

National Capital Area SKEPTICAL EYE

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



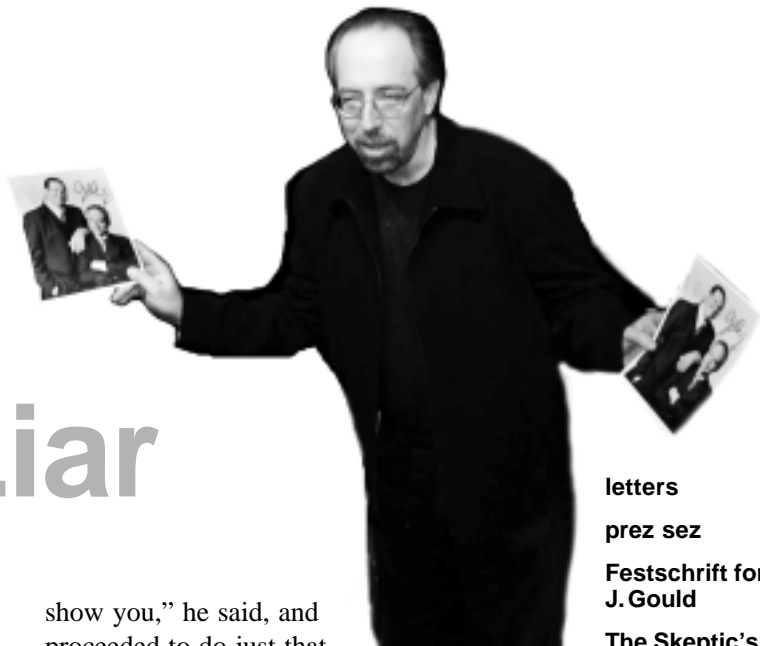
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Jamy Ian Swiss Is the Honest Liar

by Helen Hester-Ossa

Dazzling. Dashing. Dishonest? Definitely. Jamy Ian Swiss is the honest liar. Dapper in a three-piece black suit with a periwinkle blue shirt and matching tie, earring glittering in his left ear, Jamy stepped onto the stark stage of the Cecile Goldman Theater in Washington, DC, on April 21, 2001, and proceeded for the next 90 minutes to stun and captivate the packed audience with his up-close prestidigitation, mentalism, and informative patter.

Pulling out a deck of cards, Jamy stated, "We begin at the beginning with incontrovertible evidence of a misspent youth." Miranda came up on stage from the audience after Jamy learned the last game of cards she played was bridge. He proceeded to change the card she selected to a 2 of diamonds. How'd he do that? Then Phil came up and cut the deck. After contemplating it for a moment, Jamy guessed there were 29 cards in the pile. He was right. "This is a skill with absolutely no practical value except to come here and



show you," he said, and proceeded to do just that . . . show us, dazzle us, educate us.

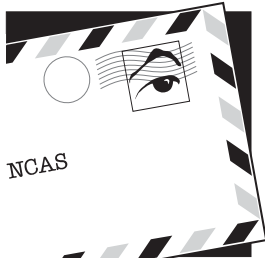
"For almost as long as I have been interested in magic, I have been interested in parapsychology, and I have concluded they [spirits] don't exist."

"I am a professional liar," says Jamy. "As far back as we can remember people have tried to determine a way to tell when people are lying. Back in Elizabethan times there was a dunking stool. If the person drowned, they were innocent, and if they floated, they were guilty and put to death. Now we have stress rates, we use the polygraph to measure nervousness: heart rate, pulse, and galvanic response (sweating). According to these tenets, I am a mythical creature. I am a professional liar. Sometimes people get nervous when they are telling the truth. The modern lie detector is pseudoscience, and is no more reliable than the dunking stool."

Charlene, another audience member, came up on the stage, stating she was a professional liar too. "I'm a lawyer," she said, which got a

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letters

Sensitivity Survey

Through my work in the field of indoor air quality, I have noted cases where people have evidently become severely sensitized to their environment—through exposure to chemicals, biological contaminants, or electromagnetic fields. I suspect that people who develop (or inherit) such a heightened sensitivity may be more likely to report ‘psychic’ experiences. Migraine sufferers and people with allergies may also fit the profile. My conversations with environmental physicians lend credence to this hypothesis. However, more systematic inquiry is needed.

In order to identify the common factors (if any) that may be at work in these cases, I have developed a survey. My goal is to have it completed by those who consider themselves psychically sensitive and people who consider themselves environmentally sensitive—and compare the results.

Of course, a control group is needed, and here is where I hope my NCAS membership and yours—will prove beneficial. I encourage you to take 10 minutes to complete the survey. I especially need women to participate. Complete confidentiality is assured: I will be aggregating the results. Ultimately those results will be shared with NCAS, as well as with the other organizations that have offered to publicize this project.

I thank NCAS members in advance for their assistance, and for any ideas or comments they may wish to offer, either before or after completing the survey. 

Because of the length of the survey, we ask that you contact Michael Jawer directly if you are interested in participating.

Michael Jawer
8624 McHenry St
Vienna, VA 22180-6837
703-849-9838
mjawer2001@yahoo.com

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24-hour phone number: 301-587-3827
e-mail: ncas@ncas.org
Skeptical Eye input: s_eye@ncas.org
Internet: <http://www.ncas.org>
NCAS discussion group: ncas-share@ncas.org

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Helen Hester-Ossa



recycled paper

Dear *Skeptical Eye* reader,

Since 1987, NCAS has worked to promote critical thinking and the understanding of science. Last year was no exception. Here are a few of our accomplishments from last year:

- Adding to our burgeoning online library of documents the National Bureau of Standard's report of Joseph Newman's "energy machine"
- Providing judges and special awards for local and regional science fairs to encourage science literacy and enthusiasm in the coming generation
- Sponsoring monthly public programs on a wide variety of science, pseudoscience, and related subjects, featuring speakers such as author, *Washington Post* writer, and NPR commentator Joel Achenbach
- Leading and encouraging government and media feedback and activism through letter, email, and phone campaigns, such as our input to the strategic plan for NIH's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)
- Acting as an information resource for local, national, and international media, including Mexican TV and FOX 45
- Supporting author, *Skeptic* magazine publisher, and *Scientific American* columnist Michael Shermer in his programs at the Virginia Festival of the Book and the National Memorial Holocaust Museum
- Covering original UFO investigations, bible code debunking, reviews of books and local events, and other issues in the *Skeptical Eye*.

These achievements were made possible through the efforts of NCAS volunteers and your regular membership fees and tax-deductible contributions. In 2001, we continue our ongoing activities and expand with the addition of new projects. These include:

- Continuing our popular monthly programs and lectures
- Continuing our support of area science fairs with judges and awards
- Presenting the annual workshop: Understanding Belief—How we know what isn't so
- Participating in the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims Of the Paranormal's (CSICOP) network of local skeptic organizations
- Continuing to serve the media as an information resource
- Increasing the availability of videos of our past public programs
- Making past issues of the *Skeptical Eye* available online
- Further expanding our offering of web accessible research and educational resources, including the addition of the proceedings of the Congressional UFO Symposium.



Please make a tax deductible donation in addition to your membership fee or volunteer to help support NCAS in 2001. NCAS has no paid staff, and all donations go directly to support NCAS activities and projects. As a 501c(3) nonprofit organization, all donations to NCAS are fully tax deductible.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, please contact me at 703-329-0270 or pjaffe@mindless.com.

Yours truly,
Paul Jaffe
President, National Capital Area Skeptics

Festschrift for Stephen Jay Gould

by Marvin V. Zelkowitz

The Skeptics Society annual meeting on October 7, 2000 was a festschrift to honor Stephen Jay Gould, the Harvard paleontologist who, after 26 years and 300 consecutive columns, is ending his monthly column “This View of Life” in *Natural History* magazine.

Professor Gould is probably today’s foremost expert on evolution, a skeptic who is a Fellow of CSICOP and on the Editorial Board of *Skeptical* magazine, and a lifelong NY Yankees baseball fan. The meeting was held in Beckman Auditorium on the California Institute of Technology campus in Pasadena, California. The day consisted of a dozen talks, either in tribute to Professor Gould’s accomplishments or on the importance of skepticism in today’s world.

Beckman Auditorium on the California Institute of Technology campus in Pasadena, California



Festschrift: a volume of writings by different authors presented as a tribute or memorial, especially to a scholar

What I learned at Festschrift

A chronology of the day would be boring, so instead I’ll concentrate on what I learned at the meeting. Various themes were repeated by several speakers.

■ Gould’s major contribution to evolution is the “Theory of Punctuated Equilibrium.” Rather than slowly evolving over time, organisms are stable for millennia, and then over a few generations change rapidly. This accounts for the lack of the “missing link”

because change is not gradual, but rapid, when it occurs.

