

# **The Mystery Investigator**

Using Science to Investigate the Strange and Mysterious No. 3 : April 2005



## **Talking with the DEAD?**

**We look at six people who claim they chat with the dear departed**



**Who is this man  
and why are  
people so angry?**

## **Mystery Investigators Show**

**Live and "paranormal" at a high school near you**

### **Dr. Phil Plait**

**The BAD Astronomer  
The Moon Hoax  
Planet X and more**

**Merchants of Deception**

**Inside the mind of a Mind Hunter**

**What's going on at Australian  
Pharmacies & Chemists?**

**Your 'Stars' for April**



# CONTENTS

Editorial	3
What in the World?	4
Just How Bad is The BAD Astronomer?	5
Your STARS for April	9
Call me RATBAG!	10
Book Review : <i>Merchants of Deception</i>	12
Talking with the Dead?	13
Lynne Kelly Master of Tauromancy	17
Book Review : <i>Inside the mind of a Mind Hunter</i>	19
Mystery Investigators LIVE	20
Berzerkeley Psychics	21
Ask for AUST R	22
Yellow Bamboozled	23



**Richard & Alynda  
The Mystery Investigators**



**Cover No. 3, April 2005**

Dr. Phil Plait during his 2004 visit to the Deep Space Communication Complex at Tidbinbilla, Australia.

## **The Mystery Investigator**

**Editor**  
Richard Saunders

**Assistant Editor**  
Steve Roberts

**Art, Layout and Design**  
Richard Saunders

**Quackery Consultant**  
Peter Bowditch

**Ass-trological Sciences**  
Orb Fontal

**Reporters**  
Alynda Brown  
Karen Stollznow  
Monica Duré

All care is taken to ensure that '**The Mystery Investigator**' is a fun and enjoyable read. The views expressed in this publication are those of the writers and not necessarily those of the editor or **The Mystery Investigators**.

Articles maybe reprinted with permission and with due acknowledgement to '**The Mystery Investigator**'

# Editorial

## Look for the Hook

Richard Saunders

Investigating mysteries is one of the strongest motivations we humans have. We are a type of animal that wants to know, wants to find out, wants to solve problems and puzzles. We long to find out what lies on the other side of the hill, the other side of the country, the other side of the universe.

This sense of wonder is woven into us from birth. You don't have to try too hard to spark the interest of children, they live to soak up new knowledge and constantly ask questions.

This is exactly what the Mystery Investigators team discover each time they perform their show 'A Good Question'. The questions asked by children are good questions indeed. Each one is a cry for knowledge, a plea to find out more and more about the world. In the case of the MI show, the questions revolve around the truly strange world of the paranormal.

What we, as Mystery Investigators, also learn is that many children accept as true whatever they see on TV. This is not to say that they think their favourite fiction adventure is real, but rather that anything presented as true is regarded by them as true.

A case in point is the so-called documentary series, 'Sensing Murder'. This show uses 'psychics' in an attempt to gain new insights into real life murder cases that have yet to be solved. Even though this show is largely a fantasy, many children take it at face value and really believe that these 'psychics' are helping police to solve crimes. But no crimes are solved, no murderers brought to justice.

Other examples are the TV shows of John Edward and James Van Praagh. Both of these performers claim to talk with the dead and demonstrate their abilities on their respective TV shows. Again, children take it as being all true and not simply make believe - despite John Edward displaying a disclaimer to this effect.

The Mystery Investigators are able, in a small way, to bust many of these myths. We do actual demonstrations of cold reading (the real skill of psychics) and point out to children that it is in fact hard working and dedicated police who solve crimes, sometimes many years after the event.

A sense of wonder is a vital part of being human. It inspires us, it moves us, it drives us to learn more. It can also be used against us to help to sell more soap powder or the latest car. We must look carefully at the bait and beware of the possible hook.

## Mystery Investigators Fashion!



[www.cafepress.com/mysteryinv](http://www.cafepress.com/mysteryinv)

# What in the WORLD?

A round-up of the strange and mysterious from all over the planet.

## SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Super star 'psychic' Sharina of radio fame found herself in the dark after a power outage ended her show. Neither she nor the 20 other psychics and tarot card readers present foresaw this event.



## EBAY - INTERNET BIDDING

A new fad has hit eBay. It seems that any bit of food that bears even a passing resemblance to anything 'holy' is up for auction.

Crazy items include 'The Legs of Jesus' found in Bag of Cheetos and 'Pope Tart' which is an imagine of Pope John Paul II on a Pop Tart (well, sort of.) We wonder what will be next?

## DUBBO, AUSTRALIA

People in the western NSW town were running for their cameras as a 'UFO' was spotted in the sky. "It looked like a bird, but much larger... with a flat top and a deeper shape at the bottom," said one witness. The local police were called in, the 'UFO Researchers Independent Network' was notified and the story made the local newspaper. Even sceptics were scratching their heads until it was discovered that the 'UFO' was in fact just a kite flown by a local father and son. "We couldn't stop laughing when we read the story," said Mr. Cremin, owner of the 'UFO'.

## MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA

Underneath Melbourne's Crown Casino, you can find a Feng Shui Store. One wonders if the casino would really allow such a store on their premises if Feng Shui did indeed work and brought luck to the gamblers.

## SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA

Parents at a recent Baby & Childrens Expo had every right to be concerned when told by certain exhibitors not to vaccinate their babies. Even more startling was the advice given to them, that in order to safeguard their babies against disease, they should use nothing more than water with special magical powers! The exhibitors in question? Chiropractors and Homeopaths.

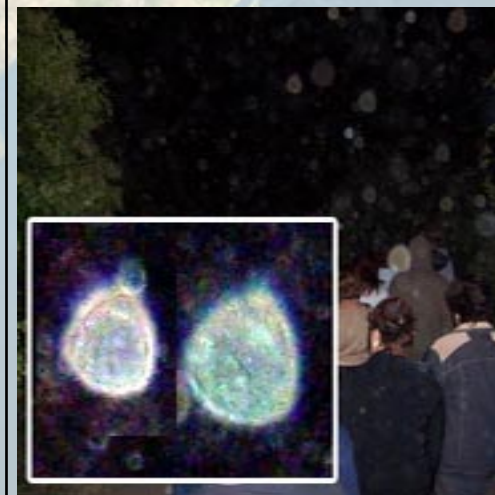
## WORLD WIDE

With the massive increase of digital camera ownership, not to mention the thousands of people who now have mobile phone cameras, it's a real mystery why photos of UFOs have, if anything, decreased. We here at the *Mystery Investigator* long for the good old days when you could be assured of seeing fuzzy, out of focus pictures of lights in the sky.

