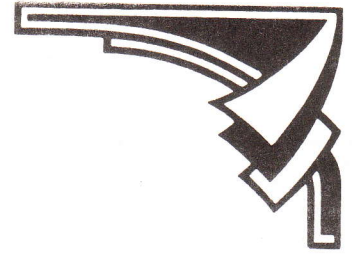


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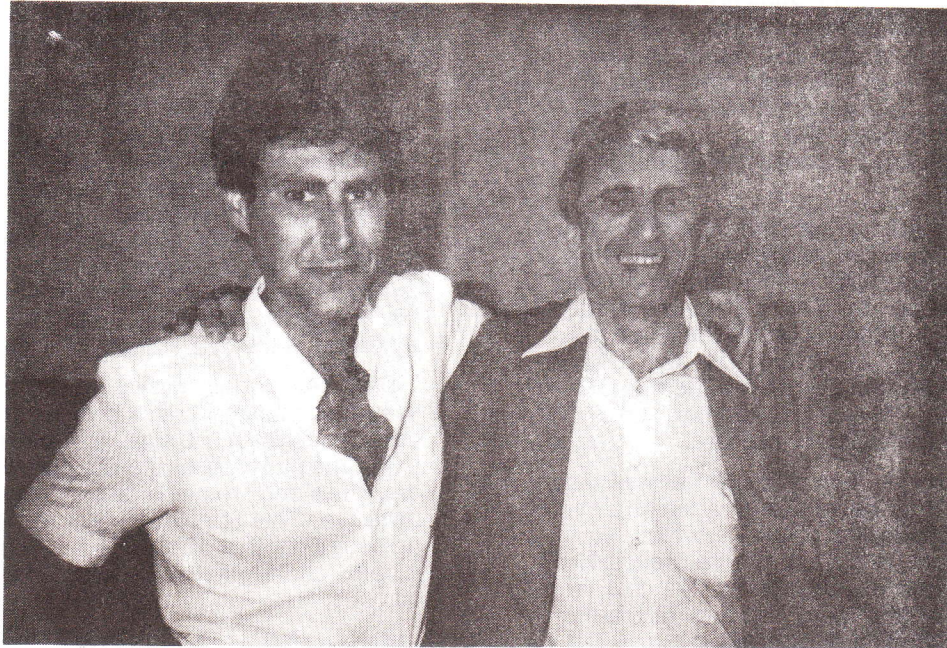
BAY AREA SKEPTICS INFORMATION SHEET

*Bay Area Skeptics is the first local chapter of
The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP)*

Vol. 3 No.8

Editor: Michael McCarthy

August 1984



URI and BOB

Fellow magicians in a moment of camaraderie

Ol' Spoon-bender is back

B.A.S. SEES URI GELLER

By Don Morris

On Thursday evening, June 14th, at the San Francisco Bay Athletic Club, an audience of 500 people were witness to an incredible display of the powers of the human mind. Uri Geller, the Israeli-born psychic, amazed almost everyone with his unbelievable demonstrations of mindreading, levitating a 200-pound man, moving material objects, bending metal, and materializing and dematerializing matter, all by the power of his mind alone!

That at least was the way most people in the audience might have described the recent appearance of "psychic" Uri Geller, bete noire of the skeptical community and shameless purveyor of parlour tricks in the guise of supernatural powers. It is certainly the way Geller would have described it. But a handful of Bay Area Skeptics who paid \$10 each to attend were less impressed. We agreed only that Uri's performance was, indeed, unbelievable.

This is a blow-by-blow report of what took place at

that performance, based on personal attendance backed up by a careful analysis of an audio recording I made there.* Our attendance at Geller's show followed an earlier Uri Geller Night at BAS, in which BAS Chair Bob Steiner showed videotapes of Geller interviews, and performed typical Geller tricks. These preparations made the show much more interesting for us than for the average audience member, because we knew what we were looking at.