■ *Contingency*, or accidents happen, is crucial to account for some evolutionary events. Evolution often takes a path that is “good enough” and not necessarily the best. The “thumb” on the panda is one such example. Unlike humans whose thumb is one of the fingers of the hand, the panda’s thumb is actually an elongated wrist bone that over time has become flexible. The meteor that wiped out the dinosaurs 65 million years ago was another. By eliminating these giant animals, nature allowed the small mammals to grow in size and eventually dominate the earth. Creationists use intelligent design as a rationale that life is too complex to happen by chance. The panda’s thumb is one example where intelligent design was not so intelligent.

■ Darwin never used the term “evolution” in his *Origin of Species*. Evolution in 1860 meant progress and improvement. Once the term was applied to his “Theory of Natural Selection,” the concept of an evolutionary ladder, with humans on top, developed. Of course once people thought in terms of this ladder, the concept of man being a “higher” form of life than apes was a natural deduction, and has led to countless arguments since.

But Darwin thought more about an evolutionary “bush” as each species evolved from some earlier species. Thus, man and apes are on different branches on this bush of life. There is no concept of high or low, and nature has a way of pruning unsuccessful branches from the bush. Being higher or lower in the bush has no real meaning.

Highlights of the day

It’s difficult to give a brief synopsis of the day without inadvertently slighting some speaker, but I’ll try anyway:

■ Letters were read from Daniel Goldin, NASA Administrator; Arthur C. Clarke; and Steve Allen.

■ Donald Prothero, Associate Professor of Geology at Occidental College, gave the

first talk and described the changes in geology and paleontology in the past 50 years.

■ Michael Shermer, Director of the Skeptics Society, gave an analysis of Gould's achievements (briefly summarized in Table 1).

Scientific papers	479
Books	22
Reviews	101
Essays in <i>Natural History</i>	300
Words (in 300 essays)	1,253,013
U.S. Presidents since essays began in 1974	7
NY Yankee managers since essays began	19

Table 1. Summary of Professor Gould's writing (by M. Shermer)

■ Randi was perhaps the most entertaining. He presented a video clip of how to work with psychics and entertained the audi-


ence with some real magic. (Well, they were tricks really, but the effects were great.)

■ Louis Friedman, a founding director with Carl Sagan of the Planetary Society, described the search for extraterrestrial life. "Either we are alone in the universe or we are not; either prospect is mindboggling."

■ Bill Nye, the science guy, gave a brief history of his transformation from mechanical engineer at Boeing to TV star on PBS. His message to the audience "you need to make skepticism fun," which is his creed on his TV show.

■ As with last year's meeting, Richard Milner, Senior Editor of *Natural History*, entertained with songs about evolution and Gould.

■ At last, around 7pm, Stephen Jay Gould had to "pay" for his tribute with the keynote address, his history on the development of some of the major tenets of evolution, science, and skepticism.

Around 9:00 pm, the 500 or so attendees staggered out of the auditorium. It was a long, but successful, meeting. 

Eating lunch outside the auditorium. Stephen Jay Gould is in foreground.



The Skeptic's Faust

by Richard Dengrove

I believe there was a real Faust. You can contend it. The sources tend to mention him as if you know who they mean, often only referring to him as Faust. And these sources are the pan-Germans of their time. Telling evidence?

Maybe not. However, I make no extraordinary claims for Faust. He is more suited to skepticism than belief—a con man who, only through urban legends, gradually metamorphosed into the scholar who sold his soul to the Devil.

My source is Philip Mason Palmer and Robert Pattison (eds. and trans.), *The Sources of the Faust Tradition: from Simon Magus to Lessing (1936, 1965)*. It gives a compilation of documents authored by some of the 16th century's greatest Germans.

Faust was first mentioned in 1507 by Johannes Trithem, a.k.a., Trithemius. He went by the name George Sabellicus, the younger Faustus. Who knows what happened to the older Faustus. By the way, Faustus, in Latin, is a lucky or happy person.

Trithem complained that Sabellicus/Faust had ducked a 1506 meeting with him at

viner, and much more. That Sabellicus boasted if Plato and Aristotle passed from the memory of man, he, Sabellicus, could reconstruct their philosophy—as the prophet Ezra reconstructed much of the *Old Testament*. Also that the miracles of Christ were not so wonderful and that he could reproduce them. And that he was the most learned alchemist of all time.

Trithem scoffed at this and considered him a fool and ignorant of learning, common accusations. It galled Trithem that these boasts were believed. In Kreuznach, the magistrate, Franz von Sickingen, a man very fond of mystical lore, had him appointed school master. However, Sabellicus could not resist, a “most dastardly lewdness” with his charges. When found out, he fled.

Before his death, Faust sighters treated Faust (going under the names George Faust, Dr. Faust, and Faust) to a similar parade of denunciations, epithets, and vices, and he was kicked out of city after city. One detractor told him to “spend his penny elsewhere.” There were, however, a few important people who were satisfied with his fortunetelling.

Then there was a report of his death by Johannes Gast, a Protestant clergyman, a witty and entertaining man despite the reputation of Protestant clergy then. He stated that Faust had been strangled by the devil, and on the bier his head kept twisting behind his back, though righted five times. The twisted head was Dante's punishment in Hell for fortunetellers. Gast remarks, “God preserve us lest we become slaves of the Devil.” It was later added that at that instant the house shook.

After his death fantastic tales grew about Faust. All Gast could claim in life was that Faust had somehow been able to acquire for his party platters of fowl Gast had never seen in that region.

Several tales about Faust concerned his partying. In one, Faust invited the guests to a ➔

Johannes Gast: a Protestant clergyman. . . reported Faust had been strangled by the devil, and on the bier his head kept twisting behind his back, though righted five times. The twisted head was Dante's punishment in Hell for fortunetellers.

Gelhausen. He described Faust with a string of epithets, vices, and denunciations: “a vagabond, babbler and rogue who deserved to be thrashed for his irreverence.” He said Sabellicus claimed to be king of the necromancers, an astrologer, magus, palmist, di-

Faust continued from previous page

party, but there was no sign of preparation. Dr. Faust knocked with a knife on the table.

Someone entered and asked, "Sir, what do you wish?"

"How quick are you?" asked Faust in turn.

"As an arrow."

"You will not serve me," replied Faust. "Go back to where you came from."

Then he knocked again and another servant entered and also asked: "Sir, what do you wish?"

"How quick are you?" Faust queried.

"As the wind," he replied.

"That is something," remarked Dr. Faust, but the servant wouldn't do.

Faust knocked a third time and yet another servant entered. He said he was quick as the thoughts of man.

"Good," said Dr. Faust, "You'll do." And he went out with him.

During the party, the servant and two others served thirty-six courses: game, fowl, vegetables, meat pies, other meat, fruit, confections, cakes, etc. This included whatever drink the guest wished. These magically appeared, as did the most charming music the guests had ever heard. It was a most pleasant night.

This obviously is not a cautionary tale. But it provided fodder for cautionary tales.

Curiously, I have only found one tale where Faust was associated with a university, the University of Erfurt. He talked his way into lecturing on Homer. In the lecture hall, he claimed to describe the real Priam, Hector, Ajax, Ulysses, and Agamemnon. Some students requested that he make these notables appear. Faust did so in the school auditorium at a designated time.

Each Homeric hero appeared as if still fighting the Trojan war. Also, the Cyclops Polyphemus, the giant with the single eye in his forehead, appeared, a leg hanging out of

his mouth. Fearing he would devour some students, Faust motioned him to go. Polyphemus hammered on the floor with his great iron spear, the building shook, and then he vanished.

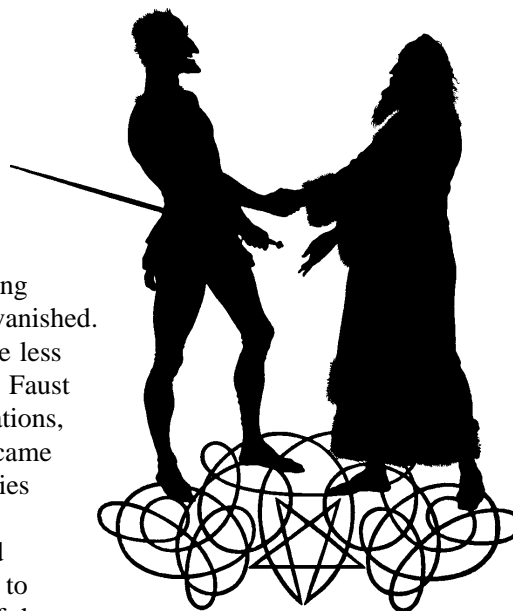
The faculty were less willing to test Faust. Faust recited several quotations, which, he claimed, came from the lost comedies of the Ancient playwrights Terence and Plautus, and offered to bring manuscripts of them back for a few hours. The faculty suspected that the Devil would slip in offensive passages and declined.

