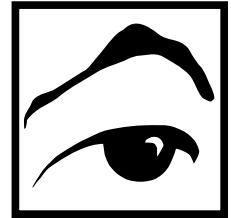


# National Capital Area SKEPTICAL EYE



Vol. 12, No. 1  
March 2000

• encourages critical and scientific thinking • serves as an information resource on extraordinary claims • provides extraordinary evidence that skeptics are cool

## Ghostbusting 101 - Part 2 Searching for Ghosts

by Helen E. Hester-Ossa

Ghost Hunter Joe Holbert faced an audience of mostly skeptics that Saturday morning in mid-October, and he was nervous. “Hello, I’m Joe Holbert,” he said, “and I’m your object of abuse today.” Joe was there to tell the attendees at the ‘Ghostbusting 101’ seminar, sponsored by the National Capital Area Skeptics, about his efforts to use high-technology to track “ghosts” in Leesburg, Virginia, and surrounding areas. Entitled “Ghosts and Electromagnetic Anomalies,” Joe’s talk discussed his beginnings as a ghost hunter, the equipment he uses, and some of the places he has investigated, including the “most haunted house in America,” the Lynch House, located right in Leesburg.

### Reality is Relative

As Joe states in his handout, “Reality is a very personal thing—my reality is different from yours, and yours is different from the person next to you. My reality did not include ghosts . . . of course, I enjoyed spooky tales at Halloween, movies about ghosts, and other oddities, but my reality did not include them. I had never experienced what anyone would refer to as a haunting situation.

“Ten years ago I initiated a special event at our local museum—at the time I was on the board of directors and we needed a fund raiser. I thought a ghost tour at Halloween would be fun and profitable for the museum. I started by contacting some people in Leesburg

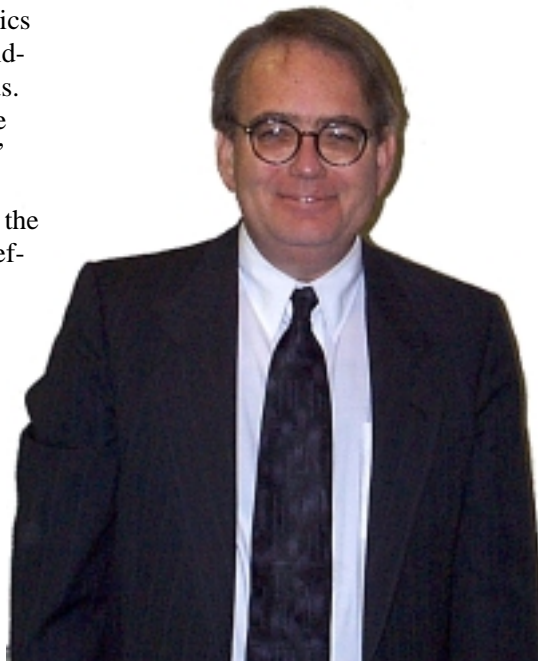


photo by Helen Hester-Ossa

who had reported stories of ghosts—then my reality changed.”

How did Joe’s reality change? He became a believer in ghosts. “If you talk to three groups of people, all sane, not under the influence of drugs or alcohol who are upstanding citizens of the community and they tell you they have ghosts in their buildings, what do you do? Tell them they are crazy, hallucinating, or believe that they are seeing what they say and try to figure out how it can be.”

Joe is trying to figure out how it can be.

Joe talked of rooms in which recording equipment does not work, framed pictures that

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# letters

## Pi and the Pyramids

by Tom Napier

I edit *Phactum*, the newsletter of the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking (PhACT), and I sometimes get the chance to browse through copies of other skeptical group newsletters. I noticed Walter Rowe's article, "Mathematical Mysticism and the Great Pyramid" in Volume 11 No 1 of *Skeptical Eye* because I occasionally speak to Mensa and skeptical groups on pyramid mythology. In 1988, while preparing this talk, I investigated the "Pi in the Great Pyramid" myth. I found it had been noted that the slope of Khufu's Pyramid better approximated 22/7 than pi. This lead me to wonder if this was an artifact of the way in which the Egyptians measured the slope of a pyramid during construction.

