



REPORT

VOL. 8 NO. 3 WINTER 1995-96

Skeptics pledge over \$500,000 for proof of "psychic" power

by Gary P. Posner

In response to a recent electronic mail campaign by James "The Amazing" Randi, skeptics from around the world have pledged more than \$500,000 toward an award to be bestowed upon the first person able to successfully demonstrate psychic power to Randi under conditions that eliminate the possibility of a non-paranormal explanation.

As of December 15, Randi has received the required paperwork accounting for \$446,500 of the total pledges of \$507,000. Thus, as of that date, the prize available for a successful demonstration of psychic power stands at just under \$450,000.

On October 25, Randi sent an e-mail message to recipients of his "Hotline" service, which stated in part:

As most of you will know, for many years now I've offered a prize of US\$10,000 to any person who can provide a demonstration of a paranormal, occult or supernatural event under proper observing conditions. My good friend Ron Leonard, a prominent magician and painter in Toronto, Canada, has suggested something that I thought I should offer for comments. . . . that I ask interested parties to agree to put up a \$1000 "pledge" towards a larger prize that could go as high as \$100,000 or so, to make the challenge much more interesting and provocative. . . . Should I discover the psychic breakthrough that the parapsychologists have been promising us for so long now, the pledgers would agree to each send in the \$1000.

Now, I can imagine the potential winners . . . whining that this is just another ploy to force them into proving their claims . . . and generally complaining that they're being further harrassed by those who have chosen to believe in a rational, real world. But then they've always done that, so not much would be new. Except, of course, that the public might just wonder why such a prize is being ignored. . . . Let me have your feedback on this, will you?

The response from the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Germany, and other countries was immediate and beyond all expectations. By the evening of October 27, Randi reported pledges of over \$110,000. Penn Jillette (of Penn & Teller) agreed to match the largest single other pledge, present or future, which was \$10,000 at the time (but is presently \$90,000). Added Randi: "To those of you who have suggested that the claimants put up some sort of money, I say that the present system gives them *no reason at all* to refuse to produce their miracles. . . . The fact that

so many persons have pledged to pay such a sum just to see *one* of the hundreds of psychic wonders that we hear so much about has to be an attractive item to the press."

By November 4 the amount pledged had risen to \$388,000, with Australia, France and the Netherlands now represented among the 150 pledgers to what Randi has dubbed the "2000 Club" (perhaps expecting the challenge to still be unmet at the dawning of the new millenium). And from Randi's November 19 message:

The adjusted total is now US\$432,000, with 195 pledgers. I'm told that the "psychics" are coming up with every sort of excuse to avoid being in the running for this rather impressive sum, bleating about how no one will actually pay the money, there's no intention of our ever paying it, the test would be dishonestly rigged, it's all just a publicity ploy, it would be so easy to win the money but we'd all leave for a foreign country if they did win it, etc.

Put your money where your mouth is, "psychic." We

(continued on page 5)

Fighting to save the night skies

by Terry A. Smiljanich

Rural Hernando County is an unlikely place for a showdown between science and big business. But that's exactly what happened in September when the St. Petersburg Astronomy Club (SPAC) took on developers and county government over the proposed construction of a 400-foot radio tower near Brooksville. Although the outcome was mixed, the astronomy club was able to heighten the public's awareness of amateur science and, perhaps, increase the level of scientific literacy in the community.

Since 1980, members of the club have trekked once a month (at new moon) to the club's Hickory Hill Observatory, about 10 miles southeast of Brooksville, site of an old but well-kept "cracker shack" containing beds, a kitchen, and an astronomy library for club members. Behind the building stands an observatory housing the club's 14-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope. Alongside the building is a pad for setting up the countless telescopes owned by club members. Far from the obnoxious lights of Tampa Bay, club members, guests, and the public can observe the truly magnificent night sky ablaze with stars, nebulae, and galaxies. Stretching across the sky is our own

(continued on page 5)

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. 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 of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) and with other local groups like TBS throughout the United States and the world, though TBS is an autonomous group not formally affiliated with CSICOP or with any other organization.