The program began with a brief introduction by someone named Sonja, who presumably represented Western Athletics Club, sponsors of the event (we understand Geller was paid \$10,000 by Western for his appearance). She gushed about Uri's abilities, citing the scientists who had tested and "verified" his powers, mentioning in particular the U.S. Naval Weapons Center ("...cannot be explained scientifically"), Werner von Braun ("...I cannot give a scientific explanation") and SRI. She seemed impressed by these names; no doubt because she doesn't know the full story behind them. [You'll find details of the SRI test of Geller in James Randi's "The Truth About Uri Geller" and Kaman & Marks' "Psychology of a Psychic"--Ed.] She concluded that Uri was a man who "uses the powers of his mind to the fullest," Uri's slogan.

Uri then bounced up to the stage that had been set up

in the gymnasium. During the next 71 minutes he performed about ten demonstrations of the powers of his mind. The first five were simple parlor tricks on the order of those found in books for children to keep themselves amused on rainy days.

The first stunt consisted of a woman from the audience writing the name of a color on a blackboard at the back of the stage while Uri looked away. She wrote "pink" but Uri was unable to "get it." This was blamed on the fact that she didn't follow his instructions to "write a simple, basic color, not a shade." She tried again, wrote "red," and Uri got it. He also asked the audience "Who was thinking of yellow?" In the audience of 500, somebody was found to admit the crime, and naturally Geller claimed that the confusing signals had thrown him off. [A good trick; naturally he'd get a hit in that size audience, and abashed viewers will try to discipline themselves in future tricks by cleansing their minds of disruptive thoughts--Ed].

The woman who admitted to thinking of yellow was characterized by Geller as a good sender and invited up on stage for the next demonstration. This time Uri held a bulletin board in his lap to hide his view of the blackboard while the new woman printed the name of a city, below that making a simple drawing, and below that writing a number between 1 and 100. She was then instructed to draw a TV-screen-like box around everything, then erase the entire blackboard.

Geller made five attempts, then correctly guessed the city as Cairo. At this point he went into a lengthy explanation of how he visualizes a blank TV screen, etc., and how the audience can try it at home with friends. He also gives a rather curious explanation for the *deja vu* experience, saying it's the mind sending telepathic waves ahead of you while you walk...[huh?]

Now he tried to guess the drawing. After asking the audience to "send" the target to him telepathically, and following the usual dramatics, Uri said with some hesitation: "Okay, I hope I'm not wrong--but it's, it was, it's like a heart." There was a moment's hesitation, then Uri asked, surprised, "Wrong?" Confused, he asked what the drawing was. To the woman's reply, Uri responded with great surprise: "A UFO! Gosh, I should have gotten that!"

But the audience protested, "It was a hat!", and when the woman redrew her image, it was a simple UFO that could easily have been mistaken for a hat. Uri attempted to show that it could also have been a heart, by drawing a heart shape over the UFO and saying "I did not get the UFO, but what I did get is I guess this part, and I thought it was a heart. But look, I was very close, right?" One alternate possibility: whoever signals Uri tried to spell "hat" but Uri took it for "heart."

We recommend you consult *The Amateur Magician's Handbook* by Henry Hay if you want to learn how to do Uri's trick yourself.

The number guess was skipped because Uri said he saw the number "so I have to be honest about that." The third demonstration of telepathy was a variation on the standard magician's blindfold effect. Uri had himself blindfolded with a borrowed woman's scarf. One woman previously invited up to the stage selected another woman from the audience. She came up to the stage and paused in front of Uri just long enough for him to do the necessary peeking, then he went into his routine. He described the details of her dress, while she walked back

and forth behind him. When he was done, he introduced the woman as a Russian psychic now living in San Francisco (a bizarre twist).

A fourth demonstration of telepathy involved another woman from the audience trying to send Uri a color. After first confirming that green was not the color, he guessed blue. Interesting to note that when asking for colors, Uri always insists on a simple, basic color, not a shade. This trims the alternatives down to six or seven, a manageable number if he uses an audience signaller (there are other methods as well). Incidentally, Uri wrote his guess on a notepad borrowed from a member of the audience -- none other than our own BAS Chair, Bob Steiner.

Uri now spent some time telling the audience about discovering his powers as a kid, and gave a condensed and highly colored version of his arrival in America at the invitation of former astronaut Edgar Mitchell, when he was taken to SRI for extensive testing. He mentioned the SRI report being published in the prestigious *Nature* magazine, and reference to the controversy he has created. Of course, he left out a few minor details, like his complete debunking in *Isreal* and the sorry misreporting of the SRI incident.

