

MATTHEW BAXTER | FRANK'S BOX | EVP | OUIJA BOARDS | PARANORMAL UNITY

THE

BENT SPOON

SPIRIT COMMUNICATION



MISSION STATEMENT

In the landscape of paranormal media, there are traditionally two unique, yet separate, brands. One geared toward the believers, and the other more skeptical in nature. The problem is that the true believers rarely, if ever, embrace a skeptical attitude or ask tough questions of their community; instead preferring to surround themselves with like-minded individuals that reinforce their own belief systems. And the skeptics, likewise, promote science and critical thinking largely to those already open to it, or who are active participants in the skeptical community. This results in an echo chamber effect, wherein the same ideas are bounced back and forth, guru-student relationships are inadvertently created, and neither side ends up learning much about the other.

Enter: The Bent Spoon.

The Bent Spoon is a skeptical magazine for the true believer. Within its pages you will find Q&A between those with opposing viewpoints, interviews with leading investigators and thinkers, as well as articles which will not only provide in-depth analysis, but also be critical of both believers and skeptics alike. Along with reviews, comic strips, and other lighter fare, The Bent Spoon hopes to foster an attitude of outreach, forming a middle ground where believers and skeptics can come together and have a conversation about the issues and questions we've all given thought to.

The Bent Spoon. Where extraordinary claims meet ordinary explanations

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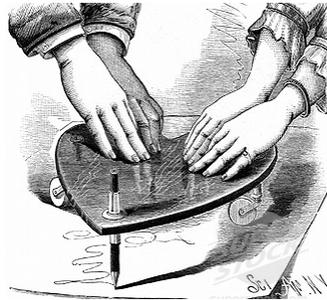
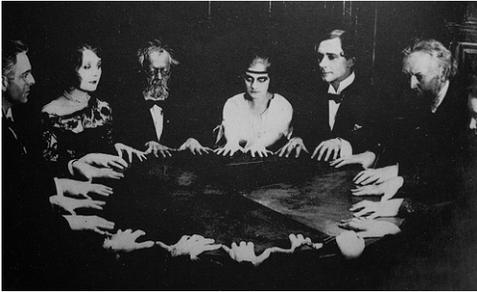
Where Extraordinary claims meet Rational Answers



The Bent Spoon
Vol. 01 Num. 03
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Special Feature

Spirit communication issue



SOUPERNATURAL THE FLASHLIGHT EXPERIMENT

pg5



INTERVIEW



Paranormal claims investigator for Rocky Mountain Paranormal Research Society, skeptic in the traditional sense, singer and guitar player, radio show host for Warning! Radio, and tv show personality.

Matthew Baxter

Discussing modern skepticism, ethics, and proper paranormal investigation.

PLUS

Electronic voice phenomenon, ouija boards, broken radios, and more...

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Come Together?

Why Unity is a Bad Thing for Believers & Skeptics

Rachel Wolf

If you are reading this magazine, you've heard about the concept of Paranormal Unity (yes, I capitalized it). It ranges from online radio hosts asking people to stop fighting and get along, to streamlining the investigation process and even nationwide registries of groups who all operate under the same methods and philosophies. One well-known team calls it a Family.

You know who else calls themselves a family? The Mob. Slippery slope here, Rachel. You can't compare a bunch of people looking for answers to a bunch of wise guys with guns. Calm down, I'm making a joke. But the more I thought about it, the more I started to see a similarity between the Paranormal, the Skeptic Community, and The Mob. They all expect you to tow the party line, you do what you are told, and anyone who dares to question is punished and ex-communicated (by radio show slander or sleeping with the fishes, you can figure out which is which). But streamlining the Paranormal isn't going to help it gain legitimacy. It isn't going to make it more scientific, and it won't make the "theories" any more theoretical. Instead, Paranormal Unity is akin to choosing to eat only one type of food for the rest of your life. You'll never get all the nutrition you need to survive, you'll get bored, and nothing will change.

The Skeptic Community is suffering from this same problem. Events like The Amaz!ng Meeting

just serve the same old soup to the same old crowd. My co-contributor, Jason Korbus, recently had a run-in with a well-known writer in the skeptic community. When attempting to book her for an interview on Strange Frequencies Radio (which he co-hosts with The Bent Spoon's Bobby Nelson), he ran into yet another smug know-it-all who is perfectly content eating the same old thing.

Which, I guess is fine. She's not really hurting anyone (although you could argue she is by not educating every person she can, just those who are in the Skeptic Community).

But Skeptic Unity is already becoming problematic. Last year, at The Amaz!ng Meeting, The Bad Astronomer Phil Plait gave a talk discussing why skeptics need to be polite to believers. From what I read on Facebook and Twitter, the

other skeptics were less than pleased. What actually transpired at the event

doesn't have nearly the impact that the rumors have, and what the rumors tell

us is that skeptics are just as exclusionary and dismissive as the Paranormal Community.

So, if unity is a bad thing, and too much diversity can impede the scientific process, then what? Honestly, I'm not so sure. But a

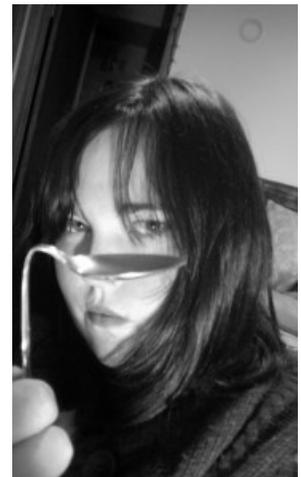
few years ago, I read a quotation by Mike Rowe, host of Dirty Jobs (Discovery Channel), that I since printed out, framed, and hung in my bathroom: "*The traditional comfort zone is a thing many people pass through on their way to complacency, sloth, and predictability. That's what makes it dangerous—long*

term, it leads to nowhere good. If our decisions were motivated by our comfort, not much in the way of accomplishment would ever transpire. Comfort without adversity has no meaning."

Perhaps we need to make the Paranormal and Skeptic Communities uncomfortable. This is why I've been on-board with The Bent Spoon since I first heard about it, because it's a great way to do just that. It gives us the adversity we need to step out of ourselves. But, for the sake of

levity, let's take this one step further. I suggest one giant picnic where we

all bring our favorite foods to share, get out the lawn darts, and see who makes it out alive.



IN THE NEWS



Samantha of Spokane, Washington adds her addition to the towering heap of questionable, blurry bigfoot videos. Allegedly captured on a hike with her friends, a dark figure can be seen running along the top of the frame and out of shot.

“While hiking, we accidentally caught an image of bigfoot walking through the woods. I didn’t even notice until I got home and saw it on the computer! This scarred the crap out of us!” claims Samantha.

Which begs the question, what was she filming and where is the rest of the video. Samantha’s Youtube account, created the same day as the video in question was released, offers us no

other footage.

These are the only facts provided in this case, though one item worth noting; Bigfoot happens to be the mascot of Spokane Community College.

While it’s easy to make a snap judgement and cry fake, that would be no different that assum-

ing it IS bigfoot. No evidence points to this figure being a sasquatch, being that the figure has no real identifiable features. More over, Sasquatches have no known documented features to compare to, being that

all evidence for such a creature is purely anecdotal.

While it seems logical to assume this is yet another hoax, we cannot officially treat it as such until further evidence

comes to light, such as the rest of the hiking footage, or a confession from the involved party. Until then, we must remain objective and consider this unexplained.

-Nicholas Callis

Another Psychic’s Epic Fail

On Monday June 6, 2011 in Hardin, Texas local authorities were given a tip that there were multiple bodies buried beneath a farmhouse. Deputies and FBI agents flocked to the scene immediately, however no bodies were found. In fact there was no evidence that a homicide had even taken place.

This tip was given to authorities by a person who claimed that they were a psychic.

Capt. Rex Evans of the Liberty County Sheriff’s Department claims that the only reason why they took this tip seriously was because it seems that the caller had insight on the interior of the location.

Authorities are now in the process of tracking down the woman who gave the tip, “we are going to continue our investigation and find out how this individual had this information in the first place,” Evans said.

When Evans was asked if authorities thought the tip was a prank, Evans said only that they found no bodies or any evidence to show a homicide had even occurred.

When authorities returned Monday night with nothing except valuable time wasted, the psychic called back and said that they had looked in the wrong house. However authorities did find blood on a back door and noticed a foul stench coming from the house, leading to the search warrant. Liberty County Judge Craig McNair says “we have to take tips like this very seriously.”

McNair also reported that there had been an attempted suicide at the house a couple weeks ago which may explain the blood stains on the door.

-Bobby Nelson



SOUPERNATURAL

THE PARANORMAL FLASHLIGHT EXPERIMENT

Jason Korbus

Most people who have watched the television show “Ghost Hunters” on SyFy will probably recognize what has commonly been referred to as the “flashlight experiment,” or “flashlight trick” in the paranormal community. Frequently featured on hit shows like Ghost Hunters, as well as the second season finale of Ghost Hunters Academy (both on SyFy), the “experiment” has been getting a fair amount of publicity.

In case you aren’t familiar with it, please allow me to describe the scenario. Typically, several ghost hunters will sit in a darkened room around a flashlight which is normally set on the floor or on a flat surface of some kind, and attempt spirit communication by asking any ghosts present to turn the light on and off. Oftentimes direct questions will be asked. The light turning on or off, seemingly on its own, is then considered to be a response from beyond.

Having seen this on television, in person numerous times at various “haunted hot spots” across the country, and in talking about its use with friends of mine, it has become clear that a fair number of people believe it is an effective method of communicating with ghosts. I am hoping this article today will help provide a very clear non-paranormal explanation, or at least shed serious doubt on the validity of the experiment itself.

First, there is the use of the flashlight. A friend recently asked me point blank how I would explain the effect. I replied that it is really quite simple: people are using a flashlight incorrectly. You see, before the “flashlight experiment” can be carried out during a paranormal investigation, the flashlight is first slightly tampered with. What investigators do, depending on their particular model, is either push the switch or twist the cap until it is precariously between the on and off positions, thus

making the instrument that much more delicate. At this position, little if any interference from a person or the environment is required to cause the light to turn all the way on, off, or flicker.