I speculated that they had used a plumb-bob and a triangular instrument which measured up one royal cubit, 28 fingers, and inwards a whole number of fingers. In the case of Khufu's pyramid 22 fingers would not only give the measured slope (51 deg 50 min) exactly, it would make the base divided by twice the altitude exactly 22/7.

This could have been a coincidence so I tried to confirm it by hunting out the slopes of some other pyramids. (I didn't use measurements of the bases and altitudes since most pyramids are too heavily damaged for these to be accurate. However, the mean slope of a pyramid doesn't change much with time.) I found sufficiently accurate references to six slopes.

Four were very good approximations to a 28:N ratio, indeed they matched 20, 21, 22 and 23 fingers. This suggests that the Egyptians knew roughly what slope was stable and used whole number ratios around the optimum value as a convenient construction guide. I have no idea if this correlation is already well known in Egyptological circles but I mentioned it in a letter which appeared in the *Skeptical Inquirer*. There I noted I had found no pyramid with a 28:19 ratio. Since this would have been a 0.15% match to e, the base of natural logarithms, it might have given further confirmation of the ancient astronaut theory!

Table 1 of Rowe's article gave me a feast of additional data to work with, albeit mostly to two digit accuracy. I was relieved to see that nearly all the pyramids he quoted matched the "cubit up by N fingers in" rule. I am also relieved to see that Wenis' and Senwosret's pyramids, which come nearest to that elusive 28:19 ratio, give a ratio of 2.67 and not e.

By the way, the entrance passage to Khufu's pyramid has been alleged to point to the position of the star Deneb when the pyramids were built. Since it has a slope of two in for every one down, Occam's Razor would lead one to think that this slope too is an artifact of the construction process.

### Walter Rowe responds:

I think that Mr. Napier's proposal may have merit, but there are some arguments that can be raised against it. The ancient Egyptians expressed the inclination of the face of a pyramid as its *seked*. The *seked* was convention-

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Helen Hester-Ossa



recycled paper

ally expressed as the number of horizontal units per one vertical unit rise (it thus corresponded with the cotangent of the angle of slope). The vertical unit was the cubit; however, the horizontal units were palms (= four fingers) rather than fingers. Thus, the problems dealing with the slopes of pyramids in the Rhind mathematical papyrus (RMP 56-60) and in the Moscow mathematical papyrus (MMP 14) express sekeds as palms plus fingers (e.g. in RMP problems 57-59 the seked is five palms and one finger). The pyramids dealt

with in RMP problems 56-60 fit the 28:N rule pretty well: the slope of the pyramid in problem 56 corresponds closely to 28:20; the slopes of the pyramids in problems 57-59 almost exactly fit 28:21; and the slope of the pyramid in problem 60 almost exactly fits 28:7. On the other hand, the slope of the pyramid in MMP problem 14 is 28:4.67. It seems that the author of MMP was not following a 28:N rule. The discrepancy could merely reflect the different ways that scribes and engineers dealt with pyramid slopes. ☒



# prez sez

by Paul Jaffe

Dear *Skeptical Eye* reader,

One of the roles of NCAS is to provide YOU, our members, with opportunities to get more involved in the promotion of skepticism and critical thinking. To this end, we've recently restarted our science fair judging program. Under the direction of board member **Walter Rowe**, you can take the opportunity to guide and encourage young people as a science fair judge. NCAS gives special awards to deserving students whose projects show their promise as budding critical thinkers. This is a perfect way to help make a difference even if you have only few hours of spare time. To learn more, please contact Walter directly at [wfrowe@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu](mailto:wfrowe@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu) or call the NCAS line at 301-587-3827.

Another way to get more involved in NCAS activities is to run for the board of directors. Being a board member lets you actively shape NCAS' focus and programs. If you have questions or if you'd like to run for the board of directors, send a message to [ncas@ncas.org](mailto:ncas@ncas.org) or call the NCAS line.