## GHOST TOURS, WORLD WIDE

And speaking of digital cameras, there has been an upsurge in so-called 'Spirit Orb' photos

reported from all over the world, especially on ghost tours. These orbs are in reality tiny particles of dust that reflect the light from the camera's flash. But not amount of arguing will convince true believers who continue to claim that the orbs are lost spirits trying to make contact.



Not spirits or ghosts, just tiny particles of dust reflecting the flash.

Send your reports of the strange and weird to:

[reports@mysteryinvestigators.com](mailto:reports@mysteryinvestigators.com)

# Just how bad is The **BAD** Astronomer?

Dr. Phil Plait runs a highly successful web site dedicated to combating those who wish to re-write space history. A long time critic of 'the moon landing hoax', he is a regular on US TV and radio and recently visited Australia as a guest of Australian Skeptics. Phil spoke to us from his home in Northern California.

**MI:** When was the first time someone called you "The Bad Astronomer" and what did you think?

**Phil:** I made it up myself, as a joke. I thought it was funny, and ironic. It didn't occur to me that people would think it meant I was a 'bad' astronomer. It was just a nickname! I still think it's funny. My mom hates it.

**MI:** Is that where the title of your book came from?

**Phil:** The title came from my website, called, imaginatively, Bad Astronomy. \*That\* name came from a few different things. The website had been around for about 5 years, but had no real name. It was just "my website". The URLs were always fairly intimidating, like <http://www.webhostingcentral.com/client/~plait/index.html> or something horrifying like that. I wanted to get a real domain for it, and that meant a real name. It was in 1998, and I wanted

it in time for the big Leonid meteor storm, which was supposed to have hundreds or even 1000s of meteors an hour.

A friend of mine had redesigned the site, and it was looking good. I was thinking along the lines of Bad Astronomy, when I found the site Bad Science, which debunked a few common misconceptions. I emailed him about it, and he said go ahead, use the name. So I did, and now, seven years later, I'm stuck with it for good or else.

**MI:** And now your site is becoming very popular. How many hits do you get a month?

**Phil:** In January I had a quarter of a million visits from about 110,000 people. That's about standard, 200,000 - 250,000

pages served. From what I can tell, it's one of the top ten busiest pure astronomy sites on the web although APOD, Universe Today, and The Nine Planets are bigger (APOD is \*seriously\* bigger). UT and I run neck and neck (I know the web proprietor; we're friends and send a lot of traffic and advice each others' way)

**MI:** Do you think it's your Moon Hoax pages that brings people in?

**Phil:** Yes, definitely. It's still, after three years, the single most popular page on the site. It's viewed about a thousand times a day, three times the next most popular page (my movie review index page). The discussion forum is by far the most popular feature of the site, but it's hard to gauge that exactly, as the software is complicated to track.

**MI:** Are you surprised by the amount of older people, people who saw the Apollo 11 moon landing live on TV, falling for the hoax theory?

**Phil:** Some people saw it, and think it



Dr. Phil Plait during his 2004 visit to the Deep Space Communication Complex at Tidbinbilla, Australia.

was a fake. Cripes, the guy who started the whole hoax idea was involved with the Apollo program!

**MI:** Do you think that the moon hoax is a passing craze?

**Phil:** Yes... well, it took a long time to build up and it hit its peak just after the Fox documentary. I'd like to thank Australia for sending us Rupert Murdoch by the way. It's dying off again right now, I don't think it's got the legs it used to have. I will say that the moon hoax page on my site is still the most popular static page on my site. But my new blog is catching up, the astrology page is catching up. It's like UFOs will never go away, astrology will never go away, the moon hoax will always be around but well at least people are coming to my page and I think I'm

making a difference. Penn & Teller are doing an episode of their show about it and interviewed me, but it's not the story it was a few years ago.

**MI:** *Are there still people saying that the Earth will collide with Planet X?*

**Phil:** Yes, but this is really dying away. Certainly Nancy Leader who was the big name in all this who said we were all going to die in May 2003, her credibility is dropping down. There are others who are promoting it but they are not getting much attention. The newer crowd are smarter and don't give an actual date for when this planet hits us, they just say "it's going to be soon." Trouble is 'soon' never comes so they can keep stringing it along, milking the market.

**MI:** *Do you deal much with Crop Circles?*

**Phil:** No. There are some things I won't touch because they are just too silly. You know, when people come out and admit they made them, have the plans and have videos of them making them and then these 'cerealogists' who study 'agriglyphs', I love these words that make them sound legitimate, come out and say, "this is real, there is no way a human could have made this", well, your 15 minutes of fame is up guys. I have a review of the movie 'Signs' on my web site, that's the closest I come to it.

**MI:** *How hard is it for humans to get their head around the size and scale of space?*

**Phil:** Very hard... let's say impossible. We were not evolved to be able to take in the size of space, the distances involved, I mean I could show you mathematically how far the stars are from us but we can never really understand it as we would take you about 114 years to drive a car to the sun going at 100km/h if that helps. We teach people about the scales involved by using a 100 foot rope with the



[www.badastronomy.com](http://www.badastronomy.com)

sun and one end and Pluto at the other. It shows you how crowded the inner solar system is and far our Pluto is.