A flashlight contains many parts that come together to make the instrument work. Among these parts are contact strips, the switch itself, and the lamp. Batteries, of course, are also essential to the use of most models. According to Enegizer.com, “when a flashlight switch is pushed to the ON position, it makes contact between two contact strips, which begins a flow of electricity, powered



from the battery.” Activated by the flow of electrons, the filament, or LED, in the tiny light bulb (lamp) begins to glow, producing light. Disrupting the flow of this electricity, which is exactly what happens when you place the flashlight between the ON/OFF positions, creates an open circuit and, as a direct result, it doesn’t work right.

Furthermore, how do we know that the heat from the light isn’t at least partially responsible for this effect? We know that heat expands wood, but it does the same to metal. It seems a good bet that when the flashlight comes on, the heat produced could expand the metal case, therefore disrupting the flow of electricity and causing the flashlight to flicker or go off. Then, upon cooling, the metal contracts, or shrinks, closing the circuit again and producing light. The Northeast Arkansas Paranormal Society conducted their own experiments and found this to be the reason for the flashlight’s behavior, stating, “It’s caused by thermodynamics - NOT ghosts.”

But what, you may ask, about the responses ghost hunters seem to get from ghosts in regards to their questions? Now that we know the flashlight is being used

improperly, and is malfunctioning as a result, these alleged responses become suspect. Furthermore, how can we actually know a ghost is communicating? Using this same method, I’ve made it appear I am having a conversation via flashlight with anything from an invisible purple dinosaur to a flying spaghetti monster. Even my dirty gym socks joined the party

from miles away once. “If my gym socks are present here, please turn the light on.” The light turned on. “You are? Wow. Here I was just looking for ghosts!”

Now, does anyone truly believe the specter of my socks made a flashlight turn on? If not, why would you believe the same thing about an invisible ghost, which is not only scientifically unproven, but rendered an impossibility by the known laws of physics that explain so much about our universe?

One of the other major problems with this spirit communication method is how unscientific it is used in conjunction with a ghost hunt. Paranormal researchers are taking the flashlight only to locations they already believe may be haunted and are using the flickering light to prove their case! A good scientific experiment should be controlled so that variables can be ruled out. For a subculture of ghost enthusiasts who pride themselves on their “scientific approach,” this experiment as it is normally performed lacks any controls whatsoever. Why aren’t ghost hunters testing the validity of the method in locations they don’t believe to be haunted; perhaps a gas station bathroom, next to the cat’s litter box in a friend’s basement, or their own houses? If the “flashlight experiment” is attempted in a setting not thought to be haunted and the results are similar, this shows you are likely not communicating with ghosts at all.

Another error the ghost hunter commits when using this method is that they set the situation up for success before they begin by giving the alleged ghost the simplest of tasks to perform. That isn’t scientific at all. For instance, when the light is off, the ghost is asked to turn the light on. Well, that’s the only option there is! So then, when the light eventually flickers and turns on, it’s considered a positive case of ghost communication. I have even personally witnessed ghost hunters waiting several minutes or more for the response. That’s absurd! There really has to be some standards set. The longer one waits the more likely that eventually the flashlight will do something. How can these ghost hunters tell whether a ghost caused the flashlight to turn on, or if it just

came on by itself?

I would suggest that, instead of this same tired experiment, try something a little new. Ask this so-called ghost to tap out a sentence in Morse Code. Ask it to turn on at a particular letter during a reading of the alphabet and spell out a word or phrase. Better yet, put a second flashlight down and have them interact with each other. Do something that showcases the possibility of an intelligent response. The point is, if you ask only for simple results, you’re likely to get them. And that proves nothing other than your own lack of creativity.

In conclusion, the “flashlight trick” as used by TAPS affiliated ghost hunting groups on television, and in amateur squads around the country, is a severely flawed method for obtaining scientific validation of ghost communication. It can be explained easily by non-paranormal means as simple manipulation of the flashlight itself and an all too eager community of believers. However, if you have doubts about what I’ve said about improper flashlight use, I will pose you a challenge: Find me a reputable set of Maglite flashlight instruction which say something along the lines of, “For best use, place between the ON/OFF position and attempt to talk with ghosts.” Only then will I concede your point. Until then, it would be wise to abandon this ghost hunting technique as yet another in a long line of failures to communicate.

REFERENCES & FURTHER STUDY:

<http://www.energizer.com/LEARNING-CENTER/Pages/how-flashlights-work.aspx>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_XRe43mhul&feature=player_embedded

http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=191248677586523



MAKING AMENDS

WHY I NO LONGER BELIEVE IN EVP

BY JASON KORBUS

I've been asked a lot about what got me interested in the paranormal. For a lot of people, it was some weird experience growing up that they couldn't explain. But for me it was watching television shows like *Unsolved Mysteries* and *Strange Universe* as a kid. If you ever watched those shows, you'll remember they often featured stories of ghosts and included audio samples of what was known as EVP. EVP, of course, stood for Electronic Voice Phenomenon, and was reputed to be the voices of the dead that could not be heard with the naked ear.

I was fascinated. I believed in life after death, and hearing these sound clips just verified to me that the veil was thinning. I was sure we were getting closer to solving the mystery of what happened when we die. I grew up, got involved with ghost hunting teams and, spurred on by the newer breed of paranormal programming, like *SyFy's Ghost Hunters*, conducted my own EVP sessions and listened intently to hours of audio trying to pick out something that seemed to be "speaking" into the recorder.

By my own admission I was never very good at hearing the voices. I could listen to what I knew was clearly white noise and thought it sounded like unintelligible whispers. I would hear what other people believed they captured, but had difficulty making the words out. I just didn't seem to "have the ear" for it. Just the same, though, during the course of investigations with my paranormal groups, we would capture something I thought was good. I may have never been the one to announce what the voice seemed to be saying, but occasionally I would agree with the consensus of the team that, yes, there did seem to be a voice on the recorder and, yes, it did seem to be saying whatever word or short phrase we thought was relevant. I may have seldom been totally convinced but I did truly believe that we were on to something.

The more we did these EVP sessions, however, the more I started to doubt it all. First of all, it seemed like our group had to be told what was being said on the recorder before we could agree. For instance, we might all be sent an audio file and asked to give our impressions. Everyone would email back and forth and it always seemed to be

different answers, most of it nonsensical. "Uhm, was it saying 'Ray fought piranhas?'" Sometimes this seemed like a good solution, never mind the fact there was no one named Ray, and certainly no piranhas involved. But then someone might say, "No, it was saying 'They've got cameras'" and then we would all go along with that and call it a Class A, clear as a bell, no doubt about it EVP. The problem, it eventually occurred to me, is that it made no sense to say an EVP was "clear as a bell" when it took so long for any of us to come up with anything close to what we eventually agreed upon. And what about the hundreds of EVPs I had heard on television or from paranormal groups online? They never seemed so clear to me either. How could the paranormal community be saying we had clear voices from beyond the grave when no one could seem to agree about what the voices were saying without being told?

That led me and Bobby Nelson, my best friend and paranormal lifemate, to start experimenting for ourselves. We would take so-called Class A EVPs and share them with a group of 5-10 different people, never telling them what they were supposed to hear. Without fail, if the EVP was alleged to be speaking a phrase, we would get a variety of different answers from our participants. The whole "Class system" of EVP, in our opinion, was therefore bunk.

We also found that what people would hear was largely influenced by what the investigator on the recording would ask the supposed ghost. If they asked a yes or no question often any noise, however difficult to make out, was interpreted as a yes or no response. If the EVPs in question were from our own collection, upon further investigation we discovered these "yes" and "no" vocalizations were, in reality, often anything but. Corresponding video footage, or audio from various other recorders, would show what we thought was a voice saying "yes" or "no" was more likely one of our feet shuffling on the recording. Sometimes one of us had whispered and didn't remember. One time, in a now famous moment of Phase 3 Paranormal lore, the sound of me zipping up a backpack was interpreted by one of the investigators as a voice saying "Del Rio." How he heard that I do not know. But I feel I now

know, beyond any reasonable doubt, why he and each one of us thought we were hearing these voices at all: Because we wanted to. More importantly, because we expected to. I learned that our expectations color our interpretations. If we expected to hear the voices of the dead on our recorders, we would find something to confirm that expectation.

There were other reasons, too, that I eventually found for not taking EVP seriously anymore. For instance, I don't believe the average ghost hunter knows that the devices they are using to capture these recordings must accept interference, as regulated by the FCC. If they would look on the back of their recorders or in the instruction manual, they will probably see the following disclaimer: "This device Complies with Part 15 of the FCC Rules. Operation is subject to the following two conditions: (1) This device may not cause harmful interference, and (2) this device must accept any interference received, including interference that may cause undesired operation."

That last part is a biggie. Interference, especially among electronics, is a fact of life. It happens all the time. Couple that with the idea that generally the recorders ghost hunters are using are voice activated and utilize automatic volume control, any interference or otherwise undesirable noise picked up is going to be amplified on the recording. If these amplifications of stray radio signals or even the mechanics of the device itself occur sometime after a question by an investigator on the recording, it is no wonder why many people believe they are hearing a response.

These are just a few of the major reasons why I no longer believe in EVP. It is often said within paranormal circles that there are no experts in the field. But that really isn't true. There are forensic audio experts, for instance, and their unique expertise has much to tell us about the lack of credibility for these alleged voice of the dead recordings.

It took me a while to learn this, but it's true. The more you educate yourself, the less reason you'll have to mistake the normal for the paranormal. The key is to first know that you don't know a whole lot, be willing to challenge your own belief system, and then seek out the opinions of people who have expertise in a related field. It may very well turn out that you have been wrong about a lot of your beliefs, but at least you'll have more information. And if you are really involved in the paranormal to find the truth, isn't that ultimately the point?