TBS's "\$1,000 Challenge" is open to anyone claiming verifiable scientific proof of the reality of ESP, UFOs, dowsing, astrology, or any paranormal phenomenon. Please contact us for complete details.

Tampa Bay Skeptics Report is published quarterly. We welcome news clippings, and articles and letters for publication (subject to editing for length, clarity, and taste), and solicit opposing views. Please submit on 3 1/2" discs (in Mac or MS-DOS-ASCII format) or by modem or e-mail, if possible.

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

TAMPA BAY SKEPTICS REPORT

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EDITORIAL

by Gary P. Posner

Burden of Proof

In the opinion of many, a paranormal event of sorts occurred on October 2, 1995, when a jury of twelve took but a handful of hours to decide that O.J. Simpson was "not guilty" of the murders of his ex-wife and her friend — at least not guilty "under the law." In the opinion of each of the jurors (assuming they based their verdict on the evidence and the law), the prosecution had failed to prove one or more of the essential elements of its case "beyond a reasonable doubt."

As "skeptics" of the paranormal and fringe sciences, we are accustomed to placing the burden of proof upon the proponents of improbable-sounding claims. Given the "mountain of evidence" against Simpson, many find allegations of UFO abductions less improbable than the notion that someone other than O.J. committed those murders. But Simpson is now free to roam golf courses in search of the "real" killer(s), while our science books remain devoid of chapters on ET visitations.

What is good for the goose is obviously *not* necessarily good for the gander. In the courtroom, "I was sleeping, or I was chipping golf balls, or I was packing for my trip" is considered an alibi to be afforded the benefit of the doubt. Just as juries in malpractice suits are holding doctors to a standard of perfection, prosecutors now increasingly need a "perfect" case, or a defendant without the means to buy a "dream team," in order to get a murderer off the streets. But in the scientific arena, assuming the validity of an improbable claim, until proven otherwise, would require that textbooks and curricula be updated upon publication of each issue of the *Weekly World News*.

Our "system of justice" was designed with a noble purpose. As they say, it is preferable that 100 criminals go free than one innocent person be wrongly convicted. This system is praised as the best in the world, although the competition may not be terribly keen. And in the 1700s, it probably served us well. But with untold thousands of groups of "100 criminals" now roaming free, those citizens so far unscathed by serious crime are becoming an endangered species.

One also wonders how so many "eminent" men of the law can seemingly have so little compunction about proclaiming before the TV cameras inside the courtroom that their criminal client is an innocent victim. Legal ethics (an oxymoron except for the relatively few Terry Smiljaniches of this world) supposedly preclude such bald-faced lies. But at least, after spending the day pleading to the jury for "justice," some let their hair down enough to look into the TV cameras *outside* the courtroom and admit that, "We're not after justice, we're out to win."

Such "eminent" attorneys, exhibiting a willingness to do anything (if the money is right) to get their client off, might be thought of as the "Kreskinites" of the legal profession. Like their namesake, an "Amazing" magician who shamelessly leads his audiences to falsely believe that he possesses genuinely mysterious powers, these lawyers revel in the use of misdirection and other nefarious techniques intended to obfuscate.

What if the scientific community were to adopt the lofty standards of our "system of justice"? In this age of political correctness, why shouldn't they? — it's only fair. Let's begin giving the benefit of the doubt to those sincere-sounding UFO abductees, whose testimony is uncontested by witnesses to the contrary. As UFO proponents have so correctly pointed out in the past, the evidence in their favor would certainly prevail in any court of law. Even Carl Sagan agrees that our dry, uninspiring science textbooks need overhauling. Why not fill them with tales of UFO abduction, ESP, astrology, pyramid power, Bigfoot, and the unabridged teachings of Ramtha? Maybe our youth would then find their science homework to be as relevant to their lives as is MTV. Then, if it works for science, we can do the same for "history."