Back to another parlour trick. Through the entire show, remember, Uri has been saying he's not a magician. A magician, he says, is somebody who does card tricks and pulls rabbits out of a hat. Since Uri guesses colors, cities and women's dresses, that means he's not a magician. This of course plays to the audience's naive presumption that if there's no deck of cards and no rabbits- and-top-hat combo, there's no magic act going on.

Having insisted he was no magician, Uri went directly to the tired old "levitation" trick in which a 200 pound man is lifted from his chair by four other men using "only" two fingers of each hand-- plus some mentalist mumbo-jumbo to convince you that the audience's psychic powers cause the man to actually lose weight. Interesting, Bob Steiner did this same trick at Uri Geller Night at BAS the previous Saturday night.

In the next demonstration, children were brought up on stage, where they stand around yelling "Move!" at a watch. The watch was set at three minutes to eight when they started, then Geller handed it to a young kid, and later took the watch back and announced that it now read one o'clock. In a classic bit of Geller logic, he adds "and the stem is untouched!" Obviously you're obliged to take his word for that. Uri insisted the kids were the ones with the psychic power. (How many hours will that kid spend trying to repeat the trick before concluding it was all a fraud? Or will he continue to believe in spite of the evidence -- like so many others?)

Now came the watch trick. Uri asked everyone who brought broken watches to bring them up to the stage -- but first to *wind them up*, a peculiar preliminary. No electronic watches and no watches without insides were allowed. Uri kept referring to the watches as "broken," and "completely broken" mentioning broken springs inside the watches.

When the watches were up on stage, the audience was obliged to yell "Work!" over and over, while Uri pawed through the watches on the table, picking out those which were ticking (this he refers to as "working") and asking the owner of each how long it was "broken"



(average: four years). Uri exclaimed over each ticking watch and invited the audience's amazement at this miracle.

He ridiculed the claim that the trick works by warming congealed oils in the watches, and again claims (with no attempt at substantiation) that he is fixing watches with broken mainsprings. His explanation: "There is a materialization that happens when we all shout the word 'work;' if the spring is broke, it is not broken anymore -- I mean there is some kind of a, a materialization, and the spring is mended!"

[Editor's comment: In case anybody actually needs an explanation of this typically misleading fraud, just stop and remember why your watch is sitting in the drawer at home. Because it's broken? Because the spring is snapped? No. Because it stopped ticking. That's how you know it doesn't work: it stops keeping reliable time. Wind it up, give it a shake, and it starts ticking again. But after minutes, hours or days it stops again. Of course, by that time Uri's show is over and nobody can compare notes on how many of the two dozen miracles have stopped running again by the following day. Meanwhile, Uri adds two dozen more "fixed" watches to his reputation.]

[Notice too Uri's reference to broken springs -- when was the last time you had a watch with a broken spring? Does Uri select out the broken watches? Does he check them first? No, he just repeatedly refers to the watches as "completely broken" and mentions broken springs over and over, as if that was the principle reason for stopped watches. In fact, as any watch repair shop will be happy to tell you, the vast majority of watches can be repaired by a simple cleaning.]

[Notice, too, that Uri doesn't take a *specific* watch and try to make it work -- he jumbles them all together in a pile, then picks out those that are ticking -- the ones that were susceptible to the wind-the-stem instruction. The deck is stacked in Uri's favor. The unquestioning gullibility of the audience does the rest.]

At this point there was a power failure in the room and everyone sat in the dark for ten minutes or so until the fuse was repaired. Uri disclaimed responsibility for blowing the fuse, and answered questions about his personal life. One member of the audience turned out to be parapsychologist Julian Issacks of the local JFK University, who stood up to say, enthusiastically, "I've been doing a PhD on metal bending for the past five years, and I've found that people like you (Geller) who can do metal bending here, can also improve your ability if you practice. So I'm into training people to get bigger and better bendings [laughter]. And we can use it (metal bending skills) for all sorts of other purposes." He invited people interested in the subject to contact him at JFK University's parapsychology department. It must be a sorry testament to the quality of research at JFK if Mr. Issacks is able to research metal bending for five years and not discover its fraudulent background.

Now to the grand finale, bending keys and spoons. Here we get to see the act for which Uri is most famous -- and a most peculiar episode it was, too.

