

The Arizona Skeptic

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Postscript to "Some Failures of Organized Skepticism"

By Jim Lippard

The following is a chronology of events relating to my dealings with the Australian Skeptics regarding the criticisms I made in my article, "Some Failures of Organized Skepticism" (AS, January 1990, pp. 2-5).

March 18, 1988: Duane Gish of the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) debates Australian skeptic Ian Plimer, professor of geology at the University of Newcastle. Plimer takes a very aggressive (*ad hominem*) stance, at one point offering Gish a chance to electrocute himself on bare wires since electricity, like evolution, is "only a theory." The ICR headlines their summary of the debate "Evolutionist Debater Descends to All-Time Low."

Winter (Australian) 1988: Steve Roberts and Tim Mendham publish an article (apparently primarily the writing of Roberts) in *The Skeptic*, the publication of the Australian Skeptics, describing the March 18 debate. The summary seriously misrepresents a number of Gish's statements, attributing to him such comments as "nobody really believed all that stuff about Noah and the Flood" and the claim that anti-evolution author Michael Denton now thinks evolution is "provable reality" (when Gish said quite the opposite). This latter piece of misinformation finds its way into the *Creation/Evolution Newsletter* (July/August 1988), under the headline "Is Michael Denton Anti-Evolution?"

Sometime in early 1989: I obtain a videotape of the debate and a copy of the Roberts and Mendham article, compare them and find discrepancies. I incorporate it into an article about errors by skeptics.

January 1990: My article, "Some Failures of Organized Skepticism," is published in *The Arizona Skeptic*. Copies are sent to the Australian Skeptics and the ICR (which also receives a copy of another article, "Dissension in the Ranks of the Institute for Creation Research"). The ICR responds with a thanks for the "objective analysis" in the former article and takes some issue with the latter. The Australian Skeptics do not respond.

June 1990: The (Australian) Creation Science Foundation (CSF) *Prayer News* publishes an article titled "American Skeptic

Slams Australian Skeptics for 'Gross Distortions'."

July 1990: The CSF publication *Creation Ex Nihilo* (vol. 12, no. 3, p. 15) prints an article titled "US Skeptic claims Aussie Skeptics misrepresented Gish" which quotes liberally from "Some Failures of Organized Skepticism." Copies of both CSF articles are distributed at the annual convention of the Australian Skeptics.

July 17, 1990: Mark Plummer, president of the Victoria Branch of the Australian Skeptics and former CSICOP executive director, sends me copies of the two CSF publications along with a letter asking for a copy of my article and asking me "why [I] felt it was necessary for [my] article to be written." Copies of the letter are sent to James McGaha of the Tucson Skeptical Society (TUSKS) and Mike Stackpole of the Phoenix Skeptics. I do not receive my copy for several weeks because it is sent to an old address.

August 22, 1990: I reply to Plummer, stating that I saw misrepresentations and reported on them. I say that I probably erred in not sending a copy of my article to the Australian Skeptics in advance of publication

September 28, 1990: Mark Plummer sends me a list of 12 questions as part of his "investigation" of my criticism of the Roberts & Mendham article. He asks such things as "From where did you obtain the videotape?", "What steps did you take to ensure that the videotape you viewed was an unedited version of the debate?", "Did you consult any appropriate experts prior to writing the article?", "Did you consult any experts on the traditions of debating American religious spokesmen in Australia?", and "What is your personal position on the creation/evolution issue?" I reply on October 7 to all of his questions. (The videotape was obtained from a Canadian skeptic who obtained it from Ian Plimer. I consulted no "experts" on the matter, since it was a simply case of a summary of a debate reporting something quite different from what actually occurred.)

Spring (Australian) 1990: Barry Williams, executive director of the Australian Skeptics, addresses my "Skeptical Failures" article in *The Skeptic* in response to a letter from CSF director Carl Wieland. He writes, "I am finally able to comment on the opinion expressed in the *Arizona Skeptic*, having at last seen a copy. The author of that opinion did indeed claim that

our report of the Plimer/Gish debate was the 'worst example of skeptical failure' he had come across. In this, he appeared to be unable to distinguish between his own interpretation of a tape made of the debate and an on-the-spot news report which summarised the debate. Our report did contain some minor errors, which have been acknowledged in previous issues. As one of those who actually attended the debate, I disagree with the Arizona correspondent claims but perhaps one had to be sitting in the audience to savour the full flavour of what was said."