In addition to our regular lecture series, NCAS will be starting some new, more interactive activities. **Rita Malone** will be heading up these programs, including book discussions and chances for you to learn more about skepticism and critical thinking. This is great opportunity to meet other NCAS members and increase your own knowledge. For more information, email Rita at [rialita@aol.com](mailto:rialita@aol.com) or call the NCAS line at 301-587-3827.

As always, NCAS welcomes your **tax-deductible donations** in addition to your regular membership dues.

Finally, if you would like to receive the *Shadow of a Doubt* newsletter via email or participate in the [ncas-share](http://ncas-share) online forum, please send an email to [ncas@ncas.org](mailto:ncas@ncas.org) indicating your interest.

Yours truly,

Paul Jaffe ([pjaffe@mindless.com](mailto:pjaffe@mindless.com))  
*President, National Capital Area Skeptics*



photo by H. Hester-Ossa



*ghosthunter continued from page 1*



*photo by Helen Hester-Ossa*

*Assistant ghosthunter Keeler Anderson operated a video camera during NCAS's Ghostbusting 101 seminar last October in Leesburg, Virginia.*


we must know the nature of the power. I look for the patterns, and after dozens of interviews, a break appears.”

What exactly powers these manifestations? According to Joe, people with high electromagnetic (EM) fields around their bodies tend to witness paranormal activities. They are people who do not often use technology, such as waiters, waitresses, receptionists. When they do use high-tech equipment, they tend to have problems with the equipment working. Joe states that the High EM generates 140+ millivolts of electricity, and the Ultra High EM generates 1+ volts. The field is a 10 Hz static field, from 50 millivolts to 1+ volt, and averages 70 millivolts. Typically, says Joe, females rather than males will “see” ghosts, although some injury to the left side of the head before the age of six or seven may also induce experiences in both sexes.

The area of psychic occurrences, says Joe, shows electromagnetic anomalies: an area of air that has a high static charge. Joe uses the Natural EM Meter in an area of reported activity, and finds readings of a 10 Hz static field, from 50 millivolts to 1+ volt, averaging 70 millivolts, just like the field around the High EM personality.

Joe admitted that he has never been able to videotape a paranormal occurrence, but that won't keep him from trying.

Time constraints prevented the audience from asking the numerous questions Joe's talk generated.

If you are interested in the Leesburg Ghost Tours, call 703-913-2060 or log on to <http://www.loudoun-net.com/ghostours/> 

seem to float down off walls gently to the floor for no apparent reason, rooms that feel overwhelmingly sad, and blood-like stains that appear and disappear in rooms where deaths occurred.

### **High-Tech Arsenal**

Armed with an array of sound, light, movement, and energy measuring equipment, Joe tries to measure changes in the atmosphere where a manifestation is said to occur. “Any effect displayed must have a source of power. It also must have a mechanism to harness that power, but first

- | Type of Equipment                            |
|--|
| 35mm Cameras                                 |
| Sony Pro-Cam Video Camera                    |
| JVC Professional Tape Recorder               |
| Sony Reel-to-Reel Tape Recorder              |
| Sound Mixing Board                           |
| Electro-magnetic Sensor (AC)                 |
| AlphLab Natural Electro-magnetic Sensor (DC) |
| Multimeters (Voltage Meter)                  |

# Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*

by Richard Dengrove

Reginald Scot—also Reynald Scot in the variable spelling of the time—is often regarded as one of the first of the modern skeptics because of his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). In the 20th century, many see his ideas as completely modern and having no relation to other contemporary authors. However, astute readers will notice that this is not exactly the case. It is obvious he is a religious man; in fact, his beliefs mark him as a Puritan. And Scot himself frankly cites writers of his day for his views. Let us examine some of his major tenets and see his sources for them.

