



# THE SECOND COMING

## Psychics

All the best from *the Skeptic*

1986 - 1990

# THE SECOND COMING

All the best from *the Skeptic*, 1986–1990

## Psychics

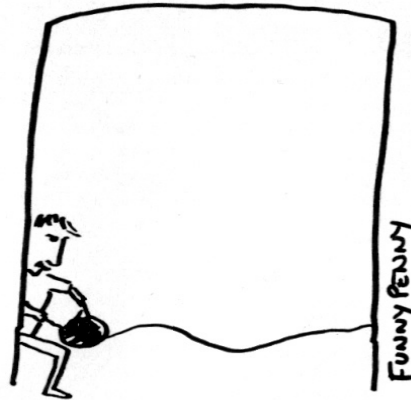
*Edited by Barry Williams*  
*Compiled by Richard Saunders*

*New Cartoons by Penny Rowe (Funny Penny)*  
&  
*Richard Saunders*



# Psychics

"OOH... TAKE CARE DEARIE. AT SOME TIME IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE YOU'RE LIKELY TO HAVE A FALL."



Vol 6 No 1 - 1986

## ***A Skeptical View of Creative Abundance***

*William Grey*

Stuart Wilde is a self-styled metaphysician who claims to have discovered a way to blend ancient wisdom with modern technology, to teach you how to create more money in your life. Denise Linn is a reincarnationist who claims to connect you with your past lives to make you more "abundant" in this one.

They toured Australia in November 1985 under the auspices of International Health Promotions, presenting seminars in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney. Canberra provided the team with its warm-up opportunity.

Wilde and Linn appeared on the local ABC *Morning Show* (hosted by Wendy Wicks) on Friday 1st November. Linn explained that she had become interested in previous incarnations, and realised their value as a resource for abundance, as a result of a visionary "near death experience" which led her to radically alter her views about reality.

Wilde's account of his discovery of the secret of "creative abundance" was a little different. Having

# THE SECOND COMING

All the best from *the Skeptic*, 1986-1990

## Psychics

made a fortune in the rag trade in Carnaby Street in the sixties he became filled with the emptiness of material success, and set out to discover deeper truths about the meaning of our existence.

The truth he discovered after his long search seemed very close to the starting point of his disillusion. The secret to life lies in making pots of money, indeed in persuading people to give you as much of it as possible. But it is important not to feel the least guilty about it.

Twenty years ago Wilde made a fortune and felt terrible. Now he is making a fortune and feels terrific. As long as you approach people in the right fashion, Wilde suggested, they will just love to make you rich.

His faith seemed amply justified. Two days later about 120 people each paid \$20 to hear his contradictory blend of Taoist philosophy and North American materialism.

Reincarnation presents a lot of problems, and I posed the following for Linn on Wendy Wicks' program. Three hundred years ago the population was about one-eighth its present size. So there were just not enough people in the comparatively recent past for everybody alive today to have been alive before.

Linn was puzzled by this problem (which had not occurred to her before), but Wilde came to her rescue, suggesting that "other dimensions" provided a convenient source of disembodied souls to resolve the difficulty. (This is patently an ad hoc artificial manoeuvre. Reincarnation claims made subsequently by participants in Wilde and Linn's seminar were

invariably claims about prior existence in this world: no one reported a previous incarnation in another dimension.)

The Canberra seminar presented by Wilde and Linn (on Sunday 3rd November) was slick, polished and delivered with enthusiasm and panache. Linn conducted the morning session and Wilde the afternoon.

Problems about reincarnation were swept aside by Linn as she explained that we are spirits whose purpose is to return bodily again and again "to polish the jewel" which we essentially are. Linn suggested that many of our hang-ups are the product of difficulties experienced in previous incarnations. Coming to terms with what we were is (she claimed) a means of coming to accept what we are. To relive is to relieve.

Linn's presentation concluded with an exercise to bring the seminar participants in touch with their previous lives. After a "deep relaxation" preliminary, everyone was invited to imagine themselves at twenty years, at ten, at five, at six months, then back to birth and the womb. And then beyond.

For this participant the nature of the imaginative task changed radically as the exercise progressed. I can recollect, albeit vaguely, five-year-old experiences. Prior to that, however, I found myself wholly dependent on old family photo albums, and reports derived from memories other than my own.

Linn appeared to be aware of this problem. If nothing "came to mind" participants were invited to "pretend, create, imagine" experiences. With a generous range



of cues about the kinds of experiences that others had reported (World War II pilots, pilgrims, Chinese peasants) we were provided with a helpful delineation of the scope of the imaginative exercise.

The participants in this fantasy exercise of imagining a possible past life appeared quite happy to accept their inventions as genuine reports of previous incarnations. We were, in effect, asked to invent a past life and then to accept the invention as reality.

There were plenty of grounds for doubting the truth of the reports. For one thing there were plenty of anachronisms. ("Roman soldiers", for example, solemnly reported having lived in castles.)

After a break for lunch the second component of the seminar was conducted by Wilde. His exposition of the secrets of "creative abundance" was an extraordinary blend of Dale Carnegie's entrepreneurial fervour, Billy Graham's evangelism, and some entertaining wisecracking reminiscent of Morecombe and Wise.

Wilde's essential message was: get other people to build up confidence in you, and then "bill them". If they like you they'll pay you. This simple message was wrapped up in a lot of dubious - often incomprehensible - guff about physical planes, abundant forces, infinite sources of energy, vibrancy, destiny, high intention, resonance, clarity, total potential, crescendos of understanding, spiritual growth, and bumping against the roughness of other dimensions. It was exasperating rubbish.

Wilde in effect presented a short course of motivational therapy wrapped up in a confusion of Taoist philosophy and spurious science. Some of the claims which he made are at least testable. Two items which he vigorously promoted were "subliminal" tapes, selling for \$20 to \$25, and a so-called "theta metronome".

Subliminal tapes purport to contain messages or affirmations embedded in a musical background. Similar tapes have been examined by the National Acoustic Laboratory (NAL) in several ways, using spectral analysis, filtering and autocorrelation. NAL was unable to find any evidence of messages buried in the "noise". Not only is there no evidence that the subliminal tapes which have been examined contain any auditory message, there is also no evidence that subliminal auditory stimulation can affect behaviour in the manner claimed. For a critical evaluation of the claims, see "Subliminal Perception: A discussion with Special Relevance to the Use of Subliminal Audio Tapes", by Robert A. Cummins, *the Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society*, November, 1985, pp 28-35.

The placebo effect guarantees that a number of people will read the claims, listen to the tapes, and swear by their efficacy. It would of course be a straightforward matter to set up a simple double-blind test to evaluate their effect. (I wonder if "Mystic Traders", the company marketing the tapes, would agree to such an evaluation?)

The "theta metronome" is another cassette tape which provides gentle repetitive tones recorded at 4-6 cycles per second (theta rhythm) or 7-13 cycles per second (alpha rhythm). The rhythms are said to improve mental abilities, memory, healing, inspirational creativity, relaxation and "accelerated rest". For an evaluation of these claims, see Barry Beyerstein's paper "The Myth of Alpha Consciousness" in *The Skeptical Enquirer*, Vol 10, No 1 (Fall 1985).

There were many more cassette tapes prepared by Wilde and Linn to help one to develop techniques for making money, nurturing health, increasing power, altering states of consciousness, and to help one to become more sensuous and radiant.

Creative abundance, which has been on sale in North America for several years, is seeking to establish an Australian market. It looks set for good business.

William Grey has taught philosophy at the Australian National University and Temple University, Philadelphia. He works in the Department of Science in Canberra and is Secretary of the Canberra Branch of Australian Skeptics.



## Predictions Revisited

Janet de Silva

Lindy Chamberlain will be moved to a NSW prison from Darwin. Bob Hawke would be the target of an assassination attempt before March 1986.

These were the predictions from English-born clairvoyant, Zandra-Marie, in Australia last year.

A slender blond woman in her mid-thirties, this bubbly psychic travels throughout the United States, England, Australia and New Zealand lecturing and giving personal consultations using her "psychic powers". According to Zandra-Marie, she has displayed psychic power since she was 10 years old when she sketched the location of victims in the "moors murders" in England. And, at times when people annoyed her at school, she wished they would fall down stairs - and it all came true.

Previously, when the clairvoyant arrived in Australia, the media embraced her enthusiastically and there were numerous reports of past triumphs and her latest "predictions". According to many newspapers, Zandra-Marie is noted throughout the world for her famous criminal cases such as the "Yorkshire Ripper" case in Britain and the "Atlantic Murders" in the US. Even Azaria Chamberlain has "spoken" to Zandra-Marie, who claims to have helped police investigate the Chamberlain case. This "brilliant" clairvoyant is reported to have predicted the outbreak of the Falklands War, the assassination attempt on President Reagan and the death of Natalie Wood - to name but a few.

In the past journalists were impressed with Zandra-Marie. Recently journalist John Brown from *The Mercury* in Maitland (NSW), took her to task.

Brown played a game he called "predictions revisited" and investigated the predictions that Zandra-Marie had made on an earlier visit to Maitland in 1983. Almost all were wrong and Brown gave her a mark of 25 out of 100 - for sheer effort.

A New Zealand radio journalist, John Haynes, also conducted an investigation. In an interview on New Zealand radio Zandra-Marie mentioned her working with the Brisbane homicide squad. But the Queensland Police say that Zandra-Marie is unknown to members of the squad and cannot be connected with any of their investigations.

Another newspaper clipping in the Zandra-Marie press kit claimed she solved the murder of Mrs Shirley Rendell of Yatton, England. According to these reports, Zandra-Marie "saw" Mrs Rendell's murderer arrive by train and obtain entry into her house by saying "I know your husband, could I come in and wait for him". Mrs Rendell was then murdered and the killer returned to his two-storey home by train. He was between 5ft 8in and 5ft 9in, aged between 34 and 36 with fair hair, said Zandra-Marie.

The Bristol Police, who have since solved the case, said Mrs Rendell was murdered by a man who drove a stolen car to her house. Mrs Rendell allowed him to enter her house because he carried a



Zandra-Marie

parcel requiring her signature. When she turned to get a pen, she was murdered and her killer returned to his three-storey house by car. He was six foot, 29 years old, and was dark haired.

Indeed, it doesn't require extensive research to prove that Zandra-Marie has bungled nearly every prediction she has made.



## Posthumous Pieces Pleasantly Played

Anne Tuohy

This year's Festival of Sydney included a piano recital of the posthumous works of Brahms, Beethoven, Rachmaninov and Liszt.

These ghostly compositions were performed by Australian pianist Rhonda Gillespie, on Friday, 17th January at the Sydney Town Hall.

British medium Rosemary Brown claims to receive visits from

great composers of the past, who dictate new compositions to her, some even requesting that their pieces be played by Rhonda Gillespie.

Rosemary Brown was brought up in a musical household, studied the piano and is a competent musician.

It is interesting to note that none of the composers has transmitted works for instruments other than the piano.

Psychology Professor Andrew Neher of Cabrillo College said that the pieces are pleasant and in the style of the dead composers, whilst not being dramatically new.

Denis Matthews, a leading English music critic, described Mrs Brown as delightfully frank and humble, incapable of deceiving others. He added that everyone is capable of deceiving themselves.

Are Liszt, Brahms and friends applauding in their celestial studios or spinning in their graves?

Can we look forward to post-mortals works by Elvis, John Lennon or maybe Michaelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci?



### **AIPR Welcomes Debate With Skeptics**

Michael Hough

On behalf of the Australian Institute of Psychic Research, I congratulate Skeptics on the success of their first convention in Sydney. I welcomed the opportunity to join in debate. Both our groups are committed to scientific methodology, accurate and public education. The AIPR does not necessarily accept a paranormal explanation for psychic experiences. Our purpose is to point to anomalies worthy of study. So much ridiculous information about this fascinating subject is being published that serious research is being inhibited. The recent comment by Paul Kurtz, CSICOP chairman, that aspects of parapsychology require serious study, is welcome. The AIPR wants to integrate parapsychology back into mainstream psychology.

#### **Where skeptics can go wrong**

Kurtz has also stated that skeptics should take notice of their critics. Skeptics correctly point out that psychic researchers are often emotionally committed to excessive belief, resulting in pseudoscience. We point out that skeptics are often emotionally committed to excessive disbelief. These skeptics (in effect, cynics) indulge in pseudocriticism. Magicians, rationalists, humanists and philosophers seem to be the most prone to falling into this trap. Evidence always counts for more than rational argument or trickery. Continued debate between our two societies helps to ensure that these inevitable extreme tendencies in both our groups are avoided.

#### **Repeatable tests**

Few skeptics these days flatly allege that parapsychology is a pseudoscience. It is true that parapsychology has a pseudoscientific overlay that must be stripped away. However, it is better described as a protoscience. The lack of strict repeatability of experiments may be caused, at least partly, by our not yet knowing the correct methodology, or the correct mechanism of the phenomena. Lack of repeatability does not mean that phenomena do not exist. Ball lightning, earthquakes, and intuitive thoughts exist - but we cannot yet produce them on demand, using repeatable experiments. I doubt whether anyone can win \$20,000 from the Skeptics for the production of an intuitive thought on demand in a repeatable test. The attitude of the experimenter is important. I hope that few skeptics will automatically dismiss the

argument that over-critical observers and test situations inhibit performance including auditions, human sexual behaviour, production of intuitive thought, and memory recall (the "tip of the tongue phenomenon").

#### **Conscious experiences - The missing element**

Psychology as it is taught today is missing essential elements of human experience. Psychology is very much a fragmented science. There is no unifying paradigm. The dissociated phenomena, mystical experiences, out-of-body experiences, ESP, micro-PK, apparitions and faith healing are commonly experienced by the community - yet naturalistic explanations are rarely offered in university courses. In my opinion, this has resulted from the difficulty of measuring the experiences, the subjective nature of the experiences (promoting both credulous belief and excessive disbelief), and by the tendency of some skeptics to ridicule (so that people become reluctant to report their experiences). Skeptics who use ridicule unfortunately create a climate wherein serious study becomes impossible.

The AIPR welcomes comment and input by skeptics. The AIPR will send a free copy of its Bulletin to any skeptic who enquires (PO Box 445, Lane Cove, NSW 2066).

#### **Extrasensory perception (ESP)**

We say that the evidence for ESP rests on 50-100 experiments (replicated in a loose rather than a strict sense) on unselected subjects. These experiments also show that ESP is enhanced by belief, altered states of consciousness, etc. Skeptics say there is no evidence - a curious remark. because, until 1984, no skeptic had troubled to systematically examine these experiments as a total group. In that year, Charles Akers (Harvard psychologist) chose the 54 best (1957-1982), and applied strict criteria. 46 failed - a sobering thought (*Advances in Parapsychological Research*, Vol 4 McFarland 1984). The criteria were strict: many experiments in mainstream psychology would probably also have failed.

Most of us conducting psychic research have had a personal experience of these phenomena. However, I do not offer this as proof. I only wish to show that a personal experience can be more impressive than a controlled experiment. Most skeptics have not had such experiences, otherwise they would not still be skeptics. The experience itself is not a delusion but it is very easy for some persons (e.g. good trance or hypnotic subjects, religious persons, and commercial psychics) to become deluded as to the interpretation.

ESP-type experiences are not confined to

parapsychologists. Dr Channon (University of Sydney) had some when she hypnotised patients. Puzzled, she quizzed 201 members of the Australian Society of Hypnosis, mostly doctors and psychologists (Aust.J.Clin.Expt.Hypnosis 12:23,1984). 24% reported similar "extrasensory communication". Dr Bennett (University of California) cites a surgeon who remarked about a woman under anaesthetic. "My God, they've dragged another beached whale onto my operating table". For several days after the operation, the woman inexplicably suffered tension and physical ailments. She suddenly recalled the insult - and the symptoms quickly vanished (Discover, Feb 1985: 13-18). These reports suggest that information can indeed be picked up outside of conscious awareness. Note that ESP is defined as "information picked up outside normal sensory channels".

### Apparitions

Some ghost sightings, at least, seem to be "real" self-created visions, rather than misperceptions. Psychiatrist Morton Schatzman studied a suggestible girl who could create her own apparitions at will (*The Story of Ruth* Penguin 1980). Most were of her father who had raped her when she was young. Harvard psychologist George Eastbrooks used autosuggestion to create an apparition of a pet bear. The bear became so lifelike it followed him around and jumped out at him from dark corners! People even report being terrified when "attacked" by such apparitions. These "supernatural assault" cases have been rationally documented by David Hufford (*The Terror That Came in the Night*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982). The word "nightmare" originally was defined as this experience. However, this meaning has been forgotten - "nightmare" is now defined as a "bad dream".

### Faith healing

More than 1400 scientific papers have been published on the effect of mind and brain on the immune system (Locke and Hornig-Rohan, "Mind and Immunity", 1983) - a discipline now called "psychoneuroimmunology" (PNI). PNI offers a rational explanation for both the placebo effect and faith

## CHARACTER ANALYSIS



Patric Cook In the Fred Daqq Scripts (1981; Nelson)

healing. PNI implies that if the patient believes he will get well, he may well do so - provided the ailment is not totally physical, e.g. a virus or broken bone. (Psychic and spiritual healing are more controversial, because more than faith is allegedly involved.) Faith healing, if professionally regulated, can play its part alongside orthodox medicine.

### Micro-psychokinesis (PK)

Many REG (random-event generator) tests indicate a micro-PK effect, although other REG tests have yielded a nil result. No skeptic has yet looked at these tests as a total group. In 1982, Robert Jahn and colleagues (Princeton University), whose credentials are unquestioned, obtained a small but highly significant result, using a very large database (Proc. IEEE, 70:136).

**Vol 6 No 2 - 1986**

## ZANEX PAYS GELLER OVER \$350 000

The Australian-based mining company Zanex, paid magician and mentalist Uri Geller \$US250,000 (over \$A350,000) for his advice on where to look for gold in the Solomon Islands and near Maldon in Victoria.

He was also granted an option to take up 1,250,000 Zanex shares at 20c each by 5th June, 1987.

Zanex brought Uri Geller and his assistant Schipi Strang to Australia in October, 1985. He was taken to the old gold mining town of Maldon in central Victoria by Zanex director, Peter Sterling.

There Geller had long discussions with Zanex geologist Alan Svansio it is believed Geller did not reveal anything about the Maldon area not already known by geologists.

Geller then visited the Solomon Islands for the opening of Zanex's Mavu gold mine in November last



year.

Zanex brought a twin-engine plane to the Solomon Islands at considerable expense to fly Geller over the Solomon Islands. Geller indicated three areas which he believed had potential.

Uri Geller has no qualifications as a geologist but is a talented magician with a reputation for being able to convince people he has psychic powers.



### Geller Story Continued

Uri Geller made international news in the early 1970s with demonstrations of spoon bending, watch starting, and alleged extra-sensory perception.

Since then magicians such as James Randi have shown his supposed metal bending abilities are merely tricks accomplished by sleight of hand, his claims of having been tested under rigorous scientific conditions are false, and that his claimed "telepathic" abilities are merely well-known magician's "mentalist" tricks.

Psychologists such as Professor David Marks and Richard Kammann have shown that Uri Geller has the same sensory powers as any other normal human being, but state he is trickier than most people in the way he uses them.

The latest book on Uri Geller was written by Australian Skeptics magic consultant, Ben Harris. Titled "Gellerism Revealed", its photos and accompanying text teach the reader how to do Geller's tricks.

In the past couple of years, the media has carried articles on Geller's latest claims of psychic prospecting.

After reading one of these articles, Zanex director Peter Sterling met Uri Geller in London in May, 1985. He was impressed by Geller and later in 1985 watched Geller perform on stage at the Young President's Club in San Diego.

About the same time, Geller's stage act was observed by the Bay Area Skeptics (San Francisco). After the performance Bay Area Skeptics magician Bob Steiner met Geller, and the two magicians posed for this photo.

The Bay Area Skeptics then watched Bob Steiner repeat

Geller's act and explain how the tricks were done. The Skeptics were not impressed with Geller's claim.

Peter Sterling was impressed with Geller however, and negotiated a fee of \$US250,000 for Geller to come to Australia and the Solomon Islands.

Geller came to the Solomon Islands after Zanex had already located a potential gold mining area downstream from Gold Ridge on Guadalranal Island in the Solomons.

At the opening of Zanex's mine, Geller entertained the guests with magic tricks and even bent a spoon being held by the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, Sir Peter Kenilorea.

Another Australian Skeptics magic consultant, professional magician Tim Ellis, was briefed on the matter. Tim was winner of the close-up magic award at the twentieth Australian Convention of magicians in June this year.

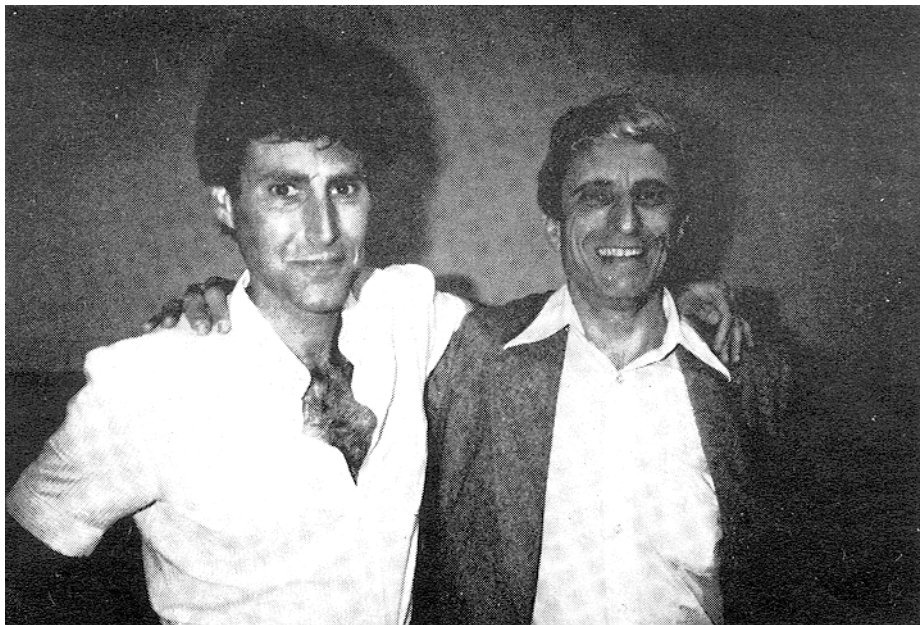
Tim spent two hours with Peter Sterling showing how Geller's tricks were only magic, but could not persuade Sterling to his viewpoint.

Gary Wiseman in "People" magazine wrote that Geller has located minerals for Britain's Rio-Tinto Zinc Corporation (RTZ), and John Pinkney claimed that Geller's biggest client was RTZ.

RTZ have informed the Australian Skeptics in writing that Geller has not been employed by them in any capacity.

The financial newspapers are reporting that several large shareholders are seeking to have two of the current Zanex directors replaced and another three elected.

One wonders if Geller foresaw these developments.



Uri Geller & Bob Steiner.  
Fellow magicians in a moment of camaraderie.

Vol 7 No 1 - 1987

### ***The Colossal Mrs Dankbaar***

When self-professed Adelaide "psychic", Mrs Anne Dankbaar claimed that she had discovered the whereabouts of the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Ancient Wonders of the World, the SA branch of Australian Skeptics was obviously interested.

However, a report that she had been "acknowledged" by the University of Adelaide to have "very significant" paranormal powers was of more serious concern.

The SA Skeptics immediately issued a challenge to Mrs Dankbaar to prove her powers under strict scientific conditions (in accordance with the Aust Skeptics standing \$20,000 challenge).

Investigations by the local media also revealed that Mrs Dankbaar's "certificate" for her powers was a "personal reference" issued by senior lecturer in electrical engineering, Mr George Karolie, who had "felt obliged to give the letter to her" following a period of testing. While Mr Karolie said the tests indicated Mrs Dankbaar had "significant" powers, another lecturer in the university's Dept of Psychology, Dr Peter Delin, was reported to have said he had "conducted a fairly extensive interaction with Mrs Dankbaar, during which there were marginally significant results in one computer section, but overall, the outcome was without great interest".



### ***Confronting Uri Geller***

*Ben Harris*

It was quite a thrill to be invited to appear on Australia's hard-hitting current affairs program, "Willesee", to confront self-proclaimed psychic, Uri Geller. (*The program was broadcast as part of "Willesee" on the 9 Network on November 6, 1986.*)

We had come full circle! I had originally approached this program in the late seventies. I was told then, "We have all the proof we need (that he is REAL)". But here we are, many years later, with the tables turned. It happens too often that assistance is called in after the horse has bolted.

I was briefed. It was a set-up. I was to play the part of "Chris Norris, acclaimed psychic". A story was

to be shot with me performing Geller's "hit" tricks and then finish with a request for the people at home to concentrate on their cutlery and broken watches. It was well anticipated that immediately after the show went to air, many people would phone the station claiming "In Home Events".

The sequence was shot and was to go to air the following evening. Immediately after this, we were to tape an interview with host, Mike Willesee, Uri Geller and myself. Mike was basically to interview Uri and then turn to me for comment. Unfortunately, I was told that Mike "likes to play his cards close to his chest". This meant that I could not obtain the list of questions or even the direction of inquiry for the interview. This made mental preparation all the more difficult.

Security had been tight, but not as secure as we'd have liked. An opposition show managed to hit on the story, and decided to move in. They began to 'promo' a Geller sequence to entice viewers to watch their show on the following night. Our plans fell to the side. The satellite hook-up to Geller in London was brought forward to the following morning. This meant that both segments would have to 'air' together and not one night after the other. Sadly, we could not test our In Home theory and then confront Geller with the details.

Mike and I sat in the studio as the cameras whizzed about lining up their shots. There was plenty of info bouncing both ways off the satellite as Geller was being wired for sound. Mike had made a drawing of a simple object and placed this on the table. The outlines of its secret contents were obvious. I asked Mike to place it in his pocket.

#### **The broadcast proceeded as follows:**

Mike Willesee: "Geller's critics say that he is nothing more than a magician. But he claims to have psychic powers and it seems that plenty of people are prepared to believe him. Mining companies are now paying him big money to help them find gold, diamonds and other minerals. Uri Geller is now promoting his psychic talents in a book called "The Geller Effect". Before we talk with him, here's an experiment we tried to see just how easy it is to make people believe in trickery. Peter Wilkinson took a magician along to a Sydney club and pretended he was a psychic."

[Here, my segment was shown. It involved my working for a group of about 30, performing Geller's big tricks. I did the drawing reproduction experiment, moved the pointer on a compass and caused borrowed keys and spoons to bend and break in people's hands. The participants were interviewed after the event and

the most common comment was "I used to be a skeptic, but seeing is believing!"]

Advertising break.

MW: "Well, whether he is a psychic or a magician, Uri Geller hopes to cash in on his reputation again with a new book. We arranged an interview with him in London and we asked our local magician, Ben Harris, to sit in. Mr Geller, thanks for your time. You've been largely out of the public eye for about ten years now, what are you trying to do with this new book, 'The Geller Effect'?"

Uri Geller: "Um, basically I wrote the book because I was asked to write it. I actually came to England to retire, and enjoy life. And er, actually there was a story about me in the Sunday Times a year and a half ago, and suddenly publishers were, er, calling me."

MW: "How do you feel professing you have these great skills, but always having your credibility questioned?"

UG: "Look Mike, what can I do? I'm er ... you know, since I came out of Israel seventeen years ago I've been knocked. I've been called a fraud, a charlatan, a con-man. Um, my gosh, I've also been called a miracle-man, eh, eh, a messiah and so on. I ... I know one thing. Many years ago it hurt me and I was angered and sad at the controversy around me. Then, I learnt that it's advantageous for me. It sells books, it made me famous, it made me very rich and I just, quite enjoy it, in a way."

[The psychological impressions from these comments to the believers are "I'm helpless (innocent) and I'm always down-trodden. But don't forget I'm also called a 'messiah'." This is Uri again trying to give his case a 'Jesus 'feel.]

MW: "What puzzles me, and has puzzled me for a lot of years, is why you don't prove your skills. Establish it as a science."

UG: "Well Mike, the book, 'The Geller Effect' if I may plug it, this is it (hope you don't edit it out) explains why."

MW: "You should already know!"

UG: "Hah, hah, I do. Ah but, to make it short, why I don't prove myself is very simple."

[Here, Uri cops out and then happily admits that he has not scientifically proven himself. Let's hope that he remembers this admission!]

UG: "Ten years ago I wanted to prove myself, because,

I thought, if I prove myself I will, em, go down in history. I was young, naive. Then I went to Stanford Institute, I went to Kent State University, I went to London University. I mean, I can go on and on and on. And every time I did an experiment that I thought was foolproof, was always knocked. And people said 'He duped you, he fooled you, there was a hole, there was a laser beam, there was a bug in his teeth'. And that's when I saw I'm going nowhere with science. And you mark my words, Mike, the only way I can prove myself is going to be a show business stunt. For instance, I'm thinking of now, stopping Big Ben. And I will do it. If I won't get permission by the British authorities, I mean, I will go to Paris and do something on the Eiffel Tower. But only such an event will prove finally that psychic abilities do exist."

MW: "One of your best tricks is having somebody sketch something very simple..."

UG: "Yes."

MW: "...and then you can reproduce that or describe it."

UG: "Yes."

MW: "I have done a very simple sketch, do you want to try that?"

UG: "Most likely, I will fail. But at the end of the show, I will draw what I am getting from you. If it's wrong, you're not going to punish me are you?"

MW: "It's not a question of punishment."

[Uri is suggesting it was due to his naivety that he originally wanted to prove himself. Now that he is much more mature, for some odd reason it does not seem as important. He runs off the names of the various institutions in order to establish a psychological authority over the viewers. The tests that were run in these places have been found to be seriously flawed. In fact, Targ and Puthoff from the Stanford Research Institute - now Stanford International - have now claimed that they knew Geller was cheating and that they wanted to study his methods.

Notice that he is trying to keep things in his arena. That is, he wants to do a public stunt in an attempt to prove himself as he'll have control over such an event. He cannot prove himself in a lab if the controls are tight. By the way, I'm sure he'll claim credit next time Big Ben does stop for whatever natural reason.

Notice also that he was answering in the affirmative each time Mike referred to one of his demonstrations being a 'trick'. I think, after all these years, Geller is becoming aware of the fact that the game is almost over. His fighting spirit is dwindling. But, millions of dollars can do that to you!]

UG: "It is a very simple drawing, right?"

MW: "Yes, a very simple drawing."

UG: [Knowing that I'm in the studio due to the pre-tape access] "Okay, and no-one told you what to draw ... you drew it alone."

MW: "No-one has even seen this."

[Uri was fishing. He had to establish if I had given a special design to Mike, something that was different to the standard type of sketches he normally gets. Now that he was convinced that Mike's sketch was 'clear' he felt confident that he could bluff it out, as we shall see.]

UG: "Fantastic ... if it works, great!"

MW: "Alright."

[Uri picks up pad and pen and starts drawing as the interview continues.]

UG: "Now there are skeptics and there are skeptics. Um, I believe there is a gentleman in your studio. In fact, telepathically I can see maybe he has a beard even, and a blue jacket. Am I right or not?"

MW: "Let's have a look."



Ben Harris

**"You have been caught many times, Uri!"**

[Camera pans to me. Yes, I do have a beard and my jacket is dark with flecks of all colours including blue. The wonders of a two-way satellite!]

UG: "Ah, there is a beard!"

[Don't act so surprised, Uri! You saw it telepathically, remember!]

Ben Harris: "Hello Uri, it's a pleasure to speak to you after all these years."

UG: "Ah, I was right!"

[Uri's first success to the people at home!]

BH: "The camera did zoom in a little bit earlier on, I believe."

UG: "Yeah, well ah, I was not in the studio. I was asked to stay outside, to sit outside here."

[Something that could not be proved, then and there to the people at home.]

BH: "I just want to make a point here. Doing something like stopping Big Ben, etc, that doesn't prove a thing. These things can be arranged. I mean, you can always have a secret assistant, and it's been known for years that you have Shipi with you..."

UG: "YES"

BH: "... and it's been rumoured that he peeks in the envelopes, etc. I use the same techniques that you use, I learnt from watching you."

UG: "So, what are you telling me?"

BH: "I am telling you that I use your techniques [to perform the effects that the viewers have already seen at home, a few minutes before]. They are magic tricks and not psychic. And that you are a wonderful performer, you are a brilliant magician, however, you are not psychic."

UG: "If you don't believe I'm psychic and want to believe

that I am a magician, that's OK with me too!"

MW: "Uri, how are you going with that drawing?"

UG: "Ah, to be very honest with you, and I am honest at this point ... [There's an admission for you] ... I'm not getting it very clearly. If it was clear, I would say, 'Look, this is what I got!'"

[Uri is in old form here. Preparing us for a failure and shielding this behind a supposed veil of honesty. Thus, if he fails, that is supposed to convey that he must be genuine as he is being supposedly honest.]

UG: "But it's not coming clearly."

[How come? My beard and jacket came in a flash! Oh, but that was Uri's controlled conditions. This is ours!]

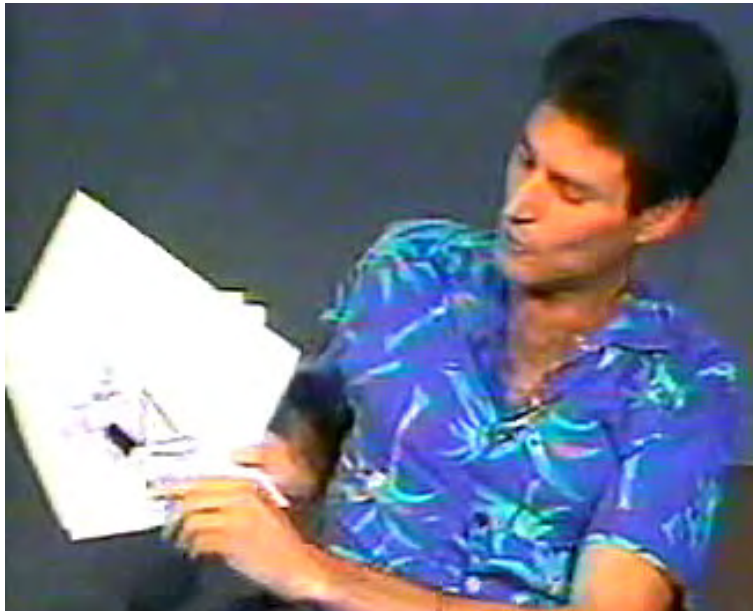
UG: "I drew something that appeared in my mind. That er, had a base and a triangular shape above it. But that's as far as it came. And ah, that's it."