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IS THE MODERN DAY PARANORMAL MOVEMENT BASED ON A LIE?

BY BOBBY NELSON

When someone tells me that they are a ghost hunter, I can't help but think of a the stereotypical television personality that is carrying a digital audio recorder searching for spirit voices. It seems that today, in the ghost hunting circles its all about spirit contact. EMF meters that were once used to find anomalous spikes are now also being used for direct communication, "can you make the KII flash once for yes?"

Spirit communication is nothing new. EVP research has been around since the late 1940's and before that other things were utilized (and still are today) items such as the Ouija board, séances and mediums. So how far back does all this really go and is it reliable?

On December 11, 1847 John Fox, his wife Margaret and two of their four daughters Margaret (15) and Kate (11) moved into a house in Hydesville, New York. Hydesville was a very small community and it has been said that previous tenants of the Fox house had moved out of the location due to mysterious noises. The fact that Hydesville was a small community is important because of how quick stories can circulate; it wouldn't take long before the family would know they were living in the "haunted" house. That being said, the Fox family did not start "experiencing" anything until March of 1848, the sounds of what seemed to be furniture moving and knocking noises.

On March 31, 1848, the youngest of the Fox clan, Kate, dared this unseen noise maker to make contact, which it did through the days. Codes were designed for this spirit so that it could partake in intelligent conversations.

Raps for yes and no, counting and even letters of the alphabet were all established for communication. The sisters addressed this "spirit" as Mr. Splitfoot, a common nick name for the Devil.

Shortly after, Mr. Splitfoot evolved into a 31 year old peddler named Charles B. Rosma. Rosma was supposed to have been murdered for goods and buried in the cellar.

The family started to dig in the basement where they found a bone that belonged to a human and in 1904 (56 years later) a skeleton was found buried in the cellar wall. However no missing person by the name of Charles Rosma was ever reported or identified.

After a while the Fox family moved, Kate was sent to live with her sister Leah and Margaret went to live with her brother David. However the plan to move in order to escape the rappings and other worldly contact didn't do much good, because the phenomena followed them.

On November 14, 1849, the first public exhibition took place at Corinthian Hall in Rochester. In addition, a

challenge was made; a team of people from the audience would be selected by the audience to examine the mediums and to determine if they were genuine. The crowd always determined that the sisters were authentic.

The Fox sisters held many séances and over the years many people came and claimed to have witnessed contact from the spirit world. Also hundreds of people started to come forward claiming they also possessed the gift to communicate with spirits.



In 1888 the Fox sisters were offered \$1,500 if they would give an exclusive story and expose their methods. On October 21st, 1888 Margaret and Kate made an appearance at the New York Academy of Music in front of an audience of 2,000 people. This is where Margaret demonstrated how she could produce raps that could be heard throughout the auditorium just by cracking her joints. Doctors on stage

confirmed the origin of the noise.

On October 21, 1888 in the New York World, Margaret said “Mrs. Underhill, my eldest sister, took Katie and me to Rochester. There it was that we discovered a new way to make the raps. My sister Katie was the first to observe that by swishing her fingers she could produce certain noises with her knuckles and joints, and that the same effect could be made with the toes. Finding that we could make raps with our feet - first with one foot and then with both - we practiced until we could do this easily when the room was dark. Like most perplexing things when made clear, it is astonishing how easily it is done. The rapping are simply the result of a perfect control of the muscles of the leg below the knee, which govern the tendons of the foot and allow action of the toe and ankle bones that is not commonly known. Such perfect control is only possible when the child is taken at an early age and carefully and continually taught to practice the muscles, which grow stiffer in later years. ... This, then, is the simple explanation of the whole method of the knocks and raps.”

Margaret also notes: “A great many people when they hear the rapping imagine at once that the spirits are touching them. It is a very common delusion. Some very wealthy people came to see me some years ago when I lived in Forty-second Street and I did some rappings for them. I made the spirit rap on the chair and one of the ladies cried out: “I feel the spirit tapping me on the shoulder.”

Of course that was pure imagination.”

In the October 22, 1888 issue of the New York Herald (and many other sources) quoted Margaret as saying “That I have been chiefly instrumental in perpetrating the fraud of Spiritualism upon a too-confiding public, most of you doubtless know. The greatest sorrow in my life has been that this is true, and though it has come late in my day, I am now prepared to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God! . . . I am here tonight as one of the founders of Spiritualism to denounce it as an absolute falsehood from beginning to end, as the flimsiest of superstitions, the most wicked blasphemy known to the world”

Also in 1888, Margaret explained how everything was done. She confessed that the rappings that the sisters were able to produce was nothing more than a hoax.

“When we went to bed at night we used to tie an apple to a string and move the string up and down, causing the apple to bump on the floor, or we would drop the apple on the floor, making a strange noise every time

it would rebound. Mother listened to this for a time. She would not understand it and did not suspect us as being capable of a trick because we were so young.”

Again Margaret was quoted as saying: “They [the neighbors] were convinced that someone had been murdered in the house. They asked the spirits through us about it and we would rap one for the spirit answer ‘yes,’ not three as we did afterwards. The murder they concluded must have been committed in the house. They went over the whole surrounding country trying to get the names of people who had formerly lived in the house. Finally they found a man by the name of Bell, and they said that this poor innocent man had committed a murder in the house and that the noises had come from the spirit of the murdered person. Poor Bell was shunned and looked upon by the whole community as a murderer.”

In November on 1889, Margaret recanted her confession but it was too late, she had already let the secret out. Within the next 5 years Margaret and Kate both died alcoholics and penniless.



There are major correlations with the modern day paranormal movement and the spiritualist movement that was started by the Fox sisters in 1848. With the confession that it was all a hoax given by the Fox sisters in 1888, would that would mean the last 123 years is based on a lie? I would say so.

VOICES OF THE DEAD

AN ANALYSIS OF THE EVP PHENOMENON

BY NICHOLAS CALLIS

Before reading this article, close your eyes and listen to your surroundings. Try and concentrate on every sound you hear. The buzzing of electronics, whirring of fans, creaking of doors, and anything else in your immediate surroundings. Can you account for all of them? Could you account for them tomorrow? How many subtle sounds can you recall from the previous day? Keep these questions in mind as you proceed to read the following.

Electronic Voice Phenomena, popularly referred to as EVP, is a term used in paranormal investigation to describe anomalous sounds recorded during an investigation of an allegedly haunted location. They are presumed to be disembodied voices of the deceased, unheard at the time of recording, but later discovered in review of the recordings made prior. These recordings are made in the attempt to collect such sounds or voices, which can only infer that the recorder has presupposed the existence of such and is deliberately seeking them. The obvious error of this method is the blatant in-

-objectivity of the investigator. Their bias, from the beginning, makes any investigation scientifically invalid. More so, to claim to have recorded the voice of spirit not only insinuates that there are such entities, but also would give the impression that a multitude of other factors have been overlooked.

The following are a selection of possible natural causes that in most cases could account for anomalous noise recorded in any typical circumstance.

Almost all electronic circuits have elements of radio receivers. The traces on the circuit board serve as antennae and semiconductors typically have some component that conducts better in one direction than the other. One of the main hurdles in circuit design is attempting to prevent the board from becoming a radio receiver. Anything with an amplifier increases this difficulty, since they amplify small electrical noise into a large signal. A cassette recorder has several amplifiers in it, such as the microphone itself and the circuit which writes the signal to the tape. Both of these amplifi-

ers are susceptible to received noise. Hand-held digital recorders, the popular choice of paranormal investigators, have exactly the same problem, they still have amplifiers in their circuits. They don't have the write amplifier for the tape head, but they still have the mic amplifier.

So, either a digital recorder or a cassette recorder can pick up radio frequency noise and convert it into an audio signal. You could pick up CB radios, cell phones, police radios, and radio stations. Since the circuit is incapable of tuning, the signal received is likely to be very distorted.

Note that there's a trade off between electrical noise immunity and cost. Generally speaking, the cheaper something is, the more likely it will be to pick up noise. The typical Dictaphone style recorder used for collecting EVPs would be highly susceptible to this.

Most likely in counter to this argument, proponents have taken this concept and run with it, proposing that EVPs are actually ELF radio waves. While ELFs occur naturally, the antenna needed to receive these wave needs to be very large. A simple circuit trace would not suffice.

Some propose that EVPs are inaudible due to being outside of the human hearing fre-

quency range, roughly 20Hz to 20,000Hz (20KHz). Though commercial recording devices vary, this range typically applies to them as well. To test this, simply attempt to record and play back a dog whistle on an array of instruments. While sounds outside of our hearing range can be recorded, in order for them to be audible, they must be manipulated by changing the speed of the playback with computer software, so if an inaudible sound is played back from the recorder itself, the rest of the audio would be altered as well, meaning that the equipment is malfunctioning and an insufficient tool, rendering

all data collected by it inadmissible.

Most collected EVPs are subjected to a battery of adjustments and filters in an attempt to clean them up. In this process, the editor is shaping the sound to fit their first interpretation. This means that the investigators bias is form fitting the evidence from what could have been nothing at all.

It's an erroneous method to review audio after the fact. Our senses work in concert with each other in order to accurately observe the world. By merely listening to a situation, after the fact, we're limiting our observation and getting a very inaccurate picture of an uncontrolled event, in which there are far too

many variables to account for, even when we have the benefit of all of our senses. In addition to this, there are many unconscious and involuntary noises created by the investigators themselves, often so insignificant that they wouldn't be recalled. Examples of such would be sighing, yawning, stomachs rumbling. Can anyone recall when and where they yawned yesterday? The investigator unintentionally generates a multitude of sounds that are very unlikely to be accounted for afterwards.

With all of these possibilities in mind, any of which cannot be discerned after the fact, yet are very plausible if not guaranteed, it is impossible to rule them out let alone jump to the further conclusion that it was indeed, not the aforementioned factors, but an unknown entity or force, capable of emitting sound or broadcasting radio signals through mechanisms incomprehensible to us. The only way any person could reach this conclusion is to have already committed to the preconceived notion that these entities/ forces exist and are deliberately searching for them, rendering any serious or scientific endeavor invalid.