First, the audience brought up spoons and keys to be bent, adding them to the pile of spoons and keys Uri has collected before the show ... uh, wait a second here. Keys and spoons *Uri* collected before the show? Doesn't that seem a little suspicious? Why would he need to collect some in advance? Is he expecting a shortage?

Doesn't it seem likely that practically everybody in the audience will have brought a spoon? Could there be more here than meets the eye?

Having thus raised a suspicious note to the whole proceedings, Uri blandly states "Now all these spoons are yours, no spoons have chemicals on them, none of them are prepared." This shows Uri's ability to make a statement flatly contradictory to the audience's observation, and get away with it. It's the sort of thing a regular magician wouldn't even attempt, because it's poor showmanship.

Uri picked out a spoon from the pile ("randomly," no doubt), had a man from the audience hold it while he stroked it, and produced a thoroughly bent key that easily broke in half. Uri's explanation: a very small piece of the spoon handle has dematerialized. Our suggestion: the spoon, contrary to Uri's statement, is specially made and prepared in advance.

Next, he asked the audience to examine their own keys and see if any had bent while this spoonbending trick was going on. Marvelously, out of 500 people in the audience, a few discover a slight bend in their keys that they claim never to have noticed before. Uri predicted that they would continue to bend for several hours. Nobody will be in a position to test that claim, of course.

Now Uri picked out a large soup spoon from the pile and brought some small children up on stage to help him bend it. This is apparently not a prepared spoon, because someone from the audience identified it. Instead, Uri will bend it himself while claiming the children are bending it with their psychic powers.

Under the pretext of directing the children on the stage, Uri turned his back to the audience while switching the spoon from hand to hand along with the microphone. He gave the spoon to the girl, and told her to hold it lightly while stroking it and yelling "bend!" With the excuse of getting a better angle for the video camera, Uri kept handling the spoon and moving back and forth in front of the girl. He announced the spoon is "curling up," then finally took the spoon triumphantly from the girl to show to the camera.

At that moment I was able clearly to see Uri bend the spoon some more with both his hands. At the same time, he told the audience the spoon was still moving. "Now she did that and not me," Geller said as the girl left the stage.

While the audience applauded, it was clear to me that Uri again bent the spoon with both hands, again announcing "it is still bending, look at it now -- it might even stop at 90 degrees if we leave it here!"

That ended the performance, which was followed by a reception. As the audience slowly trickled out into the street they were met by representatives of BAS (Dan Sabsay, Bob Steiner and myself), who handed out flyers inviting them to phone LA TRUTH for an alternative explanation of the Geller effect, as well as a sample issue of BASIS. The back of the flyer listed books the audience members could read to improve their understanding of Mr. Geller.

The audience members were surprisingly receptive to the flyers, some of them clearly not being quite so gullible as Uri would like. If anyone reads any of the books on the suggested reading list, they will find their skepticism reinforced.

Believe it or not, we also handed a flyer to Geller himself. Maybe he will subscribe? We also managed to get a photo of Uri Geller and Bob Steiner, Chair of BAS. Geller of course didn't know that Bob was head of a major skeptics group and himself a magician -- Geller would have to be psychic to know that.

Another interesting sidelight is that Geller appeared to suffer no ill effects from the presence in the audience of four or five psychics and magicians, even though Geller claims his failure to perform under properly controlled conditions is due entirely to the negative psychic influence of skeptics and magicians.

A careful listening to the audio tapes I made led me to appreciate all the more Uri Geller the showman, the clever way he manipulates his audience, the constant stream of suggestions and insupportable statements, the careful definitions that lead the audience astray the appeal to their sympathies by ridiculing his opposition.

*For a copy of the audio tape of Geller's San Francisco performance, contact Don Morris at (415) 524-1502. [*Note: The editor also listened to the audio recording before editing this article; there may however be minor factual errors.]*

WHAT WE THINK OF URI GELLER

(The following message played on the LA TRUTH line in June following the Uri Geller performance.)

ON THE EVENING of June 14, Uri Geller gave a presentation in San Francisco. If he were to frankly admit that he is a magician, we could rate him to be quite an entertaining performer. Magic is a wonderful entertainment art form. Witnessing a performer skilled in illusion is fun.