One of Scot's tenets is that the Devil, being a spiritual being, cannot appear in material form. No, he appears to man- and womankind by entering into their minds and seeking their confusion. As evidence, Scot reasoned that, since the Devil cannot read minds—dogma since the Middle Ages—he should appear to the honest and respectable in gross and corporeal form. But he only appears to the “corrupt and melancholic.” That the Devil is spiritual alone seems anathema to Scot's time. However, I gather a reading of Aristotle, the *sine qua non* philosopher of the era, could yield this opinion, as it did to Pietro Pomponazzi. Scot also mentions the Church father, Tatian. Another source he does not cite for the Devil being spiritual alone—but he certainly cites it and it certainly says it—is the *Canon Episcopi*, a ninth century document, believed third century and from the Church fathers. Originally aimed against surviving folk religion, it was later interpreted as referring to witchcraft. Witch hunters sought loopholes to avoid its strictures.

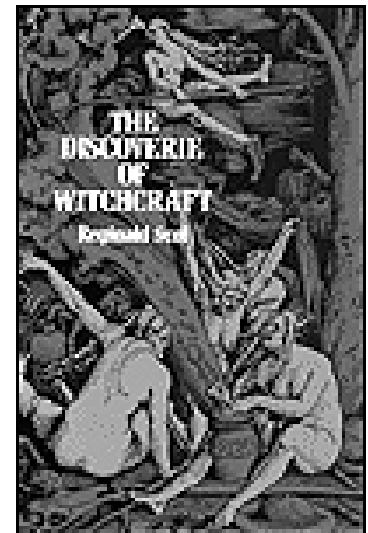
Another tenet of Scot's is that no miracles have occurred since Christianity was established. Scot reasoned they were necessary for Christ and his Apostles to establish the faith, but now to claim them is impiety. For this view, Scot cites Saint Augustine and John Calvin. However, while Scot applies it to

oracles, prophecy, and, of course, witchcraft, he cites Calvin only against magical healing and the rituals of Catholicism. Another source Scot may not have had to cite—educated Englishmen knew it—was that, according to Keith Thomas, the age of miracles had passed, part of the English Reformation's original dogma. Although it may not have been widely applied until much later, in 1550 a Bishop Jewel did use it to denounce the Rite of Exorcism as Papist and idolatrous.

Another tenet of Scot's is that the Devil is not responsible for our misfortunes; God alone is. Job's problems in the *Bible* were caused by God, not the Devil or witches. Again Scot cites John Calvin, who at least applied it to Job's problems, if not witchcraft. More *a propos*, Scot cites Brentius that only God could infect the air, although witches are accused of it. Perhaps Brentius is Latin for Johann Brenz, a Lutheran divine. Writing in the 1530s, he did believe that God alone was responsible for our misfortune. His inspiration was not the air, but an awful hail storm. There was a magical aspect to Brenz's ideas Scot would have rejected: the Devil knew when misfortunes would hit, and deluded witches into thinking themselves responsible.

According to Midelfort, Brenz was one of many German theologians who believed from the beginning of the 16th century that our misfortunes were due to God alone, and not witches or the Devil. On a different matter, Scot opposes another theologian, the Calvinist Thomas Erastus. Erastus' skepticism may have been the equal of Scot's, the Devil's powers being just one area.

A third tenet of Scot's is that the “miracles” of his time were done by deceit, by “cozeners.” This is aimed at white witches,



Richard Dengrove is the librarian for the Food and Nutrition Service, Department of Agriculture. He lives with his wife, Heidi, in Alexandria, Virginia. His ambition is to write a history of occult magic one of these days.

continued on page 6



**In Westwell, a young woman used “pythonism,” a term from the classics meaning ventriloquism, to accuse an old woman of witchcraft. In a fake voice, she accused Old Alice of using a Devil kept in a bottle to kill three people.**

also known as cunning women and other names. They were village workers in miracles, the supernatural, especially healing through prayer. Not only were they usually not accused of witchcraft in England, but sometimes were employed to hunt witches. They were the bane of Puritans like Scot, who considered them far more diabolical than black witches. I have found no authors I am certain influenced Scot on the “cozening” of these white witches. Roger Bacon in the 13th Century claimed cunning women used deceit. But Scot does not refer to Bacon. Also, there was medieval literature on magic tricks, whose purpose was often to fool the gullible into thinking one a miracle worker. However, Scot cites none of these sources.