October 31, 1990: Thinking that Plummer may not be the right person to be communicating with and being very unclear on just what Barry Williams was trying to say about my article, I write a letter to the editor of *The Skeptic*. In my letter, I note that the CSF seemed to misrepresent my article as an attack on the Australian Skeptics when in fact it was a criticism of "a single article in a publication which generally produces excellent material." I reiterate some of my major criticisms and ask just where corrections to the errors in the summary had been published. The letter is neither published nor replied to (but see April 10, 1991, below).

October 1990: The CSF publishes *A Response to Deception*, a booklet responding to Barry Price's book, *The Creation Science Controversy*. The booklet includes serious allegations made against Price and Ian Plimer, and also includes a few sentences about my "Some Failures" article.

November 26, 1990: Plummer replies with an admission that there were some errors in the article (specifically mentioning only that the "Noah's Ark" comments were erroneous), but attacks me for "rushing into print" without "undertak[ing] the full research necessary to understand why there were discrepancies." It seems that Roberts was working from longhand notes and the debate was "very lively and rowdy" and "at times hard to hear." So, Plummer concludes, I am guilty of wrongdoing but Roberts is not (Plummer calls my original article "sensationalist" and "akin to the *National Enquirer*"). Plummer also encloses several newsclippings designed to show me that in Australia, it is acceptable to bash religious people with *ad hominem*, insults, and ridicule. One clipping is a letter to the editor of a newspaper, one is an article from a trashy *People*-type magazine called *The Picture*, and the last is an article about a debate between Mark

Plummer and a minister. Plummer's argument is undercut by comments in the Roberts & Mendham debate summary, which admits that "The adjudicator summed up by saying that, rather than a debate, the evening was more like a presentation by Dr. Gish and a series of derogatory replies by Dr. Plimer. He would award poor marks to both speakers, neither of whom had properly expounded his point of view as a science." (p. 13) The same page of the summary states that "Dr. Plimer's style of speaking excited comments and polarised the passions of quite a few people. Many Skeptics have said they were disappointed in his manner of presentation and his handling of the topic, preferring that he had presented purely the scientific evidence supporting evolution in a sombre and more scientifically respectable manner." (It goes on to rebut this via Plimer, who says that scientists have been doing that for years with little to show for it.)

November 30, 1990: Unconvinced by Plummer's arguments, I respond with an angry but reasoned reply, stating that *The Skeptic* still has an obligation to print a correction.

December 1990: Mike Stackpole's editorial piece, "Note of Importance," is published in *The Arizona Skeptic*. The article soundly rejects Mark Plummer's apparent opinion that skeptical groups, out of loyalty to "the cause," should not criticize each other.

December 17, 1990: Plummer responds to my letter with two sentences: "I acknowledge receipt of your letter of Nov 30th 1990. The information and rationalizations contained therein are sufficient for me to now report on your behavior." He then ceases further correspondence with me. I never receive any copy of Plummer's report or any comment on the conclusions of his "investigation."

December 31, 1990: I write to Barry Price, Ian Plimer, and the Australian Skeptics asking questions about the CSF's *Response to Deception* booklet. I receive replies from Price and Plimer, but not from the Australian Skeptics. For the next several months, I spend time corresponding with the CSF, Price, and Plimer about the various charges made by the CSF.

March 20, 1991: I complete a first draft of an article titled "How Not To Argue With Creationists" which criticizes Price and Plimer for various misrepresentations, and send copies to them for comment. Barry Price responds with an angry letter saying that I may end up

being sued if I publish, that complaint will be made to my department head, and that a copy of my article has been forwarded to the Australian Skeptics. Meanwhile, Price himself was already being sued for defamation over remarks made in his book, *The Creation Science Controversy*.

April 10, 1991: I receive a letter, at long last, from Barry Williams (after Price sends him a copy of "How Not To Argue"). He says he sees no point in publishing my letter to *The Skeptic* because "I see no useful purpose being served by reopening a debate that took place more than three years ago" (despite the fact that he reopened the subject in the Spring 1990 issue of *The Skeptic*). He admits that there were factual errors in the article "which only became apparent to Steve Roberts the author, after he studied the tape some considerable time after the article had been published." As for *The Skeptic's* alleged publication of corrections, Williams notes that "We published three letters from people who had some comment to make on the debate, including one correcting an admitted error. This was from Ian Plimer's brother, taking issue with the description of Ian as a 'mild mannered Christian'." In other words, the only "error" corrected had nothing to do with my criticisms, contrary to the impression given by Williams' only published remarks about my article ("Spring (Australian) 1990," above). Williams went on to emphasize the cultural differences between the U.S. and Australia regarding creationism in an apparent attempt to dissuade me from publication of "How Not To Argue With Creationists."