**MI:** *President Bush would like the US to go back to the moon and to Mars. What do you think of this?*

**Phil:** Yes and no... I don't agree with much of what Bush says. Yes it's a good idea to go back to the moon, there are a lot of good reasons to do it, one of which is that sense of exploration. You know in the 50's, 60's and 70's we had that spirit of adventure, a golden age of science education that was fantastic, I mean our lives depend on science education. We can all see how anti-science is creeping up on us like Creationism and the anti-vaccination people. So there are good reasons to inspire people in science and go to the moon and Mars would certainly do that. There are other reasons, we need to expand into the cosmos, I mean we shouldn't keep all our eggs in one basket because one day that asteroid is going to hit. We need to have a self sustaining colony on the moon or somewhere else. It will be very expensive to go back to the moon, prohibitively expensive to go to Mars at this time and we just don't have the technology to do it. It's a 6 month trip to Mars, one solar flare and the mission is over and we don't have any way to keep astronauts alive for that 6 months voyage. We are doing the right thing in sending probes, look at the amazing success of

the rovers with thousands of photos and bits of data. Sadly the Voyager probes are being shut down, even though they only cost a couple of million dollars a year and that's a pittance for NASA, we are losing Hubble yet we are still funding the international space station which is a huge waste of money, a huge waste of time... the sooner we stop working

on it the better... that money and effort could be far better spent getting back the moon.

**MI:** *What would you do if you were the director of NASA?*

**Phil:** I'd be looking into more and better ways to get into low Earth orbit. Our rockets should be doing better by now. I'd offer a billion dollar prize to the first company to get to the moon, like the X-prize. NASA's job, in my opinion, is to do the kind of research that private industry cannot do. Certainly more robotic probes, they really pay off. The pictures being returned from Saturn are worth their weight in gold.

**MI:** *Who are your heroes?*

**Phil:** The ones you'd expect... Carl Sagan. But I know many of the people I thought of as heroes are now friends like James Randi and Michael Shermer so it's a bit weird. Anyone who stands up and supports science in the face of adversity is a hero.

**MI:** *Reaching out to kids is very important for the Mystery Investigators, you must have great fun when talking to them about space.*

**Phil:** Yeah, it's fantastic, they are very receptive. I'm trying to get out there more and more as a public speaker, it's my favorite thing to do. Private corporations, schools... I LOVE doing that, it's so much fun. It's amazing to be able to also fool people and then show them how they were fooled. Teaching critical thinking.

**MI:** 2004 was the first time you visited Australia, the first time for you in the southern hemisphere, were you surprised at what you saw in the night sky?

**Phil:** I saw Orion rising UPSIDE-DOWN. You whacky Aussies. I yelled something obscene I had to watch that for a while. When I saw the Magellanic Clouds which are dwarf galaxies orbiting our Milky Way, I found it a very emotional experience, like a warm wave coming over me. You have to understand that I have been studying these galaxies for a long time, but I had never seen them with my own eyes. I'll never have that feeling again but it was cool to have it that once. The same with the southern cross, it's just too far south for me to see from the USA.

**MI:** What would you expect astronomers to discover in the next 20 years?

**Phil:** Ah.. Dah! I don't know. I mean the last 20 years are full of discoveries. In 1998 astronomers discovered that the universe is accelerating as it expands. I have no idea what we'll discover, maybe the reason for this acceleration. There are also things we are finding out about gravity waves. When something moves it creates ripples in the fabric of space, even when you move your finger, but that's too small to detect. When two black holes collide it makes very sharp waves. We have been able to observe its effect on the orbit of stars. We might be able to test the big bang... for the first time in history we may be able to test the origin of the universe. Now that will be one for the creationists. Maybe we'll also discover a 10<sup>th</sup> planet in our solar system or

asteroids that orbit between the Sun and Mercury. There is lots of stuff out there, cutting edge stuff.


**MI:** Do you think that Sci-Fi has contributed to our understanding of space and science?

**Phil:** Sure because it inspires people. A lot of people my age were inspired by Star Trek, there is no doubt. But you have to be careful not to take your Sci-Fi too literally. Movies like "Deep Impact" gave the wrong impression of what is possible. We cannot just go up and blow an asteroid or comet into bits. Even if we could, it would not make any difference, you'd still have the same amount of energy hitting the Earth.

**MI:** How would you spend \$1,000,000?

**Phil:** I'd buy a really BIG TELESCOPE. That or fly to Belgium, to eat chocolate.

**MI:** Thank you Phil. See you in Australia again!

 **Richard Saunders**



### Some highlights of Phil's 2004 Australian visit.

1. Phil signs a copy of his book after a talk at the Australian Museum.
2. Brave American attacks a deadly Koala.
3. It's Dr. Karl Kruszelnicki at ABC radio JJJ with Mal Bampton and our Phil.
4. Basking in the glory after addressing the 2004 Australian Skeptics Convention.
5. This time at ABC radio 702 with announcer Angela Catterns.



## The Great Water Divining DVD

A fascinating look into the world of water divining in Australia over the last 23 years.

It is also packed with observations and insights from diviners and skeptics alike. See James Randi make one of his finest appeals to reason and the skeptical point of view. See all sorts of diviners using all sorts of divining rods in hopes of winning the tests. See Dick Smith's changing hair style!

**Total Running Time: 120 minutes**

### **The DVD includes**

**An Introduction to Divining - 2003**

**The Mighty Mitta Muster Divining Test - 2002**

**A Current Affair Divining Test - 1989**

**James Randi In Australia - Divining Test - 1980**

### **Special DVD Features**

Interactive Menu Scene Selection (VHS Video also available)



This CD is truly a goldmine, a comprehensive reference tool for educators, students, researchers, and journalists, an extensive resource on all subject matter worthy of the skeptical eye, and a fabulously entertaining and enjoyable production to pass the time with.

**Amanda Chesworth,**  
*Skeptical Inquirer*

The only problem I can see is a positive thing - it will take a huge amount of time to read all the articles from down under. Do I need to mention this? The CD is formidable!

**Willy Wegner,** *Danish Skeptics*

## 23 years of *the Skeptic* - Journal of Australian Skeptics

The Great Skeptic CD2 follows in the footsteps of the original Great Skeptic CD, adding over 1000 more pages of searchable information. As well as all 91 past issues of the Skeptic, this CD also contains the books, **Creationism An Australian Perspective**, **Creationism Scientists Respond**, **Creationism The Other Quote Book**, **Skeptical**, **Nuclear Electricity Gigawatts**, **Skeptical Poems** and the humorous **Subscription Reminders**.

