



Tampa Bay Skeptics

REPORT

VOLUME 4 NO. 3 WINTER 1991-92

“Psychic Detective” John Monti searches for Tiffany Sessions

by Gary P. Posner

On the afternoon of November 1, Ch. 10 news director Mel Martin called me about John Monti, a “psychic detective” from New York. Monti had scheduled a press conference for 6 P.M. in Clearwater to announce his intention to solve the case of Tiffany Sessions, the young woman who mysteriously disappeared several years ago while jogging in Gainesville. Martin, who has consistently demonstrated his dedication to the rational and balanced presentation of paranormal claims (and who hosted TBS’s appearance before the Society of Professional Journalists in June) told me that he did not wish to report about the press conference without input from the Tampa Bay Skeptics. I thus arrived at the studio at 8:30 P.M. to review videotape of the press conference and to tape my reactions. The fifteen seconds of air time that I received on that night’s 11:00 news was better than *nothing* which, predictably, seems to have been the value of Monti’s “psychic” detective work.

Three days later, Monti appeared on Ch. 13’s *Eye on Tampa Bay*, along with the mother of Tiffany Sessions (neither the police nor Tiffany’s father would have anything to do with him). The mother explained that although she had been disappointed by the “psychics” that she had previously consulted, she felt confident that Monti, who seemed to have more specific information than did the others, would be successful. The two of them would travel to Gainesville, and spend November 6 and 7 searching for the missing woman.

My only knowledge of Monti, other than from these TV appearances, was from a June 1 newspaper article in the *Ashbury Park* (N.J.) *Press* (faxed to me from CSICOP in response to my inquiry), and from my subsequent conversations with New Jersey law enforcement officers. The article discussed Monti’s arrival in the town of Sayreville, where 5-year-old Timothy Wiltsey had disappeared at a carnival about one week earlier. Monti, who claims an enviable track record of “psychic” sleuthing (and of private readings for members of the Kennedy and Cuomo families), purported in the article to have visions of the child running toward the kiddie rides, falling, and being “picked up and carried [by a woman] to a white car...across the street...The woman took the child, took a left turn on Washington Avenue, then the first right...and

went in to one of the cellar level apartments in the complex.” The night before the newspaper article was published, Fox TV’s *America’s Most Wanted* program had spotlighted the case.

During the *Eye on Tampa Bay* show, I remarked (by phone) that Monti had failed to solve the Wiltsey case just a few months earlier. But Monti would not accept responsibility for his failure: “The mother did not want to find the child...[A] *New York Times* article stat[ed] that the mother was suspicious (*sic*) of doing something with the child...I can do so much as a psychic, but I’m not going to tell parents what to do with their kids — I can’t take their kids away from their parents.”

I did not have an opportunity to follow-up on the air, but, after placing another call to New Jersey, I prepared a TBS “Press Release” which I faxed on November 5 to the Tampa Bay and Gainesville TV stations and newspapers. In it I noted that Monti’s “job” had *not* been to take the already missing boy away from the parent, but to solve the case via “psychic power” (*not* by reading the *N.Y. Times*). I also reported upon my conversation with Detective Sargent Ray Durski of the South Amboy, N.J. Police Department, who told me of Monti’s efforts:

He gave us about four different locations that we checked out. He had strong feelings that the boy had been in an abandoned building on our main thoroughfare. We went through the entire building and found no articles of clothing that he suggested we might find. The following day he suggested an area near a railroad track where he had strong feelings that there was someone who had committed suicide, and that he could be in that wooded area. We searched that area and there was nothing there also. He then contacted our South Amboy First Aid Department and gave them strong feelings that we could possibly find a body in a landfill area adjacent to the waterfront. They then conducted a search with over 100 people and they found nothing there. After that, he came back again, and he stated that he sees the boy running away from the mother’s house in the direction of the railroad tracks. Of course we checked that area, too, and came up with nothing.

Durski added, “We more or less believed in him to a certain extent, and we didn’t discount any of his leads. He came on strong at first [but] I don’t think he helped us whatsoever. After all the publicity and the news coverage subsided, so did he.”

When I asked about the mother’s refusal to cooperate with Monti, Durski responded, “I think what happened

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TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS Statement of Purpose and "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics, Inc. is a non-profit educational and scientific organization devoted to the critical examination of paranormal and fringe-science claims, and the dissemination of factual information about such claims to interested parties throughout the Tampa Bay area and environs. TBS does not reject claims on a *priori* grounds, but rather is committed to objective and critical inquiry. We share the philosophy of the international Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) although we are an autonomous group with no formal ties to CSICOP.

TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" is open to anyone claiming verifiable scientific proof of the reality of ESP, UFOs, astrology, or any paranormal phenomenon. Details are available upon request.

TBS Report is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing for length, clarity, and taste), including opposing points of view. As our budget is very limited, **stamped, self-addressed return envelopes would be appreciated with all correspondence.**

Views expressed in articles and letters are those of the author, and not necessarily those of the Tampa Bay Skeptics.

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS REPORT

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BOOK REVIEW by Terry Smiljanich, TBS Chairman

Mysterious Wizard of Mathematics

THE MAN WHO KNEW INFINITY: A Life of the Genius Ramanujan
by Robert Kanigel (Scribners, 438 pages, \$27.95)

Famed mathematical physicist Eugene Wigner used to tell the story of the skeptical student trying to understand statistics. Upon being told that a certain mathematical principle of population statistics relied upon "pi" — the ratio of a circle's circumference to its diameter — the student exclaimed, "Now I know you're crazy! What can circles possibly have to do with counting people?"

Not a bad question, actually. Part of the mysterious allure of mathematics is its uncanny ability to make connections between obscure manipulations of formulae and the real world.

Why does mathematics "work"?

If it is merely a human invention, if it is simply "what mathematicians do," then why do physicists sometimes discover applications for mathematical ideas never dreamed of by the mathematicians who created them?

These are philosophical questions that have been asked for thousands of years and will never be "answered."

But reading *The Man Who Knew Infinity* will give one plenty of food for thought. Robert Kanigel, a science journalist, has written a comprehensive and readable biography of the Indian mathematician Srinivasa Ramanujan, who lived from 1887 to 1920.

Ramanujan's story is romantic, tragic, and legendary. An obscure Indian clerk with no formal training in mathematics, he captured the imaginations of the greatest mathematicians of his age in a brief and frenzied output of theorems and proofs, many of which are still being mined today for the mathematical gold they contain.

Self-taught in math, Ramanujan discovered principles of numerical analysis that had escaped solution by generations of professionals.

A fortuitous letter from him to G.H. Hardy, Cambridge University's and therefore the world's greatest mathematician, brought him to England during World War I. There, he quickly became a Fellow of Trinity College and a member of the Royal Society, the highest honors that Great Britain can bestow on a scientist or mathematician.

Yet, within a year of receiving these honors, Ramanujan attempted suicide, came down with an unspecified illness, and returned to India and his child bride, dying within the year.

Kanigel tells this story with sympathy and understanding, finding the clue to Ramanujan's psychological troubles in his inability to adjust to a completely alien culture. As for the physical troubles, tuberculosis is the likely culprit.

Although Hardy was Ramanujan's champion and friend, his cool British reserve and virulent atheism could not begin to fathom the mysticism and spiritual needs of a tradition-bound Brahmin who had spent his life within miles of his birthplace.

In telling his story, Kanigel does not lose sight of the mathematics that gave Ramanujan's life its meaning. His discoveries were in the field of analytic number theory, the manipulation and understanding of the very foundation of math — its numbers.

Ramanujan, alone with his scratch pads in India, had plumbed the depths of numbers, particularly series of numbers that explored the meaning of infinity.

The life of Ramanujan gives added insight into the philosophy of mathematics. His flashes of intuition, leading to theorems that no one could prove for decades, leaves one with a strong sense that math is "discovered," not invented.

This Platonic interpretation of math has been in decline of late, but the genius of a Ramanujan, which cannot be programmed into a computer, is perhaps best explained in this way. As Ramanujan put it, "An equation for me has no meaning

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Geller kin accuses Posner of "defamation"

In a letter to the editor of the *St. Petersburg Times* (published on September 9), TBS founder Gary Posner, responding to a favorable Sept. 1 article about alleged Israeli "psychic" Uri Geller, stated, "The fact that Geller is an acknowledged magician might have been worth mentioning in your column." This letter prompted one in return (on Uri Geller Associates Limited letterhead) to Posner from "S. Shtrang," claiming that the above comment "is false and a defamation. Do you have any advertisements, leaflets, posters, tickets or any other proof that Geller 'is an acknowledged magician'?"