April 22, 1991: I reply to Williams, reiterating *The Skeptic's* responsibility to correct its errors and noting my dismay at his misleading published comments about my article. I never receive a reply.

Summer 1991: *NCSE Reports* (formerly the *Creation/Evolution Newsletter*) prints my correction to "Is Michael Denton Anti-Evolution?" (under the headline "Michael Denton's Views Have Not Evolved After All"). In the editing process, my letter is altered to refer to Denton as a creationist (he isn't one). (The editor apologized for the mistake and a correction is forthcoming.)

July/August 1991: Wendy Grossman of the UK Skeptics writes in *The Skeptic* (British and Irish, not Australian) about the "fooferaw (US term for kerfuffle)" between the Australian Skeptics and the Phoenix Skeptics. Although

she admits that "I wasn't there, and I haven't read all the letters, and I haven't seen the videotape" she doesn't "let that disqualify me from making a point of my own." She agrees that skepticism involves inquiry, a passion for truth, and no stifling of dissent, but criticizes me for sending my article to the ICR. She states that had she been in my place, she "would have mailed my criticisms to the *Australian Skeptic* for inclusion in the next issue or to give them a chance to publish a correction." While I don't agree that the article should not have been sent to the ICR, I do agree that the Australian Skeptics should have been given a chance to correct the error before I did so (but as the timeline above shows, the Australian Skeptics did nothing in the five months before the creationists published anything regarding my article). I submit a brief letter of response noting my opinions.

November 1991: "How Not To Argue With Creationists" is accepted and slated for publication in the next issue of *Creation/Evolution*.

Book Review

The Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie
1989, Viking Press, \$19.95, 547 pp.

Reviewed By Hans Sebald

The book is a Kafkaesque fairy tale, meaning to stimulate fantasy and beguile our poetic palate rather than make a claim of factuality. It is a phantasmagoric satire about the author's personal religious and ethnic background, Moslem and Asian Indian. What he apparently underestimated was the sensibility of the True Believers which is known for its thin veneer of civility and its quick explosion of fury when satire is aimed at sacred belief. Rushdie became the target of an outburst of Islamic rage.

The plot begins with the hijacking of an airliner (depicted in deliberate stereotype to create a minisatire within the larger one), which was blown to bits in midair, whence two men fall 30,000 feet to the earth and unabashedly survive. The two, Farishta and Chamcha, were blessed—or cursed—with more than survival. They underwent the strangest of metamorphoses: one became the archangel Gabriel (which, according to T.B.'s, relayed Allah's messages to the Prophet) and the other developed the telltale signs of horns, cloven hooves, and sulphurous halitosis. With the new identities, quite unstable and volatile, they entered the scene of their ethnic subculture in London. The portrayal of the social-

psychological and linguistic subtleties of this "tinted" (colored) environment is an artful masterpiece, done with humor, wit, and profound insight into life in a marginal group.

As the tragicomical plot thickens, surrealistic switches between pre- and post-fall existence take place and dreamlike excursions to holy and unholy places bring trouble or bliss to an assortment of magical characters. Occasionally the author renders the plot opaque when he defies customary time dimensions and suddenly drops the readers into the turbulence of the old days of Mecca and Mohammed, pseudo-disguised as Jahilia and Mahound. Other defiances of conventional plot intertwine dream and nondream, and sometimes it is up to the reader to try to discern. While this may at times be confounding, the reader's patience is all along generously rewarded by singularity of happening and brilliance of metaphor.

Alas, the holy and unholy happenings include some that evidently offend the sensibilities of the Moslem T.B.'s. For example, in a dreamlike setting a village scribe whispers words into the Prophet's ear that are his own and not Allah's. Someone rants that the Prophet finds it convenient to have a Revelation whenever it suits his personal preference and lifestyle; for example, when he didn't want to abandon his many women, he received word from God proclaiming polygamy to be the proper state of marital bliss. And then there are some titillating erotic innuendoes: the prostitutes of a Jahilian brothel play-act the identities of the Prophet's twelve wives, with each performing the unique ingratiating charm for which the wifely model was reputed. (Mistakenly, today's infuriated Moslems assume that Rushdie depicted the Prophet's wives as whores. An understandable mistake, considering that they failed to read the book. This, incidentally, reflects the typical reaction of T.B.'s: to display firm opinions about uncertain things.)