I wonder if this story inspired Marlowe's marriage of Faustus to Helen of Troy, or at least her demonic double.

There are quite a few other urban legends about Faust. One had to do with a high flying horse, another with Faust himself flying, *a la* Simon the Magician.

Some tales dealt with the Protestant-Catholic conflict. In one, Faust made things unpleasant for some inhospitable monks. In another, the Franciscan, Dr. Klinge, valiantly tried to reform him. In still another, Philipp Melanchthon, Martin Luther's successor, proved himself unafraid of Faust's dark powers.

Faust the con man was not completely lost, but these tales grew up around him, and ultimately completely displaced him. ☹



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.

Understanding Belief—How We Know What Isn't So

The 2001 NCAS Weekend Workshop, May 19 & 20, 2001

Why do people believe and perceive what they do? How does science “know” what is or isn't? What perpetuates beliefs that have no basis in fact? What can and should you do?

About 40 people joined NCAS in scenic Winchester, Virginia, on May 19 and 20, 2001 as we explored these issues and more in our annual workshop. Sessions began at

8:30 a.m. on Saturday, May 19, and broke around noon on Sunday, May 20. We examined how people arrive at their belief systems, how science works in practice, how false beliefs are carried through pseudo-history, the basics of logical reasoning, and much more.

Recommended reading: *How We Know What Isn't So*, by Thomas Gilovich. 



photos by H. Hester-Ossa



The Amazing Chi Machine

by Fred Kourmadas, D.C., M.S.

I am frequently up late at night and early in the morning. With two small children, it's often the only opportunity I have to read, work on my projects, or just relax. During these wee hours, the nature of television programming takes on a different face. Almost every channel has some type of "sponsored programming," i.e., infomercials.

Judging by their content, advertisers feel that we insomniacs are a truly pathetic bunch. We lug our pendulous abdomens and sagging buttocks to miserable jobs that we long to quit by making a fortune in no-money-down real estate ventures. We seek magic shortcuts to health, wealth, beauty, and happiness. We are in desperate need of "ab rollers," "butt blasters," "fat burners," and the like. One particularly interesting gadget that we all need is "The Amazing Chi Machine," an appliance that wiggles your feet in a figure-8 movement, which is said to "oxygenate the blood" and increase the metabolism (curiously, without raising the heart rate). It also raises the body's level of "chi," hence the name of the machine.

I wondered what kind of person falls for such obvious nonsense.

It did not take long for me to find out the answer to my question, and it was not at all who I expected. Audrey (not her real name) has been a patient of mine since she came to the area about a year ago. At age 78, she is truly remarkable for her youthfulness, energy, and enthusiasm. Her figure, skin, hair, her mental sharpness, all are that of a much younger woman. She appears to be in her 60s, maybe even in her late 50s, definitely not almost 80.

And Audrey is nobody's fool. This is a woman who has started and run several successful retail businesses, and has been her own general contractor and built two houses. She was the sole breadwinner supporting herself and her children. In short, she is exactly the kind of "mark" that every unscrupulous operator dreams about. Her lack of any formal education in physiology makes her credulous, her contagious enthusiasm makes her believable, and her remarkable appearance makes people think, "I sure hope I look that good when I'm her age."

With her smile, her wisdom, her sincerity, she could say, "I use 'The Amazing Chi Machine!' I'm almost 80 years old and I've never felt better!" And people would believe her. Never mind 78 years of good diet, regular medical and dental care, and regular exercise, the effects of which certainly must pale in comparison to the benefits of increased "chi."

Audrey brought me a promotional videotape and printed material about the product. Because of my chiropractic training and my master's degree in exercise physiology, she was pretty sure I would be impressed. After all, there were "over 30 years of research by Dr. Inoue Shizuo, chairman of the Oxygen Health Association." The printed material quotes from a supposed book by Dr. Shizuo, *Health and Oxygen Efficient Aerobic Exercise*, which was supposedly written originally in Chinese. I'm a little confused about why the Japanese doctor publishes in Chinese, but I read on anyway. Essentially, the doctor's contention is that having one's feet passively moved back and forth is a highly effective

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Fred J. Kourmadas is a chiropractor with an MS in exercise, fitness, and health promotion. "When I embarked on my chiropractic career, I thought I was entering a profession that was scientifically based, and would soon be getting the kind of acceptance from the scientific community that it was due. Twenty years later, the 'leadership' (if you want to call it that) of the profession seems to have lost interest in science, now that all forms of pseudo-science quackery are in vogue."

Chiropractors possess a unique set of psychomotor skills for the analysis and treatment of musculo-ligamentous afflictions. The pseudo-scientific element in the profession holds that we are not "back doctors," but rather are a comprehensive system of health care that can treat a broad range of organic and even infectious disorders, all by adjusting the spine. This faction will not 'go away' until the public becomes more savvy and seeks out practitioners who practice on firm scientific foundations."

Fred plans to write about what chiropractors can and can't do, and how to avoid practitioners who will lead you down a primrose path of pseudo-scientific dogma.

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aerobic exercise. He goes on to name a laundry list of diseases that can be improved thusly, including lung cancer, heart disease, ulcers, arthritis, and allergies.

Audrey goes on to tell me of the very motivational multilevel marketing meeting she had attended. The “expert” who spoke that night informed her that the result of all this extra oxygen that the machine brings in is the death of all pathological bacteria and even cancerous tumors. “Nothing (bad) can live in pure oxygen” she was told. I told her that, unless one has heart or lung disease, blood leaves the lungs essentially fully saturated with oxygen. You can’t “cram” any more in. I went on to explain that oxygen certainly wouldn’t kill all pathologic bacteria, and that, in fact, cancerous tumors had an increased need for oxygen and nutrients. But surely, she felt, with her limited knowledge of physiology, she wasn’t doing justice to all the wonders of “The Amazing Chi Machine in her explanation. She

felt I should watch the videotape, where the process is explained by a true expert.

That night at home, I just couldn’t go the distance. About half way through the tape, I could watch no more. The “expert” turned out to be an up-line, multilevel marketing rep. She told all the standard miraculous cure stories, and told of how the machine increased the “chi” in one’s “chakras,” blissfully unaware that she was mixing her imaginary metaphors.

“Chi” of course, is the imaginary “energy” that flows through the 12 imaginary “meridians” of Chinese acupuncture. Chakras, on the other hand, apparently originated with “polarity therapy,” an invention of a Dr. Randolph Stone, a naturopath, osteopath, and chiropractor, who was heavily influenced by Eastern mysticism and ancient systems of medicine. There are eight of these imaginary structures, which are said to be “energy centers” for an as yet undocumented form of electromagnetic energy. The incongruity sounds to me a bit like talking about Buddha giving his life on the cross for the sins of mankind.

A few weeks pass, and I see Audrey while I’m out shopping. We exchange our greetings, but nothing is mentioned of the machine. A month later, she is back in my office with a minor ache. She seems a little down. Nothing is mentioned of the machine. Has her initial enthusiasm waned? Does she see the truth now? I am frankly too chicken to ask her. At her age, she knows there are more years behind than ahead. For a short time, the thought of “The Amazing Chi Machine” made her feel more alive. Some would argue that there is an emotional benefit to a strong, positive belief, even one that is wrong. But for me, a hard truth is better than a comforting lie. 

Some would argue that there is an emotional benefit to a strong, positive belief, even one that is wrong. But for me, a hard truth is better than a comforting lie.

FortFest 2000

Report on the 30th Conference on
Anomalous Phenomena presented by
The International Fortean
Organization (INFO)

November 3-5, 2000
College Park, MD
Holiday Inn

by Neil L. Inglis

According to one description, Charles Fort (1874-1932) was an “iconoclast, pioneer and poet-philosopher, (...) a champion of the freedom of the human mind,” a man of “simple courage and honesty (...) who thought for himself and wished the same sane openmindedness in others.”

Following his example, modern-day Forteans are devotees of weird and inexplicable phenomena. Their areas of overlap with skepticism are, as you might expect, numerous: spiritualism, crop circles, hauntings, poltergeists, and UFOlogy, to name a few. While skeptics and Forteans alike track Bigfoot sightings, Forteans delve more deeply into cryptozoology, and delight in the (rare) discovery of new species or reappearance of those long feared extinct.