Or, perhaps our "justice" system might consider taking a few small strides towards emulating the scientific approach to determining truth. Not that any of us would wish for even one innocent person to be wrongly convicted of a crime. But maybe we could settle for only 99 criminals going free . . .

Waxing Skeptical

by Kenneth D. Hackmeyer

A friend asked me why I have "suddenly" become a skeptic. He asked me this while wearing the same sort of dopey smile one sports when asking someone what made him invest in ostrich farming. I sputtered something about the "dumbing of America" and the Salem witch trials. That seemed to satisfy him. We chatted for a few more minutes and then went our separate ways. But the question stuck in my mind: Why have I come out of the closet and admitted my, previously latent, skepticism?

Like the pain from a kick in the groin, I felt the answer becoming rapidly and excruciatingly obvious. I am sick to death of the stupidity around me! I am tired of feigning rapt attention while some silly, befuddled soul relates, verbatim, the latest "based on reality" episode of *Sightings*. I grow annoyed attempting to explain, to otherwise rational people, that their "really psychic gut feeling" is probably just gas. I find myself wishing that the latest 300-pound, UFO-abducted and genitally probed, histrionic female would be whisked, beer can and floral muumuu, straight back to Rigel IV. The word "Vacancy" flashes, neon-like, through my head as a college-educated adult explains to me, conspiratorially, that he or she is a follower of Wicca. Is this what has become of America? Puh-leeeeeze!

The very same skepticism nags at my psyche when the politicians begin spouting their latest voodoo theory on "improving" the "great society." The Republicans insist that "old-time religion" is the only road back from the immoral abyss. Some of them insist that school prayer will exorcise the demon of delinquency from the crack-toasted, gun-toting, parental-supervision-deprived brats menacing our schools. The Democrats, not to be outdone, insist that yet another harebrained, poorly researched social program (midnight basketball comes to mind) is just the ticket to solving the "delinquency problem." Given the evidence accrued over the last two thousand years, belief in the government's ability to solve problems is equivalent to a belief in the paranormal. So far, all of the evidence is against it! Of course, this is no deterrent to the "true believers."

After being bombarded by this unending river of schmutz, how could any thinking person *not* be a skeptic? Boneheads, crackpots, quacks, cretins and goofs not only populate much (most?) of our world, but also help create everything from TV shows to the law of the land. Celebrities confess to their past incarnations (How come none of their previous identities worked in a gas station or dug ditches, or ever died peacefully?), while a president and his wife consult an astrologer. False memory

syndrome sends innocents to jail, while "therapeutic touch" adjusts the "auras" of unsuspecting patients suffering from real conditions in real hospitals.

Why am I a skeptic, you ask? Well, my friends, it is self-defense, purely self-defense. It is the only way I know to stay sane!

Hole-in-the-Head Update

Negotiations continue between the Tampa Bay Skeptics' Gary Posner and Louay Fatoohi, representative of Paramann Programme Labs, regarding a formal challenge of PPL's claims of paranormal wound-healing abilities (see p. 1 story last issue). And the stakes have risen dramatically, as PPL is no longer interested merely in TBS's "\$10,000 Challenge," but also in taking a stab at James Randi's "2000 Club" challenge (see p. 1 story).

Posner has suggested a test along the following lines: A PPL swami/guru will pass a skewer entirely through the abdomen of another person, entering and exiting within one inch of midline. Alternatively, daggers would be hammered into the skull of another person such that the daggers stay in place without being held. In either case, the subject will exhibit nearly no pain or bleeding, and the external wounds will heal within ten minutes.

We will continue to follow this story.

Chuck Harder Update

Long-time readers of *TBS Report* may recall our hard-hitting 1990-91 series of articles about Chuck Harder (also see related p. 7 letter). Additionally, in September 1990 Gary Posner had written to B. Premanand, head of the Indian Skeptics and a world-renowned lecturer on the so-called "god-men" of India, about Harder's widely broadcast claim that the Indian government had in operation a perpetual energy generator. Posner received no reply, but the April 15, 1995, issue of *Indian Skeptic* contains an article about Premanand's futile search for such a machine, including photocopies of Posner's letter, and one from the V.P. of R&D of India's Kirloskar Electric company, who had this to say: "... Subsequent testing [of the alleged machine] showed that there was no free energy as claimed..."