It's these passages of the book that started the politico-religious uproar. No degree of poetic brilliance or superb satirical flair on the part of Rushdie prevented the T.B.'s from condemning him and sentencing him to death in absentia. Millions of dollars are set on his head, throwing international diplomatic relations into turmoil, as, for example, between England, where the author is hiding under Scotland Yard's protective wings, and Iran, where Khomeini ordered Rushdie to be shoved into

Islam's undesirable netherworld. No tolerance here of the author's literary exercise of using satire as an insolent way of expressing skepticism toward religious ideas.

The basic charge is blasphemy, parody or irreverent skepticism in the face of what the T.B. defines as the Sacred. Confronted with blasphemy, the T.B. has two choices: to wait for evidence of punishment by the deity offended, or, in the face of absence or tardiness of divine intervention, to play God himself and take vengeance into his own hands. History shows that T.B.'s tend to savor the second choice—usually with homicidal gusto.

Just so that our Western arrogance doesn't get out of hand, let us recall our own humiliating Dark Ages, when political and religious powers were merged and Christianity condemned certain writings as heretical, burned witches, issued totalitarian decrees, imposed Papal absolutism upon millions by demanding blind-faith obedience to the pontiff's infallible charisma, and marched against the "infidel" to reclaim "our" Holy Land. What we see today in certain Middle East countries is a *déjà vu* of a ghastly apparition rising from darkness of civilization.

Nonetheless we have learned some degree of lesson, at least to the point of forging the separation of powers of religious organizations from the powers of state. So for the time being we are relatively safe. We may express skepticism, even in form of biting satire, if we wish. Some people and organizations may not find it pleasant, but hardly anyone bothers to promise a hit man millions of dollars for murdering a religious dissident or a skeptic.

Finally, we have learned to understand that the difference between irreverence toward ideas and irreverence toward human life are qualitatively different: the former is a healthy antidote against absolutism, the latter is its essence. Rushdie knows the difference and to no small measure may have written *The Satanic Verses* with the significance of the difference in mind.

Hans Sebald is professor of sociology at Arizona State University and author of the book Witchcraft: The Heritage of a Heresy (1978, Elsevier).

Book Review

The Unfathomed Mind: A Handbook of Unusual Mental Phenomena by William R. Corliss

1982, The Sourcebook Project, 754pp.

Reviewed by Jim Lippard

William R. Corliss' Sourcebook Project has been collecting scientific anomalies since 1974. Many collections have so far been published, including catalogs of anomalies regarding the stars, planets, weather, and geologic activity. The Sourcebook Project also publishes a newsletter called *Science Frontiers*.

While these collections bear a resemblance to the works of Charles Fort, they are different in that Corliss focuses on respected, peer-reviewed journals and lets their articles speak for themselves rather than writing potentially misleading summaries. In this collection, *The Unfathomed Mind*, he has assembled an enormous quantity of material from such journals as the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, *Psychosomatic Medicine*, *Nature*, *Science*, and *New Scientist*.

In the preface, Corliss states that "The general thrust of this book is that the mind has powerful, subtle, often bizarre influences on the human body, human behavior, and perhaps even the so-called objective external world. Psychologists and psychiatrists will likely agree that this book goes too far and makes too much of a mystery out of the mind-body interface; parapsychologists will doubtless think the treatments of telepathy, out-of-the-body experiences, and the like are much too conservative, even negative. The occultist, alas, will find nothing encouraging at all." (p. v)

Regarding parapsychology, Corliss states that he takes a neutral position, because at this time "no one can say for certain that telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, and other parapsychological phenomena are real or not." (p. v)

The book is reasonably well-organized but has only a fairly skimpy index. It is divided into six major chapters ("Dissociative Behavior: Other Control Centers," "The Possible Acquisition of Hidden Knowledge," "Anomalous Modes of Information Processing," "Hallucinations: Sensing What is Not," "Remarkable Mind-Body Interactions," and "Mind Over Matter") which are themselves

subdivided further in a table of contents given at the beginning of each section. This structure and the weakness of the index sometimes make it difficult to find things, as the section subdivisions are not listed in the main table of contents.