[Notice that Uri claims, "that's it". Yet in a moment you'll encounter him trying to introduce other sketches into play to attempt a 'hit'.]

MW: "Well, I went all circles, so we ... I drew a simple round face."

UG: [Here it comes] "May I show what I got. First of all I got a boat and that was the first impression. Then I got two circles and something above it. That was my second impression. But it didn't materialise."

[Yes, Uri did a boat, two circles, a triangle and some other wiggly lines. Notice how he is trying to imply that he 'hit' on the circles. Note carefully how he originally announced one sketch, admitted a miss and then gave himself a second attempt. However, we had control over this experiment.]



Uri Geller

BH: "I noticed you using a technique there, where you did a basic drawing and several side pieces. A couple of circles, a

triangle, etc. That's your technique for covering yourself to claim a partial success."

UG: "Oh no, c'mon Ben! You know, Ben, you sound like a real nice man. Because in my case, it's unusual to have a magician, such a nice, a tender, a soft magician. There are no techniques Ben! Come on, at the end of the day, if I was using tricks and did have chemicals, or sleight of hand, or bugs in my teeth or peeking into envelopes I would have been caught a thousand times before!"

BH: "You have been caught many times, Uri!"

[At this stage, Uri is getting a little hot under the collar. He decides to turn the tables on us by regaining control.]

UG: "Do I have 30 seconds to do an experiment with the people at home or not?"

MW: "Yes, we do."

[Damn it. I realised that Uri was going to do the In Home experiment. We'd have had him on this if the entire episode had gone as planned. However, due to the previous security leak, our In Home experiment had not gone to air. We were wanting to prove, as has been done before, that the In Home experience can be initiated, with the resulting telephone calls, by a non-psychic. I sat powerless.]

UG: " OK, even if it's taped, it doesn't matter. You people at home, you go and get your broken watches and broken house appliances and with ... just even if I'm not on air ... for 30 seconds, believe that they will

start working. That your broken watches will start ticking. Believe that spoons and keys will bend. And if anything does happen to you, and you are not lying, you are telling the truth, call Mike Willesee and write in your response. Mike, you're going to be shocked how many people will succeed in bending spoons. And, you will, all the skeptics will say that they're all making it up or lying, and that, you will to decide. Because things are

going to happen in people's homes when this show is going to be televised!"

BH: "Things will happen in peoples' homes when this is televised, Uri. Because the watch trick, the bending trick in peoples' homes is a natural occurrence! If people take their cutlery, they are going to find that there are kinks and that there are bends. The same with keys. Nobody, before you came along Uri, gave us a reason to consider these everyday, natural bends."

[At this point, Geller sat, almost in a state of shock. The nail had been hit upon the head. His brain searched for a logical reply. Nothing came but an emotional, heated outburst and the termination of the interview. He sat, still thinking and furious. I added:]

BH: "It's brilliant. It's a brilliant stroke on your part. But, it's a trick, it's not psychic!"

UG: "That is not a trick! [Heatedly] And you people at home, exactly do what I said. Believe, for 30 seconds, that your watches will start ticking; watches that you know that your watchmaker said will never work. Or spoons that you are sure that are straight. You are going to experience this phenomena because this does exist. Metal bending does exist!"

BH: "It will happen, yes."

MW: "OK."

UG: "Mike, thanks for the interview."

MW: "Uri, it's been very good to talk with you."

UG: "Thanks Ben."

BH: "Thanks Uri."

The whole program took up well over half the program's airtime. It was national, prime-time. Thus good exposure was received.

Unfortunately, Geller did manage to come across as being partially successful. This was due to his clever twisting of the conditions to suit himself. He failed our simple test.

The following day, several hundred phone calls came into the Willesee offices. This was a great deal less than expected and definitely less than on Geller's previous appearances on Australian television. [A full analysis of the "In Home" effect can be found in the author's book, *Gellerism Revealed*.]

I was quite surprised to find people commenting about town that they believed friends and relatives caused bent spoons in the homes. Practical joking combined with the naturally introduced bends. A volatile combination for believers!

All around, the effort was a success. Geller terminated the interview when it was getting hot! I think he clearly felt the pressure.

Another story is in the pipeline. For security reasons though, it cannot be revealed at present. Hopefully though, you'll read about it in the not too distant future.

Ben Harris is a 27-year old "underground man". In layman's terms, he is one of those who 'invents' the magic tricks that magicians use in performance. He has written over 14 books and in 1986 delivered in excess of 50 lectures around the world on 'new-magic' and the secrets behind 'Gellerism'. He is the author of "Gellerism Revealed".

## BOOK REVIEW

### "The Geller Effect"

by Uri Geller & Guy Playfair

Ben Harris

While in London in October '86, I managed to read this new Geller book. I didn't buy it, but managed to arrange a copy as a birthday gift (teleport via friendly psychics). The book, which looks impressive with lots of photos showing Geller with some pretty important people, is really quite a farce. It is replete with claims that cannot be proved and lots of little and childish jabs at the skeptics.

Of the clever points, which can be counted on the fingers of one hand, the highlight is the quote printed on the back cover of the paper sleeve. It reads: "People always used to ask me, 'If you're so psychic, why aren't you a millionaire?'" This is real clever, because it's actually true. People have always levelled this criticism on the psychics. Well, Geller IS a millionaire. The psychology is brilliant. If he is a millionaire, then we are subliminally forced to accept that he IS psychic! A lovely touch! However, this is the most impressive piece in the book.

The book is divided into three sections - Parts 1 and 3 are by Playfair, the second is by Geller himself.

Playfair plays his part well. *He* is already a believer, although he comes on as a skeptic. It's a common trap. He believes, and probably quite genuinely, that he could detect a trick if Geller was to use one. Unfortunately, this very attitude traps the observer unless he is specifically trained in detection of psychic fraud.

Even a magician can be fooled by a clever psychic using tricks. It takes a magician with a very special understanding of this sphere to catch a trickster at work. That's why Geller fooled the magicians he mentions in the book. They were good competent magicians, but NOT specialists in this field.

Right from the beginning of the book, Playfair implies that he is a good observer. Let's have a close look and see just how clever he thinks he is.

Here's a quote from Playfair just prior to Geller bending a spoon: "He was not wearing a watch, I noticed, or a ring, or a belt, and the copper bracelet on his right arm was well beyond the reach of the end of the spoon. The more obvious ways of spoon bending by sleight of hand were thus ruled out." See, he misses the point. None of the psychics, especially Geller, require any of those items for the bending trick. It's just not required! But Playfair is implying that sleight



of hand is ruled out due to their absence. He is wrong.

As it turns out, Geller did bend the spoon for Playfair. He was sitting on his exercise bike when the feat took place. Now, there is a point of leverage for you. (Not that Geller would have needed it for the small spoon used in this demonstration.) Note how Playfair failed to acknowledge this bike as a possible tool for deception.

Next, Playfair participates in a telepathic experiment. He claims to have seen magicians performing the same type of trick and decides to guard against pencil reading. "I held my notebook parallel to my chest and made several movements with my pen that bore no relation to what I drew, adding a few scratches with my thumbnail for good measure. That, I reckoned, would make it difficult for him to guess what I was drawing by watching the top of my pen or by listening to the sounds it made on the paper. What I eventually drew, after Uri had become rather impatient and asked me to hurry up, was a very small head with a three-pointed crown on it."

Now this is all a little confusing. Playfair first tells us that he did the extra movements and sound effects to conceal what he drew, and then adds "What I eventually drew...". And, he "eventually drew" only after Geller had become impatient. Sounds as if Uri had everything under HIS control as usual. As it turns out, Geller drew a cat with a head and body. Playfair did see some similarities and scored it a success. Yes, Geller's pencil reading was partially successful here.

Playfair sums up the two experiments by saying "A spoon had bent (upwards incidentally) and a drawing had been at least partially reproduced without any obvious normal methods being used. Nor had he used any of the magicians' tricks that are just as obvious to somebody who knows what to look for."

Well, Mr Playfair, you were fooled by these very tricks. Maybe they're not quite as obvious as you'd like them to be!

So, Mr Playfair turns out to be a weak observer due to his own misplaced confidence in his abilities as an observer.

The second part of the book is written by Geller. He supplies the details of the times he spent in Mexico and jetting around the world mixing with the jet set. It seems to have been what Uri really wanted to achieve.

His apparent exploits with the CIA are mentioned. But, it turns out that his intelligence work is commissioned by individuals and always unofficially. Naturally, no-one wants to be identified. The fiction rolls on.

It's in this section of the book where it really becomes obvious how dangerous people like Geller

can be. Take the following dialogue for example:

This is just after Uri had performed his standard drawing reproduction. This time, the victim is Henry Kissinger.

Says Uri, "Kissinger went a little pale." "What else did you get from my mind?" Kissinger supposedly says. "Oh, I'd better not talk about that here," Geller replies.

Now, whether it actually went like this, no-one can say. But if it did, and Kissinger was really concerned, it just goes to show that people like Geller are not harmless. Millions of dollars have been wasted on researching psychic phenomena directly due to such interludes.

Shrewd operators like Geller can unsettle and mislead the minds of the most powerful men. The resulting irrational thoughts and actions can be very dangerous. As someone said, not so long ago, "I hope that at the moment of truth, Jean Dixon doesn't have her finger on the button!"

This second chapter continues with more of Geller's tales involving psychic detection, inventions, and computer magic. Yes, Uri has been fooling some of the big computer companies by demonstrating his abilities to alter and erase computer disks. Again, this is nothing more than a magic trick that can be performed by any competent magician. However, it fools the scientists and technicians. Although these writings by Geller are not as airy-fairy as his other works, they are still fantasy.

Careful reading will indicate that Geller actually admits (in a roundabout fashion) that he is a magician! You see, magicians have certain rules that they must adhere to in order to create their illusions. Geller is constantly referring to these very same rules, although shrouding them beneath various excuses. Geller applies them at exactly the same time and for exactly the same reasons that a magician must. There is no other reason for him to do this except to conceal his trickery!

In the final section of the book, Playfair returns again with his defences up. In fact, the entire book is very defensive. Geller claims that he doesn't care about the controversy or what people think, yet this book seems to convey the exact opposite, contrary to the comments put forward. Take the book in toto and it's one big defence job.

Playfair rushes along crucifying the skeptics, the magicians and almost anyone who has questioned the Geller myth.

Playfair ends: "The bent spoons may be locked away in filing cabinets. The face [Geller's] may have faded from the screens. But the subversive idea has remained buried in the collective subconscious: *things are not what we have been taught they are.* [Emphasis in

the original.]

Sure, Guy, maybe in your dream-world.

Editor's note: Ben Harris is the author of "Gellerism Revealed" which describes the techniques used to bend spoons and keys, start watches, etc.

## Vol 7 No 2 - 1987

### Fallible Futures

We've all read them - those predictions for the year ahead that regularly turn up in the popular press at the beginning of a new year. We've read them, sniggered or been impressed according to our lights, and promptly forgotten them.

Forgotten them, that is, unless you happen to be a Skeptic.

At the beginning of 1986, the national committee of Australian Skeptics circulated a copy of an article published in the Australasian Post (January 9, 1986). It was an entertaining little piece (to their credit, the Post did give it the by-line of "Just For Fun") in which "internationally famous clairvoyant" Tom Wards made predictions of events to occur in each state during 1986.

In this article, we won't be looking at every state - endless repetition of the same results can be a little tedious - however, anyone is welcome to ask for a copy of Mr Wards' predictions for 1986 so they can check for themselves how well he did in their region. Rather, we will look at a number of areas (Queensland, Western Australia and the ACT) for his 1986 predictions, and, as an addendum, we will see how well he has done in his 1987 predictions so far.

But before we launch into our quest for the accuracy of Mr Wards' 1986 predictions, let's go back a space. At the beginning of 1985, Mr Wards made a number of predictions for that year. These were reviewed in an article which appeared in the Sunday Press of December 22, 1985. Most of his predictions could have been made by anyone with a reasonable awareness of world events, and some were well off beam - those were the ones detailing a particular event. For example, he predicted that James Cagney would die during 1985 - he didn't! Mr Wards, according to this article, is dismissive of the criticisms put forward by groups like the Australian Skeptics. He says "if we [seers] were 100% right, we would be inhuman" and maintains he is 60 to 70% accurate.

### Queensland

Anne Wheeler of the Queensland committee of AS said she "resolved to pick up the gauntlet. I decided to monitor the predictions for my home state of Queensland. They were given in a fairly hodge-podge way, so I tabulated them into a better order, and kept a careful watch on the news media. On the premise that lots of heads are better than one, I went through the predictions with the Queensland committee about half way through the year to make sure I hadn't missed anything. Then, on the further premise that even more heads are better than lots, I went through them again with other members of the Queensland Skeptics at a meeting in February 1987.

"So, here are Tom Wards' predictions together with our comments, and you can judge for yourselves. Remember, they refer to Queensland for 1986 - this is one time when near enough is not good enough. So a similar event occurring over the border at Tweed Heads in February 1987 is not a 'hit'."

**1. Many strikes in Queensland and the whole state will be brought to a standstill. This could force the Premier to resign and bring a change of government.** There weren't, it wasn't and he didn't.

**2. More oil will be found near Roma.** There are oilfields at Roma, so finding 'more' there is a reasonable supposition.

**3. A spate of people disappearing or going missing.** People do go missing all the time, but there was no report of a spate of them doing it.

**4. A prominent businessman will be arrested for growing marijuana in north east Queensland.** Perhaps he was so prominent that it was all hushed up?!

**5. Masses of overseas money will start buying up Queensland properties.** Highly likely - it's very nice here in Queensland. In any case, this is hardly a new phenomenon.

**6. Chinese consortium will purchase one of Queensland's oldest hotels.** Quite possible, but we haven't heard about it.

**7. Many changes ahead in this [1986] year and upsets with federal and state leaders at loggerheads.** I could have predicted this.

**8. A man thought to be Lord Lucan, the missing British peer wanted by Scotland Yard for questioning about the murder of his children's nanny some 10 years ago, will be arrested in the Queensland outback.** At last, a detailed (well, fairly detailed) prediction. Unfortunately for Tom, a "miss"!

**9. Victorian couple lost in a bush walk near Cairns.** Depends on how you read "lost" - I can get lost driving around Brisbane. There were no reports of any Victorians being permanently lost in the Cairns



area.

**10. There will be good warm weather and high temperatures in January and February 1986.** In Queensland! In summer! There was, but noone was surprised.

**11. Brisbane will see a large robbery take place from a major banking group in April or May. Hostages taken but will be freed within a matter of hours.** Another fairly detailed prediction and another miss.

**12. About four teenage murders will have the police baffled then in October or November a major breakthrough and two people will be arrested.** Missed again.

**13. Late in December a large opal will be found also a very large sapphire at the town of Sapphire.** Define "large". Nothing of a newsworthy size was reported.

**14. Troops will be brought in to break strikes and special acts will be evoked later on in the year.** A miss, I'm afraid - sounds quite exciting.

**15. Bush fires late in 1986.** There always are.

**16. A Japanese firm will open a big assembly plant for their products late in 1986.** A final miss.

### Canberra

Canberra Skeptics' secretary, William Grey, reports that Tom Wards' predictions for the ACT in 1986 were disappointing.

Mr Wards predicted there would be speculation that the Prime Minister would offer the post of Governor-General to Prince Charles. There wasn't.

He predicted there would be speculation that the Prince and his Princess would decide to come here for from three to seven years. Not a murmur.

Prince Charles and Princess Diana, he predicted, would come to Australia to live anyway, as the Prince does seem to have problems with his father the Duke. They didn't. Perhaps Mr Wards meant a different prince in a different year who also didn't come to Australia.

January and February in the ACT, he said, would be very warm. In fact temperatures were two degrees below average in January and one degree below average in February. Mr Wards should stick to predicting warm weather in Queensland.

The national capital, he predicted, would miss out on most of the rain that the other states would get. Canberra missed out on all the rain that fell somewhere else. It always does.

Mr Hawke's popularity, he predicted, would wane in January and February. In fact, the approval rating of the PM was fairly buoyant in these months (62 and 55%). The bad months for Hawke's popularity were September (43), October (44) and December (42).

In the event of supply being blocked, Hawke would take the country to the polls, with a good chance of winning. Being a conditional prediction with an unsatisfied antecedent, this was vacuously true.

Overall, five of Wards' seven predictions were dead wrong, and two (Canberra's rain and Hawke's election) were vacuously true. Total score: zero.

### Western Australia

The WA committee of Australian Skeptics contacted the ABC Radio news team for their faithful Australasian Post of January 8 (only this time not as "Just for Fun", but in an 8-page liftout titled "Post's Prophecies - Read what the experts say about Love, Health, Politics, the Economy, and the Weather, in the New Year"), his predictions are full of "we could see" and "I feel that", as well as far fewer predictions tied to a particular time. Maybe 1987 was a harder year to predict than most, or maybe Mr Wards was a little peeved by the Doubting Thomases of the previous year.

Of those predictions which can be pinned down, Mr Wards is still showing his same skill. For instance, "The Prime Minister could call an election in March or April" is now proved false, as is "I feel that there will be a run by Andrew Peacock as Leader of the Opposition, and he could easily beat the Hawke Government".

In the same vein, we have "I feel that the Premier, Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, could resign early in the year, with Canberra in mind". Maybe Mr Wards was reading minds rather than events.

Events to look forward to are a "major accident" at the Adelaide Grand Prix "in which two people could be killed", an "airport disaster" in New South Wales (this one is definite - no "feels" or "could be" about it), Malcolm Fraser will sell Nareen, the WA Premier will call in the army to quell riots, and Tasmania "could do well by 1997".

Predictions like this really don't hurt anyone, and perhaps they do make good newspaper copy (or fillers), even if they are just for fun. But claims like Tom Wards' 60-70% accuracy should be checked, as we are sure Mr Wards would agree that accuracy in all things is important.

And before we finish, we almost forgot. Tom did make three predictions for the Americas Cup: "I feel that there will be a tragedy involving one boat" (miss), "I feel that the Australian and New Zealand boats will do well" (no second prizes - miss) and "Terrorists could be present during the Cup races".

Predictable, isn't it.



### *The Nascence of a Nugatory Nutter*

Harry Edwards

It would seem that the sole criterion necessary to qualify as a psychic is self-nomination.

An unabashed scpetic, with the tendency towards the maverick, my inclination to prove the point that anyone who aspired to the revered and exalted position of "acclaimed" psychic could do so was precipitated by the National Committee of Australian Skeptics.

On two occassions my name had been omitted from the minutes of committee meetings at which I had been present. The minutes recorded some profound (or inane) comments against my name, and committee members present recall hearing my voice.

With evidence such as this, corroborated by the least credulous group in Australia, I concluded that (a) I am capable of invisibility, (b) astral travel is a reality, (c) telepathy up to 30km is possible, and (d) that my dormant paranormal powers have awakened.

Elated by this miraculous metamorphosis, and eager to establish myself in the world of the occult, I checked my natal horoscope, consulted the tarot cards, scotch taped an amethyst over my third eye and breathed heavily on my crystal ball.

As the aromatic gray cloud of tobacco smoke dispelled, a copy of *The Sun* (Sydney) dated February 24, 1987, materialised disclosing a full page devoted to one Rosemary Brown, an English psychic who claimed that she had been receiving dictation from the spirit of John Lennon over the past two years, and had written seven songs at his behest. She further claimed to have been in touch with most famous and long dead composers, as well as Einstein and George Bernard Shaw.

The concluding paragraph, however, blurred red before my eyes - "no-one has proved me wrong"!

Here was a golden challenge for my psycho-skeptic-schizophrenia to elevate me in the eyes of the credulous and at the same time strike a blow in the name of rationality.

Cognizant of the defamation laws which preclude one from calling a liar a liar, I concocted a letter to the editor of *The Sun* over the name "psychic" Harry Edwards, in an endeavour to discredit the outlandish claims with an equally absurd albeit more plausible postulation:

"Dear Sir,

I refer to the article on London psychic Rosemary Brown, and her claim to have written songs dictated to her by the spirit of John Lennon.

Specifically, she claims that contact with him has been in the last two years; that a conversation with Lennon took place in the presence of your correspondent; and that nobody has yet proved her wrong.

That is just about to change.

I too am psychic, but do not advertise my powers. John Lennon first contacted me at I am on February 1, 1981.

Almost translucent, thin, dishevelled and badly in need of a shave, he appeared before me and explained that he was waiting to be picked up by a UFO spirit transport to be taken to Octavia, a small planet on the far side of Pluto where the spirits of departed musicians dwell.

Octavia's orbit is such that it is only visible from Earth between February 21 to 23 once every three years, and only then is communication possible subject to ionospheric conditions.

In view of this and Rosemary Brown's claim that the dictation took place in the last two years, it could not possibly have been with John Lennon. Further, conversation as we know it is not possible due to the time lapse; it takes approximately six hours for thoughts to reach Octavia and six more to get a response. A series of questions must be put, therefore, and the answers, usually grossly distorted, come back twelve hours later.

Conditions being exceptionally favourable last night, I addressed a series of questions to John Lennon and read him the article. His response came through at 5am this morning.

He said "I do not know, nor have I contacted a Rosemary Brown. I no longer compose music or write lyrics". He also added that he was learning to play the harp, and had teamed up with Elvis Presley, now an accomplished flautist, and both hoped to be chosen for an angels choir in the process of being formed to herald the second coming of the Messiah.

The coming, by the way, is still in the committee planning stage.

There's your proof - now try and prove me wrong!"

The letter was not published; but instead, an interview with a *Sun* reporter ensued in which I embellished my story with concomitant flights of fancy: my ability to communicate with the spirit world had manifested itself after I had received a heavy radio frequency discharge between the eyes; a convoluted pseudoscientific explanation of how my brain had been re-arranged; and further claims of contact with Einstein, Locke, Hume, Plato, Bertrand Russell and other departed luminaries, now resident on Zetetica, Philos, Thestos, Dioxas and Dirunas far out in space. My vivid description of the invisible UFO transport hovering over my patio into which John Lennon had

Vol 7 No 3 - 1987

levitated would have made Von Daniken blush with envy!

The reporter demurely recorded all this nonsense, part of which appeared with a photograph of "psychic" Harry Edwards in the March 11 edition of *The Sun*.

Further publicity was in the offing, when the Willesee program, eager to outdo Rosemary Brown's claims, contacted me to appear in a TV interview at which I would communicate with selected spirits.

Sensing that this section of the media was becoming more inclined to view claims of the paranormal more objectively, I declined, confessing that the whole thing was a fabrication, and that had my original letter been published, any thinking person would have perceived its intent - to discredit an outlandish claim with satire.

*People* magazine, however, was another matter.

Fed on a diet of John Pinkney's unperceptive pabulum, its readers have been conditioned to accept anything written on the paranormal as inviolable, no matter how ludicrous, inane or far fetched.

Prior to an interview arranged for April 1 (significant?), I was asked to contact the spirits of some well known film stars and pop idols.

This assignment was dutifully carried out by the simple expedient of jotting down a few comments under each of the nominees' names, expressing some pragmatic opinions of a retrospective and recriminative nature.

Thus, Rock Hudson for example was ashamed of himself, regretted the legacy he had left behind, and advised youth against homosexuality, this being typical of the messages passed on by mediums supposedly in contact with the spirits of the dead.

On May 18, the hoax appeared as a three page spread in *People* under the heading "Harry's Spirited Chats".

Credit where credit is due, however. The young female reporter who covered the story was astute, observant and perceptive, and although unable to determine whether or not she was having one of her legs pulled, was reticent (or too polite) to call my bluff.

Conscious of the old journo's maxim, "Never let the facts spoil a good story", perhaps she didn't really care, and therein lays the sceptic's lament. While the mystical may make good entertaining reading, it does nothing to encourage a rational view of the world; a lamentable situation of concern to all thinking people, and an indictment of some sections of the print media with a propensity to propagate uncritical accounts of the paranormal.

### **Shock! Horror! Australian psychic fails to find Colossus**

July 6, 1987 was the highpoint of Adelaide 'psychic' Ann Dankbaar's year, as on this day the newspapers of Australia credited her with discovering the Colossus of Rhodes, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Unfortunately for Mrs Dankbaar and psychic-supporters throughout the world, the jubilation was not to continue for very long, and the discovery of the Colossus was soon to be referred to as "one of the Seven Blunders of the World".

The story began on January 2 of this year, when the *Adelaide Advertiser* ran a front page story headlined "I've found the Colossus of Rhodes, says psychic - Adelaide woman seeks bounty worth millions". Mrs Dankbaar claimed she made the discovery while holidaying in the Aegean islands in March 1985. However, the first "official dive" to the sunken statue, according to the story, was not made until October 1986.

Mrs Dankbaar said that before her 1985 visit to Greece, she had never heard of the Colossus, a large statue of the sun god Helios constructed at the entrance to the harbour of Rhodes (Rodos) in the third century BC and supposedly toppled by an earthquake in c.224BC.

Asked by an acquaintance at a dinner party in Rhodes if the Colossus was real or a myth, Mrs Dankbaar replied that it was real and could be found, according to the report. She was later taken out on a police launch and, with her eyes closed and her hand pointing in the direction the boat should go, she claimed to have discovered the site of the statue, 750 metres off shore at a depth of 41 metres. The statue had been "toppled by a tidal wave which she says consumed about 20% of the original landmass of the ancient island".

Mrs Dankbaar said the statue was a bronze shell filled with "manmade bricks". Broken pieces of the statue still remained on the seabed, and the statue had not been salvaged as many thought - some putting the salvage operation as early as 652AD.

She claimed she had been guided to the site by a vision of "three mills" pointing in the right direction, without knowing what the mills were. In fact, they are three windmills on the Rhodes' harbour foreshore - one of the tourist attractions of the island. (Mrs

Dankbaar seems curiously ignorant of the history and attractions of the places she is visiting.)

On returning to Adelaide from another holiday to Greece at the end of 1986, Mrs Dankbaar had informed her solicitors to put in a claim for her to be registered as the official finder of the statue, and therefore due a bounty offered by the Greek government.

### Other claims

Among other statements made at the time, Mrs Dankbaar is described by some of the reports (which appeared in the media throughout Australia) as having worked with Dutch crime authorities assisting with "unsolved cases" (they don't say if they were unsolved before or after her efforts).

She also is reported as saying "She 'knew' a large part of the Colossus was buried on the spot she had pinpointed. But, just in case she did not get her just reward, she said she had 'found' two other pieces during the 1985 boat search and had not yet told the authorities where they were located".

She also is reported as having made a prediction at the time of her first visit that it would be two years before anything came to the surface. "Yesterday [January 1, 1987] she said it would be about May before the first bronze was recovered. A reconstruction of a large part of the statue would be achieved by the end of this year.

"She also foresaw she would become 'very wealthy' and said: 'It's about time'."

But perhaps one of the most interesting claims, and certainly the one that most aroused the South Australian branch of Australian Skeptics, was the statement made in the second paragraph of the *Advertiser* story that Mrs Dankbaar had been "acknowledged by the University of Adelaide to have 'very significant paranormal powers'". She claimed to hold a university certificate describing her as having psychic powers after having been tested and achieving results with a probability factor of one in 10,000.

The SA Skeptics immediately issued a challenge to Mrs Dankbaar to prove her psychic powers under scientific conditions, referring to the Skeptics' challenge of \$20,000 offered by patrons Dick Smith and Phillip Adams. State secretary Ron Evans suddenly became a media star in his own right, being interviewed by press and radio across Australia. In fact, many branches of the media seemed more interested in the \$20,000 challenge than Mrs Dankbaar's claims.

"Mrs Dankbaar stands to make a lot of money and we're interested in offering this to prove her claims," Ron Evans was quoted.

Ron also wrote to Mrs Dankbaar's solicitor,

proposing the challenge and asking for details of the "successful" dive to the Colossus in October 1986 and on Mrs Dankbaar's involvement with Dutch crime authorities. Australian Skeptics has not, at time of going to press, received any of the information requested.

The Skeptics' challenge sparked an investigation of Mrs Dankbaar's university endorsement. As reported in *the Skeptic* earlier this year (Vol 7, No 1), it was revealed that the certificate had been issued as a personal reference" by George Lip senior lecturer at the University of Adelaide's Dept of Electrical Engineering. Mr Karolie said Mrs Dankbaar had requested that he issue the reference, and he had "left obliged to give the letter to her", as she had freely given up her time over a period of several months three years ago to be tested. He had known her for about ten years, and his endorsement was issued purely on his own behalf and not that of the university.

"He said Mrs Dankbaar had been planning to travel overseas and wanted something to show universities and other institutions, as a form of introduction to her powers." It was presumably on this overseas trip that Mrs Dankbaar had 'discovered' the site of the Colossus.

Mrs Dankbaar had been Mr Karolie's best subject - he has carried out "electronic-based testing" on about ten people over ten years, only testing those who claim to have some sort of psychic power. She had performed three precognition tests, requiring her to foretell the outcome of random events before they occurred. According to a report in the *Advertiser* (January 6), in two tests she had scored one in 100 against chance, but her "peak result" had been one in 10,000, described by Mr Karolie as "significant" and "very significant" respectively. No details of the tests were given.

Another University of Adelaide researcher, Dr Peter Delin, senior lecturer in the Dept of Psychology, had also tested Mrs Dankbaar, but had not found anything to convince him that she had paranormal powers.

"I have conducted a fairly extensive interaction with Mrs Dankbaar, during which there were marginally significant results in one computer testing section, but overall, the outcome was without great interest," he said.

Mr Karolie felt that perhaps he had hit one of Mrs Dankbaar's peaks with his testing, and that perhaps the tests done by Dr Delin were performed on a bad day for her. "He said there were four sub-branches in extra sensory perception - telepathy, clairvoyancy, precognition and retrocognition - and each required different tests."

There the matter rested for some months.

### Colossal fist

Reports appeared in the press in Australia on June 29, quoting the Reuters news agency and The Sunday Times (which had an exclusive arrangement to publish the story, written by paranormal advocate, Brian Inglis), describing "a secret search" by the Greek government to find remains of the Colossus.

At a press conference, the Greek Marine Minister, Stathis Alexandris, publicised plans to step up a search for remains of the Colossus outside the harbour of Rhodes.

Details revealed at the press conference included "the search owes its start to an extraordinary chance remark" made by Mrs Dankbaar when "she casually told a friend that she knew where the Colossus was lying in the bay". The friend was a Ms Mary Papandreou. This contradicts the earlier reports which said she had been specifically asked whether the Colossus was real or a myth by Mr Paraschos Kaillis, the director of the Rhodes Chamber of Commerce & Industry and the host at a dinner party. "He was aware of Mrs Dankbaar's powers having met the couple [Mrs Dankbaar and her husband] through a mutual friend on a trip to Australia." Mr Kaillis was described in the earlier reports as the Rhodes harbour master.

One of the early reports had said Mrs Dankbaar feared the divers who investigated the site in 1986 were making a claim of their own to having found the statue. The June 29 report said the divers had been friends of Ms Papandreou.

The Greek authorities' investigation had apparently discovered "what seems like a large plinth, on which a statue might have rested, and another large object, which looks like a clenched fist".

Later reports said Greek officials were now saying that a search for smuggled drugs supposedly dumped in the sea had led to the discovery. But Mrs Dankbaar was sticking by her guns, claiming she was the inspiration for the discovery. She "intends to remain on Rhodes for another week to see if she can receive fresh 'readings' on the statue's whereabouts" a report in the Melbourne Age said on July 4. Interestingly, there was no mention of the two extra pieces of the Colossus Mrs Dankbaar was supposed to have found but was keeping secret as insurance "for her just reward.

The story became really big news in Australia with reports published on July 6. *The Sydney Morning Herald* carried a story on the top of its front page, (considered a key position "above the fold" reserved for top stories - see comment this issue). This story was headed "Australian psychic credited with finding

Colossus of Rhodes", and said "The Greek government has found its use of a clairvoyant somewhat embarrassing. When the Poseidon [search vessel] was first sent to the site, the official story was that it was looking for dumped narcotics".

These reports said a fist, 1.86m wide x 1.7m long x 0.93m thick and weighing about one tonne, had been found at a depth of about 52m. The earlier reports had said a depth of 41m, and made much of Mrs Dankbaar's correction of harbour charts which she had said indicated depths 10m too shallow.

Heavily retouched photos of the underwater fist were published.

Mr and Mrs Dankbaar had reportedly been flown to Rhodes by the Greek government from London where they had been staying with Barry Humphries, "a close friend". However, there seems to be some confusion as to whether Mr Dankbaar travelled with her or was in Adelaide fending off reporters. Barry Humphries was quoted as saying "I can't fathom any of it."

Mrs Dankbaar "told the London newspaper *The Sunday Times*: 'I stake my life the Colossus is there'." In view of later findings, we presume this is a wager Mrs Dankbaar would rather forget.

### Vision splendid

The Herald report continued:

"According to Mrs Dankbaar, the statue is lying submerged, broken into several pieces. 'I have seen a foot so big that you can't imagine it,' she said. The other hand has a different shape. It is open.

"The body is enormous. I saw him before he was destroyed. He was beautiful. There is still some bronze left."

"Last Friday, Ms Dankbaar had another revelation. She told *The Sunday Times*: 'I was awake at 5am. I saw the other foot and also heard a scream such as I have never heard before. It was the scream of the sculptor. I will make sure he is never wronged again.'

"The statue's sculptor was a local man called Chares, who committed suicide because he felt his achievement, which took around 12 years to build, was not properly appreciated."

*The Herald* is here catching some of Mrs Dankbaar's style - feet too big to imagine, terrible screams. The story of Chares of Lindos' death is not as clear cut as the newspaper would have one believe. While it does seem possible that he committed suicide, reasons put forward for his death include a mistake made with dimensions of the statue or the ever faithful disappearance of certain funds. Suicide brought on by not being understood artistically is more romantic,

obviously, but not necessarily more truthful.

*The Herald* did add a locally written tail-end to its front page story on the fist. This was that Mrs Dankbaar had first attracted public attention in the late 1970s when she featured in an ABC film and series called "Minds Between". On the programs she used her "psychic powers" to inform members of the audience about their past and present. She also claimed to pass messages to "the other side" - a sort of Doris Dankbaar.

Unfortunately for Mrs Dankbaar, Dr Peter Delin, the researcher quoted in reference to her University of Adelaide "endorsement", had been involved in the program. According to him, "nothing happened in the studio that left people gasping".