**\*PLUS\*** Over 10 hours of audio including the 1988 Australian Skeptics Convention, 2001 Dinner talks by Barry Williams, Prof. Ian Plimer and Peter Bowditch and episodes of 'Theories of Everything' from 2003.

## THE GREAT SKEPTIC CD2

**Great Water Divining DVD \$25 - Great Skeptic CD2 \$55**

**[www.skeptics.com.au](http://www.skeptics.com.au)**



# Your STARS

Very Scientific Ass-trology



**Aries** 19 April - 13 May

A trip will see you travel this month. Remember to pack before you go, or you'll have to come back. Once you're there, unpack unless you forgot to pack in the first place. Beware of people who bite dogs. Your unlucky numbers are 2, 97, 286263, 1/4 and 8.835



**Taurus** 14 May - 19 June

No one knows your secret, not even you. But the stars know everything so just you watch it baby or else! Weakness is not your strong point this month and could lead you to make decisions you may or may not regret. Your unlucky numbers are off-line. Try next time.



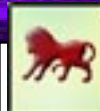
**Gemini** 20 June - 20 July

A clean house, a clean mind and a clean body... mmm, I think the stars are talking about someone else. Sorry. OK, your house needs cleaning. Call Zodiac Cleaners today. As for your mind and body, forget it. Your lucky colours have not been invented yet.



**Cancer** 21 July - 9 Aug

It's time to stop reading other people's horrorscopes. If you are not a Cancer then go away. If you are a Cancer, why not read some other people's horrorscopes! It's fun and they might fit you better than this one. Your lucky star signs are Lupus, Hydrus, Octans and Vela.



**Leo** 10 Aug - 15 Sept

The stars are very clear for you this month unless you live in a big city with bright lights or it's cloudy outside. OK, time to start thinking about a trip to the country. Please see the advice for Aries. Your lucky songs are the 'Albanian National Anthem' and 'Hit the Road Jack'.



**Virgo** 16 Sept - 30 Oct

You must stop watching TV and start watching the radio. Remember, a watched pot does in fact boil. You can treat your boils with cream. There are so many omens and some owomens that are around your aura, aura maybe not. No lucky nothing for you this month.



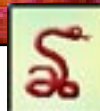
**Libra** 31 Oct - 22 Nov

Be sure to be sure before you are sure of your next move. Leave nothing to chance which means you'll just have to cheat. To help you cheat, go and see your local psychic and ask them what the next winning lotto numbers will be. When you find out, let me know!



**Scorpio** 23 Nov - 29 Nov

Your lucky number can be worked out by using the science of Numerology. Add your birthdate numbers together which will give your life number. Add this to the current year to get your past life number. Add these together with your birthdate again and.... ummm..errr, that is... yeah... your lucky number is 2



**Ophiuchus** 30 Nov - 17 Dec

This is a time for standing in front of the mirror and reflecting. Don't smash it or you'll get 7 years bad luck or at least you'll have to buy a new mirror. Take care in the kitchen or in the bathroom and don't confuse the two. Your lucky months are any with a 'k' or 'q' in them.



**Sagittarius** 18 Dec - 18 Jan

A new job is in sight so just keep looking. In fact a new job at this magazine might come up if the editor ever reads these horrorscopes. I too am a Sagittarius, that was until I found out about the Precession of the Equinoxes, now I'm a Scorpio. Your lucky animal is a slug.



**Capricorn** 19 Jan - 15 Feb

Many problems in your life... no, sorry, that should read, Many problems in your lift! Stay out of lifts and tall buildings. If you use lifts in your shoes, then you should be walking tall. Your lucky numbers are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 0 in any order.



**Aquarius** 16 Feb - 11 March

Being a water sign makes you a very fluid sort of person. This means you like to drink... a lot. You also like to swim but not at the same time as drinking. Not many Aquarians know that their soul-mates are also drinkers. Your lucky numbers are XI, XV and XL + GST.



**Pisces** 12 March - 18 April

The sign of the fish. Look out for hooks, lines and sinkers. Don't bait anyone or you'll be reeling. If you rock the boat you'll find yourself up the creek without a paddle. There are no lucky numbers for you this month as I sold them to a Virgo.

Stars by Orb Fontal



**Call me**

**RATBAG!**

**Peter Bowditch is one of the most despised men on the internet. His enemies range from those who would end all vaccination to scam pyramid companies out to take your money. Alynda Brown investigates the man they call Ratbag.**

went to the same one as my brothers. We know the same jokes and our daughters are the same age. Most important of all we share a common interest in bringing critical thinking to the Australian public. It was only right and proper that after a night with me in beautiful Adelaide, Peter woke up the next morning a member of Australian Skeptics.

It's a small world. I first met Peter Bowditch at the 1999 Australian Skeptics National Convention in Adelaide. He was one of the speakers and his subject was the Y2K bug. I was one of the people working in IT who had to put in 10 hours of work over the changeover period from 1999 to 2000, so I was very interested in what he had to say. It was interesting to hear him confirm what many of us in IT knew...that Y2K was an issue that needed to be addressed but many people were cashing in on the fact that this was more dangerous in public perception than in reality.

I say that it's a small world because we met in Adelaide. We subsequently discovered that not only do we live 10 minutes from each other in Sydney - we also grew up within 5 kms of each other (albeit a few years apart). I went to the same high school as his sister and he

What amazed us at the time we met was that we had never heard of each other before that convention, considering how closely our interests lay. Peter Bowditch runs a website called RatbagsDotCom. In 1999 the site consisted of three parts each part devoted to different types of Ratbag.

### **Quintessence of the Loon (Mad)**

"Some ratbags are gentle, deluded souls with ideas so bizarre that you would not believe it if someone told you about them. Quintessence of the Loon is dedicated to bringing you the best of this nuttiness, with new links every two weeks to places so odd that you will think we are making it up."

### **The Millenium Project (Bad)**

"One sort of ratbag is the dangerous lunatic. In an ideal world, these people would not have web sites. The Millenium Project lists a thousand of these ghastly sites, and new links and commentaries are added each week."

