it regular stuff that he gets from somewhere and just makes appear. E.H. has studied the problem (of course Sai Baba won't explain) and has decided that if he doesn't make the stuff miraculously, he must have an army of jewelers working night and day to keep him supplied with rings and stuff. E.H. asked around and nobody had heard of an army of jewelers making Sai-Baba souvenirs, so that settles that. However, in the interest of scientific objectivity, E.H. relates that once he saw Sai Baba reach into the air and produce a piece of candy wrapped in paper with the brand name printed on it, just like you would buy in the store. So it makes E.H. wonder a bit about his hypothesis. It makes me wonder if E.H. refills his brain pan from an oatmeal box.

I remember several years ago hearing Baba Ram Das speaking about Sai Baba and relating similar miracles, but Ram Das said Sai Baba would produce wrists watches, and that obviously he wasn't producing them but was teleporting them from a warehouse -- still a big-caliber miracle. I mention this alternative explanation with the hope that allying myself with Ram Das, a goofball in his own right, will go

over better with the crowd. No such luck. Only the most terminally out to lunch will let themselves believe that while Uri Geller has to sweat bullets to bend a spoon with his mind, Sai Baba can, with no effort (and no reason) conjure up a watch complete with hands, gears, logos, and serial numbers, ticking away. Just as the crowd and E.H. are giving me piercing looks, an Indian chap in the audience says HE saw Sai Baba produce a watch from somebody's hair, which, upon inspection, proved to have been made in Switzerland. E.H. does not indicate that he wants this guy's testimony for his book, especially as the guy declares that the demonstration he saw was a load of rubbish. The audience is a mite confused but recovers nicely when someone else shows off the pendant he got from Sai Baba and says he was looking closely and KNOWS Sai Baba didn't pull any tricks to make HIS souvenir. Now HE might get in the book.

I don't doubt Dr. Haraldsson has made a few more believers in the audience tonight and peddled a few more copies of his book. I also don't doubt that so-called serious parapsychologists don't think much of the enormous conclusions he has reached with such a stunning lack of evidence, but I don't see them standing up to protest the shoddy work of their colleague.

Makes ya wonder.

SPREAD SOME MISERY

by Joseph Garber

I suspect that many BAS and supporters share with me a common frustration. We are frustrated by an inability to strike back. We lack the time and/or the talent to mount debunking campaigns against psychic frauds, quack healers, and profiteering prophets. While we applaud and financially support, for example, Randi's exposure of Peter Popov, we ourselves do not have the wherewithal to strike our own "personal" blows for reason and sanity.

Happily, the April 1988 issue of "BASIS" suggests a wonderfully nasty, quite legal and very effective method for hitting the hoaxers where it hurts them most: in their pocketbooks. This method is based on the little-known economics of the direct mailing industry.

Your correspondent, Richard Cleverly, writes that he sent the sum of \$1 to one Madame Daudet. The Madame had run an advertisement promising those who sent this token sum (to cover postage and handling, of course) their "lucky number" -- useful for playing the lottery, backing horseflesh, and otherwise reaping wealth beyond the dreams of avarice.

In return for his \$1, Mr. Cleverly received "a bulk mail envelope" apparently chock full of dubious material -- and coincidentally, part, but far from all, of his "lucky numbers." The flinty-hearted Madame wanted another \$35 to reveal all of the lucky number -- and certain other cosmic secrets as well. Mr. Cleverly concludes his article by

noting that the Madame, adding insult to injury, peddled his name and address to a rather sizable number of kindred flimflam artists. As a consequence, his "box is full of mail from astrologers, psychics and spiritualists."

Mr. Cleverly should feel gratified at this outcome because direct mail pieces do not come cheap. The con men behind them must invest serious money to produce and distribute their materials. According to the Direct Marketing Association, in 1984 (the last year for which I have statistics), a "low end" direct mailer costs an average of \$.58 per package, stamped, sealed and delivered. From Mr. Cleverly's description, the junk he has received likely is of an even more costly nature. Indeed, I suspect the Madam lost money on the \$1 bait he sent her. Even if she did not, every other swindler who sent him a piece of junk mail did! Mr. Cleverly's \$1 investment probably penalized the psychic community \$5, and perhaps twice that sum -- not at all a bad return on investment. And, in passing, Mr. Cleverly seems to have tripled his vengeance by mailing the Madame \$3 from three different mail drops.