Other reports at the same time said archaeologists had examined the fist as soon as it was brought to the dock. "They said it was still too soon to be sure whether it belonged to the Colossus, but there was no question the carving had been done by hand."

The Greek Minister for Culture, ex-actress and political activist Melina Mercouri, was reportedly sceptical of the find being the Colossus. Some put this down to annoyance that her department had not been put in charge of the find instead of the Ministry of Shipping.

Armed sailors were supposed to be guarding the fist, and four navy gunboats patrolling the waters to discourage treasure seekers.

### Whoops!

Suddenly things started to go wrong for Mrs Dankbaar's Colossus.

Mrs Dankbaar criticised Ms Mercouri's doubting attitude, saying "that woman" was trying to ruin her reputation. Ms Mercouri was not the only problem for Mrs Dankbaar.

Reports started coming in of archaeologists' grave doubts of the fist's authenticity - the fist was apparently the handiwork of a modern mechanical digger and not that of an ancient sculptor (a local dock crane's teeth matched the grooves forming the 'fingers' the fist). The stone had apparently been dropped in the harbour during construction work; local dock workers had been chuckling to themselves ever since the stone had been pulled out of the water.

It was revealed that Mr Kaillis, the dinner party host who had questioned Mrs Dankbaar on the Colossus, had insisted she come to Rhodes when he met her in Australia in 1984, and he had persuaded her to accompany him on a sea-search, contradicting earlier statements by Mrs Dankbaar.

To make matters worse, video film taken of the seabed by the "Poseidon" vessel revealed that the bed

is littered with objects, including slabs, amphorae and cannon balls.

Instead of a 2000 year old statue, we now had what was possibly only a one year old hunk of sandstone (early reports had said the stone was limestone). And newspapers were calling it a "colossal error", "colossal blue", "colossal fiasco" and, of course, "one of the Seven Blunders of the World".

Mrs Dankbaar, in one report, was still insisting the Colossus was real. Later she was to say she knew the fist was not genuine the moment she put her hands on it. She claimed she had been "badly used".

Friends of Mrs Dankbaar then came up with the ultimate excuse for her dismal failure: she was not a hoaxer or a fraud at all, she was just suffering from psychic dyslexia!

This little known condition is presumably responsible for Mrs Dankbaar's continued changing of her story (who she told about the Colossus, who organised the search, the location and depth), the misunderstanding of her University of Adelaide certificate, her insistence that the fist was real and then later saying she knew it wasn't as soon as it was raised, her incorrect vision of a reconstruction of the Colossus before the end of the year, etc, etc, etc.

There are also still a number of questions that need answers, such as: when did Mrs Dankbaar first learn about the Colossus (she says not until she went to Rhodes); what is her involvement with Dutch crime authorities solving difficult cases; what happened to the other bits of the Colossus Mrs Dankbaar "sighted" (two seen in 1985 but kept secret, both feet, the other hand, the bronze cladding) or are these to be explained as her dyslexic sighting of the many bits and pieces found on the Rhodes sea-bed; and who paid for her trips (latest reports have her paying for her first trip to Rhodes, and Greek authorities paying for her trip from London this year).

But most importantly, what has become of Mrs Dankbaar since the archaeological find of the century became the non-story of the year.

We haven't heard a peep out of her. We presume she didn't take herself literally when she staked her life on the Colossus. We also presume she hasn't become "Very wealthy" because of the publicity. We would be interested to learn how all of the attention she received has affected her - is she being stormed with requests from people wanting to contact relatives "on the other side". Or have people learned a lesson to be a little more sceptical of claims of the paranormal. After all, the great psychic discovery of the decade just fizzled before our very eyes.



### *The Medium and the Message* *A case study of paranormal reporting*

*The Sydney Morning Herald* prides itself on being one of Australia's "quality" newspapers. Not for it are the "yellow press" techniques employed by the afternoon tabloids to sell more copies with sensational headlines, breathless prose, or "human interest" trivialisations.

Indeed, the *SMH* is the employer of Bob Beale, who this year was awarded the Science Reporter of the Year award by the Australian & New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science and a special award as part of the Australian Skeptics' inaugural journalism awards.

It comes as something of a surprise, therefore, to see the recent emphasis the *SMH* has been apparently giving to paranormal subjects, and from a somewhat less than sceptical stance.

The Colossus of Rhodes/Mrs Dankbaar story is a case in point, and we will look at five stories on this subject published by the paper over a ten day period recently.

On Monday June 29, the *SMH* published a story 19.5cm long (including headline, photo and caption) headed "Australian points divers to Colossus". This reprinted a Reuters news agency story (also carried by other papers) on a press conference in Greece. This began with the line "An Australian clairvoyant has led divers to the possible underwater location of the famed Colossus of Rhodes". The cautious "possible location" is alright, but we only had Mrs Dankbaar's word that she was "clairvoyant". An Adelaide report published earlier this year in fact seemed to indicate otherwise. Overall, this is the sort of story, positioned away from the main news pages, that is soon forgotten and normally deserves to be.

The following Friday, July 3, the *SMH* published a 26.5cm story (all copy, no pictures) headed "Search for Colossus resumes off Rhodes" and written by Herald correspondent David Lazarus. This had a more sceptical tone to it than the previous overseas sourced story, quoting Greek Merchant Marine Minister, Stathis Alexandris, as "sceptical that the Colossus had been found", and emphasising the different views as to who should be credited with the discovery. So far so good - no real complaints; just a light story with almost a humorous edge.

Monday July 6 was a different matter entirely. 73.5cm of copy on the search, with 52.5cm of this on the front page, and on the top of the front page at that!

The headline read: "Australian psychic credited with finding Colossus of Rhodes".

For those not in the journalistic profession, a front page story for a journalist is a credit devoutly to be wished. This is especially true for the quality papers, which do not normally throw away their front pages lightly. Readers should also note that the *SMH* is a "broadsheet" newspaper (twice the size of a 'tabloid', such as the Sydney and Melbourne versions of the *Sun*). This means that the paper has to be folded horizontally when on sale, so that only the top half of the front page is visible. Therefore it is those stories "above the fold" that are mainly responsible for sales of the paper on any particular day, leaving aside stories publicised on newspapers' posters (often the same items).

The *SMH's* Colossus story was just such a story - it had pride of place in that issue. It was also used to promote the paper on one of its posters (the wire-caged headline sheets so beloved of British filmmakers). The headline on the poster read "Aussie psychic gets it right". Thank Heavens the *SMH* is not a sensational newspaper.

Most of this particular story (and all of that part of it published on the front page - which is all most readers would have read) was written by "Margaret Harris and agencies" and concerned Mrs Dankbaar and the Colossal fist. It included a story of Mrs Dankbaar's friends trying to fool her when she claimed to pinpoint the site of the Colossus by boat - they took her out a second time from a different starting point, "but she came up with the same location". There is no source for this claim - it is presented as universal fact, without reference.

The story does include a few "she claims" and "according to", but overall this part of the story is without any qualifying statements concerning Mrs Dankbaar's claimed psychic powers.

Not so an 'envoi' tacked onto the end of the story (page 15) which is locally sourced, written by Peter Fray. Mr Fray gives some background information on Mrs Dankbaar, including the damaging statement that when she appeared on an ABC program on psychic powers, "nothing happened in the studio that left people gasping".

It also recalls the denial by the University of Adelaide that it had issued a "certificate" endorsing her powers, and carries two paragraphs of an interview with Peter Woolcock, president of the South Australian branch of Australian Skeptics. While it is not necessary for any journalist to contact Australian Skeptics or any other sceptical group or individual, Mr Fray should be congratulated for entering a dissenting view backed

up by some concrete information into the story.

On July 7 (Tuesday), the *SMH* published a two column story (total 30cm, including headline and a 14cm photo) headed "Colossal mistake, or one giant fist for mankind". Again written by Herald correspondent David Lazarus, this had Greek officials "cautiously predicting that the legendary Colossus of Rhodes ... had been found" and archaeologists saying "it was still too soon to be sure whether it [a fist] belonged to the Colossus, but there was no question the carving had been done by hand". Mrs Dankbaar was quoted as claiming credit, while officials gave credit to a search for smuggled drugs. Mrs Dankbaar's powers are referred to only in one paragraph (out of five total) and in the photo caption "Harbour authorities and tourists gather around the stone fist ... clairvoyant has claimed credit". Needless to say this story was not carried on the front page.

Finally, on July 8 (Wednesday), we have a 12cm story, published at the bottom of an inside page and headlined "Colossus find turns into a colossal error". This Reuters story reported that the fist had been revealed to be the result of a mechanical digger. Mrs Dankbaar's involvement was limited to "Searchers were led to it by an Australian clairvoyant, Ann Dankbaar, who told friends in Rhodes she knew where the statue was submerged," and "Mrs Dankbaar said today: 'I'm not convinced. I'm still sure it's the Colossus.'"

On July 15, the *SMH* published a letter from Australian Skeptic Harry Edwards (datelined July 7), headed "Colossal non-story". The letter included the query: "If it is not the Colossus, will the Herald run a frontpage story saying 'Australian psychic fails to find Colossus'?" Events between the writing of the letter and its publication showed that the *SMH* did not publish such a story. To make up for it, we have used the suggested headline in this issue. The letter, by the way, was published at the bottom of the letters page, just above the "Vice Regal" column, possibly the least read column in the newspaper.

So much for the *SMH*'s flirtation with Mrs Dankbaar, but not with psychics and the paranormal *per se*.

On July 10, the day before the federal election, the *SMH* asked four different people (or otherwise) what the weather would be like on election day. Consulted were: the supervising meteorologist at the Bureau of Meteorology, a man who can tell the weather by the itch in his nose, the chimpanzees at Taronga Zoo, and "Ellen Kicken, 38, clairvoyant, card reader, numerologist, and self-development therapist". They did not ask (or at least, did not publish) the views of

any politician, electoral officer, policeman, postman, sportsman, man or woman with bunions, motorist intending to wash their car, or anyone with qualifications as valid as Ms Kicken's to predict the weather.

Ms Kicken was depicted in a particularly atmospheric photo, lit from below, deep shadows, hands poised over the Tarot cards, and was quoted as predicting "that tomorrow's weather will be much like the election: sunny at first, then showers, ending with a storm". The accuracy of her election prediction depends on your politics, but for those of our readers not living in Sydney, her weather prediction was wrong.

The *SMH* admitted as much in Column 8 on July 14, although Ms Kicken and her profession were not referred to. Column 8, by the way, is printed almost the length of the front page of the *SMH*, on the right hand side. It is full of queer coincidences, funny names and wry humour. According to the column, the only one to get the prediction right was the man with the itchy nose ("fine warm and cloudless, with a slight breeze"). For the record, the weather in Sydney on that day varied considerably from place to place. The author of this piece can assure you that standing in a line waiting to vote, there were definitely dark clouds in the sky - not a pleasant thought when you have a long wait in front of you.

We could go on with other recent examples of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* toying with the occult, such as the Woronora Yowie (July 27 - "A group of eight young people say they were terrorised at the weekend by an ape-like creature") but most of these are definitely treated tongue in cheek.

No-one would or should object to any newspaper having some fun with lighter stories - a totally serious paper is too sombre and too dry to sell well, and can be extremely boring to work on or read. The *SMH* also has every right to decide what it wants to publish and where it wants to publish it. It has so far largely - but not entirely - ignored the temptation to put pretty girls on page three, but that is its decision and its decision only.

Australian Skeptics is largely made up of people who enjoy a joke they are not all killjoys out to erase all fun from the world, as many concerned at the Skeptics' in-roads into areas considered sacred and uncriticisable are hard to believe.

But in the same way that the *SMH* is free to comment on the actions of others, so its readers and the public at large are free to comment on it, especially when it portrays itself as a "quality" newspaper. The *SMH* was not the only quality newspaper to publish somewhat less than restrained stories on the Colossus and other equally tenuous subjects. It was just that it



gave such prominent coverage to it.

Words such as "responsible, reliable and reputable" are the sorts of terms quality newspapers like to use to describe themselves, but they could easily be supplemented by "ridiculous" if the editors and journalists on quality newspapers are not too careful with the coverage they give to dubious claims, especially in the area of the paranormal and pseudoscience.

Australian Skeptics is a group that believes that fair is fair, and criticism should be meted out honestly and without bias, even if that means criticising the employer of the winner of its journalism award. We hold no brief against the *Sydney Morning Herald* - we do not own shares in other papers, nor are we friends of Rupert Murdoch. But a quality newspaper's reputation is its life-blood, and should not be treated callously or lightly.



## **Channels - are they schizophrenic?**

*Dr Harry Edwards*

To suggest that channels are frauds, hoaxers or charlatans would not be considered unreasonable by any rational person; but to infer that they may be victims of a mental aberration may be seen to be going a little too far.

Before delivering a prognosis, what is a channel?

Channelling is a contemporary word to describe the manifestation of spirit voices through a medium, and is probably better known as spiritualism.

Although its origin dates back to the days when priests and shamen projected their voices from behind oracles and idols to fool most of the people most of the time, the phenomenon (if one presumes to legitimise what I consider to be blatant tomfoolery as genuine) achieved much respect and patronage in the second half of the last century, when serious research was begun to find evidence of a life hereafter. The motivation behind the search was to find a counter to Darwin's theory of the origin of species which had caused a dichotomy in religious beliefs.

Legendary in psychic annals are the names of Margaret and Kate Fox, Madame Blavatsky, Eusapia Palladino, Leonore Piper and Florence Cook; today, most would recognise the names of Edgar Cayce, Doris Stokes and Oral Roberts, the latter claiming access to the supreme spirit itself.

An article in the *Sydney Sun* (10/8/87) reports that psychologists, psychiatrists, bankers and senators are among those who have attended some of Shirley MacLaine's 18 seminars conducted in the past 12 months at \$300 a pop, and that "she is a highly intelligent woman" - a parsimonious compliment in my opinion to pay one who has, based on the figures quoted above, turned over \$5.4 million on a part time lecture circuit propounding a belief in UFOs, channelling, reincarnation and astral travelling.

Despite the fact that all spiritualists subjected to controlled tests over the past 130 years have been shown up as frauds, the 1980s has seen a resurgence of interest and belief particularly in Los Angeles, where there are currently more than 1000 channellers operating.

The modus operandi has remained basically the same - the medium supposedly goes into a trance, then speaks in an altered voice, their utterances varying from the apocalyptic to simplistic philosophies cloaked in verbose and often obscure jargon.

Despite the claim that the revelations come from the spirit world or super intelligences, the information never transcends that which is available from a variety of earthly sources.

Any analysis of the phraseology used discloses the same ambiguity and generalisation employed in cold readings. No information of interest about "the other side" is ever forthcoming, and the medium always claims to be totally ignorant of what was said during the trance - a convenient amnesic ploy exonerating one from responsibility.

As in cold readings, a purpose IS served however - the devotees are told what they WANT to hear. For some, it reinforces religious convictions; and for those who have lost faith in the mainstream religions, it provides a substitute. Others find comfort in simple answers to the age old questions of the purpose and meaning of life, satisfying the need that many people have to believe in something, albeit irrational.

Gone are the days, however, when mediums produced disembodied spirit heads and hands, amorphous bodies, and musical instruments that played themselves; modern channels are only too aware that ectoplasm made of cheesecloth, papier mache and luminous paint, are readily detectable by anyone with half an eye.

The diversity of "controls" (spirits) is limited only by the imagination of the medium, yet strangely, few if any have taken the trouble to invent plausible characters capable of transcending even the most elementary questions regarding their authenticity.

All mediums exhibit a blase acceptance of their

alleged powers to communicate with the dead, yet curiously it never seems to occur to them that this faculty is a pipeline to altruistic fame and fortune. Many do, however, take the opportunity to cash in on their acts quite handsomely. Oral Roberts, for example, recently demonstrated this when, through him, his control asked for and got \$8,000,000!

How times change - a couple of centuries ago anyone claiming to be possessed by spirits would have been burned at the stake!

Immediately apparent to even the least sceptical must be the absence of any evidence offered by channels to corroborate the authenticity of their alleged controls, surely a prerequisite if any credence is to be had in their existence.

A most remarkable feature, however, and one which must intrigue all those who have at some time struggled with mastering a second language, is the apparent ease with which the spirits converse in tongues other than their own, and in some cases languages and dialects nonexistent at the time of their demise.

Leonore Piper's control, for example, was a Frenchman called Mr Phinuit, who spoke no French and could not answer questions when directed to him in his native tongue.

For \$200-350 a session, Rhea Powers will transform herself into a "higher consciousness" by the name of Sanat Kumara, whose universal knowledge obtained many millenia ago will be relayed in Americanese.

Ms J.Z. Knight, for the discount price of \$150, will spiritually metamorphose into Ramtha, a 35,000 year old warrior from mythical Atlantis, who will advise clients on Wall Street investments. A "psychic pin" for punters would produce greater profits, I'm sure. Personally I would be intrigued to know how Ramtha gained his knowledge of the New York Stock Exchange thousands of years before it came into being, and where he learned to speak a non-existent language with an equally non-existent accent.

In Sydney, Cliff Dorian of the Lighthouse Spiritual Centre, speaks with the voice of an entity not even of this world - again in English, an act which I suggest could be enhanced with a touch of Glossolalia!

While amateur theatrics are understandably entertainment and can fool those who wish to be fooled, professional interviewers seem no less credulous.

Richard Neville (Extra Dimensions, Channel 10) interviewed an American channeller, Jach Pursel, who claims, among others as his controls, a contemporary of Jesus, a 16th century Irishman, and Lazaris, described as an entity who has never been a physical being.

Neville evidently didn't think it necessary to first establish the legitimacy of the spirit's claimed identity, and accepted the remarkable aptitude of a first century Jew for contemporary English without question, and likewise saw nothing surprising about a 16th century Irishman's knowledge of modern English despite the fact that he allegedly died when the only language spoken in Ireland at the time was Gaelic!

This naive proclivity to believe without addressing a basic premise was amply demonstrated when I was interviewed by *The Sun* (Sydney) and *People* magazine after I had claimed to be a psychic and in touch with the spirits of the famous dead (see *The Skeptic*, Vol 7, No 2). Neither reporter asked me whether I had spoken to Plato in ancient Greek or where Plato had learned his English.

The secret of this ability to transcend the language barrier would surely be the greatest gift the spirit world has to offer mankind, yet this valuable contribution to better world understanding, peace and happiness never rates a mention by medium, control or the credulous - why is that so?

Spirit voices as we have seen are not a new phenomenon, and require little imagination on the part of a medium. They can be traced back through the ages, particularly in Biblical writings, the most publicised being God dictating the commandments to Moses.

In recent times, the most popular exponent was the late Doris Stokes, whose entertainment career spanned some 44 years. While she claimed never to have been exposed as a fraud, it should be noted that this was probably because she persistently refused to take up the challenge to demonstrate her claimed powers under controlled test conditions. Despite this, sceptics have demonstrated time and again the techniques used, to show that her amazing gift was nothing more than a convincing exhibition of cold reading. Suffice to say at this point, that if a person experiences auditory sensations without external stimulus, it's a condition caused by mental derangement, intoxication or fever, otherwise known as an hallucination.

Likewise, the psychic visions claimed by clairvoyants are, in fact, mental representations of the external, an apparent perception without any corresponding stimulus ... an hallucination.

Similarly, psychics who claim to see future events flashing on a TV screen or with their "third eye" are simply imposing their imagination on a visual stimulus and projecting it on the basis of probability. To claim supernatural powers is self-delusion, a belief in oneself often present in dementia.

On a par with those who receive disembodied visual and auditory messages are those zapped by invisible

rays from a variety of sources, and who claim that they are being persecuted.

During an interview on the Ray Martin Middy Show, requested by Cliff Dorian of the Lighthouse Spiritual Centre ostensibly to challenge and discredit the Australian Skeptics, his partner, "inspirational medium" Joy Atkinson, in an unprovoked outburst, asked Barry Williams "Why are you crucifying us?". In view of the fact that at no time have Barry, myself or the Australian Skeptics done any more than describe the proprietors of the LSC as being no better or worse than any other spiritualist in the past 130 years, the implication inherent in the protest is characteristic of systematised delusions of persecution, otherwise known as paranoia.

Finally, astrology, tarot cards, palmistry, and all the other weird and wonderful divinologies ... what do they have in common? That all are based on the erroneous premise that invisible and undetectable forces act upon us to influence, control and determine our being and destiny, a belief associated with the irrational.

So where does this brief resume of paranormal beliefs lead us, and is there any correlation between those beliefs and a mental aberration?

The temptation is difficult to resist when one considers that hallucination, self-delusion, dementia, paranoia and irrationality are all symptoms of the same disease ... schizophrenia!

Author's note: The "Dr" which prefixes my name is an honorary Doctorate of Divinity purchased for \$15 from a degree mill in the USA - an example of how authority can be accorded those who wish to deceive. It pays to be sceptical!

## **The Death of Tarot**

*Don Laycock*

Tarot cards are dead! Killed in the same way as many other traditional survivals have been killed - by greed and overselling.

The death of Tarot became apparent recently when I found some 15 different Tarot packs going cheap at a Canberra booksale. All of these were distributed and copyrighted by a single firm: US Games Systems, Inc. And all contained introductions and "instructions" by an acknowledged, if not always historically trustworthy, expert on Tarot cards - Stuart R. Kaplan.

It was around 1970 that US Games Systems and Stuart R. Kaplan got together to build a Tarot empire. A third member of the triumvirate was the giant Swiss card manufacturing firm of AG Mueller, though other card-making monopolies like Fournier of Spain, Modiano of Italy, Grimaud of France, and Piatnik of Austria have sometimes joined the alliance.

One of the results has been that even packs that have been around for centuries, such as the Sicilian Tarot, have become part of this pasteboard imperium, and have been 'copyrighted' by US Games Systems.

To understand how this situation arose, a little history is necessary. The ultimate origin of playing-cards in general is still not quite certain, but lies somewhere east of Turkey - probably in the Indo-Iranian area.

However, the first cards that entered Europe, via Italy, in the last third of the 14th century, came from Mamluk, Egypt, with suits of Scimitars, Polo Sticks, Cups and Coins. These suit designs rapidly evolved into the basic 'Latin' suits of Swords, Staves (Wands), Cups and Coins, with subtle but important local variants in Italy, Spain and Portugal. These suits are still in use in traditional Italian and Spanish packs, and are the most usual suits in traditional Tarot packs.

Around 1435, some 60 years after playing cards had become popular in southern Europe, there arose a variant pack with an extra court card, and with 22 Tarot Trumps (the 'Major Arcana' of occultists), representing common medieval and Renaissance themes such as Death and the Devil, Justice and Temperance, the Sun, the Moon, and the Stars. These cards were invented for the game of Tarot, which still survives in Italy, France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. The place of this invention was probably the court of Ferrara in Italy, although the game was popular very early among aristocratic circles in Milan, Bologna and Florence. The origin of Tarot cards, therefore, is no more exotic than the origin of the game of Canasta.

For over 300 years from their invention, Tarot cards



# THE SECOND COMING

All the best from *the Skeptic*, 1986–1990

## Psychics

were assigned no occult significance whatever. In the meantime, ordinary playing-cards developed away from Tarot cards with the introduction of new suit symbols - variants on Hearts, Leaves, Bells, Roses, Acorns and Banners in the German speaking areas, and, from 1480, the French simplification into Spades, Clubs, Hearts and Diamonds. The French system soon conquered the world, because with it went the new technology of reproducing standard sized suit symbols by means of stencils, so that separate woodcuts did not have to be made for each card. Millions of card players around the world today have never seen any playing-cards with suits others than Spades, Clubs, Hearts and Diamonds.

via Asia Minor, until well after ordinary playing cards were established in Europe, and never had any association with Tarot cards before the 20th century.)

Court de Gebelin's book coincided with a Parisian vogue for fortune-telling with ordinary playing-cards, which was successfully exploited by a cartomancer named Alliette, who as 'Eteilia', read the destinies of delighted Parisian ladies with his own set (1783) of colourful picture-cards based on the Tarot - the first of many Tarot packs produced arbitrarily for fortune telling, meditation, or simple money.

The occult fantasy was taken further by the French occultist, Alphonse-Louis Constant (1810-1875), trading as "Eliphas Levi", and this 'ancient' tradition



By the end of the 18th century, the latin suited cards were already so unfamiliar in Paris that Tarot packs like the Marseilles Tarot were looked on as something completely exotic.

Around that time a French writer, Court de Gebelin, concocted a fantastic tale that connected Tarot cards with Egypt and the gypsies. According to the nine completed volumes of his work, *Le Monde primitif*, published between 1773 and 1782, the Tarot trumps derived from the religious murals of some ancient Egyptian temple. With the decline of the Egyptian civilisation, the priests had cunningly copied the murals as a pack of playing-cards, reasoning that their mysteries would survive if disguised as a game, especially if it was a gambling game. The peoples who preserved the cards were supposed to be the gypsies - a view that rests on an old confusion of 'gypsies' and 'Egyptians' that is not totally extinct today. (In fact, gypsies, who originate from India, did not enter Europe,

(now some 70 years old) was picked up and elaborated by further French and British occultists later in the century. Two of the founders of the magical Order of the Golden Dawn in 1885, W.W. Westcott and S.L. Macgregor Mathers, created most of the now 9 'accepted' correspondences between Tarot cards and unrelated systems like astrology and the Qabbalah, as well as probably inventing the 'ancient Celtic ten-card spread' method of divination currently favoured by clairvoyants.

In the next decades, there was a spate of new 'occult' or 'esoteric' Tarots such as those of Oswald Wirth (1889, revised 1927), Gerard Encausse ('Papus' - 1909), Aleister Crowley (1944 'Book of Thoth'), Paul Foster Case (1931: 'Builders of the Adytum'), C.C. Zain (1936: 'Egyptian'). Most influential of all, however, was the 'Waite-Rider' pack (1910), designed by Arthur Edward Waite, a minor member of the Golden Dawn, and painted in bad art-nouveau by an equally minor

artist called Pamela Colman-Smith.

The Waite-Rider pack was the one whose designs inspired T.S. Eliot in "The Waste Land". It was also the pack that popularised the English names for the Tarot trumps, especially 'The Hierophant' for 'The Pope', and 'The High Priestess' for 'The Popess'. It also reintroduced the idea, forgotten since Eteilla, of putting symbolic pictures on the ordinary suit cards which make up the bulk of a Tarot pack (and renamed the Coins suit as Pentacles). Other subtle changes include numbering 'The Fool' as 0 (Zero) and interchanging the order of Trumps VIII and X] ('Strength' and 'Justice'). Such details allow connoisseurs to identify late occult packs (such as the Royal Fez Moroccan Tarot of the 1960s, claimed to derive from 9th century designs preserved in Morocco!) as being direct cribs from the Waite-Rider pack.

For most of this century, however, such packs often existed only as the original designs or illustrations in books, or in small limited editions (often handmade) circulating among the 'initiates' of occult fraternities.

Meanwhile, the traditional 'game-playing' or 'exoteric' Tarot packs continued to be produced by card manufacturers ignorant of the occult revival. Among surviving packs of this kind are the Tarot of Besancon (in which the cards representing the Popess and the Pope were changed in the 17th century to Juno and Jupiter, in deference to religious sensibilities), and the Italian Tarots of Bologna, Piedmont and Sicily.

In other parts of Europe, game-playing Tarot packs underwent further transformations in the design of the 22 trumps, which became charming 19th century vignettes of hunting and drawing-room scenes (Tarock packs) or animals (Cego packs).

For playing the game of Tarot, there is no need for any symbolism at all; all that is required is a set of cards numbered 1 to 21, plus an unnumbered card (The Fool).

The big change came in 1960, when University Press (New York) released the first widely-available version of the Waite-Rider Tarot. The pack became popular with the 60s generation and anything to do with Tarot was a commercial success. The Crowley 'Book of Thoth' was released in 1969, at about the same time, predictably enough, as the 'New Tarot for the Aquarian Age' (1968) and the 'Aquarian Tarot' (1970: a Waite-Rider crib). After US Games Systems and Stuart R. Kaplan got into the act, Tarot packs proliferated out of all reason.

Some of the newly-produced Tarots were reproductions of traditional packs, and represented good value - like the reissue of the oldest extant Tarot deck,

the Visconti-Sforza pack of the mid-15th century. But most were creations of artists and occultists with more regard for the money-making possibilities of the medium than for historical truth. The new packs mostly came with booklets adding further to the occult myths about the origin of the cards.

US Games Systems also produced, often by direct sponsorship, 'Tarot' cards from areas that were never part of the Tarot tradition: a 'Spanish' Tarot, a Japanese 'Ukiyoe' Tarot, a 'Tantric' Tarot, a 'Native American' Tarot, and dozens more.

Since the Golden Dawn was still a name to conjure with, a 'Golden Dawn' pack was cobbled together in about 1977, followed in 1980 by a 'Hermetic' pack, supposedly incorporating the same occult mysteries.

There has been the Fergus Hall 'Tarot of the Witches' (featured in a James Bond film), an 'Eastern' pack, a 'Meditation' pack, and a 'Pop/Rock' pack.

The result of all this creation of meaningless sets of pretty pictures has been total confusion in the mind of the consumer and, therefore, a very natural consumer resistance. We can look forward to seeing lots of expensive Tarot packs being sold at discount prices over the next few years.

To date, there has not been an Aboriginal 'Dreamtime' pack, or an Australian 'Colonial' or 'First Fleet' pack, or a Hawaiian 'Kahuna' pack, but these are probably on the drawing boards right now. To the artists and publishers of such packs, I have a simple message: they've missed the boat. Tarot is dead - at least as far as the 'occult tradition' is concerned.

Don Laycock is an academic linguist who collects playing-cards as a hobby. He also creates puzzles, and is a member of the ACT committee of the Australian Skeptics. This paper was presented at the 3rd Skeptics Convention held in Canberra in April 1987.



### **Psychics and the Police Separating fact from fiction**

Many self-professed psychics claim to have assisted police by providing "insights" into the whereabouts of missing persons, finding evidence, etc. The newspaper headline "Psychic helps in hunt for woman" is commonplace, but rarely do we hear of any follow-up on how useful the psychic's advice has been to police.

The newspaper heading above, in fact, appeared in a Sydney newspaper recently, concerning the

disappearance of a Sydney girl who had failed to turn up for an appointment with her "psychic healer".

The healer, naturally upset at her non-appearance, volunteered his help to the police. The paper said he had "contacted other psychic mediums throughout Australia in a bid to find her". The paper did not say how the healer contacted the other mediums (media?) - surely nothing as mundane as a telephone.

As it turned out, the young lady in question turned up safe and sound, having had a mechanical breakdown on a trip to the snow. But the memory left in most readers' minds is that a psychic helped police in their investigations, so psychics must be valid investigators.

Many sceptical investigations of "psychic detectives" have shown their claims to be unfounded. Famous names such as Gerard Croiset and Doris Stokes spring to mind, and now the Colossal Mrs Dankbaar (see story this issue) has thrown her hat in the ring by claiming to have assisted Dutch authorities, although her claims have not been substantiated one way or the other due to lack of detailed information for follow-up.

In fact, police may use psychics' advice on occasion, much as they would use anyone's information, especially if there are no strong leads. But police use of psychics is not always as enthusiastic as the psychics (or the newspapers) would lead one to believe.

The heading "Clairvoyants in search for missing boy" which appeared in the *Sydney Telegraph* on June 30, 1986, elicited the response from police that "their investigations are being hampered by people claiming to be clairvoyants and psychics". The Chief Superintendent at the time said "We give no credibility at all to these people and we don't use them in our investigations".

More recently, the South Australian Skeptics has been in contact with the Commissioner of Police in SA. Instigated by another state's police use of psychic advice to find (or not find as it turned out) a missing person's car, SA state secretary, Ron Evans, wrote to the SA Commissioner:

"Most senior policemen would no doubt ignore messages from the tea cup. However, it concerns us that left unguided, an officer, perhaps lacking in experience or confidence, might feel the need to pursue even the most preposterous lead for fear of criticism if he did not.

"There are quite frequent reports in the popular press of some psychic or other having assisted police in an investigation. The reports seldom mention which police force or which crime or what exactly the psychic achieved. We have tried to follow up some of these

vague reports but we have yet to find even one instance where a psychic has actually helped the police. Even so, the illusion persists with the public that, from time to time, the police are in fact assisted by psychics. We are concerned that even some police may have the same illusion."

Mr Evans then went on to ask a number of questions of the commissioner: is there any police policy on the use of psychics and clairvoyants; if so, what is it; what contact has the SA police had with psychics; and importantly, is there any documented instance where a psychic has materially assisted the police.

In response (from Assistant Commissioner - Crime, K.P.E. Harvey) the SA Skeptics learned that there was no specific policy on the use of psychics; all evidence received is assessed, evaluated and acted upon according to the circumstances of the case. However, "numerous individuals describing themselves as psychics have contacted investigators during major criminal enquiries. *None of these contacts have resulted in bringing a case to a successful conclusion so far as we can trace through documentation.*" [Our emphasis]

The Australian Skeptics are keen to learn of any investigation which has involved "assistance" from psychics, especially any in which a psychic played an important and useful role. Separating claims from fact is an important role for Skeptics, and any assistance our readers could give in this matter would be most useful.

**Vol 7 No 4 - 1987**

### ***Australia visited by mythical being!***

*Barry Williams*

The first weekend in November saw the visit to Sydney of Ms J.Z. Knight, the alleged earthly channel of Ramtha, who, if pre-visit publicity is to be believed, was the Liberator of Lemuria, a god of Atlantis and various other things. Again, according to the publicity, Ramtha was alleged to have "learned all there was to know and moved on".

Lemuria was a hypothetical continent, postulated by 19th century naturalists, to account for the distribution of lemurs on earth. Atlantis was, of course, the fictional land invented by Plato for the purposes of

an allegorical story. There is no evidence that either of these two places ever existed outside the minds of their originators, although much has been subsequently claimed for them by the practitioners of the irrational.

Ms Knight, with Ramtha in tow, was originally going to visit Melbourne and Brisbane. However, these trips were cancelled so as to collect all interested parties in the one spot. Unconfirmed reports add that people in Melbourne and Brisbane were not as thrilled about hearing Ramtha's pearls of wisdom as those in Sydney.

Ms Knight also refused all media attempts to secure interviews or to publicly meet with a representative of Australian Skeptics. We had an interesting list of questions to ask someone who "knows all there is to know".

Australian Skeptics is unable to ascertain just how many people paid the \$395.00 to hear the profundities of this purveyor of pop psychological pap, but we would like to hear from anyone who may have attended the function. In the meantime, we'll offer our own piece of wisdom, entirely free of charge: A fool and his money are soon parted.