Posner's use of the word "acknowledged" (defined by the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language* as "widely recognized; generally accepted: an acknowledged authority on Chinese art.") followed the lead of James Randi (see *Flim-Flam*, Prometheus, 1982, page 39) and Kendrick Frazier, editor of the *Skeptical Inquirer* (see Winter 1986-87 issue, page 120). Shtrang, whose native language apparently is not English, may have misunderstood Posner's comment to have meant "self-acknowledged."

Randi has informed Posner that Shtrang is Geller's brother-in-law. In an article published in *New Scientist* ("Geller a fake, says ex-manager," April 6, 1978), Randi identified "Shipi Shtrang...Geller's main assistant in these matters...act[ing] as a confederate by sitting in the audience [during Geller's performances of alleged ESP] and signalling to the stage..." Though Shtrang's letter to Posner was not sent to the *St. Petersburg Times* (nor apparently did the paper receive any letter from him for publication), a "cc:" notation indicated that two law firms received copies.

As noted in recent issues of *TBS Report*, intimidation by alleged "psychics" toward those skeptical of their claims is a growing problem. *TBS Report* and its editor remain committed to excellence and accuracy in critical inquiry and reporting about claims of the paranormal, in spite of the hazards involved.

"Crop Circle" Solution?

Two biped humanoids have come forward to claim responsibility for the genesis of the "Crop Circle" craze. Initially appearing as simple circles confined to British wheat fields, the phenomenon has in recent years become world-wide, with increasingly intricate geometric patterns being found in increasingly remote areas. And as previously reported in *TBS Report*, Richard Hoagland, author of *The Monuments of Mars* (and now the former

"Science Advisor" to Chuck Harder's *For the People* radio program), claims to have found mathematical proof that the Martian "monuments" and the crop circles are related, and are conveying a message about the existence of an easily tapped fourth-dimensional source of free energy, rendering fossil fuels (and even solar cells) obsolete.

Once thought by some scientists to be explainable in terms of natural phenomena such as wind vortices, today's intricate crop "pictograms" appear explainable only as "man-made." The only remaining matter in dispute seems to be the planet of origin of the "men" involved.

Enter Doug Bower and David Chorley, inhabitants of a planet in the outskirts of the Milky Way galaxy known as "Earth." Without benefit of a UFO with which to etch their "messages" into the ground, these two gentlemen, now in their 60s, informed the London tabloid *Today* in September that they are the originators of the phenomenon which more talented 'copy-cat' artists have now refined.

To illustrate their point, Bower and Chorley, using their trusty, if primitive, wooden boards (and accompanied by a reporter), created a crop circle which author and self-styled expert Patrick Delgado declared the genuine article. Later confessing the obvious (that he had been duped in this instance), Delgado protested, "Yesterday there were circles discovered on a prairie in Canada. Have these guys been out there with their board?"

Delgado's associate, Colin Andrews, has been a bit more outspoken than his colleague. Appearing with Bower and Chorley on *Good Morning America* on September 10, Andrews railed: "These gentlemen cannot begin to account for the change in the crystalline structure of the plants....They cannot explain what we have on film — the unusual objects seen actually in these crop circles....It is most disturbing that...an irresponsible intrusion into this research in the form of what appears to be a [British] national newspaper coup...has seen fit to go along with these gentlemen who...showed how clever they were in constructing a circle which was a mess in every respect...nothing like the phenomenon we've been looking at for the last 12 years."

Ch. 10 news anchor fails to produce "\$1,000 Challenge" faith-healing case

During TBS's videotaped presentation to the local Society of Professional Journalists on June 3, WTSP-TV morning and afternoon news anchor Al Ruechel claimed to have witnessed, while in Africa, numerous examples of levitation, although apparently he has no videotaped

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TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

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SNIPPETS

According to the Rev. Marsha Middleton of the "new age" group Ministry of the Children, the world will be destroyed unless a vault allegedly containing Sir Francis Bacon's plans for a perfect society is located before the year 2000. Middleton and the other members of her Santa Fe, N.M. group believe that lost writings of the philosopher, also alleged to contain proof that Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays, are buried on the grounds of Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, Va. A judge has barred the group from further digging at the site (they already dug one hole), but the church's board is considering sanctioning an archaeologist's proposal for a professional excavation.