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ONE OF THE MOST CONTROVERSIAL TOOLS USED IN SPIRIT COMMUNICATION

BY BOBBY NELSON

One of the most controversial tools ever used in spirit communication, a tool that is still used today, is a simple wooden board. It comes in many different sizes, with a variety of beautifully painted scenes and symbols. Yet they all share certain characteristics: located somewhere on the surface of these boards are the words "Yes", "No" and "Goodbye", the letters A through Z, and the numbers 0 through 9. With this board comes a pointer called a planchette. The planchette is a triangular or heart-shaped device that will point to the letters, numbers or words, spelling out phrases, names and dates. The planchette actually predates these boards. Planchettes were originally used with a pencil attached for automatic writing (a method used a lot during the spiritualist movement). But now the planchette and this board go hand in hand. This board goes by many names such as a talking board, a witch board, or a spirit board. But most of us know it as the Ouija board.

The Ouija board is quite possibly the most infamous tool used in paranormal research. I would venture to bet that most people reading this have heard a terrifying story that has either happened to a friend or a friend of a friend that involves the Ouija board. But when was the Ouija board created? What's the history of this fascinating tool of devilish mischief? Was it constructed under candlelight in a dark dungeon sometime in the Dark Ages? Or maybe it was created by a witch who practiced black magic and satanic rituals. Many will be surprised to learn that the Ouija board is fairly young and it was made as a novelty item.

On May 28th 1890, a patent was filed by three individuals: Elijah Bond, Charles W. Kennard and William H. A. Maupin. The patent was for a novelty item developed by The Kennard Novelty Company, and the first boards were stamped February 10, 1891. Kennard was the one who named the board Ouija. People say the name Ouija means yes-yes because oui is

French for yes and ja is German for yes, but Kennard claims to have named Ouija after an Egyptian word for good luck. In all actuality the word scarab means good luck in Egyptian (or Arabic) and not the word Ouija. The story goes the board itself repeatedly told Kennard that Ouija meant good luck in Egyptian and the name just stuck. The company only produced the Ouija board for fourteen months but kept corporate control until 1898.

In 1898 the Ouija board was appointed to a man that would revolutionize the board's history, William Fuld. It was this man who said that he invented the board and that the name meant yes-yes. In 1919 Fuld bought the remaining rights and sold millions of these boards along with other toys. Sadly Fuld would die from a horrible accident falling from his company rooftop while supervising a flag pole replacement. This didn't stop Fuld's children from taking over the business or the production of Ouija boards. In 1966 the business was sold to Parker Brothers who still own the rights today.

So what happened? When did the Ouija Board get associated with evil? The history seems harmless, so why is it so closely related to Satan and demons? Although I cannot be 100% sure, while researching the subject I found that almost all negative reports relating to the board came about in the 70's, after a novel was published and then turned into

a movie two years later. The movie is a classic horror story about a teenage girl who tells her mother she has been talking to a person named Captain Howdy through the Ouija Board. Later this girl becomes possessed by the devil, which causes her body to contort, she spits up the classic green pea vomit and her head spins 360 degrees. Yes, you guessed it; I'm talking about "The Exorcist." Now The Exorcist is "based" on a true story of a 14-year-old boy who was possessed and actually "required" three separate Rites of Exorcism from three different Christian denominations: Episcopalian, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic. The case happened in 1949 and the boy did admit to playing with a Ouija board. One thing to remember here is that religious groups had already become involved when this claim came out, so the Church automatically would assume this was the reason behind the possession. Just because the Church assumes this doesn't make it fact. After 1973 (the year The Exorcist came out) there was a skyrocket of claims dealing with Ouija boards and demons; that's the fact but the movie isn't all at fault. After this another group that heavily promoted the Ouija Board as the work of the devil would be Christians.

I personally have received many claims from people telling me their stories, and as I suspected most are second- or third-hand. One thing people kept assuring me was that evil has been associated with this board since at least the 50's, possibly earlier. There are two things I noticed in





these stories, though: A. Hardly any of them had demons or possession associated with them. B. All were told that the board was evil by clergy or family members with strong religious views. This still holds me to my theory that the Church has a large role in why this toy is evil. From experience growing up in Christian household, I know the Church views any type of spirit communication as a product of the devil. The church has two views on where a spirit goes when it departs from the body, ones that go to Heaven and ones that go to Hell. I have even been taught that ghosts are actually demons portraying loved ones to win over trust so we will "let them in." With that being said, the very fact that the Ouija board claims to be able to contact spirits would automatically be looked down on by the church, even if it is just a toy. But still I will say I believe the reason why people have associated this board game with the devil is largely due to the movie *The Exorcist*.

So one has to wonder whether the Ouija board really is a tool that contacts demons or even Satan himself? Maybe it isn't demons but entities that exist on a lower plain? Or maybe it isn't anything except one's imagination. With that being said, let's look at something called the Ideomotor effect, a term that was coined by William B. Carpenter in 1852. With the power of suggestion or expectation and the subtle unconscious movements made by the hand, one may trick oneself into thinking that something supernatural is occurring. William also states that the muscle movements can be made by the brain independently of emotions. This simply means we do not know we are the ones influencing the planchette to move. This same effect also could explain pendulums and dows-

ing rods (actually that's why this explanation was created).

Another common factor in the Ouija stories I received (and have heard in the past) is most of them end with someone burning the board to get rid of the evil, but to their surprise it isn't affected by the flames. I have heard many other stories that consist of the smell of flesh when the board is thrown in the fire pit, even a board screaming in the flames. But the biggest commonality is that the fire has no effect on

the board. Could this stem from the belief that the Ouija board is closely connected with demons and the Devil, and the belief that fire is associated with Hell? It is difficult for me to believe something made out of wood could survive the fireplace.

Still this common factor is interesting, so I contacted a man by the name of James "The Amazing" Randi, to talk about this. For those who don't know who James Randi is, he is an investigator of paranormal claims. His foundation "The James Randi Educational Foundation" currently offers a \$1,000,000 check to anyone who can prove paranormal abilities and/or claims. You may have even heard of this as the "Million Dollar Challenge". This challenge has been going on since the 60's and has never been won. So Mr. Randi told me to present anyone reading this with an experiment, in his words: "Have everyone go out and buy a Ouija board and set it on fire. If it doesn't burn, they'll win a million dollars."

James Randi has also done tests on the Ouija board. To prove it is nothing more than the ideomotor effect, he blindfolded the operators, and the results produced were nothing but nonsense. No words, names, or phrases, no yes, no or dates—it was only gibberish. Surely demons or spirits would be able to spell the same whether the operator is blindfolded or not, so what happened? The logical explanation can only be that it's all done subconsciously by the operator. When the operator can't see the board, the operator can't produce positive results. It is also important to note that in controlled tests, the board has never produced any information that isn't already known to the operators.

One major problem with the modern day paranormal investigator is lack of common sense. People jump to conclusions way to quickly and let myths become fact. Based on all the information I gathered while studying the Ouija board, I have to conclude the following. The Ouija board is and has always been a board game, a children's toy. It has never been and is not a portal to hell; it does not let entities of any sort in through some invisible doorway. It does not conjure demons or Satan himself. It matters not of your intent or belief; it is a piece of wood or cardboard with fancy paintings and designs, nothing more. I have personally tested the burning of the Ouija board and it may surprise most readers, but it does in fact burn... GASP! I heard no screaming, I smelled no burning flesh, it wasn't waiting for me on the mantle magically rejuvenated, just a waste of 15 dollars.



THE GHOST BOX

BY BOBBY NELSON

One of my favorite topics to talk about in the paranormal community is a device called the ghost box. Those who may not know what the ghost box is, it is a radio that is purposely broken by causing it to continuously sweep up and down the channels without ever stopping. When it does this you are listening to a bunch of fragments of voices from DJ's, commercials and songs. You ask questions to the box while it is doing this and supposedly you will get responses from the beyond. Some people in the paranormal field that advocate the use and testing of this box (because they have found it to produce "promising" results) are people like demonologist John Zaiffis and paranormal expert Rosemary Ellen Guiley.

I on the other hand have spent years researching and testing this device and have yet to have any test produce positive results. There are tons of these modified broken radios out there with many different names. The most coveted of these boxes is called the Frank's box designed by Frank Sumption. There is also a Joe's box created by Joe Cioppi, Radioshack Hacks and The Mini Box (which can be purchased at www.paranormalsystems.com between the prices of \$499.00 – \$1,595.00, that's right folks! You can buy a broken radio for only \$1,595.00 because it is crystal enhanced).

Like I said before I have always been skeptical about this device, but I will explain now, why I'm convinced this

"tool" doesn't work.

The Steve Hill challenge

I have worked with lots of people in the paranormal whose sole purpose in this "field of research" is nothing but instrumental transcommunication better known as ITC. The first individual I would like to talk about is a good fellow, Steve Hill.

Steve Hill calls himself an electronic medium, meaning spirits talk to him through devices such as the ghost box. He claims to have more success than the average person who was to just pick up this device and start asking questions. When Steve heard I was skeptical he sent me a few "mind blowing" files in which he claimed his name could be heard crystal clear. When I heard these files I must say at first I thought they were amazing, because I could clearly hear the name Steve Hill. Well there are a couple things I didn't take

into consideration at first, for instance the file name was "ghost box says name steve hill" and also after the radio says what sounds to be like Steve Hill, Steve says "Yes I am Steve Hill". This is what is called "priming" or "front loading" which is essentially telling someone what to hear.

So after this I was asked to be a guest on Steve's radio show so I, a skeptic, could talk about how I felt about this file and device (because remember Steve thought I thought it was legit). What Steve didn't know was I had performed a test to prove this file wasn't

saying Steve Hill.