Harder recently took an even harder hit from CNN, which devoted about ten minutes of its October 29 *CNN Presents* report, titled "Patriots & Profits," to his lucrative, non-profit "For the People" foundation. Special Assignment Senior Correspondent John Camp termed FTP a "mini-empire" fueled largely by Harder's anti-government "conspiracy theories."

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SNIPPETS

In our Winter 1994-95 issue, TBS member Brent Yaciw's front-page article dealt with his having been edited out of a WTVT-TV 13 report, "Angels: A Reason to Believe." Yaciw's post-broadcast pleasantries to the reporter, Stacy Strazis, referred to her effort as a "commercial for suckers . . . proselytizing . . . slanted." But Strazis' piece impressed those who count, as it, and she, were nominated for a Suncoast Regional Emmy Award (although she didn't win).

(*St. Pete. Times, Nov. 4*)

Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan stunned a Baptist church congregation in D.C. with a claim that his recent "March on Washington" was inspired by an ET abduction. Farrakhan said that ten years ago, a UFO swept him away to a meeting with the late Elijah Muhammad, who informed him that President Ronald Reagan was plotting a war. How that inspired the "Walk" wasn't made terribly clear and, added Farrakhan, "I really don't care if you think I'm a nut." Is the man "psychic" also?

(*Washington Post, Sept. 17*)

University of Oregon psychologist and skeptic Ray Hyman has co-authored a study for the CIA on the agency's long-time use of "psychics" to track Lybia's Moammar Gadhafi, locate plutonium depots in North Korea, and effect other such "intelligence" coups. The program, code-named "Stargate," had been in operation for 20 years until this summer, and has cost taxpayers \$20-million. According to Hyman, "There's no evidence these people have done anything helpful for the government." However, his co-author, Jessica Utts, contends that the "psychics" were accurate about 15% of the time.

(*AP via St. Pete. Times, Nov. 29*)

TV columnist Walt Belcher wonders "if psychic Gary Spivey knew in advance that his radio show was going under." Spivey, of the too-weird wig and nightly TV infomercials, had the plug pulled when WSUN recently changed to an all-sports format. Bob Lassiter and the Hooters girls were also victims of the move.

(*Tampa Tribune, Dec. 5*)

One also wonders if famed astrologer Patric Walker, whose column was carried in *TV Guide*, had predicted that he would die in his sleep on the night of October 8-9. His published horoscopes for his fellow Libras certainly made no such predictions (one hopes) for either of those dates. Eulogized astrologer Shelley von Strunckel. Walker took astrology "from a tawdry, rather down-market amusement and brought to it reflection, elegance of language and thoughtfulness."

(*N.Y. Times via St. Pete. Times, Oct. 10*)

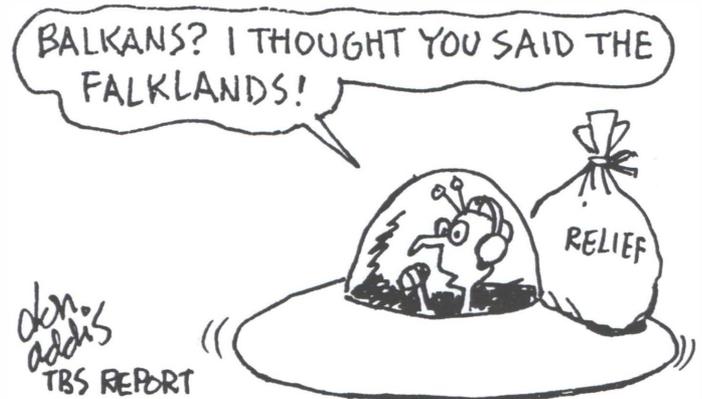
More than 3,300 readers called a "900" number in response to Price Michael of Greece's *Parade* magazine article, "Have You Ever Seen a Ghost?" 92% of callers said yes, and 73% claimed to have actually seen one. 85%

of the callers were female, and of those claiming to have witnessed such a paranormal apparition, 61% were female.