The range of topics covered is immense, and I've found the book very handy in research. Citations are complete, and the excerpts are sufficient to give the flavor of the articles. The selection of articles is also quite good--*Skeptical Inquirer* articles and other criticisms are frequently cited for the various phenomena. The book is, however, due for a revision since much has been published in the nine years since it came out.

Topics covered include automatic writing, multiple personality, mass hysteria, hypnotic behavior, altered states of consciousness, deja vu, divination and clairvoyance, dermo-optical perception, memories of past lives, eidetic images, autoscopy, hypnagogic imagery, out-of-body and near-death experiences, hysterical blindness, false pregnancies (female and male), faith healing, the placebo effect, stigmata, and psychokinesis.

This book is highly recommended for anyone interested in researching the human mind. *Information on the Sourcebook Project may be obtained by writing to William R. Corliss, The Sourcebook Project, Box 107, Glen Arm, MD 21057.*

Book Review

Labyrinths of Reason by William Poundstone
1988, 1990 Anchor Books, \$9.95 trade
paperback edition

Reviewed by Mark Adkins

This book is an entertaining melange of epistemology, cognitive science, philosophy of logic, complexity theory, and taxonomy, with sprinkles of computer science, cryptography, and game theory, held together by the ubiquitous threads of paradox. Without intending to belittle it, I think it can justly be described as bubble-gum for the skeptical mind. The flavor lingers, and for every unpleasant instance when the bubble blows up in your face, there is another time when it grows to such mammoth proportions that you are lifted away into other, unearthly realms.

Since the book is intended for a literate and thoughtful, though popular audience, there is no dense prose to wade through: only deep waters. There is no real need for previous exposure to the subjects contained therein, and indeed, the range of the book is so broad, the smorgasbord

of topics so eclectic, that it is an almost ideal starting point from which topics of particular interest can be discovered and pursued more deeply. This is not to say that the book's treatment of most subjects is trivial or superficial: merely that the dishes served up are so varied that even the seasoned gourmand is likely to be surprised by an unfamiliar spice or two.

As is to be expected in a book whose issues are largely philosophical, the issues debated are occasionally so abstract, so pedantic, that all but the most hard-core logicians are likely to feel (or even express aloud) frustration with the mincing detail, the absurd scrutiny, with which such quodlibets are examined and argued. Fortunately, these occasions are fairly infrequent, and the reader is quickly distracted by such stimulating and imaginative speculations and analyses, such penetrating examinations of things one ordinarily never questions, carried out from perspectives one scarcely credited one's self capable of perceiving, that the droning voices of the pedants, like medieval theologians, fade into the pages of history.

This book excellently demonstrates that philosophy need not consist of baffling purple prose, with high-sounding but ultimately sterile Hegelian maundering, in order to excite the romantic imagination; and that flights of the imagination do not preclude stimulation of the critical mind. As skeptics, we are not concerned with fruity phrases bereft of reason, with bombastic doubletalk, with sightings of Elvis or with psychic channelers recounting past lives filled with anachronisms: we do not find these things lovely and imaginative, we find them puerile and jejune! It is not necessary to stupefy the intellect in order to satisfy the imagination (though we may indulge in the occasional whiskey and soda when called upon to write book reviews), and after reading *Labyrinths of Reason* one can say, with full possession of reason and the dignity that entails, "Here there be monsters!"

And if that doesn't get you into the store to at least peruse the table of contents, perhaps favorable reviews by Martin Gardner and Douglas Hofstadter (featured amongst the rear cover blurbs) will.

Letters

Editor:

In reading your account of the Rosenthal lecture (reported in *AS*, July/August 1991, pp.

1-3) I was struck by the paradox which seems inherent in his position. If, as he seems to maintain, the effect is ubiquitous (and his early suggestion that it might be necessary to automate all experiments in order to remove expectancy bias seems to support this interpretation), and assuming the truth of his thesis, one is forced to the conclusion that his studies are not valid evidence for it, being influenced by his own expectation of the expectancy effect! Perhaps the small (.24) correlation between experimenter expectancy and experimenter result, mentioned in your lecture account, could be explained by Professor Rosenthal's expectancy bias in favor of the existence of expectancy bias.