With an audio editing program I was able to delete Steve confirming he was Steve Hill at the end of the file, I also saved it as a different name, something like "ghost box file." I asked 50 random people what they thought the file was saying and not one of them said Steve Hill. So after everyone had come up with their own idea on what the file was saying, I told them what the file was thought to be saying. Again no one could hear Steve Hill, why? The reason is because they had already decided on what they wanted to hear. They had already primed themselves.

When I told these results to Steve live on his show, it didn't even sway him to think it wasn't saying his name. So I asked "are all these people lying? If you say no then we must accept that the box was also saying their answers as well." Steve's answer baffled me "well Bobby perhaps I just hear things on a different frequency than others do." I decided that was when I would forfeit the fight with Steve; he had already made up his mind that his broken radio actually possesses spirits that communicate with him and no matter how much evidence I had against it, his mind couldn't and can't be persuaded.

The Jeff Rezman challenge

I was a guest speaker at an event called Fortfest last year. One of the speakers was a man named Jeff Rezman.

Now Jeff gave a lecture on the authenticity of the ghost box and it was hard to keep quiet and for the most part I did, until he started doing a live session with the crowd. His technique was clever, he never said what he thought it was saying however he would prime the crowd by saying "did you hear that?" and someone from the crowd would respond with what they thought the box was saying.

Now another thing I discovered about the box and people who believe this device is intelligently speaking to them, the box can never tell you information that you don't already know. For example at Fortfest Jeff was asking the box questions like "what color is this gentleman's jacket right here?" Everyone present knew the color of the jacket that the person was wearing so the name of that color is the answer everyone is expected



to hear. Another example is where Jeff asked "what color are the walls here in this room?" Again everyone present knew the color of the room so the name of that color is the answer everyone is expected to hear. After I realized what was going on I explained it to the crowd. I explained I could prove it by giving the box a Zener card test (which I just happened to have handy).

The test was really simple I would sit behind Jeff so we were both facing the crowd. I would allow one independent party to sit with me to write down the shape on the card (circle, star, square, cross or wavy lines) so people knew I wasn't lying. We were placed in a position where no one in the room could see the card except me and this independent party. For the sake of the "spirits present" I announced out loud all the 5 shapes the spirit could name and began the test. Again the box didn't name one card correctly, why? Because no one present except for myself and the independent party knew the shape that was on the card.

The box called out wrong shapes but also called out things like angel, Jeff tried to say that since there were fairies designed on the backs of the cards this must be what the spirit was trying to identify. Well if that were the case then the spirit world is very dumb because I strictly announced that there were only 5 shapes it could pick from. Again this test swayed some from the crowd that the box is nothing but a broken radio

and wishful thinking but it couldn't and can't change the opinion of someone like Jeff Rezman.

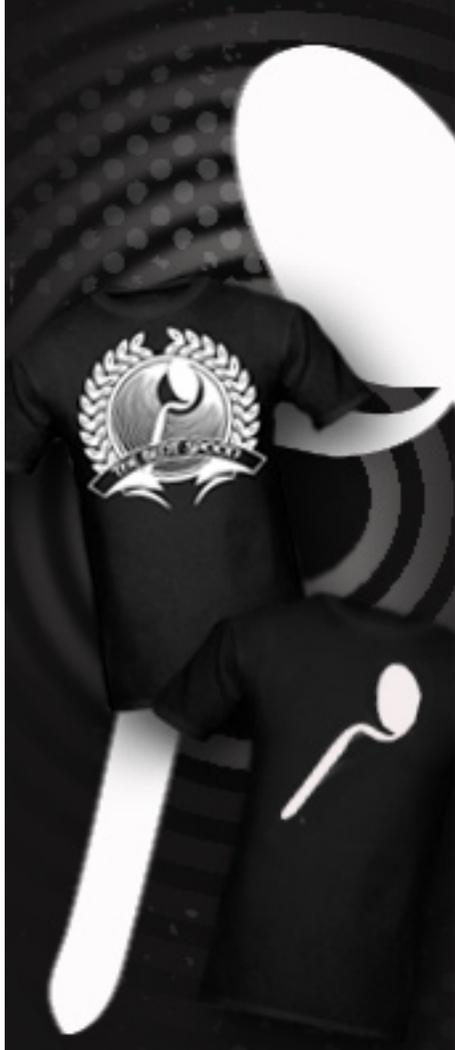
I have tried hundreds of tests with different ghost box type devices some include me using a box while someone else in a different state used a box and we asked questions about each other, hiding something in a certain area while someone else had the spirit tell them through the box where I hid the item and countless sessions in alleged haunted locations asking the box to name the name associated with the house. All these tests failed, never getting one thing right.

I mean if continuously sweeping up and down through radio channels works as a device on talking to the dead then we should be able to keep our finger on seek on a car radio and produce the same results. The truth is our brains are designed to seek patterns out of nothing; it's how it makes sense of things. It is why we can see Abraham Lincoln in the clouds or hear voices telling us things on broken radios. It is called pareidolia.

In my personal opinion I think that this is a lousy invention and it only proves that some people will cling to anything (and I mean anything) for some sort of self validation of the "spirit world", they will even speak to broken radios.



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MATTHEW BAXTER

PARANORMAL CLAIMS INVESTIGATOR AND HOST OF WARNING RADIO

Paranormal believers are criticized a lot for their pseudoscientific methods. Are there any mistakes a lot of skeptics you see making?

One of the big mistakes that believers make is letting themselves decide something is paranormal without valid proof. Skeptics are often guilty of the exact opposite. They sometimes decide something is solved based solely on Occam's Razor. Occam's Razor is only supposed to be a tool to lead one in the right direction, not the end in itself. Also, never forget that you cannot solve "the mystery" of ghosts, bigfoot, UFOs, or any other topic in the paranormal. You only have a shot at solving individual claims, not the whole enchilada. The "mystery" is born anew every time a new claim is made.

Are there any easily avoidable ethical concerns skeptics should avoid?

I will say that sometimes, to work with someone else's beliefs, you have to speak their language. You have to walk that fine line of what you believe is true and what they are currently capable of believing is true. You can easily drive someone in the opposite direction by not taking their beliefs into consideration.

Do you think it seems there is a divide between skeptics and believers that largely keep them from interacting with one another?

While I think that there can be an ebb and flow to the interaction, there will always be a divide. The very nature of skepticism insults the beliefs of the believer and those beliefs insult the methods of the skeptic.

How important do you feel it is for skeptics and believers to communicate together?

To be honest, it isn't that important. Skeptics shouldn't spend too much time trying to change the believer because it can't happen that way. Skeptics just need to keep getting the message out there to the general public in a friendly or funny way. That is how I found the movement. I became a fan of James Randi's (and Penn & Teller, etc.) sense of humor and the message just sunk in. Trying to convert a believer head on is like a Atheist trying to force a Christian to denounce Christ. It only seems to make them stronger in their beliefs. No one likes to be told that they are wrong.

What approach should skeptics use to promote science and critical thinking more effectively?

Every approach that you can think of (within reason, of course!). It is important to realize that while most of the time "you shouldn't be a dick", sometimes that is just the best route. Look at what your strengths are and capitalize on them. Podcasts, articles, books,

magazines, radio shows, tv shows, tv appearances, blogs, lectures, classes, workshops, dancing in the streets, violent abductions, and beatings. I think the most important thing is to live skepticism. Weave it into your life. If you just concentrate on being you, living by example has a tremendous impact on those you have contact with.

In your bio on your website www.rockymountainparanormal.com you state "We do not, when documenting something not yet explained, jump to the conclusion that it is paranormal." Do you feel that a lot of the ghost hunting groups jump to the paranormal as a conclusion too fast?

Absolutely. They tend to put the paranormal label on the simplest things because to do otherwise would ruin so many aspects of what they are doing and why they are doing it. Confirmation bias is the driving force in most paranormal research.

A lot of groups may say "what's the harm? If we help this family out by telling them that there is a ghost in the house that is there watching over them and they feel comforted by that, what's the harm?"

How would you respond to that?

There are so many things wrong with the "what's the harm" argument that it drives me crazy. The harm is that you are lying to them from a position of authority. That's first and foremost. Now, they will take it as fact that ghosts are real and they have one "living" with them. Their reactions could be very wide and varied. Nice ghost or not, many people are afraid of ghosts. We have had more than one 3:00 a.m. phone call from a terrified

home owner that was just told by another paranormal research team that they have a nice ghost in their house. What about the people that will now ignore dangerous situations such as a clanging pipe, bad electrical wiring, or that bad smell that could be a gas leak because they now just think it is because of a ghost in their house?

In your group Rocky Mountain Paranormal, what exactly is it that you aim to accomplish?

Our main goal is to educate. We try to tackle that by demonstrating what the other paranormal groups do and why it is ineffective and dangerous. We do a lot of public speaking, interviews, tours, and we stop at every soapbox we see.

Most people who start out in the field of paranormal research, it stems from a belief in the phenomena. Did you at one time have a belief in the paranormal? If so what cause you to become a skeptic?

I was absolutely a believer. I even spent some time as a phone psychic and psychic healer. Don't tell anyone I said that...

One day, when I noticed that a psychic prediction that I had made was wrong, I realized that I couldn't tell the difference between a psychic impulse and pure imagination. At that moment, I knew that I could hurt someone by presenting these things as fact. I stopped "being" a psychic on that very day. I moved on to UFO research and hoped that it was as real as it was presented to be. I was at a meeting and the speaker held up a copy of The Weekly World News with Clinton shaking hands with an alien on the cover. He started referring to it as if it was proof. I got up and walked out. I next got into ghost research. I

was kicked out of the first group I was in because I kept accidentally debunking all of their proof. I didn't need the skeptical movement to become a skeptic. The believers drove me there with their particular brand of complete lack of scientific and critical thought.

If you could say one thing to a person who is interested in the paranormal what would it be?