(*Parade magazine, Oct. 29*)

Fifteen hundred people gathered in a Bulgarian airfield to await the arrival of eight spaceships that were supposed to bring relief to the impoverished country — at least that's what a threesome of "self-styled mediums" had promised. Thirty minutes after the scheduled close encounter of the Balkan kind, the mediums claimed that the ETs had been scared off by unseen warplanes in the vicinity. When thirty more uneventful minutes had passed, the trusted triad claimed that the ETs no-showed because Bulgaria's president had declined to meet with them (with the ETs or the nutty trio?). Police were required to usher the troika away from the angry crowd.

(*Baltimore Sun, Sept. 12*)



"Health study touts power of prayer," cries the headline. Although Dr. Larry Dossey's claims fell flat (see *TBS Report*, Summer '94), has the case now been persuasively made, scientifically, for the power of God to heal? Well, not quite, as readers learned if they made their way to the fifth paragraph. "Scientific studies demonstrate that, by repeating prayers, words or sounds and passively disregarding other thoughts, many people are able to trigger a . . . 'relaxation response' . . ." (Emphasis added.) Harvard Medical School professor Herbert Benson added that visits to the doctor can be reduced 36%, and fertility enhanced, by employing this technique.

(*AP via Tampa Tribune, Dec. 6*)

George Anderson, author of *We Don't Die* and other tales of communication with the departed, fancies himself as a qualified "bereavement counselor." If it took place as advertised, the medium's grief-support program made its way to the Tampa Performing Arts Center on October 8, for a mere \$75 per person. Good grief!

(*Tampa Tribune, Sept. 20*)

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

“Skeptics pledge nearly \$500,000” (from page 1)

did so, now you step up and be tested. Let's see how your hot air competes with the facts of an actual test. There are now 195 of us waiting, money in hand, for *any* miracle to be produced. First come, first rich. Step right up. No waiting. You're next.

What is that great silence I hear . . . ?

On November 26, Randi announced that another milestone had been reached:

We have just had a pledge that took us to the \$500,000 mark! That's a nice round figure. Now I'll get to the media to see what interest we can evoke.

I just mailed out a firm offer to the Quadro Corporation, which makes a glorified dowsing rod called the QRS 250G Detector. This thing, which you'll see on the *Dateline NBC* show around the end of January (see article below), is being offered — and sold! — to law enforcement agencies at just under \$1,000 to detect drugs, weapons and explosives at a distance. I've tested it. It doesn't work at all, any more than any other dowsing device. So, your pledges are being offered to Quadro if they can make it work in a proper test. Don't worry.

Randi has requested that anyone interested in becoming a member of the “2000 Club” send him a self-addressed, return envelope (with stamp or International Postal Reply Coupon), along with a signed pledge that reads as follows:

I, [name], residing at [address], hereby declare that I will pay the sum of [\$1,000 minimum] to whatever person successfully passes the agreed tests to establish any psychic powers. This amount will be added to the already-published offer of James Randi as found in the World Wide Web entry under:

<http://www.mamboland.com:80/randi/randi.html>

and will be paid by me at the earliest possible opportunity following Mr. Randi's completion of such examination and validation of these powers.

In return, the pledger receives a “2000 Club” membership card, and the assurance that he/she is in no danger of having to part with his/her money, unless someone is actually able to demonstrate genuine psychic ability — a feat as yet unheralded in the annals of history as far as the scientific community is aware.