Now \$5 is a trivial enough sum when one takes into account the millions that psychic chiselers reap every year. But, if the entire skeptical community were each to extract similar sums from these frauds, the results would be real money -- and real losses. Of equal importance, the addition of several thousand non-productive names to the mailing lists used by these bilkers would severely corrupt them, reducing mailing list value enormously. The sale and resale of productive mailing lists is a significant source of income to such low lifes. Degrading those mailing lists would result in a sizable deterioration in the worth of a critical asset.

Accordingly, I offer the following modest proposal: the members of BAS should select a target psychic to "help." Let us call it the "Adopt-A-Psychic" program. The BAS board should nominate a worthy communicant with the Powers Beyond. BAS members should support this nominee by responding to his or her advertisement -- more than once. Our pet psychic, hereinafter to be known as "The Chosen One" should be the bunko artist who mails out the most expensive package in return for the lowest "postage and handling" charge. The results should be refreshing; indeed a sufficient level of kind interest and support by BAS might even put the likes of a Madame Daudet out of business. And wouldn't that be a pity?

The only downside to this proposal is the likelihood of cluttered mail boxes. For those who are concerned with such a possibility, I suggest that, the price of cat litter box liners being what they are, psychic direct mail is an economically viable substitute.

[I have even participated in a more sinister and costly plot. I order and pay for the stuff that has the "satisfaction guarantee" promise, get the junk and promptly demand a refund because I am dissatisfied. I'm two out of two so far, and that has to have cost them a fair amount. However, I am told that this venture may be risky as they may simply not return the money. -- Ed.]

NO LUNACY HERE!

If the rest of the world lolls back and watches while the Joan Quigleys of astrology continue their nonsense unmolested, the single-most potent force for rationality does not. CSICOP has launched into the forefront in an active campaign to let what is mistakenly referred to as the enlightened era, the 20th century, know that all is not well, and that it is not business as usual.

In a somewhat unprecedented move, CSICOP has directly challenged the focus of astrology attention, Ms. Joan Quigley. Normally, those alleging some marvelous miracle come to us to take advantage of our offer to pay for demonstrations of psychic phenomena.

Mark Plummer, Executive Director of CSICOP, formally requested Ms. Quigley to participate in a scientifically controlled demonstration. A copy of his letter was mailed to all local groups for publication:

"Dear Ms. Quigley,

"We were interested in your claim reported in an Associated Press article on May 9, 1988 that you were 'a serious scientific astrologer.'

"As the world's leading scientific organization investigating astrology, we would like your co-operation to conduct a scientifically controlled double-blind test of your claims.

"We would appreciate it if you could set out in your reply your skills and specialized abilities so that we may draw up a proper protocol to test your claims.

"We look forward to hearing from you so that arrangements for the protocol for the test may be drawn up as soon as possible.

"We feel that such a test is in public interest. As a scientist we feel sure you will co-operate to prove your claims in a scientific manner." (signed) Mark Plummer

A copy of the letter was sent to Nancy Reagan at the White House and included a complimentary subscription to the "Skeptical Inquirer" and back issues dealing with astrology.

While it is very doubtful that Quigley will act in any scientifically responsible manner, the very act of the challenge and her virtually certain rejection of it will serve to notify the public that maybe she isn't all she's cracked up to be. "BASIS" is working to see that the CSICOP challenge receives as wide coverage as possible.

Opinions expressed in "BASIS" are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of BAS, its board or its advisors.

The above are selected articles from the July, 1988 issue of "BASIS", the monthly publication of Bay Area Skeptics. You can obtain a free sample copy by sending your name and address to BAY AREA SKEPTICS, 4030 Moraga, San Francisco, CA 94122-3928 or by leaving a message on "The Skeptic's Board" BBS (415-648-8944) or on the 415-LA-TRUTH (voice) hotline.

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