Don't get your damn training from television. Realize that there are

NO tools designed to find ghosts. If someone claims that they have a tool that finds a ghost, run the other way. If you use a camera in your research, take a photography class. Learn what a camera will do in odd conditions. The result is probably not a ghost but a completely normal reaction of using these everyday tools in conditions that they were not built for.

Read the claims of other researchers. Look at their approach. Does it seem solid to you? Critical thinking is the most important tool we have.



REVIEWS

PARANORMALITY: WHY WE SEE WHAT ISN'T THERE

BY RICHARD WISEMAN

There are certain books that are considered to be classics in skeptical circles. Martin Gardner's "Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science," Carl Sagan's "The Demon Haunted World," and "Flim Flam" by James Randi are just a few that have influenced many to think more critically about paranormal claims. "Paranormality," written by Professor Richard Wiseman, is an offering that I am confident belongs in that select company as well.

From psychic pets to psychic people, as well as the world of ghosts and Near Death Experiences in between, Wiseman explains "why people see what isn't there" by offering strong evidence from the world of psychology and his own personal investigations into the related phenomenon. The book is also interactive, allowing the reader to scan QR codes throughout the text with their smart phones, linking them directly to online content. For instance, if you are not satisfied with Wiseman's explanation of how he uncovered misrepresentations about an alleged psychic dog, or heard first hand accounts from a successful psychic describing how to use cold-reading techniques, you can view the video of the incidents and decide for yourself. URLs for those without smart phones are included, and the

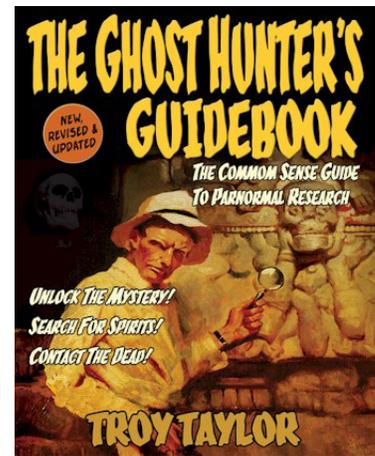
amount of online content is plentiful.

Another added bonus of this book is how Professor Wiseman frequently offers simple experiments the reader can try for him or herself to get a better understanding of the psychology behind paranormal experiences. Exercises that help induce an out of body

experience, teach you how to see a ghost, as well as enhance your own "psychic" abilities are just a few that Wiseman offers. Readers of The Bent Spoon will also enjoy his tutorial on how to fool your friends into thinking you have actually, yes, psychically bent a spoon!

It is doubtful that this book will convince many

true believers. Nor will it make most skeptics more skeptical. However, if you are sitting on the fence about certain paranormal claims, or just want an easy and informative read about the scientific study of the supernatural, I highly recommend picking up Professor Wiseman's "Paranormality."



THE GHOST HUNTER'S GUIDEBOOK

BY TROY TAYLOR

Lately here in the page of The Bent Spoon, I have been writing confessional type pieces that discuss aspects of my previous paranormal beliefs and explain why I no longer hold them. This short book review will be similar because, no more than several years ago, this is one of the few books I would recommend on paranormal investigation. My how times have changed.

The Ghost Hunter's Guidebook is largely what TAPS would write if they wrote down their investigative philosophy now. It is full of the same pseudoscientific cliches that have become all too common among the amateur ghost hunting crowd. Taking EMF readings, recording EVP, taking photos, and then looking for anomalies is not good investigative procedure. Why? Because Troy Taylor and the American Ghost Society which he runs has not found one ghost or come any closer to solving any mysteries while using these methods.

The bottom line is this: if you want a guidebook which will send you running in circles, and using the same methods that are getting no one any closer to the truth, then buy this book by Troy Taylor. But if you are more interested in gaining knowledge about the science and psychology of haunting experience, and maybe solving mysteries along the way, one would be wise to avoid this one, and look for an author with a background in science and investigation instead.





SYFY'S HAUNTED COLLECTOR

On Wednesday, June 1st, SyFy premiered their latest show in the collection of crappy paranormal themed television "Haunted Collector" starring demonologist and collector of haunted items, John Zaffis.

The first thing I had a problem with is with the name of the show, "Haunted Collector." This title doesn't make any sense. The word 'haunted' is an adjective. It describes or gives attributes to a noun. A person can be a haunted item collector. But saying they are a haunted collector is a misnomer. How does one collect a haunted? I mean I guess if the title is referring to John Zaffis looking strangely frightened or worried it would make sense, but I don't think that is what the title meant to imply. To illustrate my point, here are a few more adjectives, words like good or bad and my favorite (which should have replaced the word haunted in the title) mediocre.

The show completely lacked originality. It is set up exactly like every single paranormal television show, 2 segments in 1 hour. Each segment involves John and his team investigating a location looking for EVP's, EMF fluctuations, thermal imaging hits, etc. nothing new. However at the end of each segment Zaffis finds

some "haunted" relic that he links to the site and/or the source of the haunting. He calmly asks the tenants what they wish to do with this item, in which they conveniently tell him to take it to his personal museum of "possessed" possessions.

I have no personal problems with John Zaffis, in fact I have met him a couple times and have also interviewed him on Strange Frequencies Radio, and he is a nice guy, but a television personality he is not. He is not very entertaining (either is his team), he has a terrible New England accent which prevents him from saying words like library (2 r's John) and John's adlibs sound like an inexperienced reader of a teleprompter.

One thing I will say, this is definitely not the worst paranormal television show I have seen. It is definitely better than Paranormal Cops, Ghost Adventures, Psychic Kids and Extreme Paranormal, just to name a few. However I will sadly say, being that the star of the program is John Zaffis, this is enough to ensure that this show will not be going away anytime soon.



Paranormally Challenged

A Review of Travel Channel's Newest Show Paranormal Challenge

"Your welcome Bobby and thanks for adding to the negativity and bile in our field. Way to go!" This the response I received from Dave Schrader after criticizing the idea of a new paranormal television show that premiered Friday June 17th 2011 on the Travel Channel.

The television show is called Paranormally Challenged Paranormal Challenge hosted by Zak Bagans (of Travel Channel's Ghost Adventures fame). The premise of the show was to send two paranormal investigation (or ghost hunting) groups into an alleged haunted location and see who can find the best evidence of a haunting. The evidence will then be reviewed by a group of paranormal "experts" to determine a winner of the challenge. So far the three "experts" are Gary Galka (inventor of the Mel Meter), Patrick Burns (from TruTV's Haunting Evidence) and Dave Schrader (host of Darkness Radio).

Zak Bagans makes Gary Galka sound like he somehow revolutionized the world paranormal research. Gary invented a device called the Mel Meter which essentially is an E.M.F. Meter with a built in flashlight and thermometer. Zak's initial introduction of Galka didn't surprise me being that at one time he felt Bill Chappell was going to be the one to prove the paranormal to us skeptics. However I must say, putting a lighting device and a thermometer in an E.M.F. Meter doesn't qualify one as an expert in the paranormal.

Patrick Burns, I must say I was a bit

sad to see him on the show holding the title of expert. To be honest I was disappointed see Patrick on this show at all. Patrick is one of those "there are no experts in the paranormal" type of guys. And the excuse

a horrible picture taken by a full spectrum camera that supposedly had silhouette of a man somewhere in the photo.

Here was the problem. Before every single E.V.P. you were told what to



have used that knowledge to better the field, not validate garbage. The picture of the silhouette taken with spectrum camera couldn't be seen unless it was outlined on the television screen, which they so graciously provided for the viewers. I found it very funny that even Patrick Burns had to ask what he was looking for. However it was still added to the barage of garbage that was considered positive evidence.

One thing I also noticed was how many times Zak Bagans claimed that the tools they were using could detect paranormal phenomena. Wait...what? I am sorry Zak, E.M.F. meters, thermal imaging cameras, full spectrum video and digital cameras and digital audio recorders are not and were never designed to detect ghosts. And shame on all 3 "experts" for not stepping up to address this very fact. I know all 3 of you "experts" know there is no such thing as ghost detection devices, you have spoke on this topic before, and why does it change when you are on TV. Where the hell is your integrity? You all claim to love this "field" of research but you are helping it become more of a mockery than it already is. You have made the paranormal a game show, a shitty one at that, one where the contestants win a hand shake from Zak Bagans. What a lame joke.

that the producers are the ones who decided to use the title "expert" doesn't work, he should have known better. Burns is tech. head and an expert in photography, but a paranormal expert he is not. This show proved it. I will explain later in the review.

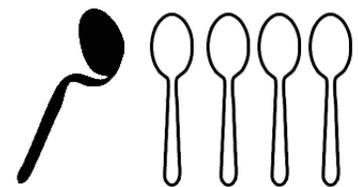
Dave Schrader, geez where do I start? Dave is one of those people who claim to be a skeptic, when he is not even close to be skeptical. The man promotes the use of things like the Ovilus and the ghost box claiming he gets positive results. Dave is the host of the very popular Darkness Radio however that doesn't make him an expert in anything except maybe broadcasting. I had a very hard time distinguishing if he was being genuine or if it was cocky arrogance. The difference between Schrader and the rest of the "experts" -Dave tried acting like an expert, Gary and Patrick just accepted the title.

The evidence the two different teams presented was below subpar, it included things like: crappy E.V.P.'s, "ghost" orbs (or dust) on video and

listen for, and then on the television screen it had a caption of the phrase every time the sound clip was played. The orbs were my favorite; I have literally heard Patrick Burns and Dave Schrader talk against spirit orbs dozens of time, however on this show they were presented as authentic paranormal phenomena. What really made me upset was Patrick Burns (a photography expert) never once tried to give rational explanation for them, not one. You are an expert Patrick, not of the paranormal but in photography, you should



This was the absolute worst paranormal themed television show I have ever watched.



QUESTIONS & COMMENTS

Regarding the comment found in the Bent Spoon issue 2 discussing Benjamin Radford's book Tracking the Chupacabra

I'd like to respond to the reader's comments. Let me begin by saying that I always appreciate constructive criticism and feedback. As a general rule I do not respond to anonymous critics; I put my name and reputation on the line with every article and book I write, and it's easy to take potshots behind the cloak of anonymity. However the author seems sincere and I'm grateful that the reader took the time to respond. Perhaps I can clarify a few issues. I'll address the points in order.