There is a brief but stimulating discussion of the expectancy effect in William Poundstone's *Labyrinths of Reason* (Doubleday, 1988), pp. 129-131. There, we find the undocumented assertion that "at least forty studies published from 1968 to 1976 found no statistically significant experimenter expectancy effect, and six others provided but weak evidence." Of course, these negative findings could be accounted for by the expectancy effect.

Tongue firmly in cheek,

Mark Adkins

P.S. Ontology recapitulates philology—or does it?!

I think that at least some of the studies which found experimenter expectancy effects (as well as some which didn't) were contrary to the expectations of the experimenters. The paradox can be eliminated if the effect is claimed to occur as a result of some mechanism which can be observed and controlled for (as Poundstone notes in his discussion). T.X. Barber, a skeptic of the expectancy effect, states in his book Pitfalls in Human Research (1976, Pergamon; see review, AS, July/August 1991, pp. 5-6) that experimenter cues can affect subject responses (p. 80). Barber's book, by the way, is the source of Poundstone's undocumented claim about forty studies which found no experimenter expectancy effect. Barber writes (p. 79) that "At least 40 recent experiments (published since 1968) reported that the experimenters' expectancies did not affect the results." He summarizes these experiments and also reports on six experiments which had equivocal results (pp. 69-71 and 72-73, respectively).

Editor:

Just a note regarding Jeff Jacobsen's recent article, "Dianetics: From Out of the Blue?" (*AS*, September/October 1991, pp. 1-5). Jacobsen writes, "Either Hubbard really studied other works before he wrote *Dianetics*, or he wasted

years of his time re-inventing the wheel." In my (humble) opinion, the latter half of Jacobsen's either/or statement should be amended to read: "... or he *spent* years of his time re-inventing the wheel, selling 'many millions of copies,' and making lots of money." In this case, the either/or statement is really invalid; it should be an "and"—if he studied others' research and theories first, he nevertheless made lots of money. (And that's one key factor, isn't it?)

Beth Fischi

Dept. of English, Northeastern University

Why Did the Chicken Cross the Road? An Episode of Human Folly

By Mark Adkins

- Theist: It was God's will.
- Mystic: The truth is beyond words.
- Philosopher: How can we be sure of the character of the sense-data?
- Freudian Psychologist: The chicken was driven by unconscious forces resulting from the repression of childhood trauma.
- Skinnerian Behaviorist: The chicken was conditioned by his environment to associate road-crossing with positive reinforcement.
- Mechanistic Materialist: A combination of gravitational and electromagnetic forces. Without specifying the initial and boundary conditions, I can only give a general solution.
- Naive Realist: To get to the other side.
- Rationalist: It was in the chicken's best self-interest.
- Solipsist: Chicken? What chicken? What road? Hey, who asked that?!!
- Robert Rosenthal: Because you expected it.

Articles of Note

Clippings and articles to be mentioned in this space should be sent to the editor.

Archie Brodsky and Stanton Peele, "A.A. Abuse," *Reason* 23(November 1991):34-39. A report on how the courts are forcing people into 12-step programs for the weakest of reasons, along with discussion of the (lack of) scientific basis of such programs.

Marc Cooper, "Debunking Biosphere," *The Tucson Weekly* 8(39, November 6-12, 1991):4,6. (A different version of the article appears in the same week's *Village Voice*.) More people have resigned from the Biosphere 2 project. Now Cooper reveals that Space Biospheres Ventures "cheated"

by installing a CO₂ scrubber shortly before the final closure. But it appears that even that won't prevent CO₂ levels from becoming dangerously high—watch for the Biospherians' exit around the end of the year.

Steven Emerson and Jesse Furman, "The Conspiracy That Wasn't," *The New Republic* 205(November 18, 1991):16-25, 28-31. A report on contradictions in the "October Surprise" conspiracy theory, which asserts that the Reagan campaign delayed the release of U.S. hostages in Iran until after the election in exchange for arms. Of particular interest to skeptics is the connection of Barbara Honegger, former Reagan campaign aide and author of a 1989 book titled *October Surprise*, with paranormal activities (her alleged sources include channeled information).

Alex Heard, "Put a Zokwendle in Your Tank!" *Spy*, December 1991, pp. 42-49. A look at claims by purveyors of "nutty physics" to have invented perpetual motion machines.