Randi to be featured on *Dateline NBC*

by James Randi (via e-mail “Hotline”)

As many regular readers of this “Hotline” are aware, NBC-TV's *Dateline NBC* is preparing a piece dealing with my work. Broadcast date is still a month or so away. In order to get the news to Uri Geller — since I always call my shots — I suggested that *Dateline* reach the fabulous “Riley” (who has now taken on Geller as a partner) for his possible participation in the filming. Not to my surprise, “Riley” declined, but of course scurried to inform his partner. . . . Shortly after, the usual poison-pen garbage appeared at the NBC-TV offices, via Geller's Automated Garbage Dispenser Unit. That's an independent unit that

serves the interests of the spoon-bending guru, hoping to interdict his inexorable decline. It is staffed by failed UFO/conspiracy/flat-earth/Bigfoot advocates with much time on hand.

And, breathlessly alerted to this latest threat against irrationality, the usual lawyers began admonishing NBC (“Please be informed that our client . . .”) about saying anything at all about him, thus gleefully providing evidence of their highly efficient covert operation, the “Constant Surveillance on Randi” movement. Geller need not worry; the program will deal with currently interesting claims, not the tired, boring flapdoodle of yore.

[Editor's note: If anyone without access to the Web is interested in obtaining a copy of the terms of Randi's standard psychic challenge, please send a stamped return envelope to TBS. Anyone wishing to contact Randi by e-mail can do so at: randi-hotline@ssr.com. To reach Randi by regular mail, his address is: 12000 N.W. 8th St., Plantation, FL 33325-1406.]

“Saving the night skies” (from page 1)

galaxy, the Milky Way, with thick star clouds that few living in the city have ever seen.

The recent controversy started with a telephone call from a *St. Petersburg Times* reporter to Dan Bricker, part-time treasurer of SPAC. Was Bricker aware, asked the reporter, that a radio station planned to erect a 400-foot radio tower practically in the back yard of the observatory site? “A radio tower? Oh, my God,” Bricker was quoted as saying.

As it turned out, WGUL-FM, Inc., a St. Petersburg corporation that broadcasts “easy listening” music, planned to expand its capabilities in west central Florida by erecting a huge tower about 2000 feet due south of the observatory. If typical of its kind, the tower would contain white strobe and numerous other lights.

Thanks to the reporter's inquiry, SPAC was alerted to an impending hearing before the Hernando County Planning and Zoning Commission to approve the station's request for a zoning exemption. Bricker and SPAC president Wayne Tripp immediately mobilized members of the club to fight this encroachment into their virgin night skies. Although I am not an expert in property or zoning law, as a SPAC member and attorney, I volunteered my legal services to the fight.

On September 11, members of SPAC flooded the Commission's hearing room. Speeches were made about the grandeur of the night sky and the important work being done at the observatory. Astronomy is one of the few areas of science in which amateurs can, and routinely do, make significant contributions to the profession. Interestingly, SPAC found itself aligned with several local property owners who did not want a radio tower in their back yard for other reasons. Some raised pseudoscientific public health objections to electromagnetic radiation from such a tower. Others wanted to preserve their property values for “better” development (e.g., a housing development, infinitely worse than a single tower). Some, however, gave moving speeches about their decisions to move to rural Florida precisely in order to get away from encroaching development.

Ultimately, the speeches were to no avail, as the Commission voted 3 to 2 to allow the tower to be built. The next and last step was to be final approval by the Hernando County

(continued on page 6)

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"Starry skies" (from page 5)

Commission on September 19. At a SPAC board meeting on September 13, members debated their next move. A lawsuit would be expensive and futile. The choice came down to a hopeless fight to the finish, or the seeking of some compromise. The board voted to authorize me to negotiate with the station.

WGUL owner Carl Marcocci had anticipated an outcry from local residents (as happens whenever a new radio tower is proposed), but he had been blindsided by the objections of the astronomy club, whose existence he was not aware of when the tower site was selected. Wishing to defuse the controversy, he agreed to our proposed compromise settlement: The tower would contain only the minimum lights required by the FAA (one red, non-strobe on top, and one light in the middle; SPAC could extinguish any ground lights associated with the tower complex during times of observatory use; SPAC would withdraw its formal objections to erection of the tower.