(AP / *St. Pete. Times*, October 30)

A Kenyan woman named Caroline Mwicigi thought the world was going to end by the beginning of 1991. At least that's what she says an American missionary, Jonathan Hansen of the Calvary Charismatic Church, told her in 1990 when he relieved her of \$18,275 for his efforts to help save mankind. When the new year arrived safe and sound, Mwicigi realized she had been had, and is now suing Hansen in a Nairobi court for "false and fraudulent" information. And no, he hasn't agreed to refund her money.

(*St. Pete. Times*, September 6)

The credits for Demi Moore's movie, *The Butcher's Wife*, include a first. Flashing on screen are the words "Psychic Consultant," followed by the name "Maria Papapetros," who has been a Hollywood "psychic to the stars" for 17 years. Having received no such credit for her work on the movie "Ghost," Papapetros "said I would do it [this time] only if I could work on it openly — and that meant I wanted a credit." That posed no problem since, says Papapetros, the movie's producer and director are clients of hers, as are "a large number" of executives at Paramount Pictures. Her appearances on David Letterman's show, and articles about her in national magazines such as *Elle*, have enhanced the reputation of her powers, for which her clients pay \$150 an hour.

(*San Francisco Chronicle*
via *Tallahassee Democrat*, August 10)

A Lake City couple that prefers faith-healing to medical care has been indicted by a Columbia County grand jury for manslaughter and child abuse in the death of their 4-year-old child. Guillermo and Luz Hernandez, members of the End Time Ministries sect, watched their daughter die of pneumonia in September, 1990.

(*St. Pete. Times*, November 23)

Dawn March of New Milford has been found not guilty by reason of mental illness in the drowning of her 5-month-old daughter. Claiming that "demons" made her do it, March, age 20, may have been suffering from post-partum psychosis, according to the judge's opinion.

(*St. Pete. Times*, September 12)

"You think I'm crazy, but let me tell you, a woman who is desperate for a child will try anything," said California secretary Kathy Singer to London's *Evening Standard* about her 5,000 mile trip to the Rising Sun Pub. Was she there to meet a world-renowned fertility specialist, or perhaps a world-renowned stud? Better yet! She had flown to the pub, in the southern English village of Ickford, to sit on its magic "birth stool." "I've [already] tried fertility drug treatment, acupuncture, diets and herbal teas." Now she's trying the 3-foot high plain oak stool, purchased by the pub's landlady at auction for \$180, and reputed to be responsible for a rise in the town's birth rate. But village doctor Ken Burche suspects that an influx of young couples into the area is the more likely explanation.

(*Reuters / St. Pete. Times*, November 14)



The small Kansas town of Russell, worried over the unexplained disappearances of four of its citizens, turns out to have had its woes from UFOs. Marcia Brock and her two daughters (both students at the University of Kansas) vanished shortly after attending the funeral of a friend who shared their belief in UFOs. Eight days later, Donna Butts, co-author (with Ottawa physician Scott Corder) of a book describing visits to Russell by UFOs flown by angels, also vanished. But the FBI, which never seems to be called into cases of "real" UFO abductions, has solved these mysterious disappearances — well, almost. FBI agents found the Brocks (with Corder) in Washinton about to board a plane to Israel. The women have declined to publicly explain the reasons for their actions, as has the Russell Board of Education, which has voted to fire Brock, an English and journalism teacher at Russell High.

(*St. Pete. Times*, October 23)

["Snippets" are derived and rewritten from the referenced sources. Please send your clippings to the editor.]

Merrell vs. Renier Update

Tennessee skeptic John Merrell, against whom Orlando "psychic" Noreen Renier won a \$25,000 libel judgement in 1986, informs *TBS Report* that his new lawsuit against her has made little progress over the past several months. Renier has received several extensions on her obligation to provide information demanded by Merrell during the pre-trial discovery process, including, among other things, the names of the police agencies that have provided her with the alleged "police evidence" that she has used during her nationally televised "psychometry" performances. Renier, who makes her living as a "psychic homicide detective," now has until February to provide the material, and Merrell anticipates a summer jury trial.

Correction: Merrell also informs *TBS Report* that he inadvertently provided a piece of erroneous information for our Winter 1989-90 front-page article, "Skeptic charges Orlando 'psychic' with fraud and perjury." As we reported at the time, Merrell had informed our editor that he had never even heard of Renier until he received letters from "Nancy Uzdavinis" in June, 1985, requesting information about Renier ("Uzdavinis" was subsequently discovered, through handwriting analysis, to be Renier, using her sister-in-law's name as an alias). In fact, Merrell, upon recently reviewing the chronology of events, now confirms that he had first heard of Renier one month earlier, from a May newspaper article about her, and had already concluded a brief inquiry about her prior to receiving the "Uzdavinis" letters, which then prompted his intensive investigation. *FATE* magazine had reported in its June 1991 article, "Taking a skeptic to court," that Merrell's investigation had indeed commenced before the "Uzdavinis" letters were written.