1) "If one looks closely at Ben's "solution", you can see how he has manipulated the data to fit his conclusion rather than letting the data lead you to a conclusion. The original drawing does not look like the "recreation" that Ben has drawn, which he calls "the most accurate depiction".

There are two points to be made here. The first is that the conclusion (the solution to where the chupacabra came from) did not come from me, but the eyewitness, Ms. Tolentino, herself. I merely quoted from a 1996 interview with her, in which she explicitly stated that "the resemblance to the chupacabra was really impressive." No one "manipulated the data"—it's her own words: the monster she saw in the film "looked like the chupacabra" (quoted on page 135 in the book). I don't even know how the data could have been manipulated, since she stated that before I ever even interviewed her. I could not have led her to agree with any preconceived conclusions or solutions unless I went back in time!

The second point is that (as I discuss on page 189 of my book), the "original drawing" s/he is referring to (made by Jorge Martin) is less accurate than my drawing—according to Tolentino herself.

If the original eyewitness says that the monster she saw in the film looked identical to the one she saw in the street, and that the drawing I did is closer to what she saw than the "original drawing," then she is the ultimate authority, and we must take her word. As for the "random screen shot," that was the best and clearest image of the film monster available (look for yourself if you don't believe me).

2) "Ben uses many terms that a real skeptic should never use such as "undeniable", "absolutely", and "solved". You can never solve a mystery that is based in eyewitness reports." When you break it down, Occam's Razor doesn't even support Ben here."

Overall I agree with this position; in fact I rarely use absolute terms such as these—except when it's clear that they are appropriate. In this case, I think it's clear that the mystery has been solved; if anyone has a better solution I'm happy to hear it. The writer is simply wrong in stating that mysteries involving eyewitness accounts are unsolvable; I've solved several, including the KiMo theater ghost case in New Mexico and the Pokemon Panic (see my book *Scientific Paranormal Investigation: How to Solve Unexplained Mysteries*). Eyewitness accounts can be unreliable, but they are not the only avenue of investigation. When all the pieces fit, all the pieces fit. The writer is also wrong about Occam's Razor; my explanation is indeed the best and simplest solution that fits the facts. I'd be interested to hear this writer's better explanation, the one he or she thinks better explains why, according to the best and only eyewitness, the movie monster "looks like the chupacabra" she saw. I can't think of an alternative explanation, other than it is pure random coincidence.

Readers are welcome to accept or reject my solution, but unless my critics have better information I think this vampire has been slain.

-Ben Radford

PARANORMAL CONJECTURES

(Issue 02)

Viruses...sneezing...hmm..is it possible that perhaps we MIGHT INDEED be "sneezing ghosts"? Are not a virus and bacteria simple forms of life that exhibit rudimentary skills to survive and reproduce? Is it possible that maybe infections are nothing less than a virus/entity whose goal is to "possess" and "infiltrate" a living host to act thru? Maybe water vapor can indeed retain memories of previously living humans, and once embedded into various surfaces (fabric, surfaces, etc) can be transferred to another living being when the atmospheric conditions might be right? More study is perhaps called for, instead of dismissing such a thing out of hand. Remember how Lister was mocked when he criticized surgeons for working in unsanitary conditions, which proved correct thru further testing.

-hlgllc (Via Blogger)

While virus' do indeed infiltrate hosts I'm unaware of any virus' possessing one. Perhaps you're thinking of the fungus that makes "zombies" out of ants?

As for the possibility of water having memory like properties, I don't feel that it *has* been dismissed out of hand. You have to understand that this concept isn't based upon repeatable, successful trials. In fact, water is the most abundant compound found on this planet. It's been pretty well scrutinized. There are a lot of ideas out there that seem far-fetched and they're often likened to incidents like you mentioned with Joseph Lister, but more commonly, these fringe ideas are just wrong. Situations like Lister's should not lend any credence to anyone's baseless speculation.

-Nicholas Callis

IT ALL STARTED WITH FRANK

THE ORIGIN OF THE GHOST BOX

BY BOBBY NELSON

Throughout the years investigating claims of paranormal phenomena I have come across some pretty crazy devices. Machines that claim to be able to read the EMF field and transfer the data into words, sensory deprivation devices that some claim can open one's mind to psychic abilities, however my favorite pieces of equipment are the ones that deal with spirit communication.

A lot of people that I talk to in the paranormal community seem to think the key that will help prove the existence of ghosts or unseen entities is something called Electronic Voice Phenomenon better known as E.V.P. This is when a person obtains a voice on a recordable device that wasn't heard at the time of the recording, it is only heard upon play back.

Though many paranormal enthusiasts hold E.V.P. as some sort of confirmation that the dead are speaking from beyond the grave, the one thing that was missing was real time communication. Well to some ghost hunting disciples, they say that the answers lay with an invention by a man named Frank Sumption.

In 2002 Frank Sumption invented a device known as the Franks Box. Here is what Frank says about his invention from his website:

"In the summer of 2002, and the idea of the box, or a voltage tuned radio swept with a random voltage, popped into my mind, practically fully formed. I had used these voltage tunable radio modules removed from older digital car stereos as AM dx receivers or for listening to distant AM broadcast stations. For this reason, I think the box idea was just my own subconscious mind providing a solution to a problem. There is however a box component that was inspired by

telepathic "guidance" from outside. That is the echo chamber, as I was instructed to use a box for the audio."

To translate what is being said here; Frank took a radio and broke modified it so that the channels are constantly sweeping, moving up and down channels. Proponents of the box call this the sweeping method. When this happens the operator hears fragments of songs, commercials, news, DJ's talking and anything else that can be heard on the radio.

Now, being a skeptic, this is all I need to hear for an explanation. It is obvious to me that people using this ghost box are hearing what they want to hear, forming patterns out of nothing, making sense out of the nonsense. There is definitely some subjective validation at play here as well. It is not uncommon for people to develop a strong bias towards the box because they have established some personal connection with it; I see it time and time again.

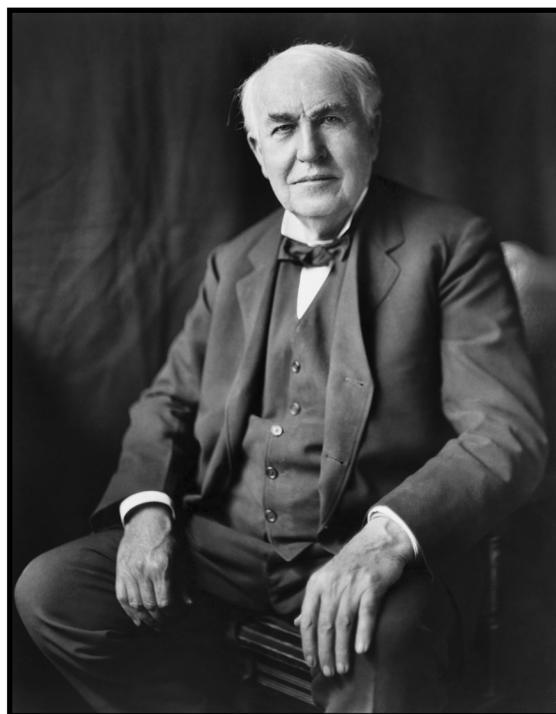
In an article paranormal researcher and author Rosemary Ellen Guiley compared Franks work to that of Thomas Edison.

"Two-way, real-time communication is not new. Back in the early part of the 20th century, Thomas Alva Edison was said to be interested in creating a trans-dimensional telephone – but if he ever worked on plans, they've never been found. EVP research developed in the mid-20th century, and instrumental transcommunication (ITC), the high-tech research that involves both real-time voice and image, evolved from EVP. ITC research goes on around the world."

This really upsets me for a few reasons. The Thomas Edison "ghost communication device" is a myth. It is highly taken out of context; Edison made no claims to be in the midst of or even planning on creating such a device. In fact what he said to Scientific American was this:

"I don't claim that our personalities pass on to another existence or sphere. I don't claim anything because I don't know anything about the subject. For that matter, no human being knows. But I do claim that it is possible to construct an apparatus which will be so delicate that if there are personalities in another existence or sphere who wish to get in touch with us in this existence or sphere, the apparatus will at least give them a better opportunity to express themselves than the tilting tables and raps and Ouija boards and mediums and the other crude methods now purported to be the only means of communication."

All Edison said was that if ghosts exist it may be possible to design some type of



machine to detect them. I think it is very clear that this was just speculation on Edison's part. I see nothing that says Edison was going to build such a device. Great research you did there Rosemary.

Also to compare Sumption to Edison is highly insulting to a great man in history. And I mean no disrespect in saying that.



Now let's get into Frank a little bit. Frank is a bit eccentric. I always loved the way Dr. Karen Stollznow described her first personal encounter with Sumption.

“Accompanied by his wife, the ‘Purple Princess’ arrived in a purple-striped shirt, with a purple earring, and this was just the beginning of a shitload of crazy...”

Sumption is shy and unassumingly insane, until he opens his mouth. He sat opposite us, wide-eyed and anxious, shifting his nervous gaze from me to Baxter; talking incessantly and barely touching the lunch that I so kindly bought for him.

He made a series of outrageous claims about his device: that he has acquired numerous ‘messages’ from beyond the grave; that these random noises are personal messages for each listener, to be interpreted by the individual; that the gibberish is ‘evidence’ that ‘life goes on’ beyond death, and that he can hear his wife’s thoughts through the box...but that none of this is ‘paranormal’ at all...”

Now one thing to note, when Dr. Stollznow refers to Frank as the Purple Princess, this isn't something derogatory Karen came up with. Frank claims that his box and other ITC devices have told him:

“You Are the Woman Who Comes From Stars.”

“You are the woman that comes from stars”, their long lost “Purple Princess.”