On the other hand, Uri Geller says clearly and often "This is REAL!" When a magician does this, he does a disservice to his audience, to the magic profession, and most of all to the many people who are throwing away their reasoning processes by following the claims of Uri Geller and his type.

Uri Geller is a magician. When I told this to a caller recently, she replied: "Everybody is entitled to his or her opinion."

When I say that Uri Geller is a magician, I do not say this lightly; it is not an off-the-cuff, uninformed speculation on my part. My name is Bob Steiner. I am a professional magician, Past President of Assembly 112 of the Society of American Magicians, and Regional Vice President of the Society of American Magicians. In my shows I have done variations of every trick Uri Geller did on the evening of June 14.

Uri Geller is a magician.

Books which deal with this topic (including detailed explanations as to how Geller does his magic tricks):

- The Truth About Uri Geller, by James (The Amazing) Randi
- Science: Good, Bad and Bogus, by Martin Gardner
- The Psychology of the Psychic, by David Marks and Richard Kammann
- ESP and Parapsychology: A Critical Re-evaluation, by C.E.M. Hansel

- Miracle Mongers and Their Methods, by Houdini. Books available locally and also from Prometheus Books, 700 East Amherst St., Buffalo, NY 14215.

New \$\$ for Challenge!

WELCOME ABOARD LYNN SLATER!

by Bob Steiner

LYNN SLATER, JR., has pledged \$1,000 to the BAS Psychic Challenge!

Lynn's commitment brings the local Challenge total to \$6,000, to be paid to the first person to demonstrate psychic abilities under scientifically controlled conditions.

The Challenge backers as of this writing include:

Bob Steiner	\$1,000.00
John A. Taube	1,000.00
Don Morris	1,000.00
Daniel Sabsay	2,000.00
Lynn Slater	1,000.00

Total:	\$6,000.00
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It truly brings on a warm feeling to observe the courage in the many who are coming forth to challenge the psychic claims which abound in the Bay Area. The claims remain just that -- claims. They have yet to be substantiated.

Of the many ways in which this courage is displayed, the very tangible act of "putting one's money where one's mouth is" provides a clear, ongoing, and open challenge to the "psychics" to prove what they can do.

Bay Area Skeptics acts as a clearinghouse for the growing offer for *anyone* who can do *anything* which is psychic under scientific test conditions (see Best of BASIS 1982-83 for the complete text of the challenge).

Now Lynn Slater, Jr., has come aboard, bringing the local challenge total to \$6,000.00! Thanks, Lynn!

The worldwide challenge to psychics, as far as I know, is up to \$236,000.00, as follows:

Dick Smith (Australia)	\$100,000.00
John Scarne	100,000.00
James Randi	10,000.00
Phillip Adams (Australia)	10,000.00
Derryn Hinch (Australia)	10,000.00
BAS supporters - above	6,000.00

Total	\$236,000.00
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Scarne's challenge is limited to certain specified performances.

Where are you, psychics? We are challenging you!

Newsnote

BOB STEINER, Chair of Bay Area Skeptics, has been re-elected Regional Vice President Southwestern States of *The Society of American Magicians* (SAM), at their annual convention held in Las Vegas in July. Congratulations, Bob!

THE REAL SEARCH FOR E.T.

By Michael McCarthy

NASA SCIENTIST JOHN WOLFE gave 40 Bay Area Skeptics supporters a fascinating look at scientific speculation on creatures from outer space in his presentation at the May BAS Monthly Meeting titled *SETI: The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence*.

Wolfe's talk highlighted some differences between the SETI project and the pseudo-scientific wishful thinking often characteristic of UFO enthusiasts. For one thing, he buttressed his speculation with a healthy respect for the facts, and enjoyed looking for specific ways to prove his theories right or wrong. Pseudo-scientists, on the other hand, feel no need to defend their speculations with facts, since they aren't progressing toward truth, only toward publicity.

Wolfe also demonstrated the virtues of being both interesting and very knowledgeable. He is Program Scientist for the NASA SETI project and was formerly Project Scientist for NASA on the Pioneer Interplanetary and the Jupiter/Saturn Missions, and Principal Investigator on 13 other space missions.