On the other hand, he cites incidents from his local area, with which he may have had personal experience: for instance, from the nearby towns of Westwell and Romnie and about a certain “Mother” Bungie. In Westwell, a young woman used “pythonism,” a term from the classics meaning ventriloquism, to accuse an old woman of witchcraft. In a fake voice, she accused Old Alice of using a Devil kept in a bottle to kill three people. Also, Scot claims that when his spies demanded to see a witches’ sabbath, the “witches” always made excuses.

A fourth tenet of Scot’s is that many of the old women accused of black witchcraft were melancholic, *i.e.*, suffering depression when they confessed, voluntarily, to pledging fealty to the Devil or calling up storms, for example. One source is Cardan, who, I presume, is the French astrologer Jerome Cardan. It is not hard to find another source Scot knew well, Wierus, Latin for Johann Weyer. Scot often quotes him nearly verbatim on other matters.

In short, Reginald Scot did not write in a vacuum. This is not to say anything against

Scot. Who can break completely from his or her own society? ☹

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- Midelfort, H.C. Erik. *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany 1562-1684. The Social and Intellectual Foundations*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1972. See pp 30-67 for the German theologians who attribute our misfortune to God alone. Also, look up “Canon Episcopi” in the index for that work’s influence.
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- Thomas, Keith. *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1971. Look up in index “miracles; said to have ceased.”

# Short Recommended Reading List

As the Board of Directors of the National Capital Area Skeptics (NCAS) prepared to get together to brainstorm on the last Sunday of February 2000, a flurry of e-mails suggested possible reading material to prepare for the meeting. Although Board members brought hundreds of books to the meeting to share, here is just a sampling:

Chip Denman, who teaches statistics and critical thinking at the University of Maryland, uses Shermer's book, *Why People Believe Weird Things*, in his course. "It's good for introducing ideas, although I wish it did more with the WHY part of the title. Chapters 1-3 are at the core of my approach. Some semesters I also use Thomas Gilovich's *How We Know What Isn't So*, to go more into the cognitive psychology of belief."

Some other books that Chip has found useful:


*Uncommon Sense: The Heretical Nature of Science* by Alan Cromer. "Interesting, if very spotty, history of the development of science in human history. I particularly like his definition of scientific knowledge as "public knowledge"—e.g., science is the search for consensus of rational opinion among all competent researchers, and the metaphysics of science defines a public world about which this consensus is possible."

*How To Think About Weird Things* by Schick and Vaughn. "Textbook introduction to weird claims, critical thinking, and philosophy of science.

"As my list reveals, for me skepticism is an essential component of critical, scientific inquiry, and not an end unto itself."

Board member Barry Blyveis suggested that a good book to read is Eric H. Fromm's *Escape From Freedom*. Says Barry, "Fromm created the concept of the True Believer: how one surrenders one's free will for an identity.

"The thesis of this highly illuminating book is that to escape a sense of anomie and its attendant seeming rootlessness, many people resort to things in society that superimpose an identity on them, a kind of drive-up window for a world view if you will. Thus you

get things like religious cults and Nazis at the extreme and Republicanism and Liberalism more toward the center. The ultimate message of this book is to think for yourself and try not to give in to the comfort of a group and its inherently limiting regulations." 

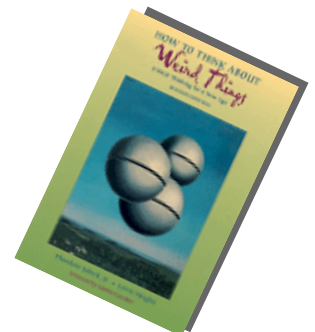
*Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time*  
by Michael Shermer, Foreword by Stephen J. Gould  
\$14.95  
Paperback, 306 pp.  
W. H. Freeman Company, August 1998  
ISBN: 0716733870

*How We Know What Isn't So: The Fallibility of Human Reason in Everyday Life*  
by Thomas Gilovich  
Paperback, 216 pp.  
The Free Press, March 1993  
ISBN: 0029117062

*Uncommon Sense : The Heretical Nature of Science*  
by Alan Cromer  
\$14.95  
Paperback Reprint edition (August 1995)  
Oxford Univ Press  
ISBN: 0195096363