Clarification: We had reported in our Spring 1990 update that the bankruptcy court judge had ruled that the \$25,000 libel judgement against Merrell "was not based in any part on perjury, fraud, misrepresentation or other misconduct" by Renier. Although Merrell's motion had requested a ruling on the libel trial, the ruling actually pertained to the *bankruptcy* trial, which Merrell also lost. The integrity of the *libel* trial remains a matter of dispute by Merrell, and of probable further litigation.

Posner addresses Unitarian Universalist United Fellowship group

For the second time, TBS founder Gary Posner has been invited to address St. Petersburg's Unitarian Universalist United Fellowship group at their weekly Sunday meeting. On November 17, Posner brought the Fellowship members up to date with a one-hour show-and-tell recounting of TBS's activities since his last appearance two years ago. At Posner's invitation, two members of the Rocky Mountain Skeptics, vacationing in St. Pete., were able to attend the presentation.

"John Monti searches" (continued from page 1)

was that after the first meeting at the grounds [where the boy disappeared], I think more or less that the mother became very skeptical of him. She watched [from her car] what he was doing and I think she probably didn't approve of what he was doing." About Monti's allegation that the mother doesn't want the child found: "That's a new twist." Does Durski agree that her behavior has been suspicious? "No, I don't."

Monti's search for Tiffany Sessions also appears to have been unsuccessful. Ch. 8 reported as much on November 7, although the reporter noted that Monti was still optimistic that he was on the right track. If he employed the same "shotgun" approach with Mrs. Sessions that he did in New Jersey — creating so many "leads" that one of them, in retrospect, will likely be considered close enough to be a "hit" if and when the body is found — John Monti may one day return to claim credit for having contributed toward solving the case.

For her family's sake, I wish Monti *had* succeeded in locating Tiffany Sessions, and would have voted to award him TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" prize had he done so. But I could have predicted (and did) that Monti's famed "psychic power" would fail him once again.

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"Book Review" (continued from page 2)

unless it expresses a thought of God."

David Hilbert, a contemporary of Ramanujan, once called mathematical analysis "a symphony of the infinite." Ramanujan for a time conducted that symphony, and we are privileged to still hear his music.

This review originally appeared in the *Tampa Tribune*

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"News anchor fails to produce case" (con't. from p. 3)

evidence to substantiate the claim. As reported in our Summer issue, he later made another paranormal claim to TBS's Gary Posner, one that he felt able to prove — that there have been, to his knowledge, many local successful faith-healings, including such dramatic cures as a golfball-sized malignant tumor being present one day and gone the next.

Although he had promised to get back to Posner with a case for TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge," Ruechel has failed to do so. On September 5, Posner wrote a letter to Ruechel, reminding him of their handshake agreement. Posner concluded, "We hope that you will follow-up on this matter. As I told you at the time, no such miraculous claims have yet been able to withstand the critical scrutiny of skeptical investigators, and history would literally be made if TBS were to be able to substantiate such a claim."

We regret that Mr. Ruechel has not responded to the letter, and has given no indication of any intent to produce evidence to substantiate his remarkable claim.

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Wilse B. Webb, Ph.D.
UF Psychology Dept.
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Other skeptical sources on the paranormal:

• *The Skeptical Inquirer* •

Flagship journal of
CSICOP / Box 703 / Buffalo, NY 14226

• *Free Inquiry* •

A secular humanist journal
Box 5 / Buffalo, NY 14215

• *Prometheus Books* •

47-page catalogue
700 E. Amherst St. / Buffalo, NY 14215

• *CompuServe Skeptics Teleconference* •

A monthly computer forum
3550 Watermelon Rd. #29-A
Northport, AL 35476

"LETTERS" (con't. from page 7)

least another half-dozen cases, including one right in your town... [the Mary Reeser case discussed in the item on "SHC" in our last issue —G.P.]