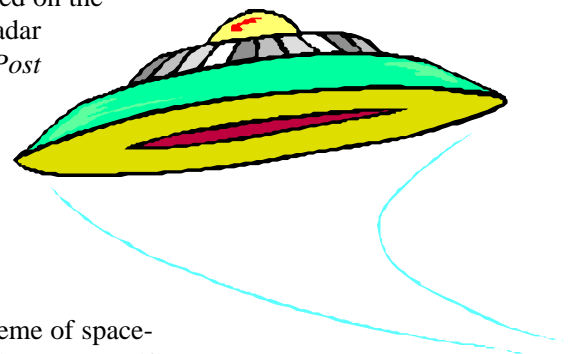
In another break from the CSICOP approach, Forteans enjoy news stories about plucky dogs and cats that survive falls from tall buildings and other near-death experiences. “Suppressed knowledge” (over-unity energy, perpetual motion machines) is another pet subject; the work of unsung scientists (Tesla, etc.) a favorite theme. Forteans stake a special claim to the *borderlands of science* (cold fusion, etc.) where skeptics too must pause and ponder the evidence. Last but not least, they subscribe to *Fortean Times* magazine. . . .

Politically, *FT* subscribers range from hardcore believers to CSICOPers. Although *FT* editor Paul Sieveking told me in London that he found the CSICOP leadership “closed-minded,” he and fellow editor Bob Rickard take an inquisitive approach that is fresh and distinctive. The *FT* letters column, where readers sound off about their psychic experiences and weird coincidences, has been described as an escape valve for the lunatic fringe. *FT*'s feature-length articles vary in quality, but are graced by a sense of fun too often lacking in *Skeptical Inquirer*. There is none of the Geller-style “what-I-do-is-real” bullying. Forteans find bizarre occurrences inherently fascinating in their own right, regardless of the eventual explanation; no skeptic need disagree with that.

As an *FT* subscriber, I attended the 30th FortFest at the College Park Holiday Inn, lured by the keynote speaker, author, and fringe-meister extraordinaire, Colin Wilson (not to be confused with Turin Shroud specialist Ian Wilson). Wilson did not disappoint, and the conference was a bonanza for connoisseurs of the strange—especially for skeptics like me, the son of a parapsychologist, for whom the paranormal was a death star in the night sky of my childhood imagination.

This year's event was a zany tribute to the Washington metropolitan area. Guests learned that the forests of Maryland are a hotbed of Bigfoot sightings and face-to-face encounters with hairy beasties not found in any zoology textbook. Another speaker recounted the stampede of Beltway UFO sightings in the early 1950s; mysterious blips, executing 90-degree zig-zags, appeared on the Andrews Air Force Base radar screens. In a *Washington Post* cartoon, the evergreen Herblock romantically portrayed two UFOs as airborne Presidential campaign banners for Eisenhower and Adlai Stevenson.

Also continuing the theme of space-flight at FortFest was Ralph Rene—gadfly,



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Mensa member, and scourge of NASA. Rene believes that the Apollo lunar snapshots (and by implication, the Apollo moonshots themselves)—were a confidence trick foisted on the American people and the world at large. Such allegations aren't new—conspiracy theories never are—and if you've watched the movie *Capricorn One* (1978) (costarring James Brolin and O.J. Simpson), depicting a bogus space mission to Mars, you'll get the general drift. Find this preposterous? Read on.

Described in the program as “a self-taught structural and mechanical engineer,” Rene asked us why the astronauts and the lunar module were not incinerated by solar radiation, and why astronaut boots did not liquefy on the roasting daylight lunar sand. Adopting a professorial demeanor, our speaker scrutinized photographs of the Apollo moonlandings for incriminating anomalies, incongruous effects of light and shadow, suggesting that the “lunar horizon” was not real but a painted backcloth.

These tendentious allegations were swallowed in silence. How I yearned to have a space-flight specialist right beside me in the lecture room—someone who could ask sharp questions, speak with authority on optical effects in the lunar environment, analyze the processing artifacts that are a common feature of NASA space photography, or explain why in one scene, the American flag seemed to be flapping in a breeze. But there was only me. . .

So I stood up and asked to speak; I demanded to know why the USSR—then our enemies, and rivals in the space race—had failed to reach the same conclusions as Rene regarding the Apollo launches—which the Soviets, after all, were independently monitoring.

Rene asked us why the astronauts and the lunar module were not incinerated by solar radiation, and why astronaut boots did not liquefy on the roasting daylight lunar sand.

True believers have answers for everything! According to Rene, the Yanks bought the Communists' silence with low-cost wheat shipments. Would that America's enemies could be stunned into submission so easily! This explanation showed Rene to be ignorant, at least in most respects, of the fanatical quality of the totalitarian mind; for the Soviets would have taken our cheap grain first, then they would have proceeded to unmask NASA's imposture with savage unrepentant glee.

The confrontation with Rene made me queasy; still, an occasional wrestling-match is good for a skeptic's soul. The acid test, perhaps, is whether critical thinkers can blast the trumpet in our own fields of expertise, but also debunk in unfamiliar terrain. At times like this, clever and unexpected rebuttals can help to knock the other side off their stride.

Ralph Rene is an extreme example, but from a skeptical perspective, Fortean speakers and authors share certain disquieting characteristics.

- A tendency to ignore mundane alternative explanations for bizarre occurrences. James Randi's “rubber duck” effect is also much in evidence, with long-discredited evidence (the Piri Reis map, etc.) constantly bubbling back to the surface.
- A casual attitude toward the discovery and management of contested evidence (one speaker spoke of “Bigfoot hair samples”—he was vague as to their source and present location, although he was sure they existed).
- An addiction to seeking patterns in nature. In the Fortean world, mysterious ancient structures (obelisks and monoliths) are invariably facing in some significant direction, oriented toward another ancient site. Usually this is just a matter of drawing a straight line between two points, and ignoring non-hits.
- An irresistible urge to carpet-bomb the audience with arcane knowledge, worn in loud colors on the speaker's sleeve.
- A propensity to confuse cause-and-effect and coincidence, relation and correlation.



• Disarming honesty. Colin Wilson said he inserted the word “Atlantis” in the title of his latest book at the behest of his publisher, who thinks that the mere mention of Atlantis will send bookstore cash registers a-tinkling.

Fascinating though he is, Wilson betrays all the pros and cons of the Fortean method. As I listened to his talk on pre-Egyptian civilizations, I found his polymathy stimulating, even thrilling; but after a while, the tide of *non-sequiturs* and logical jumps began to grate on my nerves.

Remember, though, that we’re not talking about spoon-bending, teleportation, or the usual humbug of psi; some of the time, Forteans may be on to something big. The field of human origins, for them, is a perennial source of curiosity.

Skeptics who fancy the history of human civilization to be an open-and-shut case are in for a shock. Many efforts—some honest, others craven and duplicitous—are afoot to overturn accepted assumptions regarding modern man’s origins and to push long-accepted milestones further and further back in time. To cite only a few cases of scholarly foment around the world: the Chinese government’s recent claims regarding the great antiquity of their civilization; the dissolving consensus over the earliest human settlement of North America; and the advent of anti-Semitic architecture, a field that treacherously labels ancient Israel “Palestine” and challenges the idea that the Israelites ever existed as a cohesive ethnic group in any meaningful sense.

Whenever a scholarly void appears, responsible researchers rush in (most of the time); but charlatans and flimflam artists may have beaten them to it. Clamorous disputes and finger-pointing are sure to follow. Patchy evidence and hidden agendas make life difficult for critical thinkers. Who are we skeptics to believe, where do we turn for guidance? (By the way, if you think the historical record settles the matter in these cases, you’re kidding yourself; as for the archeological evidence for the truth of the Old Testament, the “Palestine” academics are fond of describing that record as “mute”—a loaded term).

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Not all fringe scholarship is so dangerous. Pre-Egyptian civilizations are a hot topic for Forteans, in part because such material allows the imagination to run riot. The works of popularizers such as Graham Hancock (*Fingerprints of the Gods*, *The Message of the Sphinx*) are a wizard wheeze, a jolly romp—that is, until such time as the truth of the matter is discovered and the historical puzzles are sorted out at last. (This may happen sooner rather than later; Hancock and his ilk have been violently attacked by skeptics). Still, no one can be a critical thinker 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and the relaxed logical standards of Forteana are what make it such enjoyable entertainment. (It’s also why so many CSICOPers secretly—and Forteans openly—watch the *X Files*, that quintessentially Fortean show).

The atmosphere at a Fortean conference is not all peace, love, and understanding. At last year’s FortFest, an entertaining “croppie” speaker showed us slides of the new generation of crop circles—many of stunning geometric precision and beauty. For some in the audience, the crop circles had been etched out by “rays” projected from hedgehopping alien spacecraft. Ever the wet blanket, I rose to my feet and (politely and sweetly) asked if the latest designs might owe their origins to “crop circle”

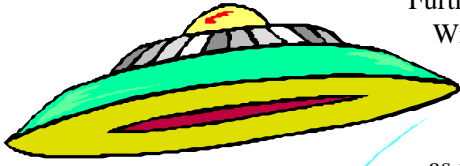


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Neil L. Inglis
ninglis@erols.com


software. Our speaker froze under my interrogation, and later warned me in person that he would give me a wide berth.