"Most scientists are skeptical; that's what science is all about" was his opening remark. He then outlined the basic arguments for and against the likelihood of intelligent life existing somewhere in the universe, and the separate idea that if such life exists, we might be able to contact it. Within 1,000 light years of us are some 10 million suns, of which 1 million are "just like the sun." Planet formation is considered quite common among those sun-like stars.

That life would be common in the universe is argued from the ease with which amino acids and pre-biotic protein-like molecules can be formed. Life seems to have appeared on earth almost as soon as conditions were right. (As an aside to creationists, Dr. Wolfe remarked: "Expecting DNA to form from carbon, nitrogen and oxygen atoms in one step is like expecting a whirlwind in a junkyard to form a 747. But the 747 had predecessors: the DC3, the Wright Brothers, Michaelangelo....")

One equation used by the SETI community to express the factors is $N = R(o)F(p)N(e)F(i)F(c)L$, which figures the likelihood of radio communications with other worlds being successful based on the average rate of star formation (perhaps 20 per year), the fraction of stars with planets (unity, if current models of planet formation are correct); the fraction with Earth-like ecosphere (indeterminate); the fraction where life actually starts (here's where arguments about the likelihood of life formation come in); the fraction of life which produces intelligent life; the fraction of same which produce civilizations which communicate; and the longevity of the communicating phase.

If all the factors work out to 1 (or 100%), then $N=L$ and the value of both depends on the *longevity of the communicating phase* (how long such societies broadcast messages into outer space). If that phase lasts 20 years, there would be 20 of them sending signals at any given moment. If the phase lasts an average of one million years, there would be 1 million such societies.

Much of this is speculation (Wolfe: "an equation is a way of cramming a lot of ignorance into a small space.)

but much of it has interesting theoretical support. By the way, Wolfe defines intelligence as: "when you can figure out that you're 3-1/2 billion years old, you're intelligent," and civilization as "for our purposes, the ability to build radio telescopes."

On the other hand are the arguments against, the most famous of which is the Fermi paradox, which goes, succinctly, "Where are they?" If intelligent life is so common, how come the entire galaxy hasn't been settled by now? (This discounts, of course, popular reports of frequent visits by UFO aliens.) Counters to this argument revolve primarily around economic factors that make interstellar travel unlikely, including:

1. Motives: Colonization unlikely because everything is too far; lebensraum, politics or religion require self-sustaining spaceships, which raise philosophical questions of their own.
2. Economics: it just doesn't work out: a round trip to Alpha Centauri, only 4 light years, in a

Announcing
CSICOP's
1984 Conference

November 9 and 10, 1984
(Friday and Saturday)

Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

TOPICS
(tentative)

The Psychic Arms Race	UFOs
Paranormal Medicine	Astrology
Psychic Detectives	Cold Reading

SPEAKERS
(names are being added)

Andrew Fraknoi	Paul Kurtz
Kendrick Frazier	James Randi
Sidney Hook	Lee Ross
Ray Hyman	Wallace Sampson
Philip J. Klass	Robert Sheaffer

Look for more details in the next SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. Subscribers will be mailed a program and registration form.

BASIS

<p>Editor: Typesetter: Publisher: Executive Secretary: Circulation: Distribution:</p>	<p>Michael McCarthy Wayne Howard Ken Bomben Earl Hautala Paul Giles Yves Barbero</p>
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1,000 ton shuttle going 70% the speed of light would require 13 years elapsed Earth time and take 30,000 years equivalent of current U.S. annual energy consumption--a figure independent of technology. This makes the cost prohibitive unless the motive is compelling. It's difficult to imagine something so valuable as to be worth 30,000 years of energy consumption (especially in terms of exploring the unknown).

3. Finally, with communications, such travel is probably unnecessary. Nothing physical would be worth the cost, and knowledge can be transmitted by radio at the actual speed of light instead of by postcard at 70% the speed of light.

So it seems more likely that anybody out there would be talking on the radio rather than hopping a trans-stellar jet plane. As it turns out, finding them might be another story. The sky's big, radio frequencies are numerous, power and tuning tradeoffs complex. The current "easy listening" plan proposed for NASA would only result in a "hit" if someone out there is "fortuitously close" or distant but with an "unexpectedly powerful" broadcast signal. For the present program to be *likely* to succeed in finding anybody, L , the length of time communicating societies remain in communication, must be in the order of one million years (even assuming $N=L$).