I have worked out the BTU required to reduce a human body, say 120 pounds (90% of which is water) to ashes, using a furnace. To give science every benefit of the doubt, let us assume that every particle of the victim that isn't water is a fuel with a heat equivalent of fuel oil (19,000 BTU per pound). In essence, we have 108 lbs. of water and 12 lbs. of fuel. Since wet fuel doesn't burn, we have to first steam out 108 lbs. of water. This means raising the body's temperature from 98.6° to 212°. This 113.4° rise would require that number times 108, or 12,247 BTU. To steam that water away requires another 970 BTU per pound, or $970 \times 108 = 104,760$ BTU. Adding the $12,247 + 104,760$, we get a total of 117,007 BTU. To find the fuel required to do this job in a 100% efficient furnace, we must divide the total BTU needed by 19,000 BTU per pound. This tells us that we need 6.158 lbs. of fuel.

However, the best furnaces, found in powerhouses, are only 25% efficient, so if the body were in that furnace it would require 4x this amount of fuel, or 24.6 lbs. Oops! We only have 12 lbs. at our disposal. SHC has just become a scientific impossibility. Remember our definition of paranormal? Write the check!

Not good enough? In a barbeque situation 24 lbs. of fuel just might roast that carcass nicely for dinner, but it wouldn't reduce it to ashes. Write the check! The only possible way to reduce that body would be to use half a ton of pure oxygen and a gigantic bomb calorimeter. Write the check!

Now you can cop out by ignoring me (the usual route), you can recite the nemesis of scientific evil which is accomplished by muttering the word "Impossible!" three times in a row while

stamping your feet (I don't go away, but it will make you feel better), or you can investigate. But please don't take too long, because, as I originally stated, I need the money to continue my real war which is with the closed-minded priests of science.

R. René', Port Richey

I am aware of no verifiable scientific proof that anyone has ever spontaneously burst into flames (the definition of "SHC"). The famous cases of alleged "SHC" all appear to involve external fuel sources (e.g. an overstuffed chair in the Reeser case) in addition to the human body. In later correspondence, René' tried to claim an additional \$1,000 because one of our Consultants is a priest who believes in a paranormal God. René' plans to continue to pursue our "\$1,000 Challenge" by finding "experts" to confirm that cases like Reeser must be paranormal —G.P.

Also, CSICOP has sent us a copy of an August 23 "Letter to the Editor" of the Skeptical Inquirer from Fred Meeker of Deland, Florida. According to Meeker, "a mere high school student has clearly demonstrated, once and for all, that the 'Amazing Randi' and all others who think like him are wrong — dead wrong! Metal such as spoons can be bent using only the power of the mind!"

Meeker claims to have been present when the student (unnamed) was invited to perform by "a group of Ph.D.s in scientific fields" who had heard of his powers. Says Meeker, "My face was only about 2 1/2 feet from the spoon...held by one of the Ph.D.s....After [about] 10 seconds...it was bent over at the middle [like] a horseshoe. The spoons of the other Ph.D.s were also bent....The Ph.D.s had brought other kinds of metal of other shapes and the boy bent them also."

TBS responded with a letter to Meeker, inviting him to "arrange for the student in question to demonstrate his alleged 'psychic' power in our presence....Members of TBS and the local media would serve in the same capacity as did the alleged group of unnamed Ph.D.s mentioned in your letter... with our \$1,000 on the line."

Our letter was mailed on Oct. 18, and we never received a response.

LETTERS • READERS' FORUM

Dear Fellow Skeptics: Oops! Thanks for the reminder that my membership was running out....Please accept my donation as a token of my appreciation for what a great job you are doing. Your friend in Miami,

William Cooley

To TBS: Again I am renewing in advance, and adding some extra to further the aims of TBS. I derive much from the *Skeptical Inquirer* and our quarterly TBS meetings. I need the skeptics' extreme position to keep me balanced.... I do wade into some deep fantasies and paranormal stuff at times, and maintaining a good scientific perspective is what I want. Thanks!

Harold Blake, Zephyrhills

"Extreme" position??? —G.P.

Dr. Posner: With this letter I make the first move to claim TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" award that you offered in the September, October and November issues of the local Mensa newsletter. A much shorter version has been sent to James "Amazing" Randi to claim the \$10,000 reward he brags about. As you will learn by reading it, I believe that you will not even want to acknowledge its receipt, after you discover that I have as little use for professional philosophers (scientists) as you have for the majority of people who understand that there is much the priests of the modern religion called "science" do not even suspect.