Furthermore, men like Colin Wilson have giant egos, and are more in the mold of traditional psi researchers, such as my father Brian Inglis, whose attitude was “here is the evidence, and you must believe”—even if that evidence were little more than artfully sorted speculation. (Wilson and Inglis were not close friends, but had collaborated on a couple of magazine projects decades previously.)

At this year’s FortFest, Colin Wilson postulated the existence of an ancient race of mathematicians, long extinct, whose knowledge of astronomy and architecture, if fully known today, would humble our pretensions to modernity. Wilson linked these supermen with the Neanderthals (!), and even spotted their descendants in today’s *idiots savants*, who (we are told) perform amazing feats of number-crunching without the benefit of computers or pocket calculators, involving prime numbers and suchlike. Wilson’s arguments involve plenty of numerology, always a

red flag for the skeptic; and why these ancient sorcerers’ vast brainpower gave them no evolutionary advantage is one of those boring questions that spoil the fun, but that must be asked.

Still, there is much that we still don’t know about Ancient Man; and there is nothing inherently skeptical about underestimating our pre-Christian forebears. Indeed, for centuries the compulsion in the West was to gloss over the achievements of those who had not belonged to the post-Christian and late pre-Christian worlds (these scientists of yore have been championed by such skeptics as Carl Sagan). Recent discoveries, such as a red ochre mine in South Africa dated at 100 centuries B.C., suggest that our distant ancestors deserve more credit than they have received. As critical thinkers, we should always stand ready to reappraise our longstanding assumptions in the event that fresh, verifiable evidence appears. In the meantime, we need to keep our thinking-cap on! 

At this year’s FortFest, Colin Wilson postulated the existence of an ancient race of mathematicians, long extinct, whose knowledge of astronomy and architecture, if fully known today, would humble our pretensions to modernity.



You Catch More Flies With Honey . . .


by Neil Langdon Inglis

My colleagues in the translation field have long wrestled with the problem of how to respond to ill-informed, “gee-whiz” articles in the press about translation—the parallels with skepticism/psi are striking. Typical problems include the fact that the “purveyors of nonsense” tend to be more quotable and available for soundbites; also, the “purveyors of sense” are seen as being po-faced and boring. It’s hard, but not impossible to get around these challenges.

Most journalists and editors like to think of themselves as smart, well-informed, and conscientious (even if they aren’t). Thus, I and my colleagues in the translation watchdog group offer ourselves up as professional sources for future consultation—good names for the journalist’s contact book.

But when that method doesn’t work — when you elicit a huffy or defensive response from the publication concerned—you can always ask the question, why in this field (of all fields) do journalists feel relieved of the need to perform thorough, in-depth research? I once wrote to a major financial publication pointing out that their reporters, if commenting on the Microsoft trial (for example), would be expected to get their facts straight. Why should the standards be any different in the translation/interpretation/languages industries? (or with skepticism, for that matter?).

Pointing out that journalists have been guilty of shortcuts in their research gets them in the raw. If this kind of dialogue is handled properly, however, the writers may return to you in future for use as a “talking head.” Unfortunately, many writers *do* become defensive; I have seen e-mail strings in which journalistic reporters—their ignorance cruelly exposed—throw a tantrum and accuse the complaining reader of insulting them and hurting their feelings. At this point, I for one throw caution to the wind and get tough, if the journalist deserves it.

One last point that my watchdog group in the translation/interpretation industry has learned: just because a publication is “bigger” or “more prestigious” doesn’t make it any less prone to printing nonsense. *The Financial Times* has been a major culprit in this respect; *The New York Times* is somewhat better. We’ve often found that local hometown papers are the most clear-eyed, although even they can be flummoxed when the concepts become difficult. But it is precisely then that constructive input from well-informed sources becomes valuable. 

Dangerous Claims

by James C. Giglio

October 4, 2000

J. Joseph Curran, Jr.
Office of the Attorney General
State of Maryland
200 St Paul Place
Baltimore MD 21202

Dear Mr. Curran:

The enclosed copy of *Alternatives* magazine was received in the mail by a co-worker.

It contains a number of extraordinary medical claims, all directly tied to a solicitation to subscribe to the magazine on a regular basis. One claim in particular is worthy of note by your office, as it is a deliberate lie. The lie in question is found on page 4 (I’ve highlighted it), and states that juvenile-onset diabetes can be cured by a herbal treatment. The lie is expanded upon in pages 13 and 14, where the clear connection to the subscription solicitation is established.

Of all the extraordinary claims made in the enclosed magazine, this lie is especially dangerous. Juvenile-onset diabetes is not curable,

continued on page 16

dangerous claims continued from page 15

and any juvenile-onset diabetic under the delusion that he or she has been cured by the herb in question will die; this form of diabetes is 100% fatal in the absence of insulin therapy.

Identifying information on the parties responsible for this dangerous and fraudulent publication is sparse, but I'm sure that your office has the resources to locate those parties if you decide to take action. The PO box is in

Rockville, which ought to bring it under your jurisdiction, or perhaps there would be joint jurisdiction with the USPS. Hopefully, you will decide to take action before these people succeed in killing somebody. I'm not sure what laws are being broken, but there must be at least a few; telling lies in an attempt to get somebody to buy something has to be illegal.



Question Posed to the Post's On-line Astrologer...and her Answer

by Gary Goldberg

Silver Spring, MD:

Long ago you asked if the \$1 million challenge for proof that astrology—or any “paranormal” phenomenon—still existed.

I can tell you the offer is still good—see www.randi.org.

Why haven't other astrologers—or YOU—taken advantage of this offer to conclusively and objectively demonstrate what you claim to be able to do?

Think of the good you could do with the money, even if you don't want it!

Reply from Charlene Lichtenstein:

I guess you have not been reading my program intros each week. Tsk! Tsk! Each week in my intro I say “Astrology does not predict the future. We must make our own decisions based on the set of choices that life doles out. Astrology, however, can help us see the choices.” Astrology to me is a personal growth and enlightenment tool. Whether

others try (successfully or not) to predict the future with astrology is of no interest to me. That's not what it is for.

That being said, I visited Mr. Randi's site. It struck me that if Mr. Randi was truly interested in discovering the value of astrology he would read and recognize the work of Gallaquin and Jung, both of whom, in their quest to discredit astrology, found its immense value and became “believers.”

Frankly, folks that offer suspiciously high rewards to debunk their own ingrained prejudices are not sincerely seeking the truth; they are seeking attention. A more extreme example is the Holocaust denier who offered \$1million reward to anyone who could “prove” the Holocaust really happened.

When the overwhelming and incontrovertible evidence came forward—from eyewitness testimony, photographs, films and even nazi paperwork—these supposedly objective “truth seekers” refused to accept the obvious and held onto their mythical million.

Trying to convince folks who are not truly interested in seeking the real answer is a waste of time. ‘Nuf said!

Folklore and Skeptics NCAS member **Stephanie A. Hall's** article "Folklore and the Rise of Moderation among Organized Skeptics" is available online in the e-journal *New Directions in Folklore* Impromptu Journal Issue 4: March 2000 at: <http://www.temple.edu/isllc/newfolk/skeptics.html>

Skepchik and NCAS member **Sheila Gibson**, chairchik of the New England Skeptics Society (NESS), now has a regular column called "For Entertainment Purposes Only" in Michael Shermer's *Skeptic* magazine.

NCAS Founding Father **Chip Denman** gave a science/pseudoscience talk April 11, 2001 for the Laboratory for Physical Sciences, affiliated with University of Maryland with some NSA connection. (He actually was given a framed certificate of appreciation with both seals on it). Chip's talk was well received, especially by the program director.


Newman Energy Machine Report

by Jim Giglio

Back in 1986 the Bureau of Standards tested the "Energy Machine" of Joseph Newman. The tests were connected to a court case involving Newman and the Patent Office, and were designed to test Newman's claim that the machine produces more energy than it consumes. To the non-astonishment of the entire scientific world, NBS found that the device consumes more energy than it produces. Of course that wasn't the end of it, except for the Patent Office. A YAHOO search on "Joseph Newman" will produce nu-

merous hits, mostly in support of the original claim. Newman himself is auctioning off some original models of the machine.

The NCAS web page now contains the full text of the original NBS report.

Like the Colorado UFO report and the DOE cold fusion report, it's a link off the main page (www.ncas.org). When you encounter Figure 1, be sure to click through to the original full-size photograph of the device; it's quite a contraption. 