So we might not be alone after all. But we may all be so far apart that--we might as well be alone.

TO MILBOURNE CHRISTOPHER

by Bob Steiner

MILBOURNE CHRISTOPHER passed away recently. He will be a great loss to the world of skepticism, the world of magic, the world of business, and to all who knew him and knew of him.

A Fellow of *The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal* (CSICOP), Past President of *The Society of American Magicians* (S.A.M.), Chair of the Occult Investigation Committee of S.A.M., elected to the S.A.M. Hall of Fame, exposé of charlatans pretending they have supernatural powers, and more, Milbourne was a magician's magician, a skeptic's skeptic. He was a pioneer in bringing magic to the world of business, using magic with marketing as "a natural for visual presentation of a selling idea...in an entertaining way so that it sticks in the mind." [Milbourne Christopher, in *Advertising Age* in 1952.]

Author of numerous books (including *Mediums, Mystics & and the Occult, ESP, Seers & Psychics*, books on magic, books on the history of magic, and more) and articles, Milbourne was one of the foremost historians in the world on magic, mysticism, and unproven claims in the world of the paranormal.

I recall vividly the enormous impact and considerable inspiration he provided for my future pursuits in this world of the skeptical investigation of claims of the paranormal. His writings, coupled with his masterful performance at Lincoln Center, New York City, about a decade ago, helped a great deal to point me in the direction which I have pursued.

Although others will continue some of his pursuits and

fill some of the positions he held, the loss is heartfelt and irreplaceable.

FROM THE CHAIR

by Bob Steiner

The hottest upcoming prospect is that the *annual CSICOP Conference* will be held at Stanford University on the weekend of November 9-10. Yes, you've been told before, but this bears repetition. Mark your calendars. Plan on attending.

And do plan on HELPING. You see, we're the hosts! Yes, Bay Area Skeptics has chalked up a new first--we're the first local skeptics group to host the annual CSICOP conference--truly a signal honor!

There is much fun and much work in the planning of such an international conference. Don't miss out! To volunteer, contact Robert Sheaffer, Chair of Conference, at 1341 Poe Lane, San Jose, CA 95130; tel: 408/984-2658. We need all the help we can get! Sign on early and often.

Happily this column need not devote itself to pep talks. Just read the rest of this issue, look around, read your local papers (!) -- you will see that Bay Area Skeptics is alive and well and functioning.

Come on out and join us!

The Astrology Debate

Report by Paul Libeu

I OBSERVED the astrology debate held at the annual Mensa meet in June between BAS's Bob Steiner and Lawrence Jerome on the negative side and Jay Jacobs and Jack Fertig on the affirmative ("Resolved: Astrology is valid"). If it can be called a debate.

The pro side failed to define astrology, and offered no defense of its validity. Instead, they began with a meandering commentary whose theme was something approaching, "Well, people have been studying the stars and man a long time."

This left the Con side to provide their own definition and examples so they'd have something to rebut. The Pro side responded, of course, by denying the Con side's definitions and examples (i.e., that's not astrology; she's not a real astrologer) but still without offering any alternatives.

In the end, the Pro side deteriorated into mockery and a series of irritating *ad hominem*s, while the Con side was left to resist these provocations and to repeat their arguments against examples they had to provide themselves.

The pro-astrology side clearly lost the formal debate, but they did succeed in befuddling the Con side somewhat with their indifference to formal debate requirements.

More interesting was the audience. Many (most?) were members of Mensa, the high-IQ society, and some Mensans were enthusiastic supporters of the pro-astrology side. Others, of course, were on the Con side. This suggests a topic for another, and more interesting, debate: Resolved: IQ is to the measure of intelligence as astrology is to the study of the heavens.

The Bay Area Skeptics

presents a free public discussion:

= Parapsychology, Science and Folklore =

- Current issues in parapsychology.
- Is parapsychology really a proto-science?
- Parapsychology and the media!
- Where does parapsychology end and
folklore begin?

==> The speaker will be Loyd Auerbach,
member of the core faculty, Graduate
Parapsychology Program, JFK University.