## **The Case of the Dribbling Psychic**

*Harry Edwards*

When it comes to calling a spade a spade, I see no cause for reticence. A hard nosed sceptic, frustrated by what seems to be an ever protracted and insoluble debate between the credulous and the rational, my conclusion, that never has so much been said by so many for so long with so little to show, strengthens my desire to call a ratbag a ratbag when I smell one.

No matter how strong that proclivity, however, one must bear in mind that even ratbagery is entitled to protection in the eyes of the law.

The following on-going saga involving the Lighthouse Spiritual Centre and the Australian Skeptics had its genesis in an article which appeared in the Sydney Sun-Herald December 28, 1986, under the heading "Voices from the past in new spirit craze". In part it read:

The Lighthouse Spiritual Centre in Oxford Street, Woollahra, used to be a brothel ... it is here that Mr Cliff Dorian, director-manager of the Lighthouse, performs the new religious experience called

"channeling" for his devoted followers.

He shares the centre with fellow professional psychic and channel, Ms Joy Atkinson, and Joseph, Mr Dorian's spirit guide.

"Joseph may be a creation of my own subconscious, but the intelligence behind it is real," Mr Dorian said. "He becomes such a reality that other clairvoyants can see him ... All Mr Dorian knows of Joseph is that he speaks in a guttural voice. Joseph has never experienced life as a person, but his appearance is undisputed. "He looks like the Grim Reaper," Mr Dorian said. Ms Atkinson dislikes Joseph's looks. She prefers to view him as "higher energy".

Both describe themselves as channels, or mediums through which spirits from the past communicate with present-day followers.

Ms Atkinson can perform channeling consciously, and is described as a light trance medium. Mr Dorian, however, goes into a full trance to channel. Male and female spirits have been channeled through his body, affecting his mannerisms and voice tone. He has been a professional channel for nine years. ... Channels were a "dime a dozen" in Sydney, he said. Every spiritualist church had channels, and public sessions were becoming increasingly popular ... the energy summoned in a channeling session could be used for a variety of purposes, he said. It had assisted in tracing vital clues in murder or disappearance cases, and healed seriously ill patients. Mr Dorian was working on spiritually inspired stock market predictions for a client.

I commented with the following letter to the *Sun-Herald* which was published on January 4, 1987:

Sir,

Re: "Channeling", Sun-Herald December 28, 1986

I am continually amazed in this supposedly enlightened age that people are still credulous enough to believe in the fraud and illusion perpetrated upon them by psychics and clairvoyants claiming supernatural powers.

Since the spirit craze started in 1848 at Hydesville USA by two schoolgirl pranksters, the claims of every medium, whether it be spirit voices or writing, aports, foreign tongues, materialisations, levitations, or other inexplicable phenomena, have proven to be without substance when subjected to critical examination.

I see the Lighthouse Spiritual Centre not as a guiding beacon illuminating the future, but as the embers of the stakes at which the innocent were sacrificed by the ignorant believers in superstition, myth and magic.

While this type of story with its absurd,

nonsensical and unsubstantiated claims will encourage irrationality, it will do nothing to instill the wisdom inherent in Aristotle's axiom. If a man wishes to educate himself, he must first doubt, for in doubting he will find the truth."

I appeal to those responsible therefore, to devote equal space to those who would, in the cause of disseminating the truth, expose charlatans for what they are.

What I considered to be fair comment was evidently not viewed as such by the firm of solicitors representing the LSC, as I and the Skeptics' National Committee received letters from them maintaining that their client had been defamed; that financial loss may occur; that a written apology should be forwarded to their client; that a letter retracting any implication of fraud be submitted to the Sun-Herald for publication; and to undertake not to make any statements oral or in writing implying fraud, dishonesty or unacceptable conduct on the part of their client in the future.

After due consideration by the National Committee, advice was solicited from Mark Plummer, our Bugliosi in the States, who suggested an official response which, after consultation with our own legal advisers, was duly forwarded to the LSC's solicitors.

"It is clear," the letter said, "that your client is unaware of investigations by sceptics into spiritualism and clairvoyants." A list of book references followed, together with numerous examples of the Skeptics' investigations which have resulted in the rapid demise of proponents of the paranormal.

The response continued, "Should your client be unwise enough to issue a writ, we will immediately start a full investigation of your client's techniques ... Our investigations will enable us to be fully prepared for any case brought by your client; should your client merely issue a writ but not proceed to a court case, the results of our investigations will then be issued to the media at a press conference held on the steps of the Lighthouse Centre."

Following a brief period of paranoia during which the LSC mistakenly accused me of attending their centre, having a reading and then demanding my money back, they challenged the Australian Skeptics to prove them fraudulent.

Barry Williams was confronted by Cliff Dorian on Clive Robertson's *Newsworld* and on the Ray Martin *Midday Show*, and challenged for \$10,000 to prove a universal negative ... naturally Barry declined to attempt the impossible.

Later on the *Midday Show*, the LSC's "inspirational medium" Ms Joy Atkinson (a former hairdresser) gave what must go down in both psychic and sceptic annals

as one of the most pathetic, amateurish and unconvincing demonstrations of cold reading ever witnessed, destroying any credibility that she may have had as a psychic.

One would have thought that after such an embarrassing exhibition, Mr Dorian, who was later to be described by *People* magazine as the dribbling psychic (he dribbles profusely while allegedly in a trance) would have dried up, but pride evidently had priority over discretion, and crying "foul" he complained to *People* making certain allegations to which I was asked to respond.

On September 28, an article "Psychics v Skeptics" appeared in that magazine, covering some of the points that had been raised.

Among other things, Mr Dorian seems to have trouble in comprehending the English language. For example, he quotes the following from the Australian Skeptics' letter to his solicitor: "...in the event of the LSC proceeding with a defamation suit, the legal techniques used by the Australian Skeptics will be similar to the 1980 UK *Moonies v The Daily Mail* newspaper libel case," and interprets this as equating the LSC with the Moonies, when it obviously refers only to the methods the AS may adopt should litigation ensue.

The AS's promise to issue the results of investigations into the activities of the LSC at a news conference was seen by Mr Dorian as blackmail, whereas the LSC's demand for a retraction and an apology - or else, was not.

Mr Dorian's reason for not proceeding with a law suit is given as "lack of funds", yet in front of a highly rated TV show audience he displayed an open suitcase allegedly containing \$10,000; during the *Newsworld* interview he claimed to have "ALL the answers to ALL the questions in the universe" and is privy to the infinite knowledge of the spirit world which enables him to provide clients with "spiritually inspired stock market predictions".

If there was ever an opportunity to cash in on the latter ability it would have been just prior to the greatest stock market crash in history in the closing weeks of October, yet we have seen no evidence of Mr Dorian's having predicted that event.

Possibly a by-product of talking to oneself in a trance, Mr Dorian tends to contradict himself at frequent intervals.

He claims that the Australian Skeptics have sent spies posing as clients to his centre to cause trouble, and then asks "how can they say things about us without doing an investigation?!"

Live on TV, when asked by a reporter "What do



you say to people who call you a fraud, quack or charlatan?", Mr Dorian laughingly replied "If that makes them feel good, it's up to them".

So why the threatened defamation suit?

Explaining his work in the People article, Mr Dorian says "I supposedly bring a spirit through me and it takes over and I talk - I don't consciously bung it on and information comes out of my mouth, which I am not consciously aware of, and it helps somebody, that's the base line, if it helps somebody I'll stand on my head. We change our approach to help people even if it means lying to them."

Note the absence of an absolute with the use of the word "supposedly", contrary to the claim made in the Sun-Herald interview of December 28 where he says that "... he [Joseph, the spirit] becomes such a reality that other clairvoyants can see him".

This positive claim that Mr Dorian's entity can and has been seen by others is tantamount to claiming the remarkable potential to become a human movie projector ... the mind boggles!

Mr Dorian's astonishing admission that he lies to his clients is bad enough, but it also raises the question, that if one is prepared to lie to those who put their trust in you, what credence can be had in anything else he says?

Further, that as he also says that while in a trance he has no knowledge of what he is saying, perhaps he can explain how he can consciously change his approach and lie to his clients, and why, when his omniscient spirit makes itself available for consultation, he presumes to substitute mortal deception for infinite wisdom. Personally I find it difficult to accept that such an approach is suited to advise anyone about anything.

During the Clive Robertson interview, Mr Dorian espoused the New Age tenet "that we have all the answers to all the questions in the universe in our heads". As Mr Dorian (modestly) claims to be able to teach others to tap this knowledge, I cannot help but wonder why, with such an encyclopaedic memory chip for a brain, he wastes his talent performing 'B' grade thespian charades.

While the psychic duo (trio?) have no formal medical, psychiatric or counselling qualifications, and the closest thing to examining a head appears to have been under a hair dryer, Mr Dorian is involved in researching schizophrenia. His most profound observation in this field to date, and one unlikely to be written up in the Australian Medical Journal or the Lancet, is that schizophrenics are simply psychics out of control. Those who have read the article "Channels - are they schizophrenic?" (*the Skeptic*, Vol 7, No 3)

would probably agree that the reverse is closer to the truth!

While I would concede that the non-paranormal claim by Mr Dorian, that his Lighthouse venue is a drop-in centre offering spiritual comfort to drop-outs, I see no valid reason for cloaking such benevolence in mysticism.

Finally, I take umbrage at the hairdresser-medium's comment in People in which she says: "The Skeptics seem to think that members of the public are fools and need protecting". While I repudiate that generalisation, I have no hesitation in stating that a large section of the public is prone to believe to a lesser or greater degree in the irrational, and if, pro bono publico, I can help to alert and enlighten those inclined to succumb to the influence of those who would exploit their vulnerability, then I am proud to bear arms as a protector.

Should the proprietors of the Lighthouse Spiritual Centre wish to submit specific claims of paranormal abilities to controlled tests by the Australian Skeptics for a prize of \$20,000 or the equivalent in babies' bibs, we would be happy to oblige. In the meantime, those who claim to channel strange voices from the other side should reflect on this: Many psychotic killers have murdered at the behest of unseen voices - are these to be considered "channels"? While those who would emulate the phenomenon may be concerned only with the financial gain or notoriety, their deceptive charades encourage irrational beliefs with an alarming potential to regress society to an age when many a life was dispatched in the most hideous manner on the strength of baseless accusations.

**Vol 8 No 1 - 1988**

### **More Fallible Futures**

Though he never wins points for accuracy, self-professed clairvoyant, Tom Wards, should win points for perseverance. Never to be dismayed by a few failures, Tom is back, telling us what we can expect for the coming year.

In the January 30, 1988 issue of *Australasian Post* under the heading "EyeSee - State by State in '88" (pretty catchy, huh!) Tom Wards has made a number of predictions for each state and territory.

As readers of the article "Fallible Futures" in Vol 7, No 2 of *the Skeptic* will know, Tom claims to be 60-

70% accurate. But as the article shows, he's rarely even near the truth in any of his predictions, except those which are so vague they could apply to nearly anything.

Normally, the Post publishes Tom's predictions in a special section, like "Post's Prophecies" (87) or "Just for Fun" (86). This year though he doesn't rate such dignity. It's just slapbang, go for it, Tom. Hardly even an introduction, either: "Here is my state-by-state round-up for the Bicentennial year. My Third Eye sees belt-tightening times, and plenty of political turbulence, but Australians will still be better off than people living on the other side of the world." - Where? China? Ethiopia? Do the Eskimoes know about this?

Anyway, although it's a little early to do a proper precis of Tom's predictions, he has made a few which can be assessed at this stage of the year.

For instance, "Australia could win the Sydney Bicentennial Test by a large margin." Oh, if only it was true. All the pundits were picking it that way, but in fact Australia just managed to stave off a dismal defeat by playing for a draw.

For Western Australia, he says "In an election, the Premier would be returned on a reduced majority." Cleverly, he doesn't say which premier - as a matter of fact, Tom failed to predict Brian Bourke's resignation as premier at all.

He also failed to predict the Nullarbor UFO (surely that must have made headlines in the astral plane) or the Carlos hoax.

He did say the NSW state government "will be in turmoil in the early part of the year. I see a new leader displacing Mr Unsworth. "I feel that the Liberals could be returned to win power." At time of writing, the first half was true, but we have to wait to find out the truth of the second half. But it should be pointed out that NSW had to go to the polls in the first half of this year, so turmoil was not unexpected. Notice Tom doesn't say who will replace Mr Unsworth.

For the ACT, he predicts "The Minister for Immigration, Mr Mick Young, must be careful of his health. He could receive an award overseas." His health was the last thing on Mick Young's mind when he resigned, which Tom also failed to spot.

He is back to favouring Andrew Peacock over John Howard: "Another challenge to John Howard could be successful, making Peacock opposition leader and eventually PM. This looks a strong possibility." Knowing Tom's success rate, that last comment must have Andrew Peacock worried. He also predicts (or "feels") that "former PM Gough Whitlam will be offered the post of Governor-General when Sir Ninian Stephen retires". Not the sort of prediction to win the

hearts of staunch Labor supporters.

### Skeptic's success!

Just to prove that anything they can do, we can do better, readers of the "Fallible Futures" article will recall that Canberra Skeptic, William Grey, made a series of predictions which he said quite properly "no-one should take at all seriously".

We can happily report that out of sixteen predictions, William got a remarkable eight correct (that is, if we can presume that Paul Keating filed his tax return on time - otherwise it's only seven).

He predicted the demise of Joh, the successes of Bob Hawke, Margaret Thatcher, Dennis Connor, Pat Cash and a New Zealand horse in the Melbourne Cup (yeh, we know, it's always a New Zealand horse).

He missed on the resumption of space shuttle flights, peace between Iran and Iraq, a nuclear accident in the northern hemisphere, swings against Labor in NSW (these last two were in the wrong year), an IRA terrorist campaign, bushfires in NSW in February, floods in Victoria in August and Ron Reagan retiring sick.

And for those of you who can count, yes, there is another prediction. William predicted that "It will be an indifferent year for psychic predictions". And you know what? He was right!

We would also appreciate receiving copies of any predictions made by self-proclaimed clairvoyants for future reference.

We will publish more investigations of 'clairvoyant' predictions next Issue.



### **The Wisdom of Ramtha!**

*Barry Williams*

On the weekend of November 7/8, 1987, between 500 and 700 people (reports say) paid some \$395 each to hear the wisdom of the universe propounded by a Ms J.Z. Knight, who claims that this wisdom is channeled from an entity named Ramtha.

Ramtha, as was revealed in our last issue, supposedly existed, on the temporal plane, in the fictional civilisations of Lemuria and Atlantis. He also was alleged to have "learned all there is to know and moved on".

Despite efforts by Australian Skeptics and various

media outlets, Ms Knight refused all invitations to be interviewed. Australian Skeptics had compiled some interesting questions to pose to someone who had learned everything, but we had no opportunity to find the answers to these vital questions. In fact, we would not have been successful even if a meeting had been arranged. The proponents of channeling are not dumb. They have, presumably with the thought of sceptical interrogation in mind, developed a perfect, no lose set of rules. Ramtha, and his disembodied colleagues, do not answer questions; they tell the faithful what they want to tell them.

The channels, of course, cannot answer questions as they are not in control of their bodies during the performance. Ramtha won't answer questions and JZ can't. You do not have to be too sceptical to have doubts about this arrangement. You also do not need to work out that if 500 people paid \$395 each, the total income from the enterprise approaches \$200,000. A generous estimate of the costs of this venture would be hard pressed to exceed 15% of the total, which leaves a very nice profit for one weekend's work.

Ramtha's visit appears to have been organised by Ms Gita Bellin, the principal of Gita Bellin & Associates Pty Ltd, trading as Ramtha Dialogues. Should any skeptic be regretting the decision not to attend Ramtha's talk, we can reveal the following pearls of wisdom from Ms Bellin's follow-up letter to Ramtha's Australian visit. In this letter, Gita "paraphrases Ramtha, using his own words". The following is a fair sampling of Ramtha's wisdom:

**"CAN YOU PROVE TOMORROW IS NOT COMING?"**

There's a challenge for all you physicists. Why would anyone want to prove that anyway?

"We must have the courage to choose our manifested destiny within 2 weeks from 14th November. Choice is very Precious. [Gita's underlining - not ours.] After the 14th Nov. everything will become very erratic. There are choices we must make in the next 2 weeks if we are to survive. It only takes a moment to wake up. Your future is as strong as this moment to wake up. You have the power to make a difference but it takes courage to make a difference. The greatest courage comes from the God within and not the altered ego [sic]. The only dignity is to be a human being that is free."

Ramtha obviously has trouble with the English language. It probably makes more sense in the original

Lemurian.

"Save and store your water. Put up food stores immediately. You must get your food stores immediately. Take advantage of what is now. Now could change at any moment."

Ramtha goes on a lot about storing food - we suspect he works for Coles or Woolworths.

"The earth is in the throes of great change. Volcanoes are going off to clean the sea. The power will be more awesome than we have ever known. Ancient volcanoes at this moment are the slumbering tigers. They are not to get rid of us but to heal what we have done. Where there is dense population Nature will become very active. There will be radical increase in activity. Strong and wondrous things will awaken us."

The bit about volcanoes cleaning the water is disturbing. Does the Water Board know about this alternative to water treatment plants?

"There will be a warming up of the whole earth. Crops will fail. Deserts will be inundated with rainfall. The recent weather changes are only beginning. There is much more to come. In the next 4 years everything will happen much quicker. There will be melting of the ice caps in the next years. A glacier has broken off which has enough fresh water to supply the whole of U.S.A. for 30 years. The sea will rise 200' in 4 years."

Ramtha has heard about the greenhouse effect! Raising the sea level by 200 feet in four years seems a bit drastic. With the increase in temperature required, it's doubtful if anyone would be around to worry about the water level, no matter how much food they had stored.

"Finances. The market will rally Gold will not always be available. Purchase your gold as soon as you can, whatever the cost. The financial crash is programmed for May '88 but could come in February '88."

With the sea level rising 200 feet, we should worry about the stock market! Still, February was OK, so it must be May.

**"GO TO A SAFE PLACE. BE SAFE. BUY LAND. BUY GOLD STORE WATER. STORE FOOD STORE CLOTHING. Take advantage of NOW. GO FOR IT!"** [Gita's capital and underlining.]

If any reader has land for sale, west of the Great Dividing Range, they can expect a good offer within the next four years (official Skeptic prediction).

I promise that I did not edit this letter just to pick out the particularly ratbag bits. It is all in the same vein. Why anyone would pay to listen to this sort of nonsense is one of the great unexplained mysteries of all time. More accurate information would be contained in a party political broadcast.

We were a bit concerned about copyright in quoting such large slices of the letter, but our legal advisers assure us that the words of someone who has been dead for 35,000 years are in the public domain.

But on a more serious note, perhaps we can explain why people would pay money to listen to Ramtha's wisdom. After all, Ramtha has made predictions in the past, and they have come true! Or so Ms Bellin tells us. In an interview in the Sydney Sun of November 3, 1987 - just prior to Ramtha's weekend visit - Ms Bellin is quoted as claiming of Ramtha "He predicted the eruption of Mt Helena, the Chernobyl disaster and the crash of the space shuttle".

Apart from the fact that no atlas I have consulted shows a Mt Helena (perhaps the eruption literally "blew it off the map" - presumably she means Mt St Helens, even though Ramtha knows all there is to know), this claim aroused the interest of James Randi, who has written to Ms Bellin, offering her his award of US\$10,000 upon receipt of evidence that establishes the truth of these claims. This offer would be increased by Australian Skeptics own offer of A\$20,000, upon receipt of similar evidence.

We would also very much like to hear from anyone who attended Ramtha's weekend based on the veracity of his predictions, as claimed by Ms Bellin. There is a very interesting situation if it can be proved that anyone attended the Ramtha seminars because of Ms Gellin's claims regarding the predictions, and that those predictions cannot be proved to have been made before the events predicted took place.



### 'PSYCHICS' OF THE PAST

#### *The de la Warrs - c'est la guerre!*

Clive Coogan

When Perth barrister Paul Nicholls, as a throwaway at the Second Skeptics Convention held in Melbourne some time ago, intoned the name "de la Warr" in the course of his paper on the legal aspects of alternative

medicine fraud, he electrified me - a flood of memories washed over me.

I had returned from the UK in 1951, having worked for a PhD there in Bristol, and in 1953 became a tutor in physics, and later vice master, at Queen's College in Melbourne University. Nightly, at the High Table, I sat next to the master of that time, Dr Raynor C. (Sam) Johnson. He had earned his nickname when he, a physicist, had arrived at Queen's and found that the physics tutor of the time was named Boswell.

Johnson chattered on every night about psychical research, in which field he was regarded as something of an expert, having written several books which eventually funded an early retirement. Like many with an attachment to that field, he always *talked* about experiments which *should* be done, but in the four or so years I was in Queen's nothing ever eventuated. I had heard of one experiment, centred around "ectoplasm" in earlier years which had gone wrong so hilariously that I don't blame him for never again screwing his courage to the sticking post! I am informed that in retirement in Ferny Creek, he was the centrepiece of the cult called The Family, of which Mrs Hamilton-Byrne is the Mother Superior, and that he was then convinced that he was the reincarnation of John the Baptist.

In my first year, the dinner table conversation was about psychical research, "automatic" writing, via which Sam had frequent messages (much to the envy of Telecom) and such like. Johnson had hardly another topic.

Then he went to England on sabbatical leave. On return he was full of the de la Warrs, whom he had been to see in Oxford, at their request. He was engorged with it! I had 24 hourly doses of the "business-like" laboratory at Oxford, of the vibrations of an oak leaf looking for its parent tree, of the interesting "research" the de la Warrs had under way; and diagnosing and telediagnosis all kinds of medical conditions via a little black box which had been thrown together (a not altogether inapt phrase in light of subsequent events) by a physics PhD they employed. When Johnson viewed their setup, they claimed to have diagnosed the illness (terminal cancer) of King George VI and claimed to be capable of curing him. When Johnson queried why not, they tut-tutted and said it would be quite unethical to do so without invitation! Then they turned to serious matters.

They could "materialise" any element you wished. They gave Sam a glass microscope slide and a diamond marker and then exhorted him to mark it with a secret sign, and to tell them of the element of his choice. Lead must have weighed heavily on Sam at the time,

and thus he decreed, and the slip was consigned to the entrance of an impressive machine. Twenty minutes later, the glass slip emerged covered with a dull grey film - it had the authentic marker on it. Sealed in a security envelope, it went off to a public analyst and several hours later the report came back, in non-automatic writing, "20 milligrams of lead".

Johnson was a spectroscopist, in the days when he *did* research, and had produced a pot-boiler Methuen mini-monograph "Atomic Spectra". He was unacquainted with the standard technique of vacuum evaporation of metals, which was almost certainly the technique used to "materialise" the dull grey film of lead. He was completely taken in - in so far as he had to be convinced of anything.

Then the hard-sell started. This sensational research must be continued, but finances are low. Where will we get funds, etc? With risible ingenuousness, Johnson suggested setting the dials to platinum but again this was decreed to be unethical as it would glut the world markets for platinum!

I left Queen's in 1957 and in 1959, having forgotten the forgettable de la Warrs. I went off to the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana to spend a year (it became two) as a visiting professor. Like MacArthur (or bad oysters), the de la Warrs would return.

We of the Commonwealth contingent at Champaign-Urbana used to avidly read the airmail version of the London Times to get news of the outside world. We became students of the legal reports columns in particular. They specialised in full reports of the best legal "bon mots"\*. Suddenly the de la Warrs rematerialised. There they were in the Times legal column, day after day (Philips v de la Warr)!

It appears (or more properly, it was alleged) that they had sold one of their black boxes to two dear and sincere old ladies who wished to cure all their neighbours, and most of the peoples of the Southern Mediterranean to boot, of their ills. After twisting knobs, pushing buttons, poring over manuals, and setting pointers, in dead earnest and with great persistence, the results were null.

Old ladies can be persistent and almost monomaniac, the de la Warrs were to find. The old ladies sued, via Miss Olivia Philips. In the ensuing court case, various interesting facts emerged.

For example, the de la Warrs had stumbled on for years with the name Warr, until Woolcott-Forbes like, they had twigged that the sine qua non of conmanship was an illustrious name - what better than a deed-poll change during the war, to "de la Warr"?

The "PhD" physicist had his moment of glory too. The wretched man's name was Leonardo Pierre Corte,

of Kings Road, Thame, Oxfordshire. He agreed in evidence that he had taken unto himself degrees he did not have, such as PhD, MSc and BSc. In extenuation, he claimed never to have claimed a medical degree! In this he was unlike Mrs (de la) Warr, who had used the degree "DO", commonly identified with Diploma of Ophthalmology, but she admitted that it actually stood for a certificate of Diploma of Osteopathy, which she had obtained after a short course given in his own home in Southwark by a man whose name she had forgotten. There was no exam. In short, like Sam Goldwyn's oral contract, it was not worth the paper it was written on. Using this "degree", she had an income of £6000 - not insignificant in England of the '50s.

It appeared that Mr (for want of a better title) Corte threw together the "black box" and "radionic cameras" Later evidence from witnesses with electrical expertise claimed the components were wired together haphazardly, that they could see no rational function for the boxes, and that although they could be comfortably made for £110 (singly - less in quantity) they were sold for £800 or more.

Warr's witnesses enlightened the court as to how these strange devices worked. Corte himself said they worked by "telekinetic thought". Other learned witnesses knew better. A certain Mr Vernon Wethered BSc said they must split the atom and release cosmic energy. Mr Griffith Ivor Evans, MD FRCS LRCP, knew even better. They worked on Einstein's unified field theory and Eddington's fundamental theory (for good luck). Why did this conflict with the evidence of the previous witness? The man did not know enough about wave-mechanics to know you could not advocate healing through force fields. Never was there a medico more learned in physics!

Other witnesses said that everything gave out lines of force (a wee bit dated by '60 - the infamous Dr Mesmer had put out his discredited theory of animal magnetism a century before). Warr himself said that everything had its own vibration, and for that reason it was necessary to have a drop of blood or a lock of hair of the patient to submit to the black box or to the camera. Some very entertaining evidence was given by a witness from Dudley Zoo, on difficulties inherent in obtaining a pinch of hair from a sick, and very cross, tiger. The keepers succeeded in first catching their hair. The box was used. The tiger died.

When told that in one case the box had diagnosed an allergy, and then in following tests, exhaustive conventional tests, it was found the patient was allergic to something (as 99% of us are), Davies J said "I thought the box would have done that". When told

that an ex-toymaker practitioner of “radionics”, using the box, made £4000 pa (I got £220 pa as a research student in the UK in 1951), Davies J said “That’s better than making toys”.

Warr admitted, after first denying it, that he had claimed to be able to cure cancer. He had rejected all offers to submit his techniques to thorough-going tests. Maybe this was because minor tests by a Dr Epstein, a medical physicist of the National Medical Council, were dismal failures, due, Warr asserted, to “Epstein’s negative thoughts”.

Another Warr witness, Mr Lionel Ogden MA, was startled to be asked in cross-examination why he was listed as a medical doctor in the membership list of the Medical Society for the Study of Radionics. He went dumb. The parade of witnesses was marvellous. It included Dr Leslie Wetherhead, a well-known Methodist cleric-mystic and author, of London, a close friend of ‘Sam’ Johnson, a name embroidered across many a rat-bag cause of that time.

Mr Justice Davies enjoyed himself immensely. He asked a witness with a Cambridge degree, why he went to Oxford to be cured of cystitis?

“It was a last resort, My Lord”.

When told sometimes many visits to the black box were necessary - “You can’t get the whole answer in one go, My Lord” - Davies J replied “I find that sometimes in the courts, too”.

One witness posed the question, when asked if the box and camera were fraudulent, “Why take thousands of photographs if it is fraudulent?” to which the answer was “to collect thousands of fraudulent guineas”.

In his final address, Miss Philips’ counsel said that, like all successful frauds, this one had been planned and had particular appeal to neurotics, hypochondriacs and religious people. Warr was a high-pressure salesman. He had persuaded a well-known oil company to give him £13,000 and Lord Rank to give him £800. He did no experiments in his “laboratory”.

Mr Justice Davies had wise-cracked his way through the trial (shades of the Scientology case) and now was the time to demonstrate his lack of bias by leaning over backwards regarding the decision. Thus the de la Warrs escaped the full wrath of the law, but they had been adequately exposed. Expenses were awarded against the de la Warrs, with Miss Philips paying nothing. Those with eyes to see saw.

I religiously cut out the de la Warr reports day by day and sent them back to Sam. I had no acknowledgement. He must have been very busy. On return I went to dinner at Queen’s and raised the subject with him. He had lost all interest in the de la Warrs! They were now irrelevant. This type of utter intellectual

dishonesty is endemic among the psychic folk. A colleague in CSIRO of the same ilk used to pin his all on the “verifiable facts” of Borley Rectory. When the perpetrator of the hoax confessed on his death-bed, Borley Rectory had suddenly become irrelevant. One must learn that the intention is to believe, despite the facts. Again the de la Warrs went into oblivion, no doubt transported on banks of ectoplasm, if not on burgeoning bank deposits.

In 1970, I went to work for a year in the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge under my old British professor, Sir Nevil Mott, Nobel Prizeman, the doyen of solid state physicists. I took with me a black sheep skin to give to Mott, as a symbol of the land of the Black Sheep. When I presented it with suitable words, Mott flipped into a soliloquy about his black sheep.

The blackest was Klaus Fuchs, the atom spy, whom Bristol University had rescued from Germany in the ’30s. But the second favourite had been the “de la Warr” physics PhD. PhDs were then less prevalent than rabbits - vice versa now seems to be the case - and the de la Warrs brought him to decorate their mumbo jumbo to give it a veneer of respectability. This meretricious syndrome is still alive and well - if you can grab a renegade scientist to decorate your case, do so - hang the expense. From the prevalent usage of false degrees, titles, etc, one surmises that such still carry weight. Graduates, cheer up!

Corte had been a physics student under Mott at Bristol - here endeth the story! No PhD, no MSc, no BSc.

The de la Warrs were con-folk, the true antecedents of the Age of Aquarius entrepreneurs. Are the present crop reincarnations of the de la Warrs?

Unfortunately it is too late to ask Sam, as he recently went to that great psychical research laboratory in the sky.

Dr Coogan is an executive scientist with the Commonwealth Scientific & Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO).

\* Footnote: One of the best of this genre occurred during the Royal Commission on Scientology, in Melbourne. The Commissioner wanted a clear vision of the Thetan (pronounced Thayton), a kind of alter ego. “Is the Thetan independent of the body?” “Yes” “Can you direct your Thetan?” “Yes” “So you can say, ‘Get thee behind me Thetan!’”

Vol 9 No 1 - 1989

### **Prediction updates - Tom Wards wrong again!**

*Tim Mendham*

The first few months of this year has been an interesting time for predictions of coming events by “world famous” psychics of one ilk or another.

“Internationally known” clairvoyant Tom Wards is back in action, despite apparently having disappeared from the pages of *Australasian Post*.

According to a report in the WA Sunday Times, Mr Wards is now claiming a “75% accuracy with his national and international forecasts over the past 12 years”. Obviously this doesn’t include his predictions analysed in these pages over past years, in which his accuracy was closer to 5%.

Unfortunately, he’s already off to a bad start, as he predicted a cliffhanger election in WA on February 4 with the Liberals winning “by a small margin”.

He also claims that “more than 100 people had won major dividends from his numerical predictions” (see story this issue for another such scheme).

For Western Australia he has also predicted:

- \* a Perth inventor will develop a household gadget which will be used in kitchens around the world:

- \* WA will see a good deal more Japanese investment;

- \* Alan Bond could move some of his main operations to the UK during a five year austerity period for the state. He and Bond Media will also dispose of some TV and print assets.

- \* There will be a drastic cut in personal fortunes and the number of WA millionaires will be cut by half this year.

- \* Gambling funds will dry up, causing a drop in revenue for the Perth Casino and the racetracks.

- \* An exclusive Perth property will be sold to an overseas buyer for 20% less than it was bought two years ago in March or April.

- \* and, in the “blood and gore department”, a senior WA politician will die in a “horror accident”.

#### **Astrologer**

Canberra was visited by “world famous Indian astrologer” Ashutosh Ojha, although as The Sydney Morning Herald’s Mike Seccombe pointed out, “International backwater that Canberra is, Mr Ojha’s reputation had not preceded him”.

Nevertheless, Mr Ojha made a number of predictions of concern to Australian politicians:

- \* John Howard should be careful to avoid treachery, particularly from a tall, dark complexioned man with a small face, an eccentric manner and a limp, who will prove to be a Judas for the Opposition leader.

- \* Andrew Peacock could have his ambitions fulfilled within 72 hours if he wore a peacock blue sapphire. He has also entered the best period of his life, and will show courage and get a lot of support, particularly from women.

- \* Labor will win an election in 1990; we presume that means a Federal election, as a conservative Federal government cannot possibly happen until after 1991 according to Mr Ojha.

- \* Paul Keating’s high interest rate policies will cut inflation, but there could be an economic crisis in 1990. He could become Prime Minister.

- \* Australia’s population will increase fourfold in the next decade -that’s about 64 million people by the year 2000 (are you doing your bit?).

- \* a cure for AIDS will be found within the next two years.

- \* Australia’s economy will boom over the next few years (obviously no one’s told Tom Wards, and how that equates with an economic crisis in 1990 is anybody’s guess, but that’s economics for you).

Japan’s economy will also bloom, in case you’re interested, but then go into decline. And the USSR will suffer more earthquakes.

Australian Skeptics is always interested to receive copies of predictions of future events, but preferably before the event is due to take place.



### **Money in Numbers - But for Whom?**

*Harry Edwards*

Most of us are familiar with the get-rich-quick schemes that are advertised from time to time, appealing to man’s inherent greed and gullibility.

Normally, they would not attract the interest of the Australian Skeptics, but the latest, which claims to be based on astrological and numerological “sciences”, and can be had for the price of a beer, comes within its ambit.

For \$2, the advertisers will send you your “Golden

Lucky Number", supposedly calculated from the positions of the stars and planets at the time of your birth, and with which it is inferred you may win over \$1 million in less than one month.

To briefly recap, we know neither astrology nor numerology have any scientific basis. Astrology erroneously ascribes influences on the destiny of man and events on Earth to planetary forces, and numerology is a popular entertainment ascribing abstract and arbitrary meanings and significance to numbers. Both are claims long discredited.