One Cosmos, Two Very Different People

by Eric Choi

A few weeks ago, I received a general distribution e-mail seeking writers to contribute content to a new website called *OneCosmos.net*. Having never heard of this site, and intrigued by the New Age sounding name, I did some research. What I found was, to say the least, most interesting.

OneCosmos Network is a new multimedia joint venture between Ann Druyan of Carl Sagan Productions and Silicon Valley millionaire Joe Firmage that will, in the words of the Founding Charter posted on the website, “create, produce, and distribute eye, brain, heart, and soul-nourishing science-based entertainment across integrating media.” Druyan, of course, requires no introduction in the science and skeptic communities. She cowrote and coproduced the landmark *Cosmos* miniseries with her late husband, the incomparable Carl Sagan; served as secretary of the Federation of American Scientists for a decade; and contributed to many of Sagan’s books, including *The Demon-Haunted World*, their stirring tome against superstition and pseudoscience.

The other half of this joint venture couldn’t be more different.

Actually, Joe Firmage and I have a few things in common. We’re about the same age, and we’re both interested in things like space exploration, cosmology, the future of humanity, and the possibility of extraterrestrial life. Where we differ is that he’s a few orders of magnitude richer than I’ll ever be (by some

estimates he’s worth at least \$100-million), and he believes in and promotes a bunch of stuff on which I have thus far thought the evidence to be less than convincing.

Firmage made his fortune as the founder and chief executive of USWeb, an Internet consulting firm. In late 1998, he changed position from CEO to chief strategist after word of his unconventional beliefs surfaced in the media. Firmage is apparently convinced that not only are extraterrestrials visiting the Earth, but that many of our recent scientific advances can be attributed to the reverse-engineering of alien technology, such as that allegedly recovered from the Roswell UFO crash. A few months later Firmage stepped down from the strategist position, but remained with the company in an unspecified capacity.

According to Firmage, he had experienced a personal epiphany in 1997 when he was allegedly visited by a glowing entity hovering over his bed. A prosaic explanation, as offered by Joe Nickell of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), is that the encounter was simply a waking dream. Nevertheless, the experience seemed to energize his beliefs. The next year, he reportedly spent about \$5-million setting up a group called the International Space Sciences Organization that supports research in ufology and fringe sciences like zero-point energy, reactionless propulsion, and faster-than-light travel. He also wrote a book expounding his beliefs called, perhaps somewhat immodestly, *The Truth*, which was at one time posted on his website (www.thewordistruth.org). According to *CNET News.com*, he has spent close to \$3-million promoting this book, which will likely be print published in the near future.

Firmage approached Druyan 2 years ago via e-mail. He quickly impressed her by donating \$1-million to the Carl Sagan Foundation. The money went to a children’s hospital

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project in the Bronx that Druyan was spearheading. Through subsequent correspondence and negotiations, the genesis of the joint multimedia venture was born. Originally code-named Project Voyager, the company was re-launched as the OneCosmos Network earlier this year.


OneCosmos has about \$23-million in venture capital behind it, and the company is expanding. In August, it announced a strategic alliance with The Planetary Society, the Pasadena-based space interest group founded by Carl Sagan, Louis Friedman, and Bruce Murray. Other groups have been less willing to work with Firmage. The SETI Institute, headed by Sagan’s longtime friend and colleague Frank Drake, declined a similar affiliation with OneCosmos. “Any connection with Firmage, no matter what disclaimers you put on your site, people will take this as an endorsement of the views of Firmage,” Drake was quoted as saying in a *Washington Post* article. “This would damage our image in the minds of many of our scientific colleagues and members of the general public.”

Druyan was reportedly angered by some of the criticism leveled against her for working with such a controversial figure. I can understand why. Anyone who doubts her commitment to defending her late husband’s legacy should read her epilogue in Sagan’s last book, *Billions and Billions*. According to Druyan, a legal agreement is in place that should prevent Firmage from advancing his fringe theories through the new venture. Druyan told writer Joel Achenbach that, “It unequivocally states that if I feel that Carl’s legacy has in any way been besmirched by any statement made in the name of our company, then I walk and I’ll take everything with me. Nothing less than that can protect the legacy.”

There is no doubt in my mind that this is exactly what she would do. I do not worry about pseudoscience being promoted through OneCosmos. My real concern mirrors that of

I do not worry about pseudoscience being promoted through OneCosmos. My real concern mirrors that of Frank Drake. It is difficult for me to think that such a venture, with names like Ann Druyan and Carl Sagan and The Planetary Society on the ticket, will not unintentionally impart greater credibility to Firmage in particular and to the fields of ufology and other pseudosciences in general.

Frank Drake. It is difficult for me to think that such a venture, with names like Ann Druyan and Carl Sagan and The Planetary Society on the ticket, will not unintentionally impart greater credibility to Firmage in particular and to the fields of ufology and other pseudosciences in general. I fear this might already be happening. In their version of the OneCosmos story that was recently posted on the *ufomind.com* website, the *United Kingdom UFO Network Bulletin* claimed it was Druyan who contacted Firmage with the proposal because she was “disgusted by what she called the ‘corporate persecution’ of Firmage.”

Carl Sagan’s legacy lives through Ann Druyan. I can think of no better keeper. But it also lives, in a much smaller way, within the minds of millions of people like me who were inspired to see the wonders of the Universe, the nobility of exploration...and the absolute necessity of reasoned skepticism. I am skeptical of Joe Firmage’s involvement in the OneCosmos Network. If I may be forgiven for my conceit, I would like to think that Carl Sagan would understand my thinking. I hope that Ann Druyan does as well. 

Eric Choi is an aerospace engineer at Honeywell Technology Solutions Inc. and a freelance writer.

The Man Behind the Curtain

by ZoAnn Lapinsky

If you're interested in watching a "cold reading" in action, check out "Crossing Over With John Edward" on the SciFi Channel at 11:00 p.m. weeknights. Edward alleges an ability to talk with the deceased, although he has no control over who "comes over" (if you're in the studio, you're fair game). He uses the typical cold reading techniques, interesting to listen to from a skeptical point of view.

The show is billed as "The Other Side of Talk," which you grudgingly have to admit is a clever line.

Cold reading involves making broad, sweeping statements that can often be interpreted in a variety of ways, and then allowing the person being read to put the meaning into the statement.

I would like to believe I could talk again to my mother. She died 17 years ago, and I still miss her.

What a priceless gift: to be able to talk to loved ones who have passed away, to know they still exist and that we, too, will continue to exist after our deaths, to understand the nature of the afterlife—not exactly angels strumming on harps, but not fire and brimstone either. And to know that our loved ones have forgiven us for all those things, large and ridiculously small, that we have fretted about since they left us so discourteously without the chance to say all those things we now realize we should have said.

This is what we can get in return for our belief that John Edward can talk to the dead. It's easy to believe because we want to.

And a lot of people do believe in John Edward's brand of spiritualism. They fill the seats at his daily (weekdays at 8:00 and 8:30 p.m.) television show on the Sci-Fi network, "Crossing Over with John Edward." He showcases his talent at sold out events throughout the country and has a book for sale that promises to help you develop your own psychic powers and chronicles his story.

He has a large, adoring following who applaud enthusiastically as he delivers messages from those who have "crossed over." He is witty, charismatic and very good at what he does. He makes us want to be a part of the magic.

John Edward states up front that he has no previous knowledge of the people he "reads." He acts as a conduit for the dead who "come through" to be with audience members they knew in life. John states he doesn't always know whom the message is for, but apparently it is always for someone physically in the studio.

Audience members are told up front that they cannot be "passive"—that by becoming a member of the audience they agree to be "read" by John, who has even received spiritual contacts for cameramen and sound technicians.

At the beginning of the show, John explains to the audience how to interpret the phrases he will use. For example, someone who is "above" the audience member is someone who was older such as a parent or grandparent; "to the side" is someone of the same age such as a sibling, friend, or cousin; and "below" is a child or younger person.

He then makes contact with the spirits and receives information from the spirit such as the spirit's relationship to the living loved one and the sound of their name. These clues allow the audience members to determine if they are the one with the connection to that particular spirit. For example, he might state that the audience member is sitting in a particular section, that the deceased's name has a "G" sound and that the deceased is a "husband/brother/cousin or friend" of the audience member. Once the audience member identifies him or herself as the target, John proceeds to have a conversation with the audience member, communicating messages and images he "receives" from the deceased. Audience members are always astounded by the accuracy of the information they receive, and seem convinced that there is no way that John Edward, a stranger to them, could know what he has communicated to them unless he is indeed in contact with the Other Side.

So what is going on here?