It is difficult to believe that anyone, especially a Mensan, would make this offer, but perhaps you are a good Samaritan and know how badly I need that money to pursue my war with the high priests of modern science. It may also be that you have never actually looked up the definition of "paranormal" ("Not within the range of normal experience or scientifically explainable phenomena" — *American Heritage Dictionary*). It is on this precise definition that I lay claim to your prize. But before we proceed, I wish to tell you why I suspect that you will never pay up.

I am the author of a book on science entitled *Mensa*

Lectures, and I have met with nothing but closed-mindedness from the men of science since the day I first invented the Rene' Two Leaf Electroscope. In my layman's naivete' I had expected that my work would be examined by the scientific community, because the first mandate of science is to maintain an open mind. Right? WRONG! What my work did was to threaten what I have come to call their EBS (Emotional Belief System).

Last February, Dr. Cyert, a President in Carnegie/Mellon University, promised to get the Rene' Two Leaf Electroscope examined. In May he admitted that he failed. The real problem is that the professional scientists immediately realize that if my instrument tests as claimed, not only does Columb's Law of Electrostatic Attraction and Repulsion need revision, but also the surrealistic field of particle physics must be tossed in the garbage can. Accordingly, these "Quackbusters" find it much easier to brand me as a "crackpot" than to test my instrument.

I had a similar experience with the National Science Foundation five years ago....Then last September the NSF financed the Scripps Institute to do one of the experiments I suggested. Coincidence? I have also been libeled by our ex-chairman and unilaterally deprived of my right to advertise my book. I have received pooh-poohs and tut-tuts from dozens of Mensa scientists, but no proof that I am wrong. I have been found guilty of heresy without a trial, and science has shown itself to be composed of extremely narrow-minded men who are limited as to what they will accept as evidence. Anything which goes against preconceived notions and the current politically correct party line is automatically rejected. Now we shall see if you are different.

The paranormal phenomenon I wish to acquaint you with is called "Spontaneous Human Combustion." The surprising thing is that you, the founder of TBS, are not aware of it. I ran into it in 1949 when I was 15 years old by reading Charles Fort's books. Since then I have heard of at

(continued on page 6)

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS MEMBERSHIP / SUBSCRIPTION / DONATION / BACK ORDER FORM

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V4N3



*Tampa Bay Skeptics
Quarterly Membership Meeting*

Scheduled:

John Monti's search for Tiffany Sessions
"Crop Circle" solution?
Non-spontaneous Human Combustion
Open Forum

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 11 -- 11:00 A.M.
CARMEN MANIS ROOM (2ND FLOOR)
PUBLIC LIBRARY, 900 N. ASHLEY DR., TAMPA**

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Santa Claus Kreskin is coming to town

The "Amazing" Kreskin will be doing eight shows at Clearwater's Showboat Dinner Theatre from Jan. 8-12.

Unlike our own "Amazing" Randi, who makes clear that his magical feats, such as metal bending, are the result of sleight-of-hand conjuring, Kreskin, a "mentalist," often leaves his audiences wondering if he is something more than a sleight-of-mind magician.

Following his speech at the 1991 CSICOP conference, Kreskin committed a stunning breach of protocol with his point-blank refusal to define "mentalist" when asked to do so by the first questioner, himself a professional magician.

Any members of TBS who do elect to attend a Kreskin performance are asked to please inform *TBS Report* as to how Kreskin represents his "mentalist" abilities that night.



6219 Palma Boulevard #210
St. Petersburg, Florida 33715

The James Randi Fund
P.O. Box 659
El Cerrito, CA 94530

and

CSICOP Legal Defense Foundation
P.O. Box 703
Buffalo, NY 14226

...have been formed to assist James Randi and other individual skeptics (Randi Fund) and CSICOP (CSICOP Foundation) in defending against lawsuits brought by proponents of the paranormal.
Consult your tax advisor about deductibility.

TBS "\$1,000 Challenge"

Tampa Bay Skeptics is offering \$1,000 and a place in history to anyone able to provide TBS with verifiable scientific proof of any paranormal phenomenon. We hereby extend an open invitation to any and all Florida UFOlogists, psychics, astrologers, and the like. Please contact TBS for complete details.

TBS Update Service

Call us at (813) 867-3533 from 9 to 5 on week-days, for recorded information about any late-breaking TBS or media events, changes in meeting plans, etc., or just to leave us a message. Or send a stamped return envelope for us to keep on hand for our more occasional mail Updates.

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