Starting in September 1987, full page advertisements appeared in several national newspapers and magazines at a cost of approximately \$5000 to \$6000 each (based on quoted advertising rates).

The principals involved were Garry Wiseman, described as a "leading astrologer", and Mark Gruner, billed as a "renowned numerologist".

In laudatory biographies, Mr Wiseman claims to have made numerous uncanny predictions, of which only two are listed (the failures are not mentioned), and Mr Gruner describes himself as "Australia's best known numerologist" (the superlatives are usually acquired in the trade through the simple expedient of self-nomination).

## The Burning Question

Addressing the burning question, "Why would these gentlemen spend tens of thousands of dollars and a lot of time advertising such a magnanimous offer for little or no return, when it is so easy to pick up a million dollars a month?", the answer, on perusing the wording of the advertisement, seems elusive. But of one thing we can be sure, it is not as they state out of compassion for the gamblers who have not struck the jackpot!

The heading reads: "Will Our Revelations Empower You To WIN OVER \$1 MILLION IN LESS THAN ONE MONTH".

In their haste to become instant millionaires, the less observant may not have noticed the absence of some punctuation, and accepted what is in fact a question as an inferred promise of instant riches.

Had it been put as a question, then in all sincerity one would have to answer "no", for when the evidence is examined, the offer appears to be no more than an age-old gambling system dressed up in the equally aged pseudosciences of astrology and numerology.

In its original form, the con artist gives "the good oil" on a horse to a punter who then, if the nag wins, gives the tipster a percentage of his win. Unbeknown to the punter, the tipster has also given the names of all the other horses in the race to other punters on the same basis - obviously the con-man wins every time.

The scheme under consideration here goes a little further- not only is it misleading, but those who are lucky enough to win (if any) are then used to testify to the accuracy of the information provided.

A proviso in the advertisement reads: "Should your lucky number win you over \$100,000, you agree in writing for the promoters of the scheme to use your name and photograph to help show other people the way".

This benevolent gesture, when translated pragmatically, has a different connotation - with a broad enough base, and substantive (albeit false) proof of the claim that there is such a thing as a "lucky number", credence and legitimacy are established, enhancing the entrapment of others gullible enough to fall for the advertising spiel.

Interestingly, since its inception eighteen months ago, there has never to my knowledge been any mention or report of a winner - large or small.

## Proof?

Positive statements in the advertising brochures are conspicuous by their absence - ambiguity and unsubstantiated "proofs" abound.

**FREE! FREE! FREE! FREE! FREE! FREE!**

**Will Our Revelations Empower You To WIN OVER \$1 MILLION IN LESS THAN ONE MONTH**

This announcement is directed only to people who are new to big money in Lotto, Betspot, and other numbers games (that includes income, when only some people win). This announcement is for people who are interested in a little extra cash, a little luck, or a little help in their lives. People who really want lots & lots of money to start enjoying the good life that was made for them.

**Mean Numbers Win Big!**

With Letters and numbers 555 possibly being the most powerful numbers in the world, you can win big money. How do you win? You win by using the power of the stars and planets at the time of your birth to influence your destiny. Some say that the only other force is in the numbers that the stars and planets and stars make up. We know that we are not left entirely alone in this powerful and complex world. Behind the hand of a universal intelligence, there are and companions. Spirit is the one who won all 555 lotteries and you may win them if you know the numbers that were used to play the game. These numbers are the numbers that were used to play the game. These numbers are the numbers that were used to play the game. These numbers are the numbers that were used to play the game.

**Combining to Give You Your Lucky Numbers**

It is no stranger to astrologer Garry Wiseman, whose 1985 report on channels on TV, "Sale of the Century", said "some say that the stars and planets of the Zodiac Factor" Garry has made numerous uncanny predictions in his newspaper columns and radio shows (broadcast on 41 stations). The Regan administration is a political technician and should the location of the wreck of the Titanic.

There have also added up needs for Mark Gruner, Author of "Numbers of Life" for Australia has known numerous psychic, having appeared on national television and should the United States.

The luck vibrations of numbers have been a trademark success of Mark's and he has a swelling file of letters from grateful clients who have obtained become big winners.

There have also added up needs for Mark Gruner, Author of "Numbers of Life" for Australia has known numerous psychic, having appeared on national television and should the United States.

**No obligation whatsoever**

**NUMBER THESE QUESTIONS TRUTHFULLY**

1) Do you get Lucky or win money?	Yes	No
2) Do you get Lucky or win money?	Yes	No
3) Do you get Lucky or win money?	Yes	No
4) Do you get Lucky or win money?	Yes	No
5) Do you get Lucky or win money?	Yes	No
6) Do you get Lucky or win money?	Yes	No
7) Do you get Lucky or win money?	Yes	No
8) Do you get Lucky or win money?	Yes	No

**We Will Help You Free of Charge**

If you have a total of 10 or more correct answers to our eight questions, everything here is FREE! For you. We will help you win over \$100,000 in less than one month. We will help you win over \$100,000 in less than one month. We will help you win over \$100,000 in less than one month. We will help you win over \$100,000 in less than one month.

**FOR YOUR FRIENDS**

Send this to your friends and family. They will be glad to help you win over \$100,000 in less than one month. They will be glad to help you win over \$100,000 in less than one month. They will be glad to help you win over \$100,000 in less than one month. They will be glad to help you win over \$100,000 in less than one month.

The original advertisement, as it appeared in *New Idea*, Sep 5, 1987



# THE SECOND COMING

All the best from *the Skeptic*, 1986-1990

# Psychics



Registration cards received under various names. Although difficult to reproduce, the registration numbers for each card are: Sep 3, 1987 - #6023; Nov 4, 1987 - #31334; Mar 3, 1988 - #41697; Oct 6, 1988 - #155061

We are told, for instance, that “at least one world renowned expert believes that the position of the stars and planets at the time of birth influences their destiny more strongly than any other force”.

The authority is not named and his “expertise” is a belief, notwithstanding that there is not one iota of scientific evidence in support of such a belief and much evidence to the contrary.

We are also told that astrology and numerology are “sciences”, and that the unique skills of the experts (Wiseman and Gruner?) have provided important winning numbers to friends and clients helping them win tremendous “\$\$\$ fortunes”.

Again there is no substantiation of the claim provided, and we are left to speculate as to what “unique skills” are required to interpret natal horoscopes and to juggle numbers, other than possessing a little imagination and a naive belief in these long discredited ancient arts.

Throughout their spiel, the proprietors urge their prospective clients “to have faith” in their (the vendors’) system.

This is an old psychological ploy following a basic pattern: first, create a need and then offer a panacea

(to be happy and content you need money); second, discredit any opposition (in this case, any other get rich quick schemes); and third, faith will be your salvation.

The proponents conclude their blurb with the question, “Will their extraordinary powers help to make you another big \$\$\$\$ winner?”

There being no definition of what these “extraordinary powers” are, and no evidence in support of their claim to possess such powers, the answer is again “no”. Despite this, however, there is a statistical probability that there will be a small percentage of winners, provided that sufficient numbers of participants can be inveigled into the scheme.

Once again the question can be raised, that if these “experts” endowed with “extraordinary powers” can divine the numerical key to riches, why would they peddle the information for a few dollars at a time?

## Logistics (and the catch)

The logistics of the exercise are interesting and revealing.

On the basis of four advertisements at \$5000 each, approximately 11,000 respondents would be required to break even. Taking into account the cost of postage, printing and stationery, there would be a profit of \$1.50

Mark Gruner's solo ad, without Gary Wiseman, as it appeared in *The Sun*, Feb 22, 1988

per capita thereafter. (By my calculations, after eight weeks as at November 4, 1987, over 31,000 replies had been received, this number being deduced from what appears to be the sequential registration numbers incorporated in the address labels.)

However, when administrative costs (rent of office, phone, staff, computer equipment, etc) are taken into consideration, together with the fact that the response would diminish exponentially in time with the absence of further expensive advertising, one could be excused for concluding that either “extraordinary powers” do not include business acumen or that the whole exercise was a sprat to catch a mackerel.

The latter turns out to be the case.

For your \$2 you receive your “Golden Lucky Number” (calculated simply by adding the digits of your birth date together then continuing the process until it reduces to one integer number -  $26/01/1989 = 2+6+0+1+1+9+8+9 = 36 = 3+6 = 9$ ), a patronising astrological theme sagaciously worded to invoke further interest in the scheme, and a few more unsupported claims and promotional gimmicks.

There do not appear to be any astrological calculations involved.

The catch is that your Golden Lucky Number, to be of any “value”, must be used in conjunction with other numbers, which the promoters of the scheme will sell you on a three, six or twelve monthly basis for \$30, \$50 and \$75 respectively.

For those who failed to succumb, a follow-up letter (with the same sequential number on the address label) promises a free “Exquisite Genuine Diamond Jewellery Ensemble of one pair of 0.25pt Diamond Stud Earrings and-a matching 0.25pt Diamond Solitaire Pendant” if you act immediately and sign up for the “Enchanted Numbers”. With diamonds selling at \$2000 a carat, is this an offer too good to refuse, and are the proprietors as philanthropic as they would have us believe?

Accompanying the “free gift” is a photocopy of an appraisal certificate issued by the Gemological Appraisal Bureau Inc of New York, who confirm that they have: “examined 1 pair of Yellow Metal Earrings set with 2 Round Near Colourless Stones 1 Pendant Yellow Metal With 1 Round Near Colourless Stone. Conclusion: Natural Diamonds- Blocked Single Cut- 0.0025 cts each”.

However, in view of the fact that the certificate number on each photocopy of the original certificate sent with the gift is the same, it would appear that only one set was submitted for appraisal, and it does not

The image shows a list of "Enchanted Numbers" for each month from October 1988 to March. Each month's entry consists of three parts:

- Grid of numbers:** A row of boxes containing numbers. For example, in October 1988, the numbers are 3, 10, 17, 24, 31. Below the grid is the instruction: "Use these lucky Enchanted Numbers for each week of [Month] 1988".
- Special 8th Enchanted Number:** A single number in a box, with the instruction: "PLUS your special 8th Enchanted Number that applies only to the week designated".
- Dates:** A list of dates for the week starting on Monday, with the instruction: "Dates above each box indicate the Monday beginning that week".

The months shown are October 1988, November, December, January 1989, February, and March.

List of “Enchanted Numbers” costing \$30.

necessarily follow that the hundreds and possibly thousands of ensembles given away were of the “quality” stated nor indeed appraised individually. A letter of inquiry sent to the Appraisal Bureau remains unacknowledged.

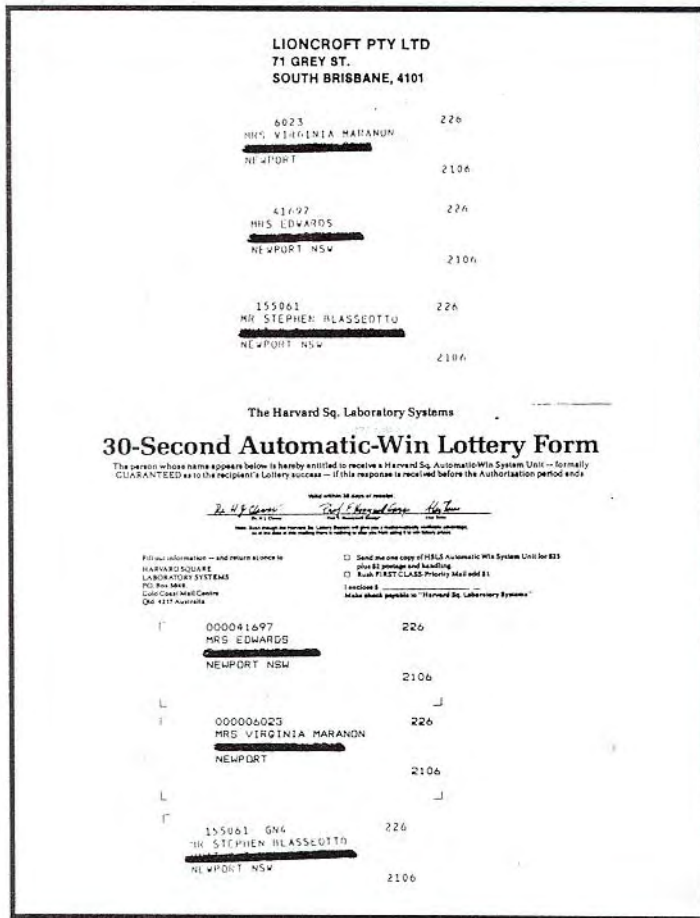
### A Scam?

It doesn’t take too much imagination to calculate the worth of the gift, but what else do you get for your money?

You will receive a set(s) of random numbers to play games of chance (Lotto, lotteries, pools, horse and dog racing, etc). If non-replicated sets of numbers are sent to a multitude of clients, this will of course, applying the laws of probability and Bernoulli’s law of greater numbers, enhance the probability of someone hitting the jackpot or at least winning a minor prize, thus enabling the proprietors of the scheme to claim success.

In effect, an involuntary betting syndicate has been formed controlled by the proprietors of a system who, regardless of whether you win or lose, stand to collect a handsome commission.

It works this way.



Labels and forms from Lioncroft and Harvard Sq (respectively) bearing the same registration numbers as on the Enchanted Numbers labels.

The chances of an individual winning Lotto (at least, under NSW conditions) are approximately 3.8 million to one, and even then the prize may have to be shared. The more permutations submitted by one person or a syndicate obviously increases the odds of winning. Needless to say, if it were possible to organise a syndicate of 3.8 million, millions of dollars are there for the taking.

It would seem, however, that there may have been some dissension in the camp, because after March 1988 new full page advertisements started to appear over the sole name of “Famous Psychic/Numerologist” Mark Gruner, who offers to reveal your “Personal Power Number” for free. (Actually he asks for three standard postage stamps.) He does ask though that, when you have won a million dollars, to send him one per cent!

One can only speculate on the withdrawal of Garry Wiseman from the scheme. It does tend to confirm, however, my suspicion that no astrological calculations have ever been, nor are, involved.

Half-way through the year there was another

development - mail started to flood in from others seeking to sell their get-rich-quick schemes including:

The Harvard Sq. Laboratory Systems on the Gold Coast, Queensland; Interwin Lotto Systems, Lioncroft Pty Ltd, South Brisbane; The Endeavour Art Union Foundation; Official Canadian Lotteries; W.W. Enterprises, Vancouver, Canada; Dr Ken, Ultimax System, West Australia; Maureen Fitzpatrick (clairvoyant-Tarot) with three telephone numbers; “Get Inspired”, 202 Pitt Street, Sydney, selling “Astro-Carto-Graphy” and “Cyclo-Carto-Graphy” reports\* Edgar J. Winter (same address) offering an astrology/numerology package deal for \$60, and another from Messrs Gruner and Winter offering \$45 seminars on numerology and astrology.

There were two others in a different category - Time Life Books and The Guide Dogs Association.

[\*An Astro-Carto-Graphy is a map which allows you to identify your “power zone” on Earth where more propitious conditions prevail, and the transparent Cyclo Carto-Graphy overlay enables you to ascertain which of the A-C-G potentials are being activated.]

In all cases the sequential registration numbers on the address labels were identical to those received from Mr Gruner. What could be seen as the hypocrisy and irony of Mr Gruner’s actions should not go unnoticed - part of his blurb reads “In my many years of numerological research, I have come across countless systems for playing Lotto. As far as I am concerned you might as well throw darts or let your pet canary peck at numbered pieces of corn!”

One could also be forgiven for questioning his principles, after speculating on why mail was received from the con artists he condemns, bearing his sequential registration numbers! The sale of “sucker lists” or lists of potential clients, in the presumed quantities we are dealing with here, at a modest rate of 50 cents per name, would make a nice icing on anyone’s cake.

At the beginning of October 1988, the sequential registration numbers on the address labels exceeded 155,000. It may be as well to mention that most of the information contained in this article was obtained by applying for the “enchanted”, “lucky golden” or “personal power” numbers, using different names but the same address. Each new name was accompanied by a higher registration number than the previous one, indicating that they are sequential rather than random.

Although Mr Gruner’s computer registration system



Vol 9 No 2 - 1989

### *Lucky Number Systems - Pt II*

Harry Edwards

Concurrently with the publication of the last issue of *the Skeptic*, in which appeared the results of my investigations into an astrology/numerology-based get-rich-quick scheme, copies of the article were sent to four Sydney TV stations, seven periodicals, twenty newspapers and to one of the promoters of the scheme - numerologist Mark Gruner.

To my mind, the interests of the consuming public and the need to redress the imbalance of reporting on the paranormal were not met, the response generally leaving much to be desired.

None of the TV media evinced any interest, neither did *Australasian Post*, *Open Road*, *People*, *The Picture*, *New Idea* or *Women's Weekly*, many of which had at some time featured advertisements promoting the scheme under consideration.

Ita Buttrose however, whose new publication *Ita* is possibly the first women's magazine not to carry an astrology column, did say that she would keep in mind the possibility of including sceptical articles in her publication at some future date.

Of the print media, the Melbourne *Herald & Weekly Times*, *The Manly Daily* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* carried the story, although in the latter case, much to the chagrin of science writer Bob Beale, the sub-editing of his story took away much of the potential impact. The inclusion of a 15 x 17 cm photograph of Mark Gruner (twice the size of the accompanying text), wearing a "custom made headband featuring a forehead crystal to help him concentrate while discerning the number patterns", probably had the effect of promoting the irrelevant gimmick at the expense of the more pragmatic revelations.

Lightlook Pty Ltd, the company promoting the get-rich-quick scheme, reacted to the publicity with an unsigned statement dismissing the results of my investigations as 'baseless assumptions'. No specific allegation was addressed, nor contrary information given.

The statement did mention, however, that Lightlook had the names of many winners on file, and that all

requests for refunds had been honoured as soon as possible.

The former statement does not reconcile with the absence in subsequent advertisements of any mention of winners large or small; and in respect of refunds, I had to apply three times over a six week period, finally threatening exposure to the Department of Consumer Affairs before receiving a refund.

Garry Wiseman, one of the two principals involved, has stated that he had dropped out of the scheme in April 1988, although a check with the Corporate Affairs Department disclosed that as at March 1989 he was still listed as a director of the company.

Notwithstanding that a perusal of the advertisements strongly suggests that Mark Gruner is the pivotal figure and that he was referred to by the company secretary during a phone conversation as 'a director', he is not listed as such, and refers to himself as a consultant on a 'modest wage'.

On the credit side, Senator Bolkus, the Federal Minister for Consumer Affairs, answering a question in the Senate on March 7, said: "They [get-rich-quick Lotto schemes] are certainly not a new approach to ripping off gullible consumers . . . they are merely a variation of existing pyramid schemes or games . . . In

order that we can offer adequate and effective protection to consumers, we are pursuing this matter not only on a co-operative basis with the States, but also on our level with a keenly-tuned publicity campaign, as well as an intention on the part of the Trade Practices Commission to prosecute wherever we can."

Finally, during an interview with 2CA, I was asked, "What's wrong with people buying sets of numbers to play Lotto, and what harm does it do?"

To the first question, I replied that it would be cheaper and just as propitious to use a pin and select numbers from a telephone directory; and to the second, reiterated a phone conversation with an 88-year-old housebound invalid pensioner who, seduced by self-professed psychics claiming supernatural powers, had invested and lost money she could ill afford, in the hope that a little luck would come her way.

While one can be disparaging of the gullible, and have little sympathy for the greedy caught up in a charlatan's net . . . what of the needy?



### Vol 9 No 3 - 1989

#### ***A Psychic in Court***

Mark Plummer

The recent court case involving a Melbourne "psychic healer" brought back many memories for this author. This report on the claims and proceedings of the case act as an excellent example of what may be involved for followers of spurious claims.

In 1984 the founder of the Bay Area Skeptics, Bob Steiner, travelled to Australia to pose as psychic "Steve Terbot" on an Australian tour. He did not charge fees or collect money as a psychic.

As Steve Terbot, Bob attracted a great deal of media publicity and he received a letter from an Australian "psychic", John Francis Fitzsimons. In the letter, Fitzsimons said that he enjoyed talking with Steve Terbot "astrally". Steiner, alias Terbot, then telephoned Fitzsimons and invited him to appear at Steve Terbot's public meeting at the Ringwood Cultural Centre. Fitzsimons accepted the invitation and spoke to the audience as a supporting speaker.

When Steiner revealed on Australian national TV that he was a sceptic and the whole event was a hoax, he criticised Fitzsimons. The furore over the hoax died down and nothing more was heard about Fitzsimons until a year later, when I, then the head of the Australian Skeptics, was approached by four former followers of Fitzsimons.

They told me that on the night of Bob Steiner's final TV appearance on the Bert Newton Show, when the hoax was revealed, Fitzsimons had gathered his followers to watch the program. The former followers said Fitzsimons turned white when attacked by Steiner. Fitzsimons' reaction started them reassessing their belief in Fitzsimons and his claims.

The former followers had several meetings with me and other committee members of the Australian Skeptics. The rather bizarre story unfolded of Fitzsimons telling them that they would become psychic mediums and healers, that they could rid world leaders of negative energies and that the world would be destroyed by a nuclear holocaust in 1984.

One of the four, Judith Kelly, had lost about 20kg on a water diet suggested by Fitzsimons. She had to be hospitalised for three weeks in February 1985. Two others in the group, Reinhart and Siew Chin Stratemeyer, a married couple, nearly had a marriage break-up because of Fitzsimons' counselling.

The fourth person told the Australian Skeptics that

she no longer believed in Fitzsimons but still believed in spiritualism and would find a new spiritual leader. I asked the four to quantify the total amount paid to Fitzsimons in course fees, payment for books, "loans" and other losses such as medical expenses and loss of earnings. I told the four they had a good case against Fitzsimons and three, Judith Kelly and the Stratemeyers, decided to sue.

Because I was about to leave Australia to become CSICOP's executive director in the United States, I referred the three to an attorney who was a close friend who had a good understanding of the issues involved.

#### **Court Case**

The case finally came to court in Melbourne in May of this year. In the writ (complaint) the three sought \$69,588 for fraudulent misrepresentations, damages for medical expenses, loss of earnings, repayment of loans, and payments for courses and books.

Judith Kelly told the court that Fitzsimons prescribed a water diet so she could lose enough weight to run and escape his premonition of catastrophe. Mrs Kelly suffered crippling malnutrition after she had been on the diet for three months. She told the court she went from 79kg down to 59kg while on the diet. She said the diet she began in November 1984 caused hallucinations, vomiting, double vision and limited limb movements.

"He [Fitzsimons] said I would suffer no harm," Mrs Kelly said. "I was convinced by the work I was doing at 'The Circle'!" Mrs Kelly said she had to stop driving because she had double vision and would reach an intersection and not know where to drive. She said she started using public transport but had to stop because she could not raise her legs onto the steps. A walk down the street was also a problem. "I was like a drunk staggering down the road, blind drunk," she said. "But I was stone cold sober."

Mrs Kelly said she was admitted to a hospital on February 19, 1985, and was diagnosed as having a thiamin deficiency from malnutrition. She was at the hospital for three weeks but had to spend another nine weeks convalescing. Mrs Kelly, a mortuary technician, had managed at work only with the help of a very supportive co-worker.

She said that after she recovered she tried to rejoin The Circle, her faith shaken only in the diet. "Mr Fitzsimons said I had to do individual rescue before I could come back to The Circle," she said. "And that I would have to endure the rock for two and a quarter hours."

She told the court that the rock treatment involved

placing a 35kg quartz boulder on her legs and hips. "In rescue missions Mr Fitzsimons used crystals to concentrate energies, like a laser." Mrs Kelly said Fitzsimons had told her he would make her a psychic healer and trance medium. Mrs Felicity Hampel, attorney for Mrs Kelly, said her client had sold her house to pay for the Fitzsimons course. She said Mrs Kelly attended the courses from January 1984 and had spent \$13,676 that she was now trying to reclaim. Mrs Hampel said that Mrs Kelly also sought damages for medical expenses and lost wages which totalled \$8042.

The court was told that Mrs Kelly had rented a house with three other followers to prepare them for living together after the world catastrophe, and to reduce their rent payments, giving them more money for sessions with Fitzsimons. Mrs Kelly said that she believed she could influence world events by helping the spirits of world leaders, including Mikhail Gorbachev, Ronald Reagan, Bob Hawke and Augusto Pinochet. Mrs Kelly said she had spent up to \$225 per week on Fitzsimons' courses.

Mrs Kelly said Fitzsimons hit disciples up to six times across the face if spirits inside them gave the wrong answers to questions during sessions with him. She said Fitzsimons hit her and others very hard.

She said Fitzsimons knew virtually every detail of his pupils' personal lives, and used the information to encourage the belief that their family and friends were acting negatively against them. Mrs Kelly said she was required to list up to twenty sins a night. Mrs Kelly said that in hindsight her involvement with The Circle was faulty and illogical. "I was so exhausted and so frightened I couldn't look at anything clearly," she said.

Mrs Kelly told the court she would attend The Circle class rescues which sometimes went until 6am. She said she and other Circle members visited spiritualist venues around Melbourne to try to recruit members. Negative activities were also required to be listed by members and they were called "listings", Mrs Kelly said. Mrs Hampel asked her client if listings were like written confessions of spiritual sins. Mrs Kelly said they were.

Mrs Hampel said that Mrs Kelly and the two other former disciples who were also suing Fitzsimons had believed him when they were told that they would become psychic healers and mediums, become better people, have physical ailments cured and become more spiritually aware. The results were not achieved, she said.

Mrs Hampel said that the world catastrophe predicted for the end of 1984 was revised when it did

not occur. In the catastrophe a nuclear holocaust would tilt the world on its axis, shifting polar ice and causing earthquakes, tidal waves and falling buildings.

Mr Stratemeyer said he lost most of his \$50,000 inheritance while he and his wife attended The Circle between March 1983 and October 1984. He said Fitzsimons had told them they could be psychic healers and cure the disabled. Mr Stratemeyer said he wanted to leave the group, but realised he would lose his wife if he did. "I couldn't leave, I knew I would be divorced like other people [from the group] before me," he said. Mr Stratemeyer said Fitzsimons had brainwashed other people in his group and caused them to break away from friends, family and marriage partners.

Mr Stratemeyer said that Fitzsimons had not helped him in any way, and the courses had not helped his stuttering or bladder problems. He said Fitzsimons had told him his brother-in-law was a bloodsucker and he should be removed from the Stratemeyers' house. Fitzsimons had also told Mr Stratemeyer that he was doing the wrong thing when he mowed his lawn instead of going to a class. Neighbours had complained because the grass was high and the seeds were being blown into their gardens. Mrs Stratemeyer said she and her husband did not renovate their house because they believed it would be completely or partially destroyed in the world catastrophe predicted by Mr Fitzsimons.

### Defence

Barry Fox, attorney for Fitzsimons, said his client's followers were adults and should have realised that representations he had made were not being fulfilled. He said the plaintiffs had begun attending Fitzsimons' classes in 1983 and 1984, and they continued to attend although they should have realised that his representations - if any were made - "Were not happening".

"Here was a case where over a long period of time people went back over and over and over again, paying their money. Adult people engaged over a long period of time going to these classes ... and they continued to go."

Mr Fox cited the evidence of Judith Kelly, who had told the court that at Fitzsimons' suggestion she had gone on a water diet and had lost 20kg so she would be able to run from an impending world catastrophe.

Mrs Kelly had conceded, Mr Fox said, that if she had consulted a dietician she would have been told that the water diet was ridiculous. "She became well aware of the consequences of pursuing this course of a water diet, and chose to proceed. A mature lady pursued this course, she admitted, over a long period of weeks or months and chose to hang on in the face

of what would have, to ordinary people, called for change."

Mr Fox told the court his client's attitude was that people could get involved if they wished. He said Fitzsimons denied giving an "ironclad guarantee" of health cures or personal advancement. Fitzsimons only told his students they could "hope to overcome" physical problems and achieve psychic healing at his classes, Mr Fox said. "He quite readily concedes that if you consider it a lot of rubbish then it's up to you," Mr Fox said.

Fitzsimons told the court he took over leadership of The Circle in January 1980. He said he had become fascinated with spiritualism and psychism in 1978. "I thought it made life a lot more interesting," he said. "I grew up with orthodox religion ... I was taught a lot about fear, hell, and fire and damnation." Fitzsimons said he believed in what he taught: "I believe that we can be guided by invisible forces."

Fitzsimons denied his business was a sham. He said he had not told his former students that psychic healing would cure their physical ills. Fitzsimons also denied a suggestion by Mrs Hampel that he was taking money from gullible people whom he conned into believing crazy values that he himself did not believe.

However, he agreed that he was operating a spiritual group registered under the business name "Aspects" while he was an undischarged bankrupt.

On further cross-examination by Mrs Hampel about predictions as to the dates the world catastrophe would occur, Fitzsimons said that in October or November 1984 he began to wonder if the dates were wrong, and consulted the spirit guides.

He agreed with Mrs Hampel that he had taken out a mortgage on a house in October 1984, despite the predictions. Asked if he was hedging his bets, he said "You can call it what you like. I needed somewhere to live."

Fitzsimons agreed that in 1983 he had been an undischarged bankrupt whose creditors would have received 20 or 30 cents in the dollar in debt repayments. He also agreed that he did not declare his 1983 earnings to a trustee in bankruptcy because he did not think he had to unless his income was high. After consulting bankruptcy administrators he thought he could run a business but could not obtain credit unless he told lenders that he was an undischarged bankrupt. (An undischarged bankrupt under Australian law is a person who has gone bankrupt but has not discharged his debts or completed his period as a bankrupt.)

### Decision

The judge found Fitzsimons fraudulently

misrepresented his psychic abilities and courses. He ordered Fitzsimons to pay \$62,000 to the three plaintiffs.

After the case, Fitzsimons said he would go on teaching but with more caution.. He said he would get a legal contract drawn up before every meeting.

Mrs Kelly said she was "ecstatic" about the result.

Mark Plummer was founding president of Australian Skeptics and until recently was executive director of the US-based Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). Details of the court case have been summarised from articles reporting the case in the Melbourne Sun and the Melbourne Age. Acknowledgement is therefore given to the work of the journalists writing for those journals.



### Psychic warns of fraud

*Tim Mendham*

"More than 90% of Australia's psychic advisers are frauds or dangerous amateurs who threaten the mental health and possibly lives of gullible clients."

No, that wasn't a Skeptic talking. That was the surprising view of Margaret Dent, a professional clairvoyant and ordained minister of the Spiritual Enlightenment Church of Australia, who had broken a 20-year public silence to speak out on the "confidence tricksters and profiteers" making a quick buck out of the "terrific upsurge in psychic consciousness with the so-called New Age".

Quoted in the Sydney Sun-Herald of May 28 this year, Ms Dent said she knew of "dozens of cases where people have needed psychiatric treatment after exposure to frauds. It's only a question of time before somebody actually gets killed." She obviously hasn't heard of Jonestown.

She quoted a number of examples of psychic rip-offs, none of which would come as any surprise to readers of this journal. These included a housewife who put up with repeated beatings from her drunken husband because she had been given assurances by a psychic that he would soon die, a family that spent \$5000 on magic spells and love potions to ensure the marriage of their spinster daughter, exorcists charging up to \$5000 to rid people of non-existent ghosts, and a successful futures market operator who hit the bottle and let his business crash after being told he would be bankrupt in 12 months (is this a case of accurate



prediction or self-fulfilling prophecy?).

She claims that the number of practising psychics could run into thousands, of whom less than one in 10 were qualified. "Look at classified columns in local papers. They're advertising everywhere. The irony is that if they have to advertise, they're no good at their job. Word-of-mouth is all a genuine clairvoyant needs. If I ever advertised, I'd be working 100 hours a day, 24 days a week."

Ms Dent, who is obviously against advertising her services, is described as "down to earth with a lively sense of humour, 42, a suburban housewife, with clairvoyance advice as a part-time job."

"All my life I've seen and heard things that other people didn't. Until I was 14, I thought I'd end up in the looney bin," she said. "Then someone took me along to a spiritualist church where everyone took this sort of thing for granted. Then I learnt how to harness the gift and put it to good use. By the time I turned 30, I was spending every spare moment reading for people or doing church services."

She claims to have clients including doctors, lawyers, high flying businessmen (although she doesn't predict share prices), politicians, farmers and even a Supreme Court judge.

Her comments in the Sun Herald were followed the next week by an agony column of complaints against psychics. One reader said that her marriage, previously relatively trouble free, had broken down following a clairvoyant's prediction of marriage troubles. "The psychic predictions seemed to trigger mistrust in our relationship." Another complained that although not having been conned, the psychic "did not know where the information was coming from". Two other readers commented on readings they had had done by Ms Dent herself, one in favour and one against, although the latter wished "to make contact with her and have another reading by her before I call her a fraud". None of the writers of the published letters doubted the validity of psychic and clairvoyant readings in themselves, only the particular practitioners they had approached.

Ms Dent, at the end of the first article, made a number of predictions of her own. "The weather becomes even more abnormal [this following a particularly cold and wet spell in Sydney]. NSW has the deepest snow falls on record and snow where it's never snowed more. Sydney is due for massive hail storms and Queensland will suffer its most damaging cyclones ever." So far, Sydney has not suffered a massive hail storm, and Queensland is yet to feel the onslaught of its most damaging cyclone. The snow season has been a mixed affair, with snow machines

providing enough for good skiing.

A final quote: "The phonies play on people's fears; fear of death, ill health, family break-ups, losing their jobs, kids running amok, financial ruin. Once people confess these fears, they become putty in a conman's hands."

We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

### Addendum:

It must be the hailstorms or the cyclone, for the season seems to have reached us whereby practitioners of the paranormal are coming out of their respective closets to be revealed as the sceptics they truly are.

In the July 19 issue of *The Age* which had an article on channellers, the president of the Victorian Spiritualists Union, the Reverend Gordon J. Cowie, warned that "there are people around who are not actual channellers nor are they truly mediums, but they certainly can pretend they are".

The article continues "He advises the sceptical approach to anyone claiming they are trance mediums (channellers) or clairvoyants. Seek proof - facts known only to you, or a person who has died. ... Be especially sceptical, he says, where money is being charged. 'Be careful of people who are charging money because they are in it to make money'.

"Mr Cowie says that in the years he has been involved in spiritualism he has seen a lot of people who caused him to doubt that they were who they claimed to be. Others he has seen seemed [our emphasis] to be honest in their intent. It must come back to personal investigation, he says. 'Keep both feet on the ground, approach it with an open, sceptical mind'." Hear, hear!