Being a skeptic, I naturally look for the man behind the curtain, furiously cranking the levers and pulleys that control the Wizard's image on stage, the same image that preserves Dorothy's illusion of the paranormal. Note



that there is no way to prove that John Edward is **not** in contact with the spirit world, short of finding proof of fraud—and I have absolutely no reason to think he is engaging in anything of the kind. However, finding that the levers and pulleys exist, whether or not we catch John Edward pushing and pulling them, should certainly cause the logical among us to question his claim of the miraculous.

In this case, the levers and pulleys are an old technique, used for years and years by mindreaders and spiritualists, called “cold reading.”

Cold reading involves making broad, sweeping statements that can often be interpreted in a variety of ways, and then allowing the person being read to put the meaning into the statement. The psychic reader makes educated guesses based on their knowledge of human nature, and relies on our natural tendency to remember the “hits” and forget the “misses” when we later evaluate the reader for his or her accuracy.

Consider this example from *The Skeptic’s Dictionary*: (<http://www.dcn.davis.ca.us/~btcarrol/skeptic/coldread.htm>):

The psychic says something at once vague and suggestive, e.g., “I’m getting a strong feeling about January here.” If the subject responds, positively or negatively, the psychic’s next move is to play off the response. (e.g., if the subject says, “I was born in January” or my mother died in January,” then the psychic says something like “Yes, I can see that”—anything to reinforce the idea that the psychic was more precise than he or she really was). If the subject responds negatively (e.g., “I can’t think of anything particularly special about January”), the psychic might reply, “Yes, I see that you’ve suppressed a memory about it. You don’t want to be reminded of it. Something painful in January. Yes, I feel it. It’s in the lower back [fishing]...oh, now it’s in the heart [fishing]...umm, there seems to be a sharp pain in the head [fishing]...or the neck [fishing].” If the subject gives no response, the psychic can leave the area, having firmly implanted in everybody’s mind that the psychic really did ‘see’ something but the subject’s

The psychic says something at once vague and suggestive, e.g., “I’m getting a strong feeling about January here.” If the subject responds, positively or negatively, the psychic’s next move is to play off the response.

suppression of the event hinders both the psychic and the subject from realizing the specifics of it. If the subject gives a positive response to any of the fishing expeditions, the psychic follows up with more of “I see that very clearly, now. Yes, the feeling in the heart is getting stronger.”

What we see from John Edward seems very similar. For example, in a recent show he said the deceased “showed me ‘dog treats’ . Any reference, before you got here today, with something with the dog, dog treats, or dog related?”

“I **have** a dog.”

“Is there anything, before you left today, did you go grab a ‘Pupperoni’ and throw it down?”

“ I always give the dog treats.”

“Right. Before you left. Ok.”

Some other recent examples of general questions:

“Who has a C or K name connected to you?”

“They’re indicating something wrong with the chest, or the chest area.”

“They told me to talk about the house painter or the house being painted.”

“I need to talk about the month of April.”

“I have a younger person who is either responsible for their own actions or their actions brought about how they crossed over.”

Spiritualist’s responses to general questions can be made to sound like the reader “knew all along.” For example, an audience member identified the friend she was with as being an “ex” wife of the deceased. John said, “not to be personal, but did **you** leave **him**?” When the woman answered in the affirmative, John replied, “he’s making me feel that he

continued on page 22



might have brought you to that point, but you're the one who left." Most divorced women who left their husbands will be able to see a connection in this statement.

Using fragments of information to make educated guesses is also a useful tool for the cold reader. Consider another example:

"Who had the alcohol problem?"

"My dad."

"Did you come to terms with it before his passing?"

"No."

"You did some introspective thinking.

He's claiming you know his image, the projection shown to other people, more than you know him. To the public, he was a kind caring man..."

"But not at home."

"Exactly. What happened when you were 16 or 17 years old, for you, with him?"

"We had a really bad fight."

"Was that the first time he got a really good dose of you owning yourself?"

"Exactly. It was the first time I stood up to him."

The first question, "who had the alcohol problem?" says nothing about the spirit being the man's father, but the son will probably be left with the impression that John knew his father had an alcohol problem. Once the spiritualist knows that there is a father-son relationship in which the father was an alcoholic, he can make some educated guesses about the relationship between the father and the son. What son in that situation would not engage in "introspective thinking"?

Now it seems to me that the entire population of Dearly Departed must either be forever milling about in some sort of cosmic spirit stew, just waiting for John to initiate the connection, or they are perpetually attached to their loved one like a thetan on flypaper.

And what about "knowing" about the fight? "What happened" might have been the teenager leaving home, the father breaking a favorite object, or even the father becoming sober for a time. The conversation might have gone down any of those paths had the answer been different. But once he knew a big fight had happened, it's reasonable to assume that a 16 or 17 year old boy would finally stand up for himself—if he didn't, there wouldn't have been such a memorable fight for the son to recall.

Edwards continues with further messages for the son of the alcoholic:

"There's a major imbalance emotionally with him. He'd go from being in a great mood to being, like, unbelievably hostile and angry. He's not the same energy now. You made a statement after he passed. You hated the man that he was."

"When you were about 10 years old he took you out to a place where it would be like a father and son bonding. You look back onto that day."

No big surprises here, once we know the relationship between the father and son. But what does this look like to the son? To him, it's as if John Edward knew the darkest part of his "soul," a part of his past shared only by his deceased father. And if the information didn't come from him, it had to come from his father. And if it came from his father, John Edward had to be in contact with the spirits.

Another believer is born.

In John Edward's world, it is always possible for the deceased family and friends of audience members to cross over just when the cameras are rolling. He never does explain how they know that their particular loved one is in the audience that day, or how they decide whether to make an appearance.

Now it seems to me that the entire population of Dearly Departed must either be forever milling about in some sort of cosmic spirit stew, just waiting for John to initiate the connection, or they are perpetually attached to their loved one like a thetan on flypaper. This last idea is vaguely disturbing—I don't mind my mother watching over my shoulder while



I'm at work, but I sure don't want her joining me as I surf the less reputable side of the net! And, of course, one would wonder how they'd decide **which** still-living loved one to attach themselves to—I'm sure those "mom loves me best" confrontations would not be a welcome addition to the traditional peace and tranquility of Eternity.

And this is just one of the many problems with contacts from the Great Beyond. How do the dead retain their memories if they no longer have the brain's neurons and synapses? If the answer to this is that their memories are part of the "soul," then I'd want to know when this mirror image of the brain is created. At death? If so, would an Alzheimers soul or a brain-damaged soul lack the memories of earlier life that made that person who he or she was? But we never seem to see spirits that have faulty faculties. So if the soul "im-printed" earlier, what causes the imprint? And what of the memories of later experiences that would be lost?


And how do the messages from the deceased enter the mind of John Edward? Is

there some sort of energy field that he keys into that we cannot detect? Is it part of the electromagnetic spectrum, and if so, why can't we measure it? If not, what kind of energy is it?

And why are the messages from the deceased filled with so many details—cryptic sometimes, but details nonetheless—once the target is established, but to establish the identity of the target they can only croak out the consonants in their names and their general relationship to the living? Do they get smarter as their time in the physical world increases?

So I'm going to stick with seeing the flesh and blood Wizard busily cranking out the illusion backstage, while the fantasy Wizard entertains the citizens of Oz center stage. I know that he doesn't have anything in his bag for me—but somehow I know my mother would approve.

SciFi Channel page on "Crossing Over With John Edward:" <http://www.scifi.com/johnedward/>

John Edward's website: <http://www.johnedward.net/> 

And why are the messages from the deceased filled with so many details. . . once the target is established, but to establish the identity of the target they can only croak out the consonants in their names and their general relationship to the living? Do they get smarter as their time in the physical world increases?

“The conjuror is the most honest of all professionals.

First he promises to deceive you, and then he does so.” -- Karl Germain

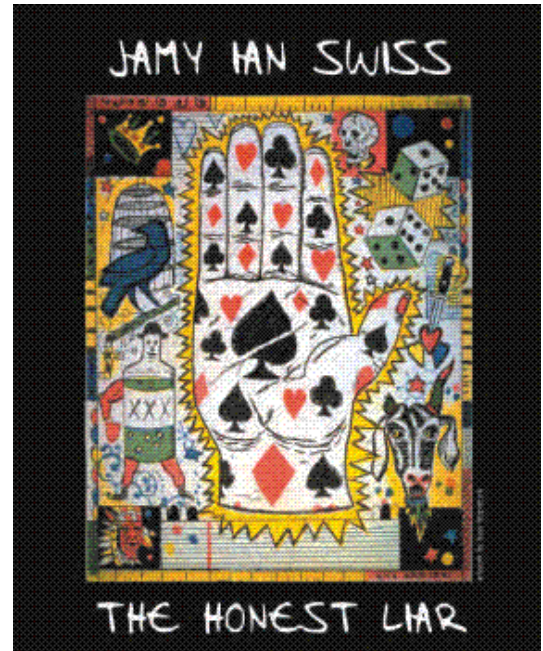
good laugh from this Capital City audience. Jamy said that the way to become a professional liar is to prepare: “Step 1 is to gather your stories together ahead of time. Step 2 is to practice. When people say ‘How’d you do that?’, it’s really an exclamation, a rhetorical question.” Why? “These are tricks!” said Jamy emphatically.