### **Full Canvas Jacket (Sad)**

"Another example of "obsessive or discreditable" is the person who rants and rages incoherently at length. Full Canvas Jacket is a site where such people are honoured by inclusion in a collection of Noteworthy Unhinged Lunatic Rants."

The part of the website that I spend most of my time is the Millenium Project. Peter wanted to make sure he had 1000 sites listed by the time the year 2000 rolled around and he made it. This is the site where I believe Peter does his best work. Whilst campaigning against all sorts of madness one of his main stands is against all sorts of medical quackery... ..anti-vaccination agitators in particular. Here is a quote from his site to give you an idea of the gentle, forgiving style of Peter Bowditch.

"It is almost beyond the

comprehension of sane people that there should be organised opposition to vaccines. A special place should be reserved in Hell for people who want to kill or maim children by preventing them from receiving vaccinations.

I thought about changing the word "liars" here after investigation showed that many of these people are simply deluded, often through a lack of scientific knowledge. However, ignorance is no excuse, especially when any attempt to correct the ignorance or error is met with ridicule, spite and pride in ignorance. Something is not less wrong because you don't know it's wrong - the world was round when everyone thought it was flat and bacteria caused diseases before anyone suspected that such tiny organisms existed."

Over the years Peter has become a critical expert in the area of medical fraud. His stance against the purveyors of this nonsense has brought him into the firing line of people who make millions from selling fake cures to the most vulnerable of people...those that are terminally ill.

Last year we went to Tijuana in Mexico to visit one of these clinics. Calling the street where this "clinic" was located a

**Peter's web sites pull no punches when it comes to calling a Quack a Quack and a Shonk a Shonk.**

slum would be an insult to slums. There were pharmaceuticals being sold here but they were the type that is generally sold through the windows of cars. This "clinic" is run by one of the worst examples of medical charlatan – the cancer quack. For more information, visit Peter's site [www.ratbags.com/rsoles/comment/clark02.htm](http://www.ratbags.com/rsoles/comment/clark02.htm)

Multi Level Marketing, psychics, racism, creationism and cults are other areas that bear the scars of Peter's lashing tongue. The proponents of these "isms" and their supporters are more than willing to give their opinion of his ignorance, arrogance and lack of paternal ancestry. Their rants are mercilessly reproduced on the website and Peter's comments about them provide some of the funniest reading on the net.

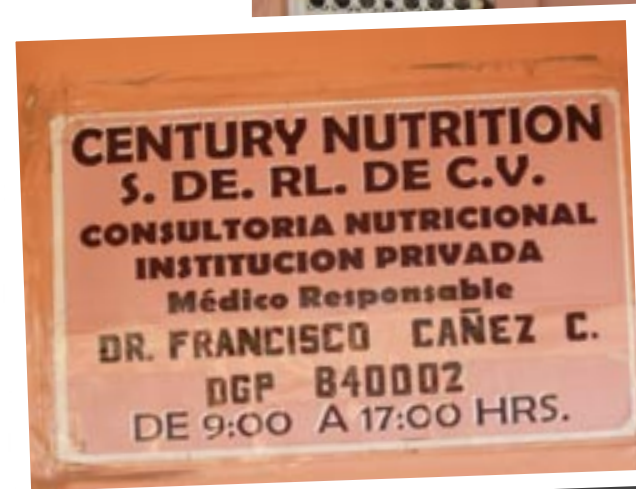
It isn't all about the bad guys. Peter opened another part of this web site a couple of years ago. This section is called the "Green Light" and contains useful references to websites and other sources of truthful information to help combat the nonsense that is all too pervasive. I was in Adelaide teaching one day when one of my students noticed that I was adding an artificial sweetener, aspartame, to my coffee. He told me that

I shouldn't be using it as that sweetener was carcinogenic. I took him straight to the Green Light. Using the references found on this site we were able to find truthful information provided by various health agencies including this

"The SCF (European Commission's Scientific Committee on Food) also concluded that there is no need to revise the previously established Acceptable Daily Intake (ADI) calculation for aspartame of 40 milligrams per kilogram of body weight per day (40mg/kg bw/day).

This means that an average adult weighing only 65 kgs can safely consume over 2.5 grams of aspartame per day. I drink a lot of coffee but even I couldn't consume that much!

This is the reason why Peter puts all this time and effort into RatbagsDotCom and his other website the Australian Council Against Health Fraud. If the information provided saves the life of one child because their parents haven't been frightened away from vaccination or someone with cancer seeks proper medical help instead of "miracle" cures then all the effort is worth while.



Peter's travels have taken him far and wide. These photos were taken outside a 'clinic' in Tijuana, Mexico.

## Book Review

# Merchants of Deception



Often I am asked why I do what I do with Mystery Investigators. The answer is it is enjoyable performing in schools and elsewhere, and I get to meet some really great people with diverse interests. However, I suppose the main reason is that by teaching critical thinking I am able to give people some tools that will help protect them against vulnerability.

Many of the topics we deal with can be harmless. Most people don't take astrology seriously nor base really important decisions on the "stars" in the newspaper. Some people, however, do take things to the extreme and there are many people who are willing to take advantage of this.

Unfortunately the 'baddies' do not usually wear black hats or have a 'shifty' expressions. The dangers can come from places where you least expect.

One man has written a book describing a journey down a path that promised everything and ended with him losing – almost – everything.

"Merchants of Deception" is the story of Eric Scheibeler. It is a frightening story of how normal, hardworking and intelligent people can be lead into a downward spiral leading nowhere but despair. Sounds a bit melodramatic doesn't it? I found that I was unable to read too much of this for too long before I wanted to get away and recover. Yet I couldn't stay away from it for very long as I felt I owed something to this man – even if it was just to let him tell me his story. His story is gripping.

The particular baddie for Scheibeler is the Amway company. They sell soap powder don't they?