## NAARF off

A Sydney reader sent us a copy of the following promotional letter from the New Age Astrological Research Foundation (NAARF) in Sydney's Paddington. We can't guarantee its authenticity, but it makes fascinating reading.

"Many of you will be aware of the fantastic success of the Compatibility Seminar held last December by NTK Associates, at which seminar participants were able to find their "perfect match" by means of NTK's sophisticated computerised per-profile

matching system. The New Age Astrological Research Foundation, in conjunction with NTK Compatibility Associates, has now formulated an alternative social compatibility matching system using widely accepted New Age principles including Astrology (both Occidental and Oriental), Numerology, Crystal Vibrations, Harmonic Convergence and Phrenology. This exciting new system will be discussed and demonstrated for the first time at the May 7th Conference (the date for which has been selected as being both Astrologically and Numerologically auspicious). We're sure you will want to attend.

Available to answer all your questions at the Conference will be Research Directors of NAARF: Nel Grigg, well known Virgo phrenologist, Tim Owen, noted Cancerian crystal specialist, and Karl Zlotowski, eminent Aquarian author and commentator on New Age issues.

Minimal sustenance (rice crackers, organically grown seaweed dip, etc) and soothing background music (whale song recordings and white noise) will be provided. Conference participants are requested to bring their own ideologically sound beverage. Participants should also be prepared to fill out a short questionnaire upon arrival at the Conference for NAARF evaluation purposes.

Yours eternally,

New Age Astrological Research Foundation"

Hmmm!



## **Travels of a Skeptic II** **Mamba Magic**

Harry Edwards reports from semidarkest Africa

Most psychics attribute the nascence of their alleged paranormal powers to a traumatic experience - Peter Hurkos, the psychic detective, fell off a ladder; at the age of three, Uri Geller felt energy forces enter his body; others have been zapped by lightning or alien beings, and so on. But to discover that one has been supernaturally vitalised after being bitten by a deadly African Green Mamba must rate as unique - such is the claim of South African Dr Ronnie Barkhan PhD, FAAPH, FCH (USA), Hypnotherapist, Psychotherapist and Relaxologist.

In Johannesburg on May 20 I was guest speaker at the inaugural general meeting of ARIP (Association

for the Rational Investigation of Paranormal Claims) where nearly 100 South African skeptics and likeminded persons attended to see a demonstration by (according to his impressive list of achievements) a world honoured hypnotherapist.

Having been introduced as the Rev Dr Harry Edwards, I informed the audience that I was an atheist and therefore qualified as the "ultimate skeptic", my ordination and doctorate having been purchased in the USA for \$15.

This confession, showing how easy it is to obtain impressive, albeit false, credentials, was a ploy to induce Dr Ron to give an account of his own, a subterfuge which to a certain extent produced the desired result.

Following my brief account of some of the investigations carried out by the Australian Skeptics, Dr David Liknaitzky, ARIP's chairman, introduced Dr Ronnie Barkhan.

Modesty does not appear to be Dr Ron's strong suit. Quoting from his advertising brochure, we have: "The well renowned and much loved Dr Barkhan, for over 30 years he has helped people from all walks of life to develop into happy confident and problem free individuals they always wanted to be", and "this man possesses strange and supernatural powers which enable him to trace the cause of an ailment and treat the effect in usually the first session". The two page spiel concludes with an impressive list of international awards and mentions in "Who's Who in the World".

The list of ailments treated by Dr Ron includes allergies, agrophobia (sic), hyperinsension, neurosis, insomnia, depression, psoriasis, sexual problems, nail biting, weight control, stuttering and stammering, but during the course of the evening he explained several times that he only treated psychosomatic conditions, not physical illnesses. This claim appears to be contradicted later on.

After a heart-rending and tedious account of Dr Barkhan's early years during which he was bitten at the age of 11 years by a deadly Green Mamba and knew what it was like to die; served in the forces during the war, ending up in a hospital a cripple about to have his leg amputated, saved only by self-hypnosis and going on to win a walking marathon; a mother dying of cancer; took up night time education in accountancy and supported his almost destitute family, he started to attend seances and felt a "power" building up in himself.

He was seized by a spirit control, and by means of automatic writing wrote a thesis "Hypnotism and its relationship to Mediumship" for which the College of Applied Sciences in London conferred on him a PhD.

Like others who have claimed to have produced similar literary works by this means, Dr Ron admitted his complete ignorance of the subject and cognisance of what he had written I don't think it unreasonable, therefore, to suggest that as the thesis was dictated by a spirit or spirits unknown, the prestigious distinction was obtained under false pretences.

Notwithstanding no mention of formal training in hypnosis, "DR" Ron became co-founder of the South African Hypnotherapists Association and set up practice.

Thumbing through a mountainous pile of testimonials and letters of thanks accumulated over the past fifteen years, he reiterated some of his cures: a woman confined to a wheelchair with polio who, after therapy, stood up and danced like a fairy; another, in calipers, was cured by the magnetic energy emanating from his gyrating hands; and similar miracles.

He then went on to tell of a patient he had regressed to a past life in Atlantis, who told him of a magic healing stone that "diffused rays" and which cured cancer. A regression to another past life in which the patient had been a healer in Kenya revealed that the mineral could be found at the foot of Mt Kilimanjaro.

Obtaining a sample of the magic healing stone, Dr Ron used it to cure many of his patients of arthritis and produced several photographs of gnarled hands as evidence!

Proudly displaying a sealed cardboard box, Dr Ron told the audience that the box contained the miracle mineral.

I speculated at this point that perhaps he was familiar with the works of Edgar Cayce in which the 'sleeping prophet' describes a crystal energy source called the Tuaoi Stone used to trap and utilise the rays of the Sun, and was somewhat alarmed that Dr Ron was irresponsibly exposing us to such a potent force without protective shielding.

Aware of the value of his acquisition, Dr Ron contacted cancer research institutes and hospitals all over the world, all of whom declined to test it or failed to show any interest.

Lamenting that mankind was being deprived of the benefits of his great discovery and that he could not use it himself for fear of being charged with practising medicine without a licence, he wound up his dissertation to the relief of a restless audience, who perked up at the promise of a practical demonstration of his powers.

### **Dr Ron in action**

Calling on a woman sitting in the front row to come up onto the stage, Dr Ron explained that to save time he was going to hypnotise the same subject with whom

he had worked on previous occasions.

The subject, a pale round-eyed person whose vacant expression caused me to believe that she was only ninety cents in the dollar, dutifully sat on a chair.

The audience leaned forward, expectations reached fever pitch, only to be dashed by the lacklustre and unconvincing performance that followed.

No swinging pendulum, no mysterious hand gestures, no mesmeric stare, no Svengalian incantations; simply a thumb pressed to the subject's forehead while Dr Ron squinted at the audience through his pebble lens glasses.

The effect of this magic touch was instantaneous; the subject's normal vacant expression was transformed into that of a stunned mullet.

"The subject is now in a hypnotic trance and will obey my every command", the disappointed audience was told.

Dr Liknaitsky, a pathologist, was called upon to verify that the subject was indeed in a comatose state, and he agreed that she was. (Subsequently Dr Liknaitsky told me that the subject was not in a trance and that he had just gone along with the act.)

"I will now give you superhuman strength" continued our hypnotist. "Raise your left arm."

The subject obliged with a "Sieg Heil" and appeared to effortlessly resist all attempts by Dr Ron to push the arm up or down.

A member of the audience was invited to try, with the same result. My offer to break the arm off at the shoulder was rejected however.

Then the subject was told to fold her arms across the front of her chest with the forefinger of one hand resting on the forefinger of the other. Two members of the audience were then invited to try and pull her arms apart; they failed to do so.

Next we were told that the subject would feel no pain while under an hypnotic spell. To this end Dr Ron pinched up the skin on the subject's forearm and thrust a needle through it. "See, no pain and no blood," he exclaimed. The subject walked up and down the auditorium aisle to give the audience a closer view.

(There is nothing supernatural about this particular incident. The epidermal layers can be pierced by a needle without producing blood. Acupuncture is an example. And pinching the skin together is the "pressure anaesthetic" method used by doctors when giving an injection.)

Finally, with a pathetic attempt at humour, the subject was told that she was from Venus and seeing human beings for the first time. The "Venusian" mechanically jerked her head from one section of the audience to another, pausing each time to say "ha, ha, ha".

This concluded Dr Ron's demonstration of his extraordinary powers and the audience was invited to ask questions.

A frail and bespectacled young lady (who incidentally happened to be the wife of ARIP's resident magician) jumped to her feet and offered to perform the same miraculous feats of superhuman strength without being under an hypnotic spell. Dr Ron scoffed at the suggestion but agreed that she should try - she succeeded to tumultuous applause and much to the embarrassment of Dr Ron.

I asked whether Dr Ron had asked his hypnotically regressed patient any questions to authenticate his claim to have lived in Atlantis, to which he replied "No, I believed him". My offer to have his magic stone tested in Australia was rejected on the grounds that it already had been tested by him and it worked.

Finally, after a barrage of questions from ARIP's secretary Marian Laserson, Dr Ron exploded, "Madam, I'm not here to convince you. I don't care whether you believe me or not!"

A somewhat crestfallen hypnotherapist and a disillusioned audience then filed out for coffee and cakes in the foyer. to discuss what had amounted to an amateurish performance of some simple party tricks.

### Conclusion

While I am rarely loath to express my gut reaction to the shenanigans of charlatans when I recognise them, in deference to our President's blood pressure I will refrain from what he may consider to be defamatory comments in respect of Dr Ron. Instead, perhaps the reader would like to hazard a guess as to what they may be by completing the following multiple choice question.

Given that the above is a true and accurate account of the proceedings, I conclude that Dr Ron is:

- a) deluded,
- b) a liar,
- c) a fraud,
- d) a nut,
- e) a charlatan,
- f) not the full quid,
- g) a con artist,
- h) all of the above.

There is no prize for the first, best or neatest entry.

On behalf of my wife and myself, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Marian and Jack Laserson of Johannesburg, and David and Hannah Liknaitsky of Hout Bay for the kindness and hospitality they afforded us while in South Africa.

### Review

#### *Psychic Powers Live*

7 Network June 8, 1989

*Barry Williams*

This latest effort in a series of "live" two hour programs on various mysteries was the one that all sceptics were waiting for. This was the one where sceptics, in the person of James Randi, were to have equal time. To my mind, the show exhibited all the characteristics of the curate's egg - it was good in parts.

Seven paranormalists attempted to perform their stunts under controlled conditions and all were signally unsuccessful. The pot was sweetened for them by the offer of US\$100,000 for any who could perform at a level greater than chance, and not one came even close.

An astrologer, asked to assign to 12 individuals their correct star sign, got all 12 wrong. Someone tested for ESP using Zener cards had 50 correct guesses out of 250 - exactly as chance would predict. A psychometrist asked to divine which watch belonged to which key from 12 people got two right.

An aura reader detected auras where there were no people, and a water diviner had trouble detecting water, although the denouement of this latter test seemed to be too abrupt.

These results, and the others obtained by two clairvoyants, were what a sceptic would expect, absolute failure. No attempt was made to interview the "psychics" to determine what excuses they would offer, nor was there any resume at the end to point out the magnitude of the failure of seven different "psychics" to perform the skills they had claimed they possessed.

A confrontation between Randi and Uri Geller, which should have been the high point, did not materialise. There was no face-to-face meeting. While Randi quite clearly showed how Geller performed his tricks, Geller is sufficiently adept at showmanship that he probably convinced non-sceptics that there were still areas of doubt.

In general, this program left this viewer somewhat dissatisfied.



### Review

#### **Nostradamus: The Final Chapter**

7 and Prime Networks

August 27, 1989

Tim Medham

What is it about the 7 Network that makes it the bastion of pseudoscience on the TV medium? Apart from a scattering of programs on the other networks (Richard Neville's short-lived series on everything alternative on the 10 Network being the most notable), 7 has given more promotion to the weird and wonderful world of just plain silliness than any other network, the program described at left notwithstanding.

This latest addition to the genre was a continuation of a program shown ten years ago, with little extra to justify the effort.

Why anyone takes any notice of the supposed predictions of the 16th century "seer" is anyone's guess. Statements about the future based on his quatrains inevitably fail - the predicted destruction of California last year is an obvious example. It is only when followers of Nostradamus look back on recent events and twist the various verses to fit that there seems to be any justification for any belief at all.

In fact this is what the producers of the show, Paul and Margaret Dane, said during the program (you must be scraping the barrel for experts when you have to interview yourself for your own program - this is like asking Paul Keating to unbiasedly espouse the successes of the Labor government). "There's no doubt that it's much easier to understand what he is talking about when you've got the benefit of hindsight," they said. Too true! But if you can't make an accurate prediction before the event, then what good is a prophet to anyone?

Obviously he's a lot of good to the producers. The previous program rated extremely highly. We'll wait for hindsight to predict the success of the second edition.

And what of host John Waters? Everyone knows actors are experts on everything. Just look at Shirley Maclaine. Summary? Rubbish!



### **Dealing with Tarot Cards**

Probability and the Scientific Method

Richard Walding

**A debate about Tarot cards and probability raged last year in the pages of the *Australian Physicist* (AP), the journal of the Australian Institute of Physics (AIP). The war of the words began when a research article "An Experimental Test on the Basis of Probability Theory" using Tarot cards by Professor Brian McCusker and Cherie Sutherland McCusker was published in the January 1988 edition of the journal. It ended when the editor called a halt after publishing the McCusker reply in October. In this article, the editor's decision to publish and the response by the scientific community to such a provocative challenge are examined.**

When a professor of physics from Sydney University writes a report saying that he has used Tarot cards to disprove the axiom of probability theory, even the most hardened sceptic needs to take notice. The McCuskers' experiment was an exact copy of an experiment carded out by Dr Jane English<sup>1</sup> and they conclude that "In easily repeatable circumstances, the predictions of the axiom are grossly in error"<sup>2</sup>.

#### **Examples of the Basic Axiom of Probability Theory**

After a large number of throws of a uniform die, the relative frequency of occurrence of any one face will be 1/6; in the case of playing cards it will be 1/52; for a coin 1/2; and for Tarot cards, the frequency will be 1/78.

The McCuskers argue that just as Euclid's parallel axiom was questioned and overthrown 100 years ago, it is common sense to question other "obvious" axioms.

#### **Jane English's Experiment**

Physicist Jane English is a Tarot practitioner who began each day by, first, meditating and then selecting a card from a facedownwards spread of a Tarot deck. The first selection was for the state of her body, the second for mind and the third for spirit. She recorded these three selections each day in her journal.

When she analysed the 22 months of data (1,982 selections), the probability that her selections was in agreement with the predictions of the axiom for random selections was 0.03%; that is, not good agreement at all.

Two friends, also Tarot practitioners, achieved similar results - one with 2395 selections had a

probability of agreement with the axiom of 0.01% and the other with 2015 selections had almost negligible agreement (less than 1 in ten thousand million).

Without meditating and using non-Tarot cards merely numbered 1 to 78, Jane English made 1,982 selections and achieved 47% agreement with the axiom. A similar run on an Apple computer gave a result also in agreement with the axiom.

### McCuskers' Experiment

In October 1985, Brian McCusker, Cherie Sutherland and her 15 year old son Eden began the experiment meditating and selecting. The results were clear-cut to them the axiom was wrong.

Cherie's results, for instance, gave a probability of agreement as one chance in one million billion billion. Control results, without meditation, gave results in agreement with the axiom.

### Other Experiments Examined

The article went on to compare the McCuskers' results with other experiments. They chose the 1934 experiments of Dr J.B. Rhine in which he used a special 25-card pack (Zener cards) made up of five sets of five cards (star, rectangle, cross, circle and wavy line). One of his subjects correctly guessed the card chosen by the experimenter (often Rhine himself) more than 32% of the 17,500 trials whereas the probability axiom predicts 20% success.

The McCuskers comment that whereas Rhine considered this to be proof for the occurrence of clairvoyance, they believe it to be an enormous discrepancy between experimental results and the predictions of the axiom. With dice throwing, Rhine believed he proved psychokinesis as agreement with the axiom was less than one in a billion billion. The McCuskers think otherwise.

They then cite G. Spencer Brown's highly controversial monograph, "Probability and Scientific Inference", which, like the McCuskers' work, directs its criticism not against technical details of the application of statistical procedures, but against the basic assumptions of probability theory itself.

Finally, the McCuskers suggest why the axiom fails and we start to get an insight into McCusker philosophy. "The axiom of probability theory came out of the same intellectual climate as classical physics. The assumptions underlying both were realistic, materialistic, deterministic and reductionist"<sup>3</sup> They remind readers that classical physics, which "failed catastrophically even to explain material phenomena" such as the optical spectra of sodium or mercury vapour lamps, was replaced by quantum mechanics.

"It insists on the essential role of the observer" they add. "Like quantum mechanics, the Tarot experiments emphasise the importance of the observer in the universe. And if the observer is important, then any accurate description of the universe must include a detailed study of the observer, that is ourselves."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, contend the McCuskers, a psychological examination of human consciousness is warranted. They note that the progression of psychology has been from Freudian to Jungian to Humanistic/Gestalt to Transpersonal and since 1977 Ken Wilbur has synthesised this modern work with the older, mystical schools of psychology (Buddhist, Zen, Christian, etc). He no longer sees the universe as matter but as nine levels of consciousness, the lowest of which is matter.

Tarot experiments are seen as important in exploring the higher levels of consciousness. The most challenging remark in the article is to "do it yourself".

### The Response

The response by the scientific community was swift and unanimous. Patterns of such response have been examined in the past, and the letters to the editor of the *Australian Physicist* (AP) may be usefully viewed in these terms.

**1. Fraud and Deception.** This allegation is one of the most consistent, damaging and hurtful levelled at parapsychology researchers. The high regard that letter writers obviously have for Prof McCusker prevents the same boots-and-all approach of psi-watchers like James Randi. Nevertheless Dr H.H. Macey (AP, April 1988, p.77) questions the uniformity of the Tarot cards used. Poor printing results in cards being able to be read from behind "thus making it easy for anyone with the necessary knowledge of the code to pick a wanted card. The use of marked cards in playing is one of the oldest forms of cheating."

ANU physicists B.I. Henry and Y. Kondo (AP, April 1988, p.103) purchased a new deck of cards and noted the irregular patterns on the back. Twenty-two cards exhibited thick-line patterns while the remainder were thin-line. They note that physical bias by intentionally or unintentionally selecting or avoiding these cards could lead to anomalous outcomes of the order obtained by the McCuskers. "Perhaps the most obvious scenario is one in which intentional bias is achieved by using distinguishable cards. If there is no possibility for bias in the Tarot card experiments, then we would be forced to accept the conclusion that the bias is a paranormal phenomenon or that the fundamental axiom is incorrect after all."

Hard-boiled physicist E.L. Deacon (AP, May 1988,

p.104) of Beaumaris also examined Tarot packs, one from the USA and one from the UK, and agreed with the observation above. His statistical argument showed that by just having 12 cards selected one-third less than the rest gave a probability over 2340 selections of 1 in 10,000, just like McCusker.

Also on the attack about bias is CSIRO scientist Dr H.G. Scott (AP, May 1988, p.105): "... a used deck almost always has minor variations in the appearance of some cards: consciously or otherwise these are another source of bias."

Fraud and deception are rife in the history of parapsychology. Letter writers generally give the McCuskers the benefit of the doubt and suggest unintentional bias.

Three levels of fraud have been common in the past:

a) *Conscious fraud by all parties including the researcher.*

Mathematician S.G. Soal, one of Rhine's strongest critics among the British parapsychologists, began his own testing program in 1934. After five years of heroic research, Soal concluded that he succeeded in demonstrating the laws of chance.

In 1945, Soal began more testing of ESP using cards. Never before had so many safeguards been introduced and fraud seemed impossible. Soal's findings in favour of ESP were hailed as definitive by parapsychologists and were so good that the rest of the scientific community, including the sceptics, could not ignore them. Here was a man, a severe critic of Rhine's protocol and analysis, a professional mathematician who took every known precaution, a researcher who previously confirmed laws of chance, now suddenly demonstrating highly successful ESP. The odds against his results were 1079 to 1.

But it appeared he did cheat. He altered 1s to 4s and 5s and inserted extra "hits" into record sheets. Supporters claimed he must have been in an "altered state" or did "automatic writing in a dissociated state".

Cheating has been rife in the history of parapsychology, mostly from the subjects, but well documented cases of experimenter fraud can be found.

The late Don Laycock, linguist from ANU and somewhat of an authority on Tarot cards wrote (AP, April 1988, p.76) "In the experiments reported, there were no scientific controls, so even outright fraud is not excluded. Magicians know many ways to keep

cutting the same cards from a pack."

b) *The physical researcher, because of eagerness to believe, has been taken in by unscrupulous subjects.*

Stanford researchers Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff<sup>6</sup> were certainly conned by the unscrupulous Uri Geller<sup>7</sup>. Evidence suggests that Freud, himself a believer in telepathy, was misled by subjects who intentionally gave him positive results out of kindness.

c) *Everyone sincere and honest but that they all deluded themselves.*

Perhaps where the McCuskers come in. It is interesting to note that the McCuskers cite J.B. Rhine's work on ESP as confirmation of the Tarot card effect. Surely, if anyone has been shown to be deluded by sloppy protocol and recording errors, it was Rhine. In spite of being an "intensely sincere" man (Martin Gardiner's words), Rhine used cards which

could be read from the back<sup>8</sup> and these transparent cards were used by the Society for Psychological Research up until 1960<sup>9</sup>.

As the protocol was tightened the psi effects disappeared. Rhine developed *ad hoc* hypotheses to account for this. "Forward displacement" meant that the subject was thinking of cards ahead; incredibly "backward displacement" meant the subject was calling cards maybe two or three behind; negative results were due to "psi missing"; good performance under loose conditions which vanished as controls were tightened was called "decline effect"; "lag effect" meant the subject was selecting cards from previous experiments.

Skeptics luminary Anthony Garrett (AP, April 1988, p.76) wrote "Although more than one hundred years of parapsychology has failed to produce a replicable success, methodology has nevertheless moved on, and it is disappointing to see Rhine's results quoted without due caution."

Rhine spoke of ESP as "incredibly elusive, fickle, skittish, shift ..."<sup>10</sup>. The 1952 test with hidden cameras showed that psi believers cheated in favour and psi non-believers cheated against. Prof McCusker makes no mention of this conclusive (and well known) debunking of Rhine's work. Perhaps he has suspended judgement of his soul brother. Rhine, like McCusker,



believed the attitude of the observer affected results<sup>11</sup>. Rhine, a radical dualist, believed it was necessary to demonstrate psychokinesis and ESP to put the principles of mind-body dualism (the existence of a soul) on a scientific footing<sup>12</sup>.

Proof of fraud and deception can be achieved by two means: expose the fraud directly, as Randi did with the Geller cheating, or provide a rational reconstruction as to how the fraud could be achieved. Randi also did this with Geller, showing how the trickery worked. Letter writers to the Australian Physicist belong to the second group by showing how unconscious bias *could* occur.

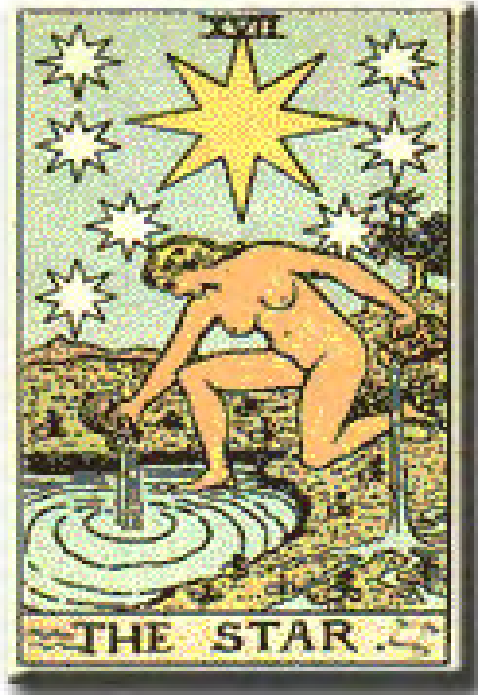
Sceptics can exploit this position. Proof of fraud or even establishing the probability of it takes evidence away from the researcher. McCusker is seen to be vulnerable when bias is implied. A sceptical position borrowed from Hume and his dismissal of miracles is "it is easier to believe in lying and cheating than in the suspension of the laws of physics". In the past, such implications weakened the claims of parapsychology researchers and branded them as charlatans. Parapsychologists dismiss fraud charges as non-scientific. A chemist doesn't accuse another of fraud when results upset them.

The other weapon in the hands of sceptics but not used by readers of AP is ridicule. It is a popular rather than a professional attack and not worthy of scientists. The closest anyone comes is Anthony Garrett who writes: "Those of us who have researched at Sydney University's School of Physics (including this writer) are well aware of Brian McCusker's disdain for the alleged narrow-mindedness of contemporary science." Not exactly below-the-belt stuff.

Well, no time like the present. You see, Brian McCusker believes in levitation, the sort where people can rise off the floor by mental, not physical means. In January 1985, he claimed on ABC Radio<sup>13</sup> that a group in Sydney were having a 90% success rate with levitation but he declined to say where, even when pressed by the Australian Skeptics at a public lecture at Deakin University on September 11, 1985.

Eventually, after addressing a MENSAs meeting on May 17, 1986, at the home of Dr Met Dickson, the electron microscopist from the University of NSW, Prof McCusker finally obliged and told colleague Anthony Garrett that the Transcendental Meditation organisation in Sydney was the place to go<sup>14</sup>. "Try it yourself" he challenged repeatedly. Come to think of it, he made the same challenge in the Australian Physicist articles. A shallow retort, but very provocative. Mathematician Dr Ken Smith from the University of Queensland summed up: "When some

of these professors get near retiring age they get some ratbag ideas". Presumably he was referring to Fred Hoyle.



**2. Violations of Accepted Law.** A standard sceptical position on parapsychology is "if psi contradicts scientific law, then it must be fraudulent". It has now become standard for parapsychologists to look to quantum mechanics for a scientific basis of ESP. Proponents of psi accuse sceptics of dogmatism by clinging to a world view refuted by ESP and modern physics itself.

E.L. Deakin writes that Heisenberg's uncertainty principle is misunderstood and cautions that it applies at the atomic and subatomic level and not at the Tarot card scale of the McCuskers' experiment. You'd wonder how many times scientists have to say this.

**3. Simple Prejudice.** None of the respondents overtly take the position of simply refusing to believe psi. Targ and Puthoff claim to have been told by a journal editor "This is the kind of thing that I would not believe in even if it existed".

The statement of one respondent (H.G. Scott) is typical: "I will need far better experimental evidence of the falsity of the axiom before I am prepared to devote twenty, or even two, minutes a day to the test that the McCuskers suggest."

**4. Theological Arguments.** In 1909, Pope Pius X sent Dr Godfrey Raupert on a lecture tour of Roman Catholic seminaries in the US warning of the hazards



of psi research. In the brief Australian Physicist exchange, theological criticism was not invoked. McCusker sought support from the Cardinals. He recalled how the Cardinals were invited to look through Galileo's telescope at the moons of Jupiter: "The Cardinals refused, saying they had no need to waste time on such nonsense. The Cardinals were wrong."

**5. Philosophical and Methodological Arguments.** The major criticism of the McCusker work falls into this category. It can be divided into six areas:

a) *Conceptual.* Garrett argues that "it is impossible, logically, to test theories of probability by experiment. Probability theories can only be selected on the grounds of internal consistency." Scott asks "Can a test, the validity of which depends on the truth of the axiom, be used to establish the falsity of that axiom?" This suggests an analogy with Godel's theorem that no proof of the consistency of a sufficiently powerful formal system can be given within the system itself. In a similar manner, no competent scientist can ever prove his absolute competence to himself; only incompetent scientists can do this.

b) No repeatable experiments. In 1937, J.B. Rhine stated emphatically "We must try to discover [psi] by repeated test, by careful labour and techniques. The material within the field must be taken from the anecdotal stage to that of experimentation before it can be classified as scientific knowledge."<sup>15</sup> Rhine, however, as has been shown, was guilty of shoddy science.

Readers were quick to jump on McCusker for poor methodology. Garrett: "Unfortunately the description of the experiment is vastly insufficient; for example, what randomising process was used on the cards between each day's choice? Selection from an unconsciously preferred region of the pack, coupled with inadequate shuffling between trials, could easily account for the observed deviations." Laycock: "Repeating such experiments under uncontrolled conditions, as suggested by the authors, is unlikely to add any evidence to this already worthless pseudo-scientific account of pseudo-experiments." Jim Graham, CSIRO, (AP, April 1988, p.77): "... we are not told the criterion of success or failure of the arcana test, and without this the article is so much hot air. We are urged to repeat the test for ourselves - an impossibility with the information supplied."

c) Editorial impropriety. The last three quotes

suggest that the editor of the Australian Physicist is remiss in allowing a half-baked article to be published. E.L. Deacon was merely "astonished" but Dr Macey went further: "I was sorry to see the Physicist publishing that paper by the two McCuskers as to me it breaks the fundamental laws of physics publication. In reporting experimental results in print it is essential that the methods used to get them be described in complete detail...".

At the Fourth Annual Skeptics Convention in Sydney, Easter 1988, President Barry Williams awarded the Australian Physicist a dishonourable mention as runner-up in the "Bent Spoon" award. Dr Macey, twisting the knife further in AP's editor, wrote to AIP President Dr John Collins suggesting that AP should have won the award and that those responsible for bringing the AIP into such disrepute should be replaced. The editor may have agonised long and hard about the decision to accept the McCuskers' paper and in retrospect the President may have wished he didn't. See him squirm in AP October 1988, p.247, in reply: "my personal judgement would have been not to publish ....."

Perhaps the criticisms of the editor are unwarranted, not because parapsychology has been given an airing in such a respectable scientific journal but because the editor was neglectful in not insisting on more details regarding experimental procedure. Only 22 (7%) of the 325 lines in the McCuskers' article were about this.

The editor shouldn't have worried - he is in prestigious company. Nature published Targ and Puthoff's now thoroughly discredited work on ESP with less than 3% on procedure. But at least Nature carried an editorial disclaimer warning that the work had experimental design flaws and lacked rigour but was published to show readers what was happening in psi research. New Scientist was conned by a Czechoslovak telepathy hoax<sup>16</sup> and the Institute of Electronics Engineers published Targ and Puthoff's also discredited research of Geller's "remote viewing" or out-of-body experience<sup>17</sup>.

d) Lack of a theory. Only by producing a theory capable of deductive development and with verifiable predictions can parapsychology be separated from the occult. One of the current, most respected psi researchers, R.A. McConnell of the University of Pittsburg, admits that "parapsychology is pre-paradigmatic because it has no theory"<sup>18</sup>. It is worth mentioning this now, even though no letterwriter takes this line of attack, because McCusker tries to come to grips with this criticism in his October 1988 reply in

AP. It is also worth noting that psychology itself has no theories, but that parapsychologists do not often mention this as it calls into question the already shaky status of psychology as a science.

e) *Ad hoc stratagems*. Evidence against psi is twisted to become evidence for psi. Deacon reminds us of the two instances in which McCusker obtained a good agreement with probability theory: “That Brian McCusker obtained a null result with the Tarot cards might be explained by him being either less perceptive or more preoccupied”. McCusker, while not avoiding the issue, suggests that the failure to disprove probability in this case is because “these last two trials were for only 365 selections each” (p.21).

Even McConnell is guilty of *ad hoc* stratagems. His 1982 re-evaluation<sup>19</sup> of his 1948-50 dice rolling psychokinetic research found a disappointing absence of a significant deviation from chance in the experiment as a whole but careful examination turned up an intra-session scoring decline (decline effect) that occurred every quarter page of results. He was not testing a pre-formed hypothesis but merely discovered, a posteriori, this “quarterpage decline”. You may laugh, but McConnell, like Jane English, exclaimed “If a hypothesis can be completely stated before an experiment is first tried, either the problem is trivial or the possible outcomes are circumscribed by an pted theoretical framework.”<sup>20</sup>

I wonder if Prof McCusker has read McConnell. After 166,752 throws of a die, McConnell lamented “The ultimate skill in the analyst is to predict (fairly, of course, without peeking at the data) just what kind of computation will yield a small probability, while eschewing other tests of significance. Parapsychologists must exercise caution in planning the formal analysis of an experiment lest a statistically significant finding be swamped by a host of chance probabilities.”<sup>21</sup>

He probably didn’t read it. There’s too much (23%) on experimental method and procedural control. This leads us into statistics.

f) *Statistics*. Most writers attacked the McCuskers over the issue of statistical analysis. Two of the most

extensive replies were from Scott (April 1988, p.77) and Henry and Kondo (May 1988, p. 102-3).

Both letters argue that small subconscious omissions of cards from daily selections can account for the disagreements with probability theory. It is staggering to think that zero to one omissions, that is just one card which is subconsciously avoided, can account for all of Jane English’s results. Brian McCusker’s results can be accounted for by zero omissions in one case (that’s where he confirmed probability theory) or zero to three omissions for another. Eden is accounted for a 4-5 card omission and Cherie with a 12 card omission.

McCusker’s reply in the October issue is fascinating (see below). A score of 20/20 under perfect control, repeatable on demand, would be much more persuasive.

For a detailed critical review of G. Spencer Brown’s work cited by the McCuskers, readers should seek out Malcolm Turner in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* (ASPR), 55 (1961): 112-117. Numerous problems with Brown’s unorthodox treatment are discussed.

**6. Association with the Occult.** Don Laycock argues that “the authors ... appear to give veiled credence to the occult view that the cards are in some way ‘mystical’ or have hidden powers—such as altering the laws of probability”.

It is easy to link parapsychology with other rejected forms of knowledge that emphasise spirituality, psychic powers, survival of the soul and other traditional religious concerns. Parapsychology can be castigated as a reversion to a prescientific religio-mystic tradition. It may be unfair and *ad hominem* but it contains a grain of truth. “Phone Calls from the Dead” doesn’t enhance the scientific image of parapsychology.

**7. Tensions in Psi Research.** Recall that the McCuskers claimed probability and classical physics were “realistic, materialistic, deterministic and reductionist”. Their Tarot experiments, they claim, contradict this view of the universe, but is in harmony with quantum mechanics. Their most savage attack comes in their October 1988 reply - more on that later.

J.G. Pratt, in the *Journal of the ASPR* (72, 1978, p.129) writes that parapsychology should remain true



to the motives of the founders of psychical research and “struggle to overthrow materialism”. By aping science and ignoring the critics, he says, will make parapsychology a mere cult. “Instead parapsychology should struggle to force the acceptance of a scientifically [based] mind body dualism”.