*How to Think About Weird Things : Critical Thinking for a New Age*  
by Theodore Schick, Lewis Vaughn (Contributor)  
\$21.95  
Paperback 304 pp 2nd edition (November 1998)  
Mayfield Publishing Company  
ISBN: 0767400135

*Escape from Freedom*  
by Erich H. Fromm  
\$14.00  
Paperback 1st Owl bk edition (February 1995)  
Henry Holt (Paper)  
ISBN: 0805031499



# Teaching the Blind to Read (Without Braille!)

by Neil Langdon Inglis


At GWU's Lisner Auditorium last September, what had been billed as a display of Indonesian dances turned out to be a horrid display of alleged "psychic" feats. Yes, there were dances at the beginning and end, and jolly good they were too; but the "paranormal" display was clearly intended as the highlight of the evening.

Practitioners of an Indonesian martial art were introduced; these people are trained to fight in darkness, presumably relying on senses other than sight. Fair enough. One plump gentleman demonstrated what in karate would I think be called a "kata." Then the "psychic feats" began, including a very routine display of blindfolded knife-throwing (except balloons were the target, a pop-gun the weapon). The blindfolding was emphasized in the next portion of the show, which included an exhibition of blindfolded "reading" of symbols, words, and colors; it was standard Gellerite stuff, of a kind far more imaginatively replicated by conjurers everywhere. The idea is that the practitioners sense the "emanations" from the words on the page or card.

I was squirming in my chair, although the gullible audience lapped it up. Bear with me, it gets worse. Two young men, supposedly blind, were introduced, to perform another blindfolded reading (although if they were blind, I'm not sure what the blindfold was supposed to prove). The practitioners of this martial art intend to use it to teach the blind how to read, we were told. After the deeds were done to much applause, the two young fellows stalked off the stage; perhaps they were indeed blind or visually impaired, although it seemed to me that they were walking in the way that sighted people imagine blind folk to walk, and they strode more purposefully once they thought they were out of the sight-lines.

All of the hallmarks of such performances were in evidence. The lady presenter explained that she, too, had once been a skeptic, although she was now utterly convinced; there

was a certain faux-humility about the proceedings (not a "conjuring show," you see—a total lack of stagecraft and showmanship); I noted the emphasis on good works in teaching the blind to read; there were several professions of earnestness, and one stunt even failed, for good measure. Many "volunteers" were plucked from the audience like daisies from a meadow. Nobody seemed to realize that the artists controlled the conditions on stage, and the possibilities for directly or indirectly cueing the performers discreetly, in an unfamiliar language, were immense.

The "Spirit of the New Indonesia 1999" roadshow is going round the country. It interested me that no mention was made of the real social problems in Indonesia, which all the shadow-boxing in the world won't solve. 

**Two young men, supposedly blind, were introduced, to perform another blindfolded reading (although if they were blind, I'm not sure what the blindfold was supposed to prove).**

**I noted the emphasis on good works in teaching the blind to read; there were several professions of earnestness, and one stunt even failed, for good measure.**



In the spirit of encouraging skeptical activism, from time to time we will use this column to acknowledge NCAS members who have let us know about skeptical correspondence they have sent (letters to newspaper editors, television producers, etc.) or other actions they have taken proactively or in response to various articles, programs, events, etc. of concern to skeptics.

So please send us a copy of the text or even just a mention of your skeptical correspondence. Send hard copy to the NCAS mailing address. Copies of email can be sent to NCAS officers at [ncas@ncas.org](mailto:ncas@ncas.org). OR, if you already participate in the NCAS interactive email exchange, NCAS-SHARE, then consider sending copies or references to [ncas-share@ncas.org](mailto:ncas-share@ncas.org) to share with others.

When you write, be sure to encourage good skepticism when you see it, as well as positively expressing your concerns about uncritical thinking or disregard for established science. Please do not put overt cc's to NCAS in your original letters or emails to others (send us a bcc).