After tricking and fooling the audience and participants a while longer, Jamy said, “It’s a lot of fun to stand here and lie to you, but I can’t create matter. I’m an honest liar. The first time I was paid for magic I was 29 years old. I finally realized it was more important than anything else to me.”


“Tricks are for kids,” said Jamy. “Magic often brings up thoughts of childhood. As a magician, I have the heart of a child . . . I keep it in a jar on my desk. Magic is not just

The Honest Liar explores the deepest recesses of deception, be it cheating and crooked gambling, con men and scam artists, lying and lie detection, or phony psychics and the illusion of psychic powers. And why is he fascinated with deception? Because he is obsessed with the truth!

Master of deception Jamy Ian Swiss is one of the original co-founders of the National Capital Area Skeptics. Now based in New York, he brings a sophisticated show of magic—honest lying—to audiences around the world. His special “Cracking the Cons” was recently seen on Discovery Channel.



the domain of childhood. The process of growing up puts blinders on us.”


Mingling facts and information with amazing feats of dexterity, Jamy concluded by saying, “The fantasy world I create as a magician is a nice place to visit, but I wouldn’t want to live there.” 

Notes from New York: the Day

September 12, 2001 4:20 p.m.

by Jamy Ian Swiss

Yesterday, Carol walked to work, wondering about the menacing smoke visible at the south of the island. She saw both towers in place, as always. My

friend Kramer phoned shortly after her departure and woke me, telling me to turn on the television. Both planes had already hit. Carol and I spoke, and shortly afterward she came 

home. In the course of her 20-minute walk, the first tower went down. I watched both towers go down live on camera ... at first it was impossible to understand what had happened when the first one vanished. It must be obscured by smoke, right? It must be there, right? It can't be gone ... can it? This is not merely an international symbol to the world ... this is the view in my home town.

We went out to donate blood but they were turning people away. We walked to Central Park to be out amid our city and among other NYers. As we walked west, crossing each avenue we could look south and see the smoke and ash, until we reached views where the towers had always existed and now were clearly missing.

Sitting in the park for a while, there was no air traffic except for the distant roar of military fighter jets circulating the island at high altitude.

We returned home, past long lines at a blood bank, to discover Carol's sister, Chris, and shortly afterwards her boyfriend, Mike. We came upstairs, and I prepared a dinner for us all, while we spent the evening talking, watching, thinking. I was raised to believe that when the world is coming to an end, you eat as well as you can, so we did.

They left to make their way home, and hours later, past midnight, our friend, Tim, came by on rollerblades ... he needed to get out of the house.


Early in the morning, as soon as he heard some news, he went out and brought a video camera ... he reached the west side highway down around the Village level, and stopped. He took video of both towers going down. The worst of it was seeing the people jumping out of the building, clearly different from the falling debris ... and it made him wish he hadn't seen it. He posted the video on his web site and sent a mass email to friends and colleagues, and as the day wore on and word spread, the web host phoned and explained apologetically that his traffic was consuming their servers, and that they would have to take it off line soon.

Phone service, both land and cell, was intermittent ... some incoming, less outgoing, but with exceptions to both. We couldn't get

on line all day because all the local att dialups are dead. Today I got online by connecting through out-of-town dialups. What phone calls did get through were from all over the country, and indeed the world. Magicians calling from all over, magicians trying to make inventory of magicians in New York, then emailing (this morning) a list of those accounted for. I got calls from Japan, Morocco ... emails from all over the world today, checking, asking, wondering ... People's concerns and generosity becomes the most desperately needed and effective antidote against the evidence of our capacity for hatred and violence. A close friend from Boston reached on the cell, but six hours later his first voicemail suddenly paged through to me ... "I'm hoping you're alive."

Although the city is mostly closed for business today, Carol is in the office with a slender staff, doing the work of journalism, telling the stories we need to make sense of the senseless.

Second Avenue, in front of our apartment, was closed off early in the morning and used as a southbound route for emergency vehicles and the like all day. The first four hours were non-stop sirens ... we saw fire trucks from well out on Long Island ... to the point that by the time the end of the night came around, Carol and I were both imagining that we heard sirens where none existed, an eerie sensation. All day the avenue was filled with streams of people, wandering, trying to figure out what to do and where to go and how to get out of the city. In the early evening the traffic changed to earth movers and the like on flat beds. Then later we saw flat beds hauling racks of huge lighting arrays, lots of generators, and emergency equipment from Con Ed, phone, etc. Carol's brother, Michael, is a fireman who works in Queens, and in the early evening his unit was moved by bus into the zone to work on the rescue; he called his wife at 8:00 pm to say he'd be there all night, and for all I know he may still be there now.

And as I finally lay in bed in the dark, I tried to determine if the sirens in my head were real, or imagined. 

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The Mind of a True Believer

by Barry Blyveis

I encounter an insurmountable difficulty in comprehending the mind of the True Believer, the person who believes that thousands of Earthlings are being subjected to anal probes by aliens, or that a laying on of hands can cure disease, or out-of-body experiences etc. I had an interesting experience recently that taught me something about the reactions of True Believers without giving me any real insight into their minds. I offer my story for what its worth.

I am on a Jewish Reconstructionist listserv. Reconstructionist Judaism began as an attempt to create a branch of rational, humanistic Judaism without superstition. However, the listserv has recently been flooded with what I would call New-Age Jews, who seem to be attempting to meld Judaism with various Eastern superstitions, alternative medicine, and virtually every other superstition that comes down the pike.

Some members began promoting homeopathic remedies and naturalpathy. I am particularly upset by this kind of New-Age magic inasmuch as they may, for example, dissuade people with treatable cancers from seeking the care of an oncologist before the cancer metastasizes.

I explained that homeopathic remedies are water containing a minute quantity of something that was diluted so many times that the substance is no longer present in a measurable quantity. I went onto the internet to discover how easy it is to become a doctor of

naturalpathy. You pays your money, attends class for some weekends, and, voila, you is a doctor. I tried to explain that you can become a doctor of naturalpathy without knowing much at all.

I was met with a barrage of vituperation. I tried to explain things in measured tones, but they accused me of being rude and even of the worst possible crime in their eyes, the crime of "SCIENTISM," which I had never heard before, but which sounds like a capital crime. I think it is a synonym for "rationalism." In fact, they specifically decried "rationalism," a dirty word in their eyes.

When I talked about double-blind, controlled studies, they again decried me as a rationalist.

I tried humor. I began signing my e-mails with, e.g.,

Barry Blyveis

Doctor of Footpathy

Specializing in Diseases of the Left Foot

or

Barry Blyveis, Ph.D., Ph.D., Ph.D., Ph.D., Ph.D., Ph.D. (would have gotten a seventh Ph.D., but six weekends at the Institute for Ayurvedic Medicine was all I could take) .

That got me kicked off the listserv for "rudeness." The worst thing I had done in the eyes of the moderators was suggest that the address of the listserv be changed from "Recon-J" to "Occult-J."

Members sent me private e-mails condemning me for being rude and closed-minded. I would respond by asking again and again, as I asked on-line before I became an excommunicated Jew, is it plain water or is it not plain water? No one ever responded to that question.

One woman kept telling me how long she had been studying homeopathic medicine, to which I would reply, "Is it plain water or is it not?" No answer. Just further condemnation. For example, she told me that I don't know

I had an interesting experience recently that taught me something about the reactions of True Believers without giving me any real insight into their minds.

mind of true believer continued from previous page

much math even though I claim to (I had made no such claim whatsoever and offered no math, inasmuch as my mathematical ability does not extend beyond ten fingers plus ten toes).

I do not believe that it is possible to influence a True Believer to any significant extent. I will keep trying, however, through my Skeptics membership, in what I cannot avoid concluding to be an almost hopeless endeavor.

I see that if we attended, say, a homeopathic convention and tried to offer a contrary view, our lives would be in danger. You'll have to go to the Homeopathic Convention without me.

Any other opinions?

Barry Blyveis
Excommunicated Reconstructionist Jew

I went onto the internet to discover how easy it is to become a doctor of naturalpathy. You pays your money, attends class for some weekends, and, voila, you is a doctor.

Don't be mystified.

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