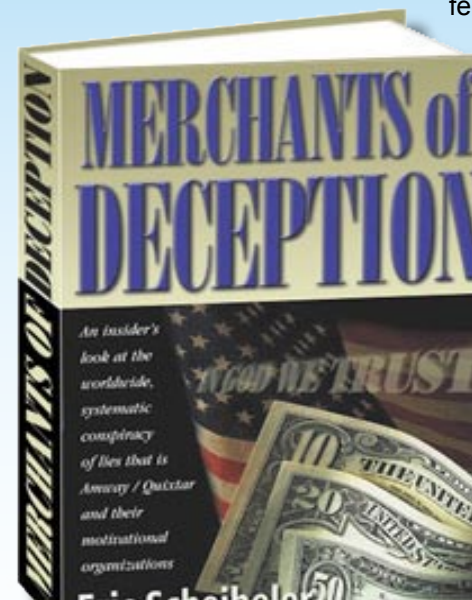
Like astrology, Amway is something that not many people take seriously. However, as we read in Scheibeler's book, for those that do take it seriously the result can be devastating. The rewards that are promised by Amway are seductive. Who amongst us does not want financial freedom and more time with our children? If we were to take a vote I'd be the first to raise my hand. Scheibeler talks of Amway as a cult. He

describes in chilling detail the methods used to dull people's senses and reshape their thoughts into the way of the cult. They are subtle and mesmerising. The thing that I found the most disturbing was recounting of the way that their whole family put their lives on hold for year after year, chasing what turned out to be nothing. Eric Scheibeler sounds like he may have been an Amway failure, but in fact he attained one of their highest levels.

Only those in the highest echelons of Amway make a significant amount of money. In one section he describes how they had worked a staggering amount of hours to achieve the "Pearl" level - well over a hundred hours most weeks. This is where, to use his own words, "the big money was supposed to kick in". In this month his organisation moved over \$70,000 in merchandise and as a Pearl he was looking forward to receiving a big bonus cheque. They had been told for years that people achieving this level were on incomes of \$80,000 to \$100,000 per year and retiring. When the bonus cheque arrived it was for exactly \$64.

So why did it take them so long to figure out what was happening? One of the reasons is that there are strict rules in the organisation about "crosslining". That is communicating with people who are not in your direct organisation. Everyone believes that everyone else is making huge amounts of money but because it is forbidden to compare notes with each other they never find out the truth. When they don't achieve the rewards they expect they are made to feel guilty that they haven't worked hard enough.

For all of the loss described in this book you are not left without hope. Eric Scheibeler and his family have survived with their health and their family intact. He has written this book and allowed it to be distributed freely over the internet so that everyone may be armed with the knowledge of these insidious techniques.



*At the time of writing, you can download Merchants Of Deception for free from Eric Scheibeler's website.*

 **Alynda Brown**

# Talking with the DEAD?

The claim of talking with the dead is nothing new, although you'd never think it, judging by the interest in American performers like John Edward and James van Praagh. Popular as they are, they are still the new kids on the block when it comes to contacting the 'other side'. Their gimmick? TV exposure and lots of it.

But there are those in the trenches who will never reach the same dizzying heights of international stardom, yet they also claim to be able to talk with the dead. Unlike Edward and van Praagh, these small time operators are unlikely to ever get their own international TV series or make the same sort of money as 'the major players'. Yet there is still a lucrative market for their talents.

This overview looks at six 'clairvoyants/psychics' who are based in or at now operating in Australia and New Zealand. Each one of them performs at live shows, each one claims they have a real supernatural ability and each one will not only contact the dead right in front of your eyes, they will also get answers.... or that's the way it can seem.

*Note: In order to gain a better understanding of this subject, it is highly recommended that you read Ian Rowland's "Full Facts Book of Cold Reading". (see page 16) It is then recommended that you attend a live performance of a 'clairvoyant' to judge for yourself.*

---

Richard Saunders & Karen Stollznow



## David Thompson

David Thompson is visiting from the UK. He claims to talk with the dead.

Not only does he claim to chat with the departed, David Thompson also claims to be a 'psychic surgeon', that is he is able to 'heal' people by removing tumors and other malignant growths from within the body, without the need to cut the skin! Does his fingers somehow demilitarise and penetrate the body? We can only wonder.

But getting back to his main claim of talking with the dead. In one of his stage shows, David Thompson came across as a nice and friendly sort of guy with no pretensions. His cold reading technique however, was not all that it could have been. He did a so-so performance but made many errors in his routine. He, for example, often found himself down 'dead ends' so to speak, when his subject could not relate to the bait Thompson was casting. "**Who is the man who had the dog please?**" Instead of capitalising on a negative response, Thompson kept hammering the point. Yes, this can work very well when the subject finally makes some connection, but fails when it's obvious they are getting nowhere. Another mistake was for Thompson to bring up the topic of suicide when fishing for a hit. Not good at all as it brought the whole show down to a depressing level.

At one stage a very interesting trick backfired when Thompson, discovering his subject was born overseas, used the following line. "**Your husband.... I feel he was not born in Australia.... I'm getting a name.... his grandmother is with me.... I... ah, I cannot.... she just told me her name, but I'm not even going to try to pronounce it! It's very strange. What was her name please.**" "**I don't know, I never met her.**" came the reply. Maybe the grandmother mumbled. This trick would have worked, and probably has worked, when the subject does in fact come back with a foreign sounding name.

Maybe David Thompson does talk with the dead when he gives private readings. Pity he didn't do it on stage.

David Thompson is 'performing' at Spiritualist Churches around Sydney. See his site for more details.

[www.davidthompson.com.au](http://www.davidthompson.com.au)



## Luke Patrick

Luke Patrick is based in the Hunter Valley, NSW. He claims with talk with the dead.

'Psychic medium' Luke Patrick has a nationwide travelling psychic show called "From the Other Side". His audiences are promised, **"know that you are in good hands, with lots of love and support"**. In reality, Luke opens his show with **"If I don't make contact with your**

**loved one, it is not my fault, it is yours. Don't expect anything."**

How does Luke explain his 'talent'? He "receives messages" from the dead. They may be visions of faces or names that appear like text on a computer screen. Thoughts, like memories of the deceased. Sounds, like voices or music. The smell of perfume or the ocean. But what does he really do? Cold reading! The common names, common diseases approach! **"Who has the letter D? No? S?"** Then later, **"who has an N? Can anyone give me a P?"** Running through the letters of the alphabet until hands are raised, Luke then lists common names until an audience member takes the bait. Then he lists a number of common causes of death until one is interpreted as a 'hit'. Sometimes, in their eagerness to "make contact", people will provide all the fodder a 'medium' can need for a cold reading. **"I see a 'B'. Does that mean anything?" "Yes, 'B' was Bill. Short for William. My father. He died in England recently"**.