At the public hearing before the County Commission on September 19, SPAC announced the terms of the agreement. Commissioners praised SPAC for being "reasonable." Other residents in the area continued to raise objections to the tower but, as predicted, the Commission voted overwhelmingly to approve the zoning request.

During the hearing, the station owner and one commission member referred to SPAC as "astrologers." SPAC members educated them on the profound differences between astrology, a pseudoscience, and astronomy. Members described the nature of the club's observatory work, including asteroid occultations, CCD camera imaging, meteor shower counts, and comet hunting. I venture to say that this was the first county commission meeting in a long time to include descriptions of the Andromeda galaxy!

At the conclusion of the hearing, the Commission directed its Planning and Zoning staff to meet with SPAC to "explore" the possibility of creating new county ordinances regulating "light pollution," a new concept for them. SPAC plans to press this initiative, to see if Hernando County can become the first "enlightened" community to address the problem of the disappearance of our night skies, now

awash in the glow of football stadiums and shopping malls.

Although SPAC was unable to defeat the forces of development and "progress," it did raise the sensitivities of the community over scientific issues. Hopefully, the community learned that there is more to life than work, television and football. Overhead, on a dark, rural night, you can look up and see star clouds, galaxies, and an occasional fireball lighting up, for but an instant, an otherwise jet-black sky.

[Editor's note: Terry was quoted in several related St. Pete. Times and Tampa Tribune articles.]

20th Anniversary CSICOP Conference

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) celebrates its 20th anniversary in 1996, and will host a "World Skeptics Congress" on June 20-23 at the State University of New York at Buffalo, near CSICOP's new headquarters at the Center for Inquiry.

Topics to be covered include The Role of the Mass Media in (Mis)Informing the Public, The Growth of Anti-Science, UFOs, Astrology, Alternative Health Cures, Homeopathy, Therapeutic Touch, Chiropractic, Creation/Evolution, Recent Developments in Parapsychology, Mechanisms of Self-Deception, Philosophy and Pseudoscience, Psychoanalytic Theory, Critical Thinking in Education, and Spiritualism and the University at Buffalo Exposé.

Scheduled speakers include (among many others): CSICOP Chairman Paul Kurtz, mathematics professor/author John Paulos, Dr. Dean Edell, UFO expert Philip Klass, Ray Hyman (see 'CIA psychics' "Snippet"), *Time* magazine Senior Editor (science) Leon Jaroff, Joe Nickell, James Randi, and evolutionist Stephen Jay Gould (Keynote Address).

For further information, send a stamped return envelope to TBS, or contact CSICOP (see box, lower left).

Other skeptical sources on the paranormal

• **Prometheus Books** •
60-page catalogue
(30% discount available through TBS)
59 John Glenn Dr. • Buffalo, NY 14228

• **Skeptical Inquirer** •
Flagship journal of
CSICOP • Box 703 • Buffalo, NY 14226
Web site: <http://www.csicop.org>

• **Skeptic** •
Published by the Skeptics Society
2761 N. Marengo • Altadena, CA 91001

• **Skeptics UFO Newsletter** •
by Philip J. Klass
404 "N" St., S.W. • Wash., DC 20024

LETTERS • READERS' FORUM

Editor: I read your article [last issue's lead story about the "miraculous" cure] in the Sept/Oct *Skeptical Inquirer*. Great job of putting a little light on this "mystery." *Unsolved Mysteries* is really a very poorly researched program. Keep up the good work!

Michael Dennett
Federal Way, Washington

Editor: Thanks for the enlightening Fall issue! I must own that I would quite readily have accepted the authenticity of K. B.'s miraculous healing (though not "God" as its real agent), but your skeptical investigation proved it to be otherwise. Touché!