## The Power of Belief

Jeff Miner wrote the following note to John Stossel and received this response:

Dear John Stossel,

Congratulations on your excellent program "The Power of Belief." You are providing an invaluable service by airing a much-needed skeptical point of view on paranormal beliefs.

It may interest you to know that the same sort of magical, anti-scientific thinking you examine in your program has taken hold at colleges and universities across the country, where a set of literary and humanist scholars regularly teach that science is a mere "social construction," or belief system, with no more claim to the truth than any other "way of knowing." If you are interested in this topic, a good place to start is Gross and Levitt's book *Higher Superstition*.

Thanks again for a great program.

John Stossel's response:

Thank you for your comments on "The Power Of Belief". More than a thousand of you have e-mailed us, so I regret I cannot respond to your comments directly. However, I do read most of the e-mails (at least the shorter ones). To you who were offended, I'm sorry. To you who were complimentary, thank you, your encouragement means a lot. To you in the Central Time Zone who are mad because your kids heard me say Santa wasn't real, I'm very sorry. I totally forgot that the show runs earlier some places; it never occurred to me

that young children would be watching. That was stupid of me.

Anyway, if you would like to order a videotape or a transcript, call 800-225-5222. Ask for a copy of "The Power Of Belief" which aired 6/3/99. Tapes are \$34.90 and transcripts are \$17.90. Sorry about the price; its out of my control.

But happier news: Bob Chitester, of the Palmer R. Chitester Fund, is now preparing to adapt and some of my other shows for classroom application. Accompanying text material is being developed as well. He needs help. If you have an interest in helping with a new business, please contact him at 800/876-8930.

Some of you wanted to contact people who appeared in the show. Hope this helps:

James Randi: e-mail: [randi@randi.org](mailto:randi@randi.org), fax: 954-467-1660

Skeptic Magazine (Michael Shermer): 626-794-3119  
P.O. Box 338

Altadena, CA 91001

Susan Miller (astrologer): [REDACTED]  
Physicist David Willey (Firewalking segment)

University of Pittsburgh: 814-269-2021

Elmer Glover (Voodoo Priest): 504-523-1279, 504-821-6533 (after 9 p.m.)

TM Flying: Contact: Sally Peardon at Madharshi Univ.: 515-472-1200

Dr. Melvin Morse, Child Psychologist - near death experiences: [morsefam@aol.com](mailto:morsefam@aol.com)

Sincerely,  
JOHN STOSSEL

**To you in the Central Time Zone who are mad because your kids heard me say Santa wasn't real, I'm very sorry.**

## Reincarnation of Inadequate Data

by Scott Snell

A couple of months ago, the *Washington Post Magazine* published an article by one of the editors of the *Post*'s Style section. This editor, Tom Shroder, had just written a book about a guy named Ian Stevenson. Stevenson is a psychiatrist at the University of Virginia who has collected a large number of cases he thinks are compelling evidence for reincarnation.

The article, an excerpt of the book, hit some familiar notes for those who enjoy reading about scientists who investigate the paranormal: "Why," he asks for the third time since night has fallen, "do mainstream scientists refuse to accept the evidence we have for reincarnation?" Shroder mentions at one point that Stevenson has been compared to Galileo by one researcher. And so on.

Another familiar passage in the article was the contrasting of Stevenson from "wackos" who claim to "have fragments of the True Cross or a radio that communicated with a race of blood-red dwarves on the fifth moon of Jupiter."

Yet I wondered just how much better Stevenson's evidence (essentially a bunch of interesting anecdotes) was, compared to, say, the (apparently completely unrelated) "Jupiter dwarves" idea that Shroder dismisses offhandedly.

So I wrote a letter that they finally published in the *Washington Post Magazine* this past Sunday. They made some changes to it that I think make it harder to understand where I'm coming from. <sigh>

Scott

*Editor's note: because of space constraints, we are publishing Scott's letter as he sent it. You can find the published version at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/WPlate/1999-09/26/0081-092699-idx.html>*

To the Editor:

I read Tom Shroder's article on reincarnation with great interest, but also disappointment that he dismissed "blood-red dwarves on the fifth moon of Jupiter" as being "wacko." How can he be so certain? Clearly, all that Stevenson can claim he knows for sure is that some kids seem to know a lot about some dead people. Does that necessarily suggest reincarnation as the answer? Couldn't it be the blood-red dwarves of Jupiter using some amazing technology to beam the thoughts they collected from people prior to death into the susceptible minds of Earth children, perhaps as a prank against gullible Earthlings? How can Shroder dismiss this as a viable possibility?