Jim Moseley, "The Lawsuits Against James Randi," *Saucer Smear* vol. 38, nos. 8, 9, and 10. The most detailed reports that I've seen on the lawsuits by Uri Geller and Eldon Byrd against James Randi; Moseley quotes from the court documents themselves and gives some background on the suits.

Dennis Stacy, "Science Watch: Randi in Deep Doo-Doo?" *Fortean Times* #59(September 1991):44-45. Unsympathetic report on the Geller lawsuits, including quotes from Randi's and Geller's open letters.

Pamela Weintraub, "Natural Direction," *Omni* 14(October 1991):34-41, 109-110. Report on research by John Cairns and Barry Hall (some of which has been published in the journal *Nature*) which seems to indicate that microorganisms can sometimes influence their future evolution through directed mutation.

Robert Wright, "The Experiment That Failed," *The New Republic* 205(October 28, 1991):20-25. Analysis of the failure of Soviet science and the "brain drain" from the former Soviet Union.

Issue #57 (Spring 1991) of *Fortean Times* is essential for those interested in Satanic child abuse hysteria. It contains five articles about cases in England, all highly skeptical.

October Meeting "Magical Moments"

Reviewed by Ron Harvey

About 50 people attended a standing-room-only meeting at Jerry's. The meeting reminder billed Don Lacheman as "a magician who will show us how mentalist and entertainment psychic tricks can be used to deceive people concerning the validity of New Age powers."

Mr. Lacheman shocked the crowd into silence by proclaiming not only a belief in God, but a belief in astrology. His explanation was that God uses the positions of heavenly bodies to impart uniqueness to each of His creations. These bodies impel the individual but do not compel. No mechanism for the nature or transmission of this "force" was offered.

He then proceeded to do a magic show in the crowded confines of the dining room. At some point he took a break to put in a plug for his business, which is of course doing magic shows. He also talked a bit about his sideline, which turns out to be doing horoscopes, psychic readings, and many other types of analyses by mail with his computer. At least, this is what the flyer offered.

Did Mr. Lacheman do as promised? Were we being scammed, being shown how one could scam an audience, or just being entertained? I don't pretend to know.

Next Issue

The January/February 1992 issue of *The Arizona Skeptic* will feature skeptical predictions for 1992; a response by Robert A. Baker to the review of his book, *They Call It Hypnosis*, which appeared in our July/August issue; and a review of Charles Bufe's *Alcoholics Anonymous: Cult or Cure?*

Upcoming Meetings

The Phoenix Skeptics will meet at the Jerry's Restaurant on Rural/Scottsdale Road between McKellips and the river bottom, with lunch at 12:30, on December 7 (predictions for 1992 will be made) and January 4 (Rene Pfalzgraf, a Neuro-Linguistic Programmer, will speak). Meetings are on the first Saturday of each month except where it conflicts with a holiday.

On February 21-22, the Institute for Creation Research will be bringing its "Back to Genesis" seminar to Phoenix; on February 24-26, to Tucson. The Phoenix seminar will take place at Bethany Bible Church, 6060 N. 7th Ave; the Tucson seminar at New Testament Baptist Church, 2855 N. Craycroft Rd. Skeptics who plan to attend should contact Jim Lippard (address given below) for information on some specific claims to watch for and questions to ask.

The Arizona Skeptic is the official publication of the Phoenix Skeptics and the Tucson Skeptical Society (TUSKS). The Phoenix Skeptics is a non-profit scientific and educational organization with the following goals: 1. to subject claims of the paranormal, occult, and fringe sciences to the test of science, logic, and common sense; 2. to act as clearinghouse for factual and scientific information about the paranormal; and 3. to promote critical thinking and the scientific method. The contents of The Arizona Skeptic are copyright © 1991 by the Phoenix Skeptics unless otherwise noted. Reprinting of material in this publication with Phoenix Skeptics copyright may be reprinted provided that The Arizona Skeptic and the author are provided copies of the publication in which their work is reprinted. Address all correspondence to the Phoenix Skeptics, P.O. Box 62792, Phoenix, AZ 85082-2792. Submissions for publication in The Arizona Skeptic may be sent to Jim Lippard, Dept. of Philosophy, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721 or electronically to LIPPARD@RVAX.CCIT.ARIZONA.EDU. All manuscripts become the property of the Phoenix Skeptics, which retains the right to edit them. Subscription rate is \$12.50 per year.

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