Your *bête noire*, *For the People*, recently featured two very credible-looking "experts," Drs. Greer and Brian O'Leary, both assuring us of a coming New Age of post-contact galactic blessedness just around the corner! This is a different delusion, reviving the gospel of the '50s phony "contactees" — although these preachers, at least, appear wholly innocent of guile, and guilty only of optimistic credulity.

Alexander Mebane
Venice

Chuck Harder's For the People radio show (which TBS Report followed closely in 1990-91) is now also a TV show, carried locally on Ch. 38 weeknights at 2:30 a.m. Apparently he is still promoting UFOs. I wonder if he is also still vouching for the perpetual energy "N machine" (see related story on page 3).

And, *Lex*, once again, many thanks for your continuing generous financial support of TBS. —G.P.

Editor: Just read your "Taking a stab" article on the CSICOP World Wide Web site. Thanks for a well-written story. I didn't know there was a local skeptics organization, and I'd like to join TBS. I'm a technical writer/editor/illustrator by trade, and maybe I can be of some help.

Victor Chapel
Brandon

Editor: Patrick and I are horrified that we overlooked the date of the last TBS meeting, but that's exactly what happened — we somehow overlooked it. We hope it went well, and it's our loss that we weren't there. Really sorry.

Judy Welsh
Clearwater

Editor: I'm a new subscriber to the *Skeptical Inquirer* and am interested in knowing more about your organization and becoming a member, so that I can be involved at a local level. My background is in health sciences.

I'm very interested in UFOs and have extensively studied this phenomenon since the early 1970s when I personally witnessed many UFOs in southern Nevada when I was stationed at Nellis Air Force Base. I firmly believe that there are many strange things flying around in our skies, but I am very skeptical about their extra-terrestrial origins.

I keep an open mind about UFOs, but I'm a skeptic all the way — especially about all of this alien abduction nonsense. Much of what I watch on television disturbs me inasmuch as it may be good entertainment, but it's definitely poor science. More than anything else, I seek the truth based on facts rather than forming beliefs based on fiction.

Warren Gammel
Williston

And from Penn Jillette (of Penn & Teller), who was sent an advance copy of this issue's Editorial by e-mail, with the expectation that he might get a "kick" out of its reference to his own *bête noire*, *The "Amazing" Kreskin*:

Wow — well, I don't agree at all. I think the O.J. verdict was fine and I don't agree with the comparison.

But, there you go . . .

Penn Jillette
Las Vegas, Nevada
(E-mail address withheld by request)

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Announcing...

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Scheduled: Open Forum; Video from recent media coverage of the paranormal

SATURDAY, JANUARY 20 --- 11:00 A.M. - 1:45 P.M.
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TBS in the Media

TBS chairman Terry Smiljanich was interviewed for the WTOG-TV 44 10 p.m. newscast on October 16, about the 1947 Roswell crashed-saucer claims. The station had earlier that evening aired the TV movie, *Roswell*.

Vice chairman Miles Hardy appeared on WTVT-TV 13's 10 p.m. newscast during a November 3 story about the blossoming national celebrity status of local "psychic" Gary Spivey (also see related "Snippet"). Hardy pointed out the lack of scientific evidence for the existence of "psychic" power.

Founder/editor Gary Posner fielded an October 17 phone call from *St. Pete. Times* "Action" columnist Judy Harriman, and was able to fax her the information she needed for a reader who had been fleeced by a "psychic" fortune-teller.

Have an e-mail address?

Send our editor a note by e-mail if you would like to be kept more closely informed as to the doings of TBS, James Randi, and the rest of the international community of skeptics. Address: garypos@aol.com.



1113 Normandy Trace Road
Tampa, Florida 33602

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. This notice represents an open invitation to any and all Florida UFOlogists, psychics, astrologers, dowers, and the like. Please contact TBS for complete details.

The James Randi Fund
3555 West Reno Street, Suite L
Las Vegas, NV 89118

and

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

...are assisting in defending against lawsuits brought by proponents of the paranormal. Both funds hope also to be able to provide assistance to other skeptics in need. Please consider a donation.

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