One answer might be, "Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence." Stevenson's work is, unfortunately, not extraordinary evidence. Until someone can find a way to study the subject in a way that isn't so dependent on the honesty and reliability of the people involved, it remains speculative and brimming with a lot of wish fulfillment.

Scott Snell

The author of the article replied to my e-mail the next day:

I agree with you entirely, and agonize on just that topic quite extensively in my book. I'm sorry I couldn't get into it at greater length in the magazine piece, but if you get a chance to read the book, I'd love to hear back from you.

Sincerely,

Tom Shroder





# media notes

NCAS member, **Jeff Miner**, had his book review of Ken Wilbur's *The Marriage of Sense and Soul* published in the January-February 2000 issue of *The Skeptical Inquirer*.

**Chip Denman** and Kari Coleman were interviewed by *People* magazine in October 1999 for a fairly substantial (for *People*) story on ghosts and spirits. There was a whole sidebar on the Fox sisters, coming mostly from Chip. "They even wanted to know how much the Foxes charged for their seances," said Chip. "(My best answer: \$2/head when they worked at P. T. Barnum's Museum, but most of their work was in private homes.)"

NCAS Spokesperson, **Chip Denman**, participated in a 20-minute recorded telephone interview on Fairfax Cable Radio WEBR 94.5 FM aired sometime between 2:30 - 4:00p.m. during the "Joel Paul" talk radio show on Sunday, October 10, 1999. The topic of the show was "Pet Peeves."

**Tim Carr** wrote on February 1, 2000, that the syndicated public radio program "Soundprint" recently aired a program on pseudoscience. "I heard it on WAMU in the wee hours of Monday morning (January 31). A certain **Chip Denman** is heard at several points in the program. An archived Webcast and audiocassettes can be obtained through their Web site: <http://soundprint.org/documentaries/2000/pseudoscience/>

Chip replied "Wow, I did that "SoundPrint" show some years ago — at least 5, I think. I just compared my cassette tape against the RealAudio on the website, and they are the same. Except that originally it was titled "On The Edge of Reason" rather than "Pseudoscience."

Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose."

**Dave Smolar**, radio producer for the "new" overnight format, hosted by anchor Dean Lane, and named "Dean

til Dawn," interviewed NCAS member **Eugene Ossa** about what happened at the turn of the first millennium. This stemmed from Eugene's presentation to NCAS early last year. It was aired (locally) Tuesday, January 11, 2000, on WTOP, then fed all over the country to CBS affiliates on Sunday, January 9, just before the news on the hour.



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# NCAS Says Goodbye to *Horizon*

January 13, 2000, marked the final issue of the monthly *HORIZON Learning Section* from the *Washington Post*.

Over its 5-year run, the *HORIZON* Calendar section has been very supportive in announcing NCAS events. We want to thank them for all they've done to promote science awareness in our community. We encourage them in their new endeavor of a daily science

column for 9-13 year-olds, and hope they can someday expand their efforts again to include all readers who need lifelong science learning.

Everyone who has ever enjoyed *HORIZON*, Please send email to "Horizon" <[horizon@washpost.com](mailto:horizon@washpost.com)> to thank them for a job well done.

Gary Stone  
NCAS VP

## *Skeptical Eye* Mentioned in Gardner Book

Scott Snell writes: "A 1996 collection of Martin Gardner's essays, *The Night is Large*, refers to an issue of the *Skeptical Eye* (vol. 6, no. 4, 1992) on page 374 of the

book. The story is about some New Agers who think Francis Bacon actually wrote Shakespeare's plays, and the evidence to prove it is buried in a Williamsburg graveyard.

## What would YOU like to see in the *Skeptical Eye*? Write us at

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