Rhine<sup>21</sup>, on the other hand, advocated “adopting camouflage for psi’s inherent antimaterialism”. He saw it as bridging “the cult of Spiritualism and the mechanistic philosophy of Science”<sup>22</sup> even though he believed that only science and its methods were competent to establish the truths of religion, refute materialism “and the dangerous doctrine of communism”. The paradox appearing in the McCuskers’ work is apparent: using a materialistic philosophy to defeat materialism: using probability to disprove itself.

Parapsychology began not because of any anomalies encountered in scientific research but because science appeared to threaten the concept of a soul. The McCusker research, like all psi research, is an attempt to challenge the mechanistic world view rather than study anomalies, no matter how the research is cloaked.

The quest is for anomalies which can’t be explained by science. It has to be a quasireligious motivation. It just has to be. As Garrett points out, “more than one hundred years of parapsychology has failed to produce a replicable success”, so surely they would have given up a long time ago otherwise.

### THE RESPONSE

After a torrid time from AIP members, the editorial board invited the McCuskers to reply to comments and criticism. The reply, “Science, Probability and Scientism” (AP, October 1988, pp.243-47) by Brian McCusker and Cherie Sutherland is blood curdling stuff. It introduces new ideas as foreshadowed in the first article which makes it too divergent to discuss in a limited space. Readers with an hour to spare will find the whole article of interest - there’s something to irritate everyone.

Their first point is to establish that the Einsteinian branch of physics is in error by 46 standard deviations and the quantum branch by a factor of  $10^{46}$ . “Obviously, we need to take a very searching look at the fundamental axioms and assumptions of physicists, that is to say, at their belief systems” and “So today many alleged practitioners of science have a set of belief systems (or dogmas) that are in accord with reality”. McCusker wipes out materialism with the argument that Aspect and his co-workers claim their results rule it out. That’s what I call sweeping.

### Answering the Charges

On fraud and deception, McCusker claims “if one engages in the experiment in good faith then one does not cheat” and suggests ways that others could use to overcome these problems - like closing your eyes. But he and friends didn’t close their eyes, and it is unconscious bias we are worried about here.

He then reminds us about the “many experiments which have demonstrated the failure of the axiom”. He again cites Rhine in the same breath as “tight protocol”. This I can’t believe. Garrett mentioned Rhine’s sloppy protocol but McCusker persists. Today, parapsychologists who want the scientific establishment to take their work seriously do not offer for inspection the evidence that previous generations of psychic researchers believed sufficient - the findings of Wallace, Hare, Crookes, Soal *or* Rhine. McCusker is one of the few who still do. Instead, they ask us to look at the trends and patterns they find in research programs carried out in different parapsychological laboratories.

So McCusker cites Warner and Raible (1947) in the USA who experimented with cardguessing using a Zener deck. The experimenters were in an upstairs room and the only method of communication with the subject was with an electric light used to signal when she was ready to guess the next card. McCusker missed one thing. In “Science: Good, Bad and Bogus” (Prometheus, 1981), Martin Gardner showed how a “time-delay” code can be used and was used in a recent experiment using light signals by Charles Tart. Another cheat!

Other research by Jahn and Dunne (1987) using a microelectronic random event generator appears to support psi. McCusker claims that their 250,000 trials confirm Rhine’s findings. One to McCusker. McConnell’s work<sup>18</sup> with 166,752 throws of a die concludes the opposite. Hardly definitive proof.

Criticism by Drs Henry and Kondo that card omission could account for the results is dismissed by McCusker. He said he was aware of the “subliminal awareness” hypothesis before starting. He examined the cards later and found that there was not the sufficient difference in back-patterns required. Martin Gardner once said that “If a researcher submitted a paper ... in which the author was both subject and experimenter, the paper would be rejected.”

McCusker describes the shuffling procedure, fanning and selection. My Tarot book (Sasha Fenton, Aquarian, 1987) says you must keep the cards in a drawstring bag or a silk scarf to insulate the cards from outside influences. Other people should not be

allowed to mess about with them or they will pick up cross vibrations and you should work up a new pack by laying out each card on top of a card from an old deck. Now did Cherie do this? How can we test your hypothesis as you keep suggesting unless we know all the details. Did Cherie use an Annual spread, a Consequences spread or a Celtic Cross? In *Unicorn* (March, 1989) Tarot professional Stephanie Hayward says that fooling with Tarot is like “sitting on a pile of dynamite playing with matches”. Brian McCusker, you should warn Australian Physicist readers of this! Are you trying to blow us all up?

Dr H.G. Scott commented in one letter that you can't test the validity of an axiom with methods which depend on the truth of the axiom. McCusker says: sure you can - the proof is a proof by *reductio ad absurdum*. Who's right?

McCusker replies to Scott's other point about the profitability of casinos proving probability theory. Landing men on the moon doesn't prove Newtonian physics. Touché. He does say though that a large number of successful predictions does not prove the truth of a theory. Popper agrees. But McCusker can't leave this one alone. He says “One incorrect prediction proves its falsity. One case ... is enough to wreck classical probability theory.” This myth of the single, crucial experiment has resulted in needless controversy and has contributed to the False Dichotomy. Antony Flew is just one who has argued that a single, unreplicated event that allegedly attests to a miracle is simply an historical oddity that cannot be part of scientific argument.

“So again we suggest to our readers, if you find our alleged facts hard to swallow, try the experiment for yourselves ...” (McCusker p.247).

McCusker's motivation is irrelevant to the evaluation of his claims. It is important in understanding the persistence of his claims and the claims of other parapsychologists. And it is the claims that come under sustained attack from the scientific community.

The history of science is littered with instances of dogmatic scientists persisting with degenerating research programs in spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. That their persistence has often paid off and their paradigm re-emerged supreme is a testimony to the tenacity of scientists and the power of scientific philosophy.

To abandon probability theory because of one unsettling experiment is naive. McCusker is naive to expect it to happen. But then again, the articles are only half scientific. This is like being half pregnant. It's either scientific or it's not; and it's not.

As long as the need exists to find meaning in life

beyond that which is forthcoming from a materialist philosophy, the search for the paranormal will do on, probably until the end of history.

Richard Walding, B.App.Sc., Grad Dip Tch, MSc, MPhil, ARACI, is a physics and chemistry teacher at Moreton Bay College, Brisbane. He is an associate of the AIP.

### References

1. English, Jane, A Scientist's Experience with Tarot, in “The Wheel of Tarot; a New Revolution”, ed Wanless, J. and Arrien, A., Merrill West Publishers, Carmel CA (in the press).
2. McCusker, C.S. and McCusker, B., 1988, Australian Physicist, 25 (1), 20-23 and 25 (9), 243-247.
3. *ibid*, p.20
4. *ibid*, p.22
5. Leahy, T. and G., 1983, 'Psychology's Occult Doubles'. Nelson Hall, Chicago.
6. Targ, R. and Puthoff, H., 1974, Nature, 252 (5476). October 18.
7. Ranch, J., 1982, 'The Truth About Uri Geller. Prometheus, NY.
8. Stokes, D., Parapsychology and its Critics, in Kurtz, P. (ed), 1985, "A Skeptics Handbook of Parapsychology". Prometheus, NY, p.400.
9. Dingwall, E., 1971, The Need for Responsibility in Parapsychology in "A Skeptics Handbook of Parapsychology" (see ref. 8), p. 169.
10. Marwick, B., The Establishment of Data Manipulation, in \*A Skeptics Handbook of Parapsychology" (see ref. 8), p.305.
11. *ibid*, p.302.
12. Alcock, J.E., Parapsychology as a "Spiritual" Science, in 'A Skeptics Handbook of Parapsychology" (see ref. 8), p.553.
13. Gerrand, J., 1985, The Skeptic, 5 (3), September 1985, p.27.
14. Garrett, A., 1986, The Skeptic, 6 (2), June 1986, p. 19.
15. Rhine, J.B., 1947, "New Frontiers", William Morrow, NY, pp.20-21.
16. Randi, J., 1987, "Flim-Flam", Prometheus, NY, p. 146.
17. *ibid*. p. 146.
18. McConnell, R.A. (ed), 1982, "Parapsychology and Self Deception in Science", Uni of Pittsburg.
19. *ibid*, p.37.
20. *ibid*, p.38.
21. *op cit*
22. Rhine, J., 1947, Impatience with Scientific Methods in Parapsychology, in The Journal of Parapsychology, 11, p.283-95.



### ***I Wuz Robbed!***

*Harry Edwards*

The headline should have read, "Aussie Skeptic as Britain's Top Psychic", but the smell of rotten fish pervaded the air as I sought to find out why it didn't.

On August 26, 1986, the London Sun newspaper ran a contest with a prize of £500 to find Britain's top psychic. The contest called for six predictions covering the six months beginning September 3; the results to be announced in March 1987.

On vacation in London at the time, I submitted six predictions based on probability, as detailed in the table.

On February 20, 1987, I wrote to the organisers of the contests claiming six hits, excusing the two near misses (marked with an asterisk in the table) using the usual psychic's ploy of making the event fit the prediction.

The first "near-miss" I claimed to have seen in a vision - just rice paddies, and bodies floating in floodwaters; it could have been one of many far eastern countries. I just guessed wrong. The second 'disaster' was averted by the combined efforts of meditators for peace and tranquility around the world.

Believed or not, I could not fail to be credited with at least four hits - or, at least so I thought.

Neither my claim nor a follow-up letter were acknowledged, and it is only recently through the courtesy of Wendy Grossman of the British & Irish Skeptics that I now have the information necessary to tell the tale.

The result of the contest was announced in *The Sun* on February 23, 1987.

An all correct entry by a young English woman and

two runners-up each with three forecasts correct have raised my suspicions that the protocol and ethics involved in the contest were not above reproach.

First, the newspaper stated that there were many "hundreds" of entries. Exactly how many hundreds there are in "hundreds" is difficult to ascertain.

However, it would comprise somewhere between 1200 and 5994 assorted predictions, otherwise the paper would presumably have said "thousands of entries" which sounds more impressive.

As *The Sun* also states that the entries were locked away in a strongbox in a London bank vault, and did not mention that provision had been made to daily monitor the contestants predictions, I assume that they were not.

The winner, on being told that she had won, said "I didn't keep a record of my predictions, but I remember some and as they began to come true I thought I might come second or third". In other words, she was not particularly confident, and there is no way of verifying the exact wording of the predictions nor the paper's version of them.

The indisputable fact that I had four correct forecasts, whereas the two runners-up had only three, would seem to indicate that all the entries were not carefully scrutinised, or indeed checked at all.

Further, the winner's predictions were not as specific as mine - they were spread over the six months whereas mine nominated the month, many being accurate to within a few days.

Naturally, the judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.

**Conclusion ..... I wuz robbed!**

Prediction & date	Closest event	Confirmation
1. Aircraft crash, Nov 1986, 100 killed	C130 crashed Nov 2, 1986 Baluchistan, 98 dead	All media
2. Film star dies Dec 1986	Desi Arnaz died Dec 3, 1986	All media
3. Political assassination Jan 1987	Musbar Gharibah Libyan Charge d'Affairs Beirut, Dec 27, 1986	All media
4. Earthquake, Japan Feb 1987	Earthquake, Japan Feb 1987 (6.9 on Richter scale)	Press
5. Floods, India, Dec 1986 Many drown	Central Vietnam, Dec 1986 165 dead	Press*
6. Train smash, India Dec 1986	Terrorist attempt to blow up train at Chandighur Dec 26, 1986	Press*

Vol 9 No 4 - 1989

### Woman's Daze

Tim Mendham

What's happened to *Woman's Day*, that bastion of royal family stories, this week's miracle diet, cheap presents you can make yourself and the goings-on of the famous-and-notparticularly-interesting? For on the front cover of the December 12, 1989, issue is the headline: "ALIENS HAVE LANDED! We expose government secret file".

Had we stumbled into *People* magazine by accident? What would Fergie have to say about this?

The story, which begins on page 18 (not bad for an 128 page issue), was headed "The most astonishing story ever untold! UFO. For the first time this story reveals a 40-year-old secret - there are such things as aliens and they have landed on our planet". Wow!

And what is this remarkable story? Nothing less (or more) than the MJ-12 "conspiracy" about a flying saucer which supposedly crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947, leaving the bodies of four extraterrestrials, which the authorities hussed away and never officially revealed.

The fact that this story of top secret documents of the US government's "Majestic-12" committee's nefarious activities was "revealed" by William Moore and two associates, Stanton Friedman and Jamie Shandera, in May 1987 and by Timothy Good in his book *Beyond Top Secret* of the same year seems to have escaped the good editors of *Woman's Day* - this is not a story exposed "for the first time". Could it be that *Woman's Day* has got a hold of an old story? After all, it is actually 42 (not 40) years since the supposed crash, and two years since the story was first revealed to the world's press. Or is it that the readers of *Woman's Day* are presumed not to read the newspapers?

What also seems to have escaped the good editors is the great doubt that has been cast on the MJ-12 documents upon which the entire case rests (see *Skeptical Inquirer*, Vol XII Nos 2 & 3, Winter 87-88 and Spring 88, and *the Skeptic*, Vol 8 No 2, Winter 88). In the *Woman's Day* article, no doubts are expressed on the authenticity of the documents, only on whether you believe the story in the first place or not.

The article, in fact, mainly recounts the claims of Stanton Friedman, and the only dissenting views are vague comments from public officials approached by

the author, Moira Martingale, who seem to know little if anything about the issue at all.

The article also makes the startling revelation that "A US Air Force spokeswoman confirmed that there was once a committee called Project Bluebook, which investigated UFO sightings." I didn't think this was a particularly great secret? I can recall a television program 20 years ago which based all its exciting adventures on case studies from the Bluebook. Was Project Bluebook ever a secret?

*Woman's Day* also gives identikit pictures of what your average alien looks like based on "remarkably similar descriptions" given by "five different people on five different occasions". Drawing on the experiences of the late Dr J. Allan Heineck (sic), "veteran UFO consultant with the US Air Force", the pictures follow the now standard images as portrayed in books of UFO abductions, although no mention is made of Whitley Strieber, Budd Hopkins, Jenny Randles or other experts on the subject.

If *Woman's Day* is going to become involved in such claims, at least they could do it properly. Its readers deserve better than rehashed unsubstantiated two-and-a-half year old claims masquerading as sensational hot news. Personally, I preferred the article on Jason Donovan's surprise career move (it doesn't involve Kylie! - now there's hot news).



### New Age Festival for Mind, Body, Spirit and Money

Tim Mendham

Thursday, November 16, was an auspicious day for the New Age in Australia. It marked the opening of the four-day Festival for Mind, Body, Spirit, what is surely the largest gathering so far of New Age marketing yet held in this country.

Held at Sydney's Darling Harbour Exhibition Centre, the event brought together about 130 exhibitors, about 60 free demonstrations of New Age lifestyles, almost 40 lectures and workshop sessions, and no doubt many New Age adherents and customers - the organisers were expecting over 20,000 visitors, and it seems quite possible that this was achieved.

The range of exhibitors was great, with about 40% dedicated to various aspects of alternative health: aromatherapy, essential oils, herbal cures, vitamins galore, massage, pyramids, crystal healing,

macrobiotics, iridology, flotation tanks, acupuncture (including a needleless ear version), energy “balancing”, reflexology, faith healing, etc, etc, etc.

Mixed in were a range of cults, such as Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, Eckankar, several different schools of yoga, Meher Baba, spiritualists - even the quaint Aetherius Society, which still after 35 years supports the “teachings from other planets” transmitted from the “Cosmic Masters”.

New (and not so new) Age motivational and philosophical groups were also there in number, including the Conflict Resolution Network, Excelled Learning (Money & You), Discovery Foundation, Anthroposophical Movement, Swedenborgians, Arica school of mysticism, and even Scientology, albeit in the guise of Dianetics.

Mixed among all these were some strange bedfellows, including Animal Liberation, a company selling New Age capes, another selling shower roses (an unusually mundane and useful product for such a show), another selling a compound to keep your spectacles from fogging up, another with books on “Practical Spirituality for Children”, and on it goes.

If you wanted to, you could outfit an entire New Age lifestyle on the one spot, complete with pyramid hats, crystals of every style and shape for every application, enough pills to start your own shop. In fact, the diversity was mind-boggling.

And this is the problem - so much at the exhibition, lectures and demonstrations was mutually exclusive. Who runs your life, the stars, disembodied spirits and guardian angels, extraterrestrials, dreams, dolphins, or, dare I say it, yourself? All were proposed as the answer, along with sure-fire means to propitiate them. Do you find your true self with yoga, massage, Tai Chi, meditation, weekend motivational courses, or in a bottle?

Richard Glover of *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported a meeting with one stallholder who told him the people crushed under the freeway in San Francisco had “chosen their own fate”. Another told him that protesting about the starving of Ethiopia would only add to the levels of negativity in the world. How does this equate with the aims of Animal Liberation or Oscar Ichazo, the founder of Arica, who says “If we start believing that we are the cause of our own world we are totally mistaken, since we don’t create anything - not even our dreams”.

Pity the poor environmentalists in the audience. A visitor could fill an entire library with the brochures, pamphlets, books and booklets being handed out or sold, and very little (if any) printed on recycled paper. Everything from sad little photocopied single-sheets to massive glossy, coloured tomes. Pity the poor

dolphins who have to live in the chlorine-polluted sea caused by the production of this lot. My favourite, however, was the brochure promoting the 2nd World Healers Congress (to be held in New Zealand) which folded up into a pyramid shape - if the congress doesn’t help then maybe the brochure will.

Certainly the visitors didn’t seem to mind the contradictions. Listening to New Age music full of peace and light followed by a demonstration of how you can train your kids to jump on people with Tae Kwon Do, wearing a wire-arrangement on your head and taking part in a self-healing workshop, the aisles were full of potential customers. All ages were present - the young and innocent, the old and willing, and no-doubt a few trying to solve the problems of their past lives.

There was something for everyone - in fact, in true New Age style, everything there was for everyone. Richard Glover began one of his reports in the *SMH* (November 24) with a quotation from the noticeboard of a Sydney church: “We can’t build a good society just on selfishness and tolerance”. Initially confused by what appeared to be opposites, it dawned on him that the message applied to the New Age: tolerance was the key word - anything goes, regardless of how silly, pointless or how mutually exclusive. New Agers, despite their concerns for the well-being of the world upon which they live (one of their magazines is called *The Planet* are really more interested in self (selfhealing, self-acceptance, revealing your destiny, transforming your life, secrets of the inner self, remembering your past lives - all of these phrases taken from titles of workshop sessions).

Admittedly, there were mixed in talks on “our responsibility to the environment”, “a vision of global healing”, “earth repair action” and “revolution for world peace”, but as at least some of these involved selfhealing and a program from the people who talk to squirrels (*the Skeptic*, Vol 9 No 3), what hope is there. The organisers of the Festival of Mind, Body, Spirit, can be congratulated for putting together a professional looking show. It should be, as it is an off-shoot of similar events which have been going in the UK and elsewhere since 1977. The six dollar entry fee was not too expensive.

And despite the media coverage, which seemed to be, without exception, cynical and/or mocking, the followers were out in force. There is no indication how well the exhibitors, lecturers and workshop holders did. Probably very well, if numbers are any indication. They probably did a lot better than the Ethiopians, but then, they weren’t exhibiting.



### **Mind, Body & Computerised Tarot**

*Barry Williams*

Visiting the recent “Festival of Mind, Body, Spirit”, I happened across the booth manned by an old sparring partner, Simon Turnbull, president of the Australian Psychics Association (or the Leader of the Opposition). Simon, an amiable sort of bloke with whom I have had a few good natured arguments in the past, offered me a free sample of his wares, a computerised Tarot reading (I kid you not).

I was instructed to concentrate on a question and, when I had it properly focussed, to press the trigger of a computer game joy stick. (The question, by the way, had to be precise so that I would know I was getting the correct response from the reading.) This done, the printer proceeded to churn out four pages of type. This, the accompanying brochure informed me, was the equivalent of the readings from three packs of Tarot cards. The brochure also notified me that Tarot in some way equated with nuclear physics, quoting no less an authority than Carl Jung.

The printout is far too long to quote in detail, however I will give the first comment from each pack. Pack 1, supposedly the most important, “is directly linked to the conscious awareness of the questioner”. It began “Ace of swords, overcoming greatest source of unhappiness possible the theme of the question is now under control; relates to 2 years ago.” The remainder of this pack went on in similar vein, indicating that things were going to be OK.

Pack 2 “is divinely connected to the subconscious awareness of the questioner” and led off with “Two of wands, plans are indicated as successful due to balanced approach the theme of the question is now under control; relates to 2 years ago”. This pack continued in a quite contradictory fashion, informing me that things both were and were not under control. Pack 3, described as the “least most important” and illustrating the “more subtle and underlying influences involved interacting with your unconscious state”, started out “Justice, fairness dealt out allows good balance to occur the theme of the question is now under control; relates to 2 years ago” and then also rambled on in an inconsistent way.

It is quite clear that, on all three levels of consciousness, my question was under control and had been for two years. At this point, my eye was taken by a rather extraordinary “Legal Notice & Disclaimer”:

“The attached analysis is intended for the querent’s

personal use and provided at their request on the implicit understanding that in no way do any of the written advices contained herein constitute any form of guarantee or professional consultancy. The querent upon receipt of this Tarot analysis, hereby fully guarantees to indemnify the producers of this Tarot research document against any claims which may arise in respect of either the querent, or any of their associates. This report is confidential & may not be used in any form of publication without permission in writing from the copyright holders.”

It would seem that “all care but no responsibility” is the motto of the Tarot. A lawyer, to whom I happen to be related, informs me that this statement has probably never seen the inside of a law office, but the thing that really intrigued me was the term “querent”. I have consulted four different dictionaries, none of which mentions the word. I am left to assume that it is a portmanteau word, devised either by Simon or his computer, and having the meaning “Queer entity”. A better description of a believer in Tarot readings I have yet to encounter.

Oh, by the way, I didn’t tell you the question which elicited those reassuring responses. Being a long time fan of the Goon Show, I concentrated on the puzzle that constantly perplexed the famous Eccles: “What happened to the crispy bacon we used to get before the War?” Aren’t you all pleased that it appears to be under control?



### **Calling All Spirits**

*Harry Edwards*

Occasionally, surveys are published showing that the least understood and most feared aspect of life is ... death; a universal reluctance by much of the world’s population to accept the inevitable finality of man’s sojourn on this planet, resulting in widespread beliefs in an afterlife, reincarnation and communication with the spirits of the dead.

How did these beliefs arise? What their grounds? Are they valid?

This article, by a one-time pseudospiritualist (cf “Do it yourself spiritualism”, *the Skeptic*, Vol 7 No 2), sets out to examine one aspect of the above - communication with the spirits of the departed, a facility whose ramifications for the betterment of society would provide answers to age old mysteries, solutions to unsolved crimes, discourse with historical luminaries,



and access to all knowledge both past and future.

In the beginning, the concept of supernatural beings or gods was established to explain otherwise inexplicable phenomena; the ideas of a reward in the form of an afterlife, transmigration, immortality and communication with the dead, were all consistent with contemporary thinking.

These doctrines have captured and dominated the minds of intellectuals and laymen alike, forming the kernel of many a classical treatise and involved discussion.

Traditional theories in respect of the soul are many and diverse, although in general they tend to revolve around its distinction from and relation to the body.

Aristotle sums up the controversy succinctly in the opening pages of his treatise, "On the soul", in which he says "To attain any assured knowledge about the soul is one of the most difficult things in the world", a view not shared by some mediums as we will shortly discover.

For the purposes of this article, I make no definitive distinction between the words "soul" and "spirit", as semantics in this instance are of secondary import - the popular definition of "soul" being accepted as "the disembodied spirit of one who has died".

Before we entertain whether or not communication with the dead is possible, it will be necessary to create a composite picture of a home brand, no frills generic spirit, based on the well documented evidence accumulated over the past 150 years. To do this, I have selected some well known examples to illustrate some of the qualities attributed to them.

In the process of piecing together this Identikit, I will not be concerned with the veracity or otherwise of witnesses, chroniclers or sources, only the overall picture that emerges from the cumulative evidence.

Raps, taps, knocks and bangs and other disembodied noises are common to most exhibitions of spirit manifestations; the greatest impetus to these being accepted as a method of communicating with the spirits given by the young Fox sisters in 1848, who were allegedly in contact with the spirit of a dead peddler and communicated with him by these means.

The playing of musical instruments, table tilting and the levitation of chairs, tables, inanimate objects and even persons, soon became commonplace at seances convened by the Fox sisters and other mediums ostensibly for the sole purpose of proving the existence of spirits. Eusapia Palidino and Daniel Dunglas Home being the most famous exponents in the nineteenth century, the latter reportedly levitating out through a third storey window of one room and back through another window in an adjacent room.

Eusapia's "control" or spirit is also recorded as having prodded, pinched and touched sitters at seances, untied shoelaces and removed their spectacles and cravats. Best known, however, were the "prolongationst" in the form of human limbs which emerged from various parts of Eusapia's body and which were given the name "pseudopods".

Franek Kluski's spirits (adults and children) would plunge a hand, a foot or even part of their face into paraffin wax, enabling a plaster cast to be taken on which creases in the skin, the veins on the back of the hands and even the fingerprints were clearly discernible.

Marthe Beraud, otherwise known as "Eva C", specialised in "full form" materialisations - the emanation from the natural orifices of her body of an amorphous substance known as "ectoplasm" in forms resembling faces, limbs and in some cases full sized human figures.

Kathleen Golighor also produced ectoplasmic limbs from her navel and vagina, successfully mimicking human limbs to the extent that one psychic investigator testified to not only feeling the bones, fingers and nails, but could actually smell the flesh!

Florence Cook's "controls" were possibly the most animated - John King could be met and shaken by the hand, and his daughter Katie became most agitated when grabbed by an experienced investigator of spiritualist phenomena, scratching his nose and pulling some of his whiskers. Other ghosts in her repertoire included Bien-Boa (whose exhaled breath, when tested by Charles Richet, the distinguished French physiologist and Nobel prize winner, was found to contain carbon dioxide), Dominica and the King of Bulgaria, all of whom were photographed for posterity at one time or another.

Carlos Mirabelli surpassed even Florence Cook with his astounding materialisations in front of as many as 60 respectable and qualified investigators at a time. One, a young girl who had recently died, apart from looking uncommonly pale, had a detectable pulse. On another occasion, a recently deceased poet suddenly appeared sitting between two investigators, and at yet another seance a well known member of the local community came back from the other side, spoke, and responded to tests by a doctor as though still alive!

The spirits were also adept at passing on their messages by means of automatic writing. Jean Doyle, wife of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, allegedly received a message from the dead mother of Houdini. Writing which would mysteriously appear on covered slate boards were a favourite method of communication with "the other side" by many mediums.

Conversely, letters to the dead were, of course, a long established practise in Egypt dating back to the Old Kingdom (2780-2280 BC), when they usually took the form of messages written on pottery vessels used for making food offerings to the dead, in the belief that they would see the messages when they partook of the food.

Today, a Californian company known as Heavens Union run by Gabe Gabor, will, for 50 cents to one dollar a word, send messages to souls residing in heaven via terminally ill persons here on earth. The estate of the dying person is paid \$10 for each message conveyed and Heavens Union collects the rest.

Even more direct communication was established by spiritualist Mina Crandon, better known as “Margery”, who would speak while in a trance in the unmistakable voice of her dead brother Walter; and Leonora Piper who had numerous “controls” enabling her clients to speak to their dead friends and relatives. Elvis Presley and John Lennon have also been in touch with a chosen few consoling their fans and dictating more songs (see *The Skeptic*, Vol 7, No 2).

Spirit voices have also been recorded. In 1959, Swedish film maker Friedrich Jurgenson heard what he believed to be his dead mother’s voice on a tape of bird calls he had recorded. Since then, he has recorded hundreds of “spirit” voices.

Other researchers claim to have recorded the spirit voices of Churchill, Hitler, Stalin and other famous men and women of history, and in recent times a group of American scientists and psychic investigators in the field of Electronic Voice Phenomena have reportedly accomplished two way communication using a “telephone like electronic instrument” with those who have “passed into higher planes”.

In 1982, Mr George Meek, founder of Metascience Foundation Inc of Franklin, North Carolina, claimed to have established two-way communication with those “who had crossed over to another realm” by means of electronicetheric technology. When a cassette tape of the voices was played to reporters at a press conference, one described them as sounding like “Igor responding to Dr Frankenstein through a closed door on a windy night in Transylvania”. The unconvincing demonstration notwithstanding, Mr Meek made public a technical manual and companion documents which he said proved the feasibility of communication between “different levels of consciousness”, meaning people now living and others dead.

Having served my apprenticeship in radio and telecommunications, I naturally find the “telephone like electronic instrument” intriguing (albeit asinine!) and will digress a little to dispose of it.

Obviously physical connections in the form of wires can be ruled out, as can communication by chemical means or mechanical vibrations used by some animals, birds and insects, leaving either EUTS (energies unknown to science) or electromagnetic propagation as possible transmission media.

If the former existed (other than in the minds of psychics), then it would no longer remain in the realm of the unknown, and would be available to all desiring to communicate extraterrestrially.

The second option is more feasible but raises some awkward questions for believers. For example, do the spirits have access to conventional radio apparatus and therefore live in an as yet undiscovered material world? Are the vocal chords of the dead impervious to decay or the all consuming flames of the crematorium? if so, in the absence of lungs, what causes them to vibrate? or have their vocal chords been miraculously altered to enable the fundamental voice frequency range of 600-20,00cps to be extended to include the upper kilohertz and megahertz (radio frequency) bands?

Either way these transmissions would be detectable with the most basic of radio receivers, and furthermore, the location of such transmissions could be pinpointed using equally unsophisticated direction finding equipment.

Some spiritualists claim that the spirits construct for themselves vocal organs out of “ectoplasm” supplied by the medium. With these vocal organs they are able to speak to the sitters.

On the local scene, Cliff Dorian of the Lighthouse Spiritualist Centre (see *the Skeptic*, Vol 7, No 4) channels “Joseph” who is, in Mr Dorian’s words, “a creation of my own subconscious who becomes such a reality that other clairvoyants can see him”.

At a seminar held in March 1988, the channel’s sidekick, former hairdresser turned clairvoyant Joy Atkinson, whispering in a voice more suited to coaxing a frightened cat from underneath a house, persuaded Joseph to put on his pre-scheduled act. As her voice was barely audible at a distance of one metre, Joseph either has exceptionally sensitive hearing or was standing by waiting for his cue.

### Modern Spiritualism

In a phenomenal resurgence of modern spiritualism, gone are the traditional physical appurtenances, reliance now being on the thespian charisma of the medium, the spirit voices produced by them and the percipients’ credulity.

Unlike the spiritualists of the previous century whose “controls” were generally of a contemporary nature,

today's channelers have moved with the space age. Daryl Anka, for example, channels "Bashar" from the Essassani civilisation "300 light years in the future" (light years are, of course, a measure of distance, not time - a fact which seems to have escaped the wisdom of Bashar); Pamela Newstreet "Soncha" from Sirius, and Jannie Sims closer to home with "Leah" from Venus.

None of these visitors deems it necessary to explain how they spanned the enormous distances, or why beings from the advanced technological civilisations one would associate with such an undertaking, their mission seems merely to "hang around" at the beck and call of earthly nonentities.

Other channels are blessed with wisdom from the past; in the case of J.Z. Knight it comes via "Ramtha", a 35,000 year old Atlantean warrior; to Jac Purcel via "Dr-Peebles", a 17th century Irish doctor, and to Kevin Ryerson (beloved and projected to stardom by Shirley MacLaine) who has earned fame and fortune channeling "Tom McPherson", another 17th century Irishman, this time a professional pickpocket - a rather apt choice when you think about it.

Some channel non-physical entities, as in the case of Lyssa Royal, her "control" being "Raydia", a "non-physical fifth dimension being from the star Arcturus"! Finally, evidence that the spirits fill in the odd spare moment doing a spot of reading can be assumed from the notes, letters and prayers, folded and pushed into the cracks of the Wailing Wall in Old Jerusalem, and letters appearing in the public notices column of newspapers addressed to the Holy Spirit and St Jude offering thanks for favours received.

Before painting a composite picture of a spirit, I repeat that although most of the examples quoted have come from the reports of distinguished psychic investigators, eminent scientists and reputable members of society, as well as dubious books and sensational tabloids, I am not concerned with the veracity or otherwise, only the image that emerges when the pieces of the jigsaw are put together.

Ignoring the potential for prosthetics offered by mediums who, with apparently effortless ease, manufacture genetically engineered artificial limbs from nitrogen, oxygen and secret herbs and spices unknown to intelligent man. When the aforementioned characteristics, attributes and peculiarities of spirits are amalgamated, it is reasonable to assume, given the above "evidence", that spirits are in fact nothing less than complete corporeal entities who have retained all the faculties and physical characteristics they possessed before departing this world, plus some extraordinary and enviable powers.

The inestimable quantity and quality of knowledge that could be attained from past Earth dwellers, never-incarnated spirits and those purporting to come to us from the future, is unfortunately not forthcoming, because the spirits exhibit a singular reticence when it comes to parting with anything more edifying than convoluted pop philosophy, apocalyptic forecasts, homilies, and more often than not, sheer unadulterated nonsense.

Nevertheless, we are led to believe that certain individuals are selected and privileged in an ad hoc fashion to speak and act on their behalf - J.Z. Knight, for example, whose 35,000 year old dead Atlantean warrior, well versed in the intricacies of the Wall Street stock exchange, sells his advice through his control, making her a multi-millionaire.

Likewise Lazaris, an entity whose control claims has never physically existed, has enabled Jac Purcel to build up a flourishing video business selling his spirit's words of wisdom.

Both their fortunes would seem like petty cash, however, when one considers the potential value of invisibility to the various Defence departments, the secret of anti-gravity to NASA, instant transportation facilitating intergalactic exploration, and the overcoming of language barriers just to mention a few, all of which are seemingly second nature once we are freed from our Earthly constraints.

### Conclusion

It would appear from the foregoing accounts that there certainly is life after death, and that communication with the departed is, at least according to some, possible.

However, while the credulous may swallow this as a salve for what ails them, sceptics are more inclined to choke, and not without good reason.

To live up to the claims made on their behalf, spirits would of necessity have to live in an invisible material world in proximity to our own - so close in fact, if the evidence is to be believed, as to be within the range of a human whisper or even a thought.