When Luke has 'received' this information he would give a 'personal' message from the loved one, "I'm sorry. That's all I have. I'll leave that with you." A pretty unconvincing act!

Luke told the audience **"when people die, they go to what I like to call the 'heaven hospital'. This is where they are healed of their earthly afflictions."** People even "de-age" and "are made whole again". Evil people are punished, reincarnated as "poor people to pay their karmic debt" while rich people are rewarded for poor past lives, **"Joan Collins lived in the slums of Calcutta in a previous life. This life is her reward for suffering that."** How silly and circular is that?

Luke did a final reading. **"I have an 'M'. Anyone lose someone with an 'M' in their name?"** Someone said, **"I lost a Max"**. Quietly, she proceeded to tell her story to Luke. Shockingly, he repeated her story, as though it were a 'message' sent to him! So...the lady spoke quietly and Luke loudly repeated all she said to the audience. This gave the effect of him 'receiving' the information when he had really elicited it! How does he do it? Luke 'receives' more messages from the living than the dead!

Luke Patrick's website is: [www.lukepatrick.org](http://www.lukepatrick.org)



## Jeanette Wilson

Jeanette Wilson was born in the UK but now calls New Zealand home. She claims with talk with the dead.

Jeanette Wilson is very slick and very well presented. She is quite attractive and seems like the sort of person you could trust.

Wilson's notoriety received a boost when in 2004, she was the subject of a 20/20 story, 20/20 being a New Zealand investigative current affairs type TV program. Wilson did a live show, talking with the dead in front of an audience. **"Can you place the name Tom or Thomas?... I'm getting a William or Bill.... Who's John?... Can you place the name Frank in the spirit world?.... Who's Jack?"** Also taking part in the story was NZ Skeptics Chair-entity, Vicki Hyde, who sat in on Wilson's act. Vicki was given just a few minutes out of the 28 minute story to try and explain cold reading to the viewers. Although she made lucid and telling points, the story was clearly biased in favour of talking with the dead.

The story turned to pure farce when 20/20 **"Put Jeanette Wilson to the test!"** And just what sort of test was used? A one-on-one session with someone not known to Wilson... in other words a cold readers' delight with not a skeptic in sight. Having a skeptic with cold reading skills present would have killed the story, something 20/20 had no wish to do. So, Wilson was given free rein and her subject, with no knowledge of cold reading techniques, was suitably amazed. In fact Wilson relied on histrionics to divert attention from her ultimately inaccurate reading. So much for the test, so much for 20/20.

Jeanette Wilson might indeed be able to talk with the dead. She may do it every afternoon and twice before breakfast. But when in front of a live audience or on TV, she uses standard cold reading techniques. She also uses uncritical TV shows to promote herself, her tours and her books.

For more reading on Jeanette Wilson, see:

<http://tinyurl.com/akaae>

[www.listener.co.nz/printable,2598.sm](http://www.listener.co.nz/printable,2598.sm)



## Margaret Birkin

**Margaret Birkin is based in Queensland. She claims to talk with the dead.**

According to her web site, Birkin also channels Maitreya, “a New Age Ascended Master”. Channeling, once popular in the 1980s, has these days lost much of its novelty.

So, to her live show. When talking to her subject, Birkin tends to chat about what might happen in the future. **“Are you married? - I have a feeling that your husband will within a year start thinking about working for himself.”** Or she will give advice from ‘Upstairs’. **“They are telling me that you should do this or that etc...”** or **“There will be a woman coming into your life and she’ll need your help.”** There is nothing new here, no amazing insights. Another technique that works well is to bring humor into the act. To one woman, **“Do you have a son?”** **“Oh Gwad!!”** came the reply. Much laughter in the audience, followed by Dent saying **“Yes, I know you have a son”** and then imparting more advice from the beyond.

There are some disturbing aspects to Birkin’s show and ‘teachings’. Among these are;

- People who die in car accidents actually leave their bodies before impact
- The victims of the 2004 Tsunami all chose to die that way and none suffered (This was placed on her web site after the event.)
- People with cancer chose to have it
- Cot death is due to reincarnated souls using up the last bit of their previous life that ended too early

It takes a certain amount of nerve to play around with such serious issues, issues that can and do impact on many people. Imagine the impact on Birkin if an irate parent of a recently deceased cot death baby lost their temper during one of shows? Or what about someone battling cancer being told it was their decision to have it in the first place?

Birkin’s predictions, made in 2003, include; Saddam Hussein would never be found – Australia has nothing to fear from terrorist attacks – Something will happen to George Bush – Osama bin Laden is already dead.

Margaret Birkin’s web site is: [www.maitreya-edu.org/Margaret.htm](http://www.maitreya-edu.org/Margaret.htm)



## The Amazing Valda

**The Amazing Valda is based in Newcastle, NSW. She claims to talk with the dead.**

Normally, stage cold readers find it hard to bomb. Their audiences are ready and waiting to see them talk with the dead or at least get some sort of messages from ‘the other side’. Most people watching will be more than forgiving if the messages are a little vague as, well, it’s very hard to do this sort of thing. Cold readers, more or less, use a standard formula of starting with a common name, finding a person who relates to that name, throwing out more names and spending the next 2 – 3 minutes agreeing with whatever their subject tells them as if they knew it all the time. It can end with tears as the subject thinks they have indeed heard from the dear departed.

So, how does Valda approach it? When trying to get a ‘hit’ or connection, she tends to start with an initial. **“I’m getting a message from someone with the initial ‘H’. Who was that?”** Now it’s not hard to get a connection here, but it’s not as sure-fire as it seems. The trick is to turn any failure into a success. It really is the key to good cold reading and anyone who does this for a living should be able to do it with style. When her subject could find no connection to the initial ‘H’, Valda was stuck. The best she could come up with was **“H, H... OK.. They’re telling me that you’re a Helper!”**

The last thing that needs saying about Valda is her utter lack of respect for the victims of the 9/11 and Bali bombing tragedies. On the very day Australia held a national day of mourning for the people who died in Bali, Valda was on stage telling her audience that:

**“We got to do this because the spirits just said, ‘Join hands’ as the people who have ‘gone over’ from Bali have been trotting around here. They just said ‘It’s a sea of love,’ and your love is getting them to be accepted on the other side, with those from the American tragedy.”**

How low can you get? Those who lost their lives in Bali and the USA were reduced to nothing more than “trotting around” like some sort of performing extras for this woman’s pathetic stage show.