==> Participate in a discussion with the speaker
and the audience.

Date: Wednesday, August 22, 1984 at 8:00pm

Place: JFK University, Orinda, California

Room 501 (in smaller free-standing classroom building).
Directions: Exit Hwy 24 at the Orinda offramp. If coming
from San Francisco, cross under the freeway. All cars
turn right at Santa Maria Way (the first signal) and
proceed in the direction away from San Francisco, up a
hill (name changes to Altarinda Road). You will see the
entrance to JFK University (12 Altarinda) immediately on
your right. Enter and drive past main building to rear
parking lot.

Sponsored by: The Bay Area Skeptics, the first local
chapter of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of
Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). For more information,
call (415) L+A + T+R+U+T+H.



BAS CALENDAR: AUGUST

- **AUGUST 22, Wednesday, 8 PM - BAS MONTHLY MEETING** at JFK University in Orinda to hear a member of the parapsychology department faculty talk about "**Parapsychology, Science & Folklore**", or "Current issues in parapsychology, is parapsychology really a protoscience, etc."--see the BAS flyer included in this issue for complete details including directions to JFK University in Orinda (12 Altarinda Road, Orinda exit off Highway 24). Host will be Loyd Auerbach, core faculty member with MS parapsychology and a performing magician. This should be a really interesting one right in the eye of the hurricane, folks, so levitate yourselves over the Berkeley Hills to this one! As with all BAS meetings, this is open to the general public.
- **AUGUST 25th, Saturday, 3 PM - BAS BEACH PARTY/STAR PARTY!** -Come to Half Moon Bay to socialize, talk about that week's visit to the parapsychology lab at JFK (see above) and look at the stars through the 10" and 16" telescopes (fog permitting). Starts about 3 pm, hot coals by 6 pm, at the home of Greg Edwards, -41 Ventura Road, take Highway 92 to the coast, north on Highway 1, about 2 miles then on the right is La Dolce Pizza--just past it, take the left. Go 2 blocks, L on Ventura, then 150 yards; house is on the left with a large cypress tree in front. Come one, come all. BYO-everything!
- **AUGUST 28 -SACRAMENTO SKEPTICS**, branch of B.A.S., has its monthly meeting on the last Tuesday of every month. For information, call (916)965-4606 and leave a message.
- **AUGUST 16-19 - New York Magic Symposium** appears in San Francisco for three days, including many stage shows, close-up shows, ten lectures on magic topics, several workshops, and dealers in magical effects. Since so many of our psychic claimants use disguised magic, skeptics often have an interest in professional magic out of self-defense. \$75 registration, contact the Symposium at 2901 Broadway, Suite 124, New York 10025 or call (707) 526-SYMP for registration or information.

- **COMING:** Watch for coming events in the BASIS CALENDAR! And for up-to-the-minute BAS news and events, call **415/LA TRUTH** for a recorded news message, or to leave a message.
- **DEADLINE** for September issue is August 18th; call (415) LA TRUTH to leave message. Send all materials for publication to **The Editor** and all other business to **Bay Area Skeptics**, both at Box 2384, Martinez, CA 94553.

HAUTALA AND STEINER ON RADIO

By Bob Steiner

Earl Hautala joined me in an appearance on *The Bob Lee Show* on KSL Radio, Salt Lake City, on March 22nd. The topic was "Scientific Creationism," and the animated Bob Lee kept the talk show quite lively.

Earl has done his homework. His calm, reasoned analysis of the scientific questions at issue helped bring the listening audience a clearer picture of the void in both scientific and logical thinking in this fake science.

I happened to be in the middle of a major research project on the subject. My book **Scientific Creationism: A Make-Believe Science** will be out in about a month (paperback, about 75 pages, available from Penseur Press, Box 659, El Cerrito, CA 94530 at the pre-publication price of \$6.00, postage paid, California residents add appropriate sales tax).

There was active, often intense participation by those calling in on the show. BAS received several inquiries and some subscriptions as a result of the show.

COMING IN BASIS:

Future issues of BASIS will catch up on long-promised subjects such as the Telex Psychic, Negative Coincidence, the New Age healers versus BAS, a special skeptical quotes quiz, our dowsing meeting reviewed, more clippings, and lots of good articles. Subscribe now!

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