“Whether or not you're In Truth-- You Are an Alien”

“Frank Is our Princess-This Is Good--(followed by) Purple Princess—(sung).”

“He's a Girl--reversed--Princess- We'll Be Watching You.”

I know Frank doesn't do a lot of interviews, but I didn't just want to take the information I was given on the web. I am pleased to say that I was at least able to get Frank to provide me with a statement and to answer a few questions in regards to his invention.

So far, after ten years of this stuff, everything I say falls on deaf ears, the majority want the scary ghost hunter crap. Pitifully few will make the effort to actually get any spirit communication, they treat it as path to fame and fortune, a way to get on TV, or podcasts, or charge excessive amounts for “box readings”.

I'm no paranormal expert, or spirit communication guru, just a tech. Nothing magic about the “the box”, it's just one way of providing the raw audio the entities use to make voices. You can do the same thing by tuning a radio by hand, or flipping a TV between channels, or tuning a radio between stations and recording, you can tune in a shortwave broadcast in a language you don't understand, and record--announcing you're doing an EVP recording, mixed in with the foreign language will be messages in your language.

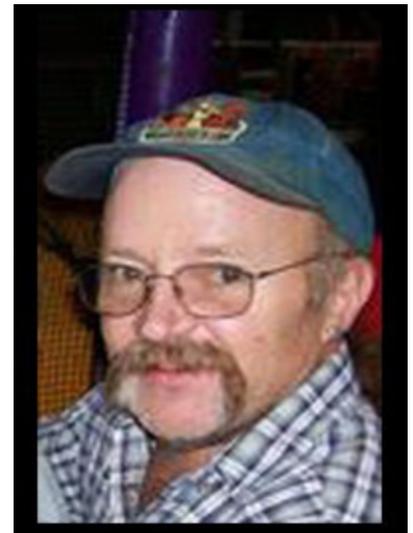
The EVP maker invented by German Stefan Bion in the 80s works extremely well. Disappointing that everyone, almost without exception only ask how can they use it (various EVP methods) to get on TV.

“The box” is a radio with swept tuning, sweeping across the radio bands, AM, or FM creates bits of speech and music that the entities use to form voices. As far as clarity, and coherence, its piss poor at best! The messages are often ambiguous or too noisy to understand. One major problem with this type of method is mind

matrixing; no one will hear the same thing out of any given message. I actually prefer EVP maker and the foreign language method over the boxes. Tuning a radio by hand, the manual sweep method is better than the box with automated sweep, probably because touch is involved, and it produces clearer messages.

The box can work great, but it depends on conditions from the other side. There seems to be propagation (sic) effects similar to radio that affect the clarity of the messages. Not that it matters. Most just want to run around in the dark with the hack boxes trying to get the latest version of “get out”.

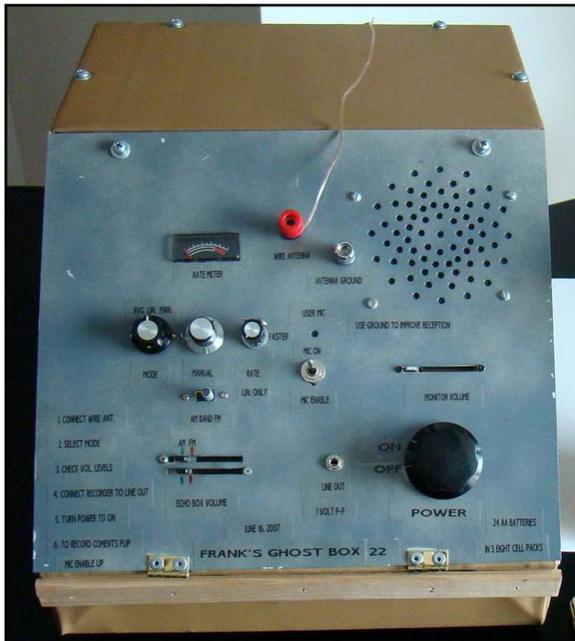
Spirit communication is not as simple as most want to believe. There are multiple levels or dimensions that come through at different times, depending on propagation (sic) effects. There are non-human entities that come through from time to time. Then as if that's not enough, the recordings actually seem to change. I can pick up a tape recorded sometime in the past, months, or years ago, and they



will talk about what is happening at this moment.

Most of these ghost hunter types want to believe spirit is some half aware zombie like thing that attaches itself to dolls and crap. I have not been able to make a dent in this idiotic Hollywood version of the paranormal. The fact is, it is us on the physical that have all the limitations, especially the intellect.

I don't know how EVP works, I just know if you provide something that has elements of speech in it, and record using this "raw audio" they will speak. White noise has these speech frequencies, if you want to destroy your ears listening with volume turned all the way up to hear the voices. That is why I use these methods of "raw audio".



If no one hears the same message from the box, doesn't that enforce the idea of audio pareidolia (matrixing)? I mean if someone is using fragmented voices jumbled together, isn't it possible they may be using wishful thinking and the brain is just making sense of nonsense?

I think it depends on your mind state and what is expected from the box. I think at times there is real spirit communication, but given that no one else hears it, much of it is almost certainly due to pareidolia. I get just enough to keep me intrigued. That makes it perfect for con men, you can't prove or disprove it. It concerns me that no one hears what I get from the boxes, yet I can post voices from other, but related, methods and people hear it.

What led you to design the box?

I was using EVPmaker and kept getting messages that were relayed from spirits

that presumably couldn't use the computer. So after thinking awhile on what else I could use, the idea for the box came to mind. It was based on work I had done with voltage tuned radios.

By your response it seems to me that you hate what the box has become, is this an accurate statement?

The "box" has been taken over by con men, scammers, liars, cheats, thieves, kind of like the whole paranormal is all about making money, there is no truth left in it. It's all about selling fear for profit. The paranormal is something one gets to make money in while having to prove nothing. There seems to be no shortage of gullible people, people willing to pay excessive money to someone that will say what they want to hear.

Maybe "the box" just doesn't work for me? I don't want to be too negative, as there is a real phenomenon, I just don't think you can make it perform on demand.

When Frank said "The 'box' has been taken over by con men, scammers, liars, cheats, thieves, kind of like the whole paranormal is all about making money, there is no truth left in it." I would like to think he is referring to a man named Chris Moon, who was actually trying to sell sessions with the box. The price was in the hundreds of dollars. I once saw on eBay an hour session going for \$900. Also over at <http://www.paranormalsystems.com> they sell something called the MiniBox, their own version of the Franks Box. The price list ranges from \$525 to \$1595 per box.

This is absolutely insane. What is worse is that people actually buy this stuff, I know many people who have.

I have been asked numerous times if I think that the box works. I think this might be the wrong question we should be asking, I think what people should be asking is, why when perfectly rational explanations are given to explain what is going on with this device – such as audio

pareidolia and subjective validation – the believers still hold on to the supernatural explanation. When I interviewed Rosemary Ellen Guiley on the "Ghost Box" subject, I asked how do we know that this isn't just our brains making sense of something, finding a pattern. Rosemary responded that it very well may be but moved right along to but I have had unexplainable occurrences, which outweigh chance. Well our brains making sense of nonsense isn't chance, it is what it does, that is the brain's job. Does the box work? No, it doesn't. Until I am proven wrong, I maintain the opinion that it is just random fragments of words and wishful thinking.

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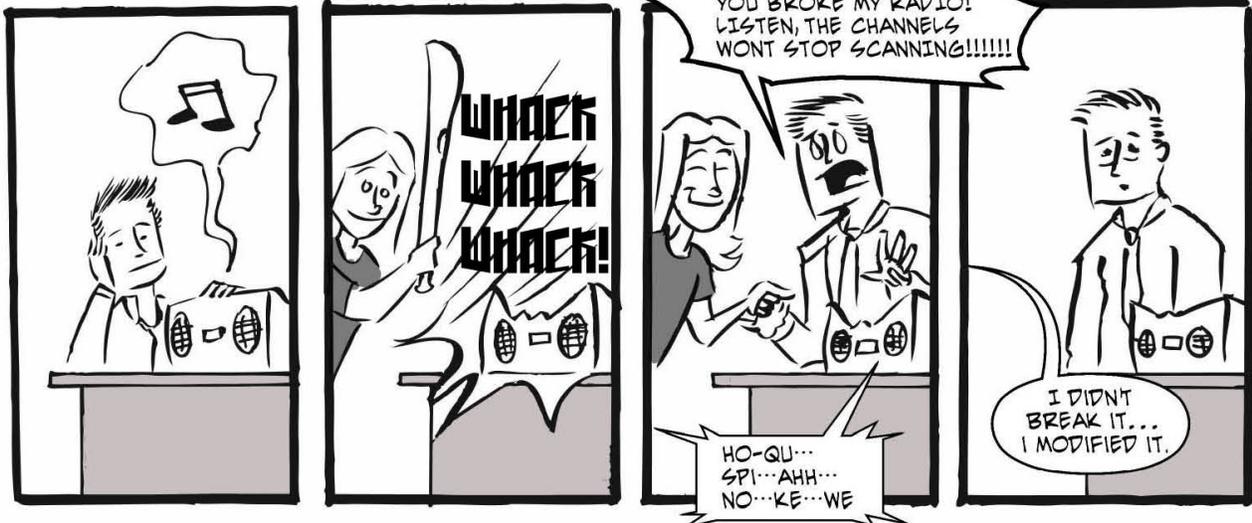


PAREIDOLIA OF THE MONTH

Pareidolia of the month goes to James Henderson over in the UK. Apparently after a returning home from vacation, the 23 year old spotted the face of Jesus coming from a bleached spot on his sock. Personally I think it looks more like Tommy Chong, but I digress. "I am not especially religious, but it was a shock," Henderson said. "I have heard it all the time that people are finding images in weird and wonderful places, but it was a surprise that I found one." Relax James; it's just your mind making sense out of nonsense.



BELIEVER vs. SKEPTIC



By Bobby Nelson & Andre Frattino