In view of the billions who have passed on since man first evolved, and the incredible pulsating celestial congestion such a concentration of spiritual and material matter would create just above our heads, one would have thought that this would have been an implausible concept, even to the most credulous of minds.

The all-transcendent metamorphosis notwithstanding, the activities of spirits are generally confined to simple party tricks and comments incompatible with that which one would expect of the

all-seeing, all-knowing.

They also engage in a sacrilegious disregard of the putative worth of their alleged knowledge and talents, by allowing themselves to become commercial puppets in freak sideshows.

Without exception when interviewed, the spirits speaking through their mediums expect to be accepted without question, steadfastly evade questions which seek to authenticate their claimed origins, pompously answer questions with a profundity lacking even a modicum of intellect, expertise or commonsense, and if taxed will explain away, rationalise or invent any excuse no matter how inane or infantile, subordinating intelligent communication to play acting by the medium. Why should they be so evasive?

Given the “proof” for their existence, one is entitled to ask:

Why would the spirits of the dead bother to get in touch with the living when they have nothing to say?

Secondly, given that death is the last thing that the living look forward to, if it were possible to “come back” after dying, why not do so to those who love, cherish and need them, rather than seek out entrepreneurs who exploit them?

And thirdly, considering the millions that die prematurely and not of their own volition in wars and accidents, why the reticence to “come back” en masse? The evidence to date, for the existence of spirits from our own and other worlds, can be seen by the critical analyst as being a travesty of serious research, and in the absence of somewhat more substantive and tangible proof, to suggest that communication with the dead is possible is simply wishful thinking by the deluded, whose vulnerability makes them delectable pickings for the carrion crow.

**Vol 10 No 2 - 1990**

### ***Mafu: face-to-face with an ascended master***

*Barry Williams*

For two weeks, beginning May 20, 1990, Australia was host to Ms Penny Torres Rubin, alleged channeller of 32,000 year old entity, Mafu. Mafu, it is claimed, has lived seventeen times, most recently as a leper in Pompeii, ‘about 2,000 years ago’. As the deadline for this edition is too close, we have held over a complete report on this visitation until the next issue, however,

here are some impressions gained by Barry Williams during his TV appearance on the Midday with Ray Martin Show on May 22, with Ms Torres Rubin.

I am sitting in the Channel 9 Green Room, wondering if the ‘flu I am harbouring can be cured by a dose of ancient wisdom. Worse still, will I burst into uncontrollable coughing and stop the show? Or uncontrollable laughter? My fellow guests are a rock group, of whom I have never heard, and John Mortimer, creator of Rumpole, one of my favourite fictional characters. Mr Mortimer also appears to be suffering from the ‘flu. There is no sign of Ms TR nor of any of the entourage that accompanies her. My hosts tell me that we are being kept apart deliberately. It can’t be my ‘flu. Surely, during seventeen lifetimes, Mafu must have had it before. I believe that it maintains the tension and makes for better television. I can understand that, it would be boring if guests settled their differences over a couple of drinks in the Green Room and spent the interview swearing undying devotion to each other.

I am well briefed, the *Midday* researchers having previously supplied me with a video-tape of a performance by Mafu on a regional US television program, and from having watched her in a show on SBS-TV a couple of weeks ago. In the US program, she was confronted by an audience consisting equally of believers and of fundamentalist Christians. It was an odd feeling, listening to argument between two protagonists, both of whom were talking through their hats. A bit like watching the Gulf War. Clearly, Ms TR can handle moral indignation quite well. Wonder how she handles laughter?

The format of the interview is that Ms TR is on air with Ray Martin alone for five minutes, then assumes the Mafu role for eight, then I go on with her for a further eight. I remain in a room watching a monitor for the first thirteen minutes.

Air Time. Ms TR is a small, pleasant looking young woman who has obviously told her story many times before. Brought up as a Catholic, she was living with her LA cop husband when Mafu entered her life. Rather than seeking help from her priest, it appears that she asked a ‘well known Californian psychic’ for counsel. She accepted Mafu’s bona fides and agreed to let her body be used for the promulgation of his ancient wisdom. She had recently been accepted into a Vedic Hindu group as a monk and has renounced all her worldly goods. All of this was delivered at high speed and it was near enough to letter perfect with the two previous iterations of the same summary that I had heard from the tape and the SBS program. Ray Martin, ever the gentleman, treated her gently.

Now is the time for the transformation. Interestingly,

in the two previous performances I had witnessed, this had taken some time. One was in an hour long show and the other was in a documentary. This was in a restricted time, chat show, format and Mafu shows that he understands TV schedules as well as the next entity. Penny has barely closed her eyes and entered the 'Theta' state, when she is breathing harshly, eyes, throwing her legs wide apart, squaring her shoulders and pulling down the corners of her mouth. Total time, twenty one seconds. "Good morning" she says, in an accent that sounds like someone playing Fagin in an amateur dramatic society production of *Oliver*.

The wisdom begins to pour forth. In fractured syntax, Mafu produces the fruits of seventeen incarnations and 32 centuries of existence. Excepting only 1950s Hollywood Biblical Epics, produced by Sam Katzman and starring Victor Mature, no-one in the entire history of the human species ever talked this way. I wonder what Vic is doing these days - could he be working as a dialogue coach for channellers? The words are typically New Age jargon, full of love, god-being, Christ consciousness, self-awareness, feeling good and cosmic awakening but the phrasing is pure Hollywood B picture. I file it away for later.

Ray's questions become more probing. Can Mafu give us any evidence that he is what he claims to be? With the consummate skill of a practiced interviewee, Penny deflects the question, saying that it is good to doubt the facts and to be left with the response of the emotions only. Other questions of a like nature are deflected with equal facility. It is clear to me that one of Mafu's former incarnations was as a politician. The ability to answer any question other than the one asked is obviously not a recently acquired skill. To the question, "Why do you speak English?" the not unreasonable answer is given, "Because you understand English", however, she then goes on to explain that she can speak other languages but does not because she is using her "oracle's English-speaking tongue". This solves the problem of being asked to speak in another language, but raises the larger problem of whether non-English speakers have different tongues. I must ask a physiologist.

Now there is a breakthrough. To the question, "Why do you charge for your performance?" the answer is that Mafu does not, but that his 'oracle' requires transport in 'aeroships' and accommodation in 'hotels' and that 'donations' seem to be the norm on this planet and so on, but there is no requirement to 'exchange gold'. The wisdom is available for all. Ray presses further. Does that mean that if someone attends and does not wish to pay, then they will be let in? "Of course", says Mafu. What is that strangled cry I hear

from offstage? Could Mafu's business manager be tearing his hair out? How many *Skeptics* can I muster for a free night out next week?

Now a commercial break and I am ushered on stage. What is it like to meet an 'ascended master' face-to-face? I am under-awed. Mafu, in the flesh, looks just like a pleasant young woman with a scowl on her face.

Back on air. Ray asks me what I think. I respond that I am still waiting for some wisdom and suggest that all I have heard thus far could have come from a cab driver or a bartender. Penny explains that cab drivers and bartenders are 'also divinely accessed'. Does this mean that only a god can get a cab on a wet Friday night? If so, then I am on Mafu's side. If not, then I don't know what it means. She then goes on to explain that, had she the time, she could discourse on quantum physics or the meaning of life for an hour or so. Ray reminds her that that is not possible within the format of the show, a point which Penny graciously concedes, but he then asks her for a sample of her wisdom. She responds with the observation that she loves Ray and he is her father. Ray looks a trifle nonplussed at this revelation of paternity. I intervene with my observation about stage Jewish accents and Hollywood scripts, the audience titters and Penny launches into a long and convoluted monologue in the now familiar vein. When she pauses to draw a much needed breath, I opine that seventeen lifetimes makes for extreme long-windedness. The audience laughs loudly and Penny looks less than pleased. I have been maintaining eye contact during all this and have a disbelieving grin plastered onto my face. I think this is getting to Penny.

Penny then embarks on an even longer foray into the wilds of obfuscation. She goes on and on mentioning Christ consciousness, Krishna, Mohammed, God and much, much more. At last she finishes and I reply, after a dramatic pause, "Yeah, I'll go along with all that", at which point the audience breaks into hysteria. Penny smiles and then realises that she is not supposed to. She wipes the smile from her face with her hand, but the slip from her role-playing is very obvious. The audience is on my side and Penny is staring daggers at me. I essay some channelling of my own. Albert Einstein no less. " $E=mc^2$ ", I say, pointing out that Albert sounds like me because he is using my vocal cords, and modestly claiming that that is the wisest thing that has been said all day.

Pressed to make a prediction, Penny tells Ray that he will become a god. He points out that that is the prediction she always makes. I jump in and ask whether I too will become a god. She seems to feel that I might

if I lose my anger, to which I respond that I am not angry, I am in fact greatly amused. So is the audience. The interview is nearing its end and Ray persists with the question of whether people can get into Penny's seminar without paying. She can hardly refuse now. He reads out her dates and venues and finishes with the observation that anyone should turn up, whether they wish to pay or not.

The interview ends and Geoff Harvey and the Channel 9 orchestra strike up the play-out music. It is Colonel Bogey. Geoff knows, I know and much of the audience knows that the popular words ascribed to that old march are, 'Bullshit was all the band could play'. Penny, being young and American, probably does not know this, but one would expect that someone as old and wise as Mafu would. Luckily he is very forgiving or he could have wrecked the studio. Later in the show, Ray Martin asks the audience how many believe that channelling is a load of bollocks. The response is almost unanimous.

At the beginning, I was in two minds about Ms Torres Rubin. Was she always in control, or had she subconsciously convinced herself that Mafu was real? During the performance, she gave me the option of believing that she was what she claimed to be or that she was a brilliant actress. I chose neither option. I believe that she is a mediocre actress and that her performance showed that she knows exactly what she is doing at all times. She is accomplished at handling moral indignation but cannot successfully contend with being laughed at. H.L. Mencken was right, 'One horse-laugh is worth a thousand syllogisms'.

The following evening, Penny Torres Rubin appeared on the ABC-TV Couchman program, confronted by an audience liberally sprinkled with members of the Victorian branch of Australian Skeptics. This appearance served to confirm my judgement about her. A report on this, and an analysis of the Mafu visit will appear in the next issue.

---

### STOP PRESS

At the National Convention of Australian Skeptics, held in Melbourne on the Queens Birthday long weekend, the **Bent Spoon Award** for 1989-90 was awarded to **Mafu**, alleged discarnate entity of some 32,000 summers. As far as can be ascertained, Mafu has made no comment on his achievement of this outstanding distinction. As the award was announced in Latin, perhaps this is not surprising.

---



### *Prophecy at Sydney Town Hall*

*Tim Mendham*

An exhibition entitled "Bible Prophecy Display", held at the Sydney Town Hall on April 19-21, proved an irresistible temptation, especially in view of the articles in this and previous issues taking a sceptical approach to the same subject.

Organised by the Sydney Revival Centre, the displays covered such current items of interest as the Greenhouse effect, the fall of the Berlin Wall, pollution and soil erosion, as well as older favourites like the state of Israel, the Russian threat, the British throne as direct descendant of the throne of David, and the Great Pyramid.

This latter subject seemed to have little relevance to Biblical study, but rather concentrated on how clever the Egyptians were to have built the pyramid in the first place, aligned as it supposedly is with every real or imagined line of longitude and latitude of significance. As this display was based on the now discounted theories of Piazzzi Smyth, there seemed little point in including it.

Nevertheless, truth and relevance did not seem to be of great concern to the organisers, who obviously preferred simplistic observations and fear tactics as weapons in the war to win converts.

One of the silliest displays was the amazing revelation that Australia is mentioned in the Bible: "Behold, these shall come from far, and lo, these from the north and west, and these from the land of Terra Australis" (Isaiah 49:12). While admitting that "Terra Australis" is not actually in the English language version, but rather is lifted from the vulgate Latin of St Jerome, the organisers see this as further proof of the Bible's inerrancy.

The facts that the Old Testament wasn't written in Latin originally, that Australia was first called New Holland by Europeans, that a correct translation of the quote as used in the exhibition would be the meaningless "from the land of the land of the south", and that the New International Version of the Bible translates "Terra Australis" as "the region of Aswan" in southern Egypt, and therefore a long way from Australia, seem to have escaped the organisers. Still, a local touch, no matter how nonsensical, always works well with the visitors.

Just as silly was the long diatribe (circa 1899) on the numerical coincidences of the Bible. This style of numerological legerdemain has no value at all, being equally easily carried out on any work of length, and even on something as simple as your own name. From the exhibition's point of view, coincidence (often

contrived) equals fact. The meaning of life is 42!

Many of the other displays covered in the exhibition referred to prophecies dealt with by Colin Groves *et al* in this journal.

What was most disturbing was an almost gleeful approach as one disaster after another - earthquakes, famine, war, plagues, etc. - were listed, all of course indicating the approaching “final days”. It seemed that the organisers could hardly wait for the end, regardless of the suffering imposed on their fellow humans, not to mention other forms of fauna and flora.

The greatest toll from an earthquake in historic times probably took place over 400 years ago in China; the greatest volcanic explosion over 3000 years ago at Thera; and the worst plague was the Black Death of 1347-51. In fact, there is no evidence that natural disasters are increasing, or getting worse; it is just that our communications are better and we know about more.

This doesn't bother the organisers either, who equate the Newcastle quake (small by “world disaster” standards) with the worst of recorded history.

A total lack of historical perspective is evident in every utterance of those espousing a “final days” scenario.

Rather than thoughtful prophecies, these are fear-mongering bogeymen. We may ask, therefore, what value are converts created from fear rather than the love which is supposed to be the basis of Christianity?

### Vol 10 No 3 - 1990

#### **Mafu - Further reflections**

Mark Plummer

The visit of Penny Torres to Australia, to act as a medium “channelling” a Pompeiiian leper Mafu, gave me a chance to put into practice some debunking skills I had learned in the USA. While I was working at CSICOP we had been able to apply linguistic techniques to our study of channellers and I hoped to use this approach here. Unfortunately, during the recent visit, I was only partly successful.

Had Ms Torres actually been channelling a citizen of Pompeii, then it is not unreasonable to suppose for that entity to remember the tongue he had used in life. The claim was made that Mafu could remember his past life and it is reasonable to assume that these memories should have been stored in some linguistic

form. Yet when challenged to speak in Latin on the *Couchman* TV programme, Mafu refused. Secondly, when she was allegedly channelling, Penny Torres, in keeping with most channellers, used a different voice from her normal one. This skill is not evidence of any external entity influencing the channeller and is quite common in competent actors (one can imagine the numbers of entities who could be “channelled” by actors with the imitative skills of Meryl Streep and the late Peter Sellers, had they had the desire to do it).

Aware of an analysis of the voice patterns of prominent American channellers' by leading American linguist, Prof Thomason I approached a number of Australian linguists, with the request that they read his work and comment on Penny Torres' voice and accent while she was in Australia. Regrettably, they all declined, preferring “not to get involved”. This disinclination by some Australian academics to get involved in exposing fringe areas is unfortunate and contrasts with the attitude of their counterparts in the USA.

We had ample notice of the visit of Ms Torres and were invited to participate in the *Couchman* ABC TV programme, in which psychologist David Freeman and myself were to appear on stage with Ms Torres and her assistant. We had a great deal of material on our subject from CSICOP and other sources and had had the advantage of seeing her appearance on the previous day's Channel 9 *Middy with Ray Martin* programme, in which Barry Williams had treated her claims with amused disbelief. This typically Australian approach was obviously new to Ms Torres, who is more accustomed to being treated seriously by the American media. (see the report in *the Skeptic* Vol 10 No 2) She was clearly unnerved by the experience and we decided to use a similar approach in Melbourne.

The best laid plans, however, do not always stay firm when dealing with the proponents of the New Age. When we arrived at the ABC for the taping of the *Couchman* show, we found that Ms Torres had refused to appear if David Freeman and myself were allowed to share the stage with her. Peter Couchman was faced with the dilemma that he was about to pre-record a programme, for transmission later that evening, and his principal guest was threatening to withdraw. This is a common tactic, used by ‘psychics’ in the USA, to ensure that they can control the show. Couchman took the only course available to him and acceded to her demands. He requested that David Freeman and I remain in the front row but assured us that we would be given preference during the question period.

We could have stood on our dignity and withdrawn

from the show but it would be unlikely that we would have been invited to take part in any further shows had we done so. It is unfortunate that the producers of TV current affairs programmes do not realise that they do not have to pander to the demands of visiting ‘psychics’. As was shown by the Carlos hoax of a couple of years ago, the ‘psychic’ depends on the free publicity afforded by the media to get an audience and the producers are actually in a strong position to set their own standards and to insist that they be adhered to.

I briefed members who attended the show and suggested that we refer to her as Penny Torres throughout and not to use any of the titles, such as Mafu, Swami Paramananda Saraswati etc, which she had adopted. She appeared to be happy to respond to her given name, even when she was supposedly in her Mafu persona. She began the show with the initiative as she went into her performance of pretending to be Mafu, the leper from Pompeii, which seemed to convince the believers in the audience that her play acting was real. We began by requesting that she spoke in Latin, which she steadfastly refused to do throughout. Her excuses were long and unconvincing but that did not appear to discomfort the believers. We missed an opportunity at this point in not demanding that, if she would not speak Latin, then she should try English, in lieu of the pretentious gibberish which she was spouting.

*Couchman* had invited an actress to demonstrate the ease with which a trained person can put on a performance as a medium, which she was about to demonstrate when Ms Torres interrupted and changed the subject. Unfortunately, the programme never got back to this demonstration, but it should have been clear to all that Ms Torres’ performance as Mafu was not of Oscar standard. Torres was clearly nonplussed when a member of the audience stated that, although she herself was a medium, and believed in the spirits, she could not understand the “wisdom” that Mafu was

propounding. **And so say all of us.**

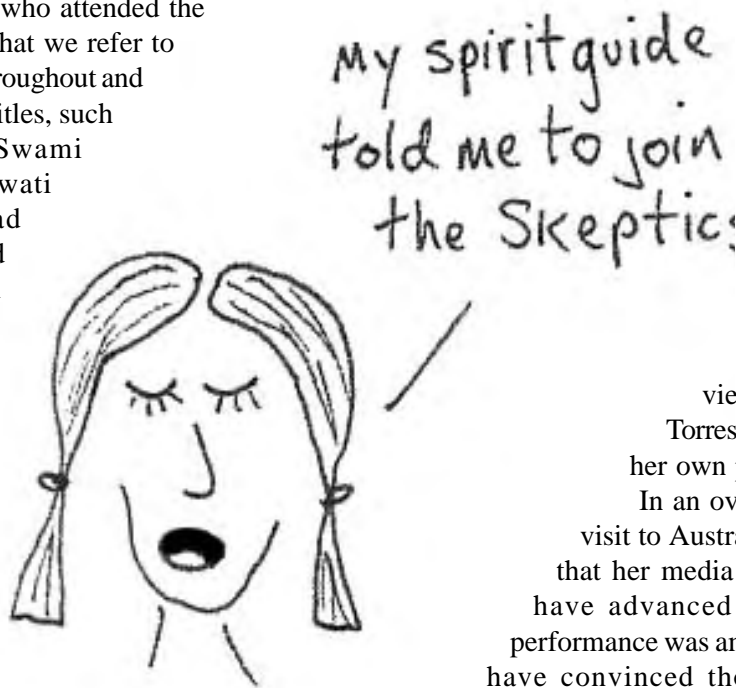
Probably the most telling strike against Ms Torres came from her own mouth. It is an article of faith with most channellers that the events which occur while they are channelling are unknown to them when they are in their normal state. Ms Torres has publicly stated, on more than one occasion, that the only way she knows what Mafu says is if someone else tells her. Yet, on the *Couchman* programme, she answered

questions as Penny, about things that had been put to her as Mafu. I wished to reinforce this point during the programme, however, time ran out. I need not have been worried, as this was the most common point raised

by people who had viewed the programme. Ms Torres had in fact been hoist with her own petard.

In an overview of Penny Torres’ visit to Australia, we can be confident that her media performance would not have advanced her cause at all. Her performance was amateurish and would only have convinced those who already were committed believers. It is generally recognised that no committed believer will be turned off by any rational analysis. If the performer puts on a good show, then it convinces them; if the performer acts badly, as Penny did, then that is “proof” that she is not acting at all and is thus genuine. We are unable to ascertain just how much mone: Ms Torres made from her visit to Australia, but we have been told that people who sought to attend he performances without paying were despite her assurances to the contrary on the *Ray Martin show*, not admitted.

Penny Torres was, before her decision to become a channeller, a housewife from Los Angeles. The “wisdom” she offers to her followers is precisely what one would expect from such a source. It was quite disconcerting, during the *Couchman* programme, to see the blind acceptance the believers gave to Ms Torres’ pronouncements on pap and their conviction that what she said was some sort of profound statement about the world. But then, the same sort of people said the same sort of things about the statements of Carlos and we all know that James Randi made up





Carlos' thoughts to be trite and meaningless but to sound like typical New Age verbiage. We await the visit of Shirley MacLaine, who at least can act.



## Nostradamus and the Middle East Crisis

Allan Lang

During the recent events in the Middle East some people apparently rang radio talk-back programmes with the news that Nostradamus had predicted the crisis. Unfortunately I was not able to hear any of these claims, and have no idea what was said. At first I thought that this might prevent me from making any comment on the latest "Nostradamus was a prophet" claim. Then it occurred to me that ignorance has never been a handicap to other people when writing about Nostradamus.

On the basis that any fool can make any case from Nostradamus, I decided to simulate a case for the Nostradamian prediction of current Middle Eastern events, considering that if I have assumed an argument that was actually not made, its place would be completely filled with one that was worse. (pace Mark Twain) Author's disclaimer: The following is a simulated argument and should be believed at your own risk.

### Nostradamus predicted the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait!

Four hundred years ago Nostradamus foresaw that the Final Anti-Christ (A-C) would rise up when the Cold War between the USA and the USSR ended.

#### Quatrain 2:89

*One day the great powers will become friends  
Their great power will be seen to increase  
The new land (America) will be at the height of its power  
To the man of blood (the A-C) the number is reported*

Nostradamus of course actually named his candidates for the first two Anti-Christes as Pau Nay Loron (Napoleon) and Hister (Hitler). It is possible that he also named the third? In the Nostradamus industry, nothing is impossible. We can probably discount Nostradamus's naming of people like Louis Pasteur and Tony Barber in this context. However, there is the interesting case of:

#### Quatrain 2:62

*Mabus will soon die, then will come  
A horrible slaughter of people and animals,*

*At once vengeance is revealed coming from a hundred lands*

*Thirst and famine when the comet will pass.*

Up to now Nostradamus have failed to interpret Mabus, however, I can now reveal the real meaning for the first time. As is well known, Nostradamus spoke anagrammatically (see Pau Nay Loron above). If we reverse Mabus, while at the same time reversing the "b" to make it "d", we get "Sudam". QED.

And where will the A-C arise? Nostradamus knew.

#### Quatrain 8:70

*One who is ugly, wicked and famous will come to power and tyrannise all of Mesopotamia.*

*He will make friends by seducing them  
and the lands will be made horribly black by destruction*

The final line obviously refers to the use of chemical weapons by an Iraqi Third A-C. These are even more clearly referred to in another Quatrain.

#### Quatrain 8:77

*The Third Anti-Christ very soon annihilated  
Twenty seven years his bloody war will last:  
The heretics dead, captives, exiled  
Blood soaked human bodies, water and reddened icy rain covering the entire earth.*

There is a seeming conflict between "soon dead" and a twenty seven year war. Nostradamus obviously meant, by personalising it to "his" bloody war, that it covered Saddam's entire struggle to achieve his personal ambition. This can be considered to have begun in 1968, making 1995 the final year.

"Heretics dead" refers to the execution of Saddam's opponents; "Captives" are western hostages; "Exiled" are the Kuwaiti El Sabah family; "A reddened, icy rain" is an obvious reference to chemical weapons.

The rise of the Iraqi war machine is predicted, as is the battle over the Shatt-el-Arab waterway, in:

#### Quatrain 3:61

*The great band will arise in Mesopotamia  
Near the river shall be a light company  
Which will hold that law for an enemy.*

The Iraq-Iran conflict is also alluded to in:

#### Quatrain 5.25

*The Arab Prince, Mars, Sun, Venus in Leo, Will make the rule of the church suffer at sea, Towards Iran nearly a million men will march Ver. Serp will also invade Turkey and Egypt.*

Here we have Nostradamus seeing Saddam Hussein (the Arab Prince), fighting the theocratic Iranian mullahs (Church...towards Iran) and then, later Turkey and Egypt (which were among the first countries to mobilise after the Kuwait invasion). The accuracy of Nostradamus's vision is attested by the number he ascribes to the size of the Iraqi army (nearly a million). The World Defence Almanac 1989-90

(Monch Publishing Group) gives the strength of the Iraqi army as 950,000.

Immediately after the invasion of Kuwait, there was concern that an economic embargo of Iraq might fail because Turkey would not close a pipeline. Nostradamus knew better.

### **Quatrain 5:47**

*The Great Arab will march on,  
But his ambitions will be undermined by the Turks.*

The surprise of the Kuwaiti invasion and the speed of the western response is predicted in:

### **Quatrain 4:39**

*The Arab Empire will now reveal its intentions  
And Hesperia (land of the west i.e. America) will  
compensate for the losses.*

Here endeth the argument.

\* \* \* \* \*

The preceding was just to demonstrate that anyone can mine Nostradamus to find the odd reference for any historical event. The real question is, “Did anyone see these predictions in Nostradamus’s writings before August 1990?” As always, the answer is no. The turn of events in the Middle East has been as much a surprise to the Nostradamens as to everyone else. Nevertheless, I will here make a fearless prediction—At least one Nostradamian will write a book, after the event, which will retradict N’s knowledge of the events.

Real people, however, must recognise that Nostradamus lived in a world where the geopolitical situation was somewhat different from that which applies today. It was only 60 years since the last of the Moslem territory in Spain had been recaptured. To the east, the Ottoman Empire was advancing into Europe and was only 50 miles from Vienna. To the south, the Barbary States were major naval powers.

Under these conditions, Nostradamus’s many quatrains dealing with a Moslem-European war, involving invasion of Europe through Spain, Italy and Germany described a possible, though as history proves, a not-to be fulfilled prophecy. Where modern writers fall into absurdity is through assuming the situation today to be identical to that in the 16th Century. While Nostradamus spends considerable time worrying about a Moslem invasion of France, he spends none considering a Mesopotamian invasion to seize the oilfields of Arabia or the Gulf. (Does that surprise you?)

While it is easy for modern writers to produce predictions for a violent Arab/European war, getting

specific forewarnings of actual events in the present day Middle East is slightly more difficult.

A brief review of modern writers on Nostradamus shows that almost all of them totally discount the possible rise of an Arab military leader in Mesopotamia, or, as Nostradamus unaccountably failed to call it, Iraq. I examined the works of the current crop of Nostradamus analysts to discover how they had previously analysed two quatrains (3:61 and 8:70), which were chosen because:

(i) they mentioned Mesopotamia;

(ii) their meanings could, just possibly, be taken as referring to the current crisis.

### **3:61**

*The great troop and cross bearing sect  
Will arise in (or direct itself to) Mesopotamia  
From the nearby river the light company (will come)  
Which such a Law/religion will hold for an enemy.*

### **8:70**

*He will enter, vile, wicked, infamous  
Tyrannising over Mesopotamia.  
He makes all (his) friends by the adulterine lady;  
Horrible land, black of physiognomy.*

Line 4 may have been meant to have been read “horrible thief...” Much of the ambiguity in Nostradamus may be due to atrocious proof reading. In this case, Nostradamus may have written “*lerre*” and his publisher then printed “*terre*”.

In chronological order, Nostradamus’s interpreters saw these verses as follows:

**Lee McCANN** (1941) includes news of a bit of future trouble with the Arabs, principally by lumping N’s Arab Threat quatrains into a bundle. However, she omits both Mesopotamia quatrains as an Arab invasion of Europe and that the events associated with this would be all over by August 1987.

**Henry ROBERTS** (1947) declares that 3:61 means “A great organisation, with some sort of cross as its emblem, shall emerge in a land between two rivers. Near one of these rivers, some traitors shall give the enemy assistance.” Like most of Henry’s interpretations, this is nicely literal and inane and no real advance on N’s own impenetrable poetics. No-one could possibly specifically relate this to the current crisis, or indeed to anything else. According to Henry, 8:70 means “the country near Babylon will be terrorised by a person of the Negro race”, which is even less apt than the previous example.

**Erika CHEETHAM** (1975) has no idea what 3:61 might mean, but thinks that Mesopotamia might be the area between the Seine and the Marne, and that the verse refers to Germany’s occupation of France in 1940. In 8:70 she thinks Mesopotamia may be Avignon,

between the Rhone and the Durance.

**Charles Nelson GATTEY** (1977) includes N as one of the prophets in his “They Saw Tomorrow”. However, as Gattey only mentions past fulfillments, his book might better be called, “They Saw Yesterday”.

Probably the best claim could be made for **Jean Charles de FRONTBRUNE** (1980). Although he considers 8:70 to refer to Ayatollah Khomeini’s exile in Iraq from 1963-1978, he did relate 3:61 to future Western-Arab conflict. Just to ensure that we did not overlook this, *The Adelaide Advertiser*, on Friday 17th August, carried an item from *Agence-France Presse* pointing out that Jean Charles was saying “I told you so”. The translation given in the AFP report was:

*“The great band and anti-Christian sect of Moslems shall rise up in Iraq and Syria, near the Euphrates, with an army and shall consider the Christian law as its enemy.”*

This is substantially what he wrote in in 1983, except that then he translated *compagnie legere* as “tankforce” rather than “army”. It should be noted that Frontbrune tends to add his own interpretations into N’s text. In “*anti-Christian sect of Moslems*” the naming of the Moslems is solely Frontbrune’s addition. What N originally said was “*secte crucigere*”. Most common factors have taken this as coming from the Latin for “cross-bearing”, *crux-gerens*, Nostradamically modified so that it will rhyme with the subsequent line three and meaning “crusaders”. Frontbrune declares that the original was *secte crucif gere* or “sect of crucifiers” meaning Moslems. I would be the first to admit that I did seem to suffer from syncope on occasion, however reading “crucifying sect” as “Moslems” stretches the meaning of crucifiers to Humpty Dumpty proportions Frontbrune shares with Nostradamus the nationality of Nicholas Chauvin and restricts the basic arena of the predictions to France. As such, he probably reflects the original intentions much better than do British or American interpreters, however, while the prediction may be reasonable reflections of 16th Century France their applicability to 20th Century occurrences requires a substantial suspension of reality. Frontbrune principally sees the Arab/European war occurring in Europe.

**Rene NOORBERGEN** (1981), although he follows

a similar pattern to Frontbrune, sees it slightly differently. In his scenario, Russia is allied to France, America and Britain (Frontbrune has them allied with the Arabs). The Chinese attack before the Arabs, rather than after them. In particular, he places 3:61 at the end of the Holocaust War. (Prior to this, a large meteor has hit the Earth, China has launched a nuclear attack, then germ warfare, against the West, invaded Russia, invaded Europe in concert with the Arabs. England had been flooded, the British have landed in France, the Russians and Americans have taken the offensive and recaptured Europe and the Chinese have surrendered Dull it ain’t.) He does see 8:70 as referring to a Mesopotamian Arab, of questionable reputation, making trouble about August 1987.

**John HOGUE** (1987) did not consider either of these quatrains worth mentioning. Indeed, Iraq does not loom large in his writing. This may be because he predicted that Hussein would be totally defeated by Iran in August 1987, so it is unlikely that current events would have been anticipated.

Hogue, in his “Nostradamus and the Millennium”, nominated four candidates for the Third Anti-Christ, none of them Saddam Hussein. But then Hogue also said that the great new spiritual teacher who will bring peace and

enlightenment in the New Age, is none other than the late Silly Old Bhagger, Shree Rajneesh. Hogue’s four candidates for the Anti-Christ are:

A pair of terrorists known as the Two Abus; Ayatollah Khomeini; Khaddafi of Libya, whom Nostradamus considers a “posturing fool”, or at least that is what he told Delores Cannon.

**Delores CANNON** (1989) had the advantage of actually talking with Nostradamus. In “Conversations with Nostradamus: His Prophecies Explained”, she used hypnotic regression techniques to conjure Nostradamus from several subjects, similar to “past life therapy”. But it can’t be that. They couldn’t all be Nostradamus, could they?

Despite this “advantage” she failed to give us any warning of current events. Like the others, she appears not to consider Mesopotamia an interesting area and totally ignores both quatrains. (All may not be lost. Her book is styled Volume 1, and these verses may appear in Vol 2 as “fulfilled predictions”. But what’s



Nostradamus

the use of postdictions I say.)

If any conclusion can be drawn it is that the current mob of Nostradamus experts have shown a remarkable degree of almost “psi-missing” in failing to relate either of these verses to presently unfolding events. So, despite all claims for Nostradamus’s amazing vision, the situation remains: in 400 years, no-one has yet managed to predict the future by using the writings of Nostradamus.

**Late News:** It has now been noted that a 1949 Warner Bros cartoon had Bugs Bunny falling into the clutches of a black-moustached Hussein of Baghdad. This appears to be a far more accurate prediction than any of Nostradamus’s nonsense.

I wish to thank M V Jones for providing a non-credulous translation of Nostradamus, and, in particular, his suggestion of a possible misprint in quatrain 8:70. **AL**

### References:

- Delores CANNON, *Conversations with Nostradamus: His Prophecies Explained Vol 1*, 1989, America West, Boulder
- Erika CHEETHAM, *The Prophecies of Nostradamus*, 1975, Corgi, London
- Jean-Charles de FRONTBRUNE, *Nostradamus: Countdown to Apocalypse*, 1983, Hutchinson, London (English Translation)
- Charles Nelson GATTEY, *They Saw Tomorrow*, 1977, Harrup, London
- John HOGUE, *Nostradamus and the Millennium*, 1987, Bloomsbury, London
- M.V.JONES, *Nostradamus: A Guide to the Centuries* (Unpublished)
- Edgar LEONI, *Nostradamus and his Prophecies*, 1982, Bell Publish, New York (Original printing 1961)
- Lee McCANN, *Nostradamus: The Man who saw through Time*. 1941, New York
- Rene NOORBERGEN, *Invitation to a Holocaust*, 1981, NEL, London
- Henry C ROBERTS, *The Complete prophecies of Nostradamus*, 1985, Panther, (Revision of 1941 original)

