

# Sceptical souls and alien abductions

---

## I SAW

with IAN WARDEN

---

**F**OR THIS sceptical soul the pleasure derived from *Secrets of the Psychics* (SBS, Wednesday, 8.30) James Randi's essay about credulists and the Uri Gelleresque charlatans who exploit them was almost exactly the same species of pleasure derived from seeing the Raiders beat Brisbane. It was a triumph of good over evil and of light over darkness.

And yet it is not really a triumph at all. One felt good for the duration of the hour and while Randi was demonstrating that Geller is just another magician and that assorted "psychics" were just silly old women but then this was SBS and so there would only have been about 17 people watching the program.

And of those any credulists would have been resistant to Randi's reason. It is an endearing characteristic of credulists that no amount of actual *evidence* will convince them that nonsense is nonsense. Shewn that Uri Geller is a charlatan, shown as they were by

a charlatan, shown as they were by Randi that a particularly outrageous "faith healer" was a charlatan (the one we saw went to prison for his frauds) they shrug their shoulders and say that well, all crafts and disciplines have their frauds and the fact that one astrologer or faith healer is a crook tells us nothing about the deep, enduring truths of astrology and of faith healing.

Somewhere in South America not so long ago the villagers (all credulists are equal but Roman Catholic credulists are more credulous than others) flocked to the "miracle" of a face of a pale and ghostly Jesus that had appeared on a wall. When it was pointed out that this was not in fact an apparition of a pale and ghostly Jesus but a poster for a Willy Nelson concert that, the concert over, a billposter had covered with a few light brushes of whitewash, one feels sure that the ex-

perience did nothing to dent the credulity of those who had believed that this was Jesus. One feels sure that the next whitewashed Willy Nelson poster would have the same power to impress them.

Randi seems to know that he is urinating into the gale. Again and again in *Secrets of the Psychics* he made the point that a belief in psychic tripe seems to meet some deeply-seated needs in those who hold the beliefs. Visiting Russia where even some government departments seem to dabble

ernment departments seem to dabble in the supernatural he acknowledged that the more miserable and government-shackled monstered the peoples lives the more understandable it is that they will have an appetite for magical mystery. Two alleged psychics in psychic-infested Russia, two women, given a photograph of serial murderer Ted Bundy to tune their psychic antennae to so as to pick up the special vibes emitted by this picture of a proven monster, did no better at working out the true nature of the man than any of us would if shown a photograph of someone's auntie Gloria we had never met.

I missed the end of the program, distracted when a UFO landed in my garden and when its green and two-headed occupants abducted me and subjected me to various humiliating medical experiments (at least one hopes that's what they were) although, as a Sagittarian, this did not come as a complete surprise, my astrologer having warned me, with what one realises with hindsight was uncanny accuracy, of the likelihood of an interface with strangers.