## Margaret Dent

The late Margaret Dent was an Australian who performed overseas, particularly in the USA. She claimed to talk with the dead and did so live and on the radio for over 35 years. Her nickname was '**The Graveyard Guru**'.

Dent was one of those 'clairvoyants' who said that anyone could do what she did. There are others of her ilk who state the just the opposite. Do we all have magical powers? Who to believe?

So how did Dent make contact with the dead? According to her, "**First and foremost, it works on energy. That the whole thing about whether I'm seeing them or hearing them has to do with the energy. If it's a high energy anything can happen, we can have miracles.**" This of course could mean anything and explains nothing. It is pure drivel.

In a TV interview, Dent was asked if she could contact the spirit of Princess Diana to find out just what happened in that Paris tunnel. "**Well I keep away from the story of Princess Diana, which you'll find out in the future why.**" Dent evaded the possible test of her claims by hinting that she knew more than she's letting on, a game anyone can play.

Dent's live act was right out of the pages of the cold reading manuals. She asked question after question followed by "**Do you understand that?**" This usually would get a positive response, even if it was just a nod of the head as people tried make their own connection to what Dent had just told them. She also came across as a nice Grandmother type figure, someone who has the wisdom of age, someone you could trust.

One trick that Dent and others use, is to encourage the audience to clap and cheer after each reading. "**It lifts the vibrations**" and makes her readings seem more effective. She also made references to God. Which God in particular was not specified, but we can assume it was a variation or a generalisation of the Christian God as much of her audience was of that faith. The odd, "**Thank you, God bless..**" and other mentions can go a long way as it puts her onside with the Almighty and who can argue with Him?

In the end, all messages from the dead were along the lines of, "**They want you to know that they are OK and are looking over you.**" No one goes to hell, no one is lost in some sort of weird spirit dimension. Everything is always alright.

Margaret Dent died on the 20th of February, 2005. Her web site, based in the USA, is: [www.margaretdent.com](http://www.margaretdent.com)

## How can you be sure your 'psychic' is the real deal?

### **The Full Facts book of Cold Reading**

This is the definitive book on cold reading. It explains everything there is to know about this limitless technique! How can you apparently tell complete strangers about names, dates and events that mean something to them? In business, how can you seemingly get inside the mind of every lead, customer, client, colleague and rival? This book explains all, and is the most authoritative ever written on the subject.

#### What's in it?

#### Contents include:

- The Setup: how the cold reading process begins before one word of the reading is spoken
- The Reading Itself: what to say and how to say it
- 38 different elements from which any reading can be made
- Presentational Points: factors which add to the illusion
- The 'Win-Win Game': how psychics are right even when wrong!
- Coping with sceptics: how psychics handle 'difficult' clients



"I can't say enough how much I enjoy this book. It is so far the best I have read on the subject. I was impressed by the incredible amount of detail, groundwork and explanation of the psychological ploys used, and the way you have laid out each and every direction a reading can take, and categorized each method. I will treasure it and recommend it highly"

- Banachek, 1998 APCA Campus Entertainer of the Year

[www.ianrowland.com](http://www.ianrowland.com)





## **Lynne Kelly** **Master of Tauromancy**

What do tarot cards, stars and planets, tea leaves, sheep's entrails, crystal balls and glowing embers have in common? They, along with thousands of other objects over the centuries, have been used in divination, the art and science of magically seeing into the future. As luck would have it, they can also be used to gain amazing insights into the hearts and minds of individuals. Cries of "**That's amazing! Nobody could possibly know that!!**" can often be heard.

Enter '**Tauromancy**', the new/ancient art of gaining mystical knowledge, just as good, if not better, than all the others. Australia is lucky indeed to be the home of the world's leading authority on the subject in the guise of Melbourne author Lynne Kelly.

By applying Tauromancy, which uses the scattering of chopsticks and the placing of metallic masks, Lynne has astounded believers and sceptics alike.

Does this all sound too good to be true? What's the real story?

Lynne is in fact an investigator, not a mystic and has learnt and become expert in the art of Cold Reading. In fact Lynne is so good at giving 'readings' (much like any tarot card reading) that even when she is seated beneath a sign saying "**THIS WOMAN IS A FAKE**", people still insist that she is has real psychic insights. Is it any wonder that so many are convinced after readings given by those who are sincerely deluded or don't admit to be fakes?

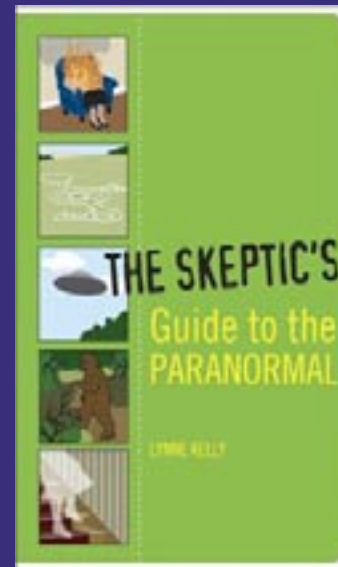
But that's not all. Lynne has is also an accomplished magician and public speaker. Her knowledge on matters strange and mysterious is impressive and she has even been awarded "Skeptic of the Year" for her contributes to science education by fighting superstition.

We can all benefit from Lynne's insights as she has written "The Skeptic's Guide to the Paranormal" covering such topics as spoon bending, aliens and UFOs, psychics, ghosts and astrology.

# **The Skeptic's Guide to the Paranormal**

**Lynne Kelly**

**Can a human being really spontaneously burst into flames?  
Just how deadly is the Bermuda Triangle? And what's the real  
story behind all those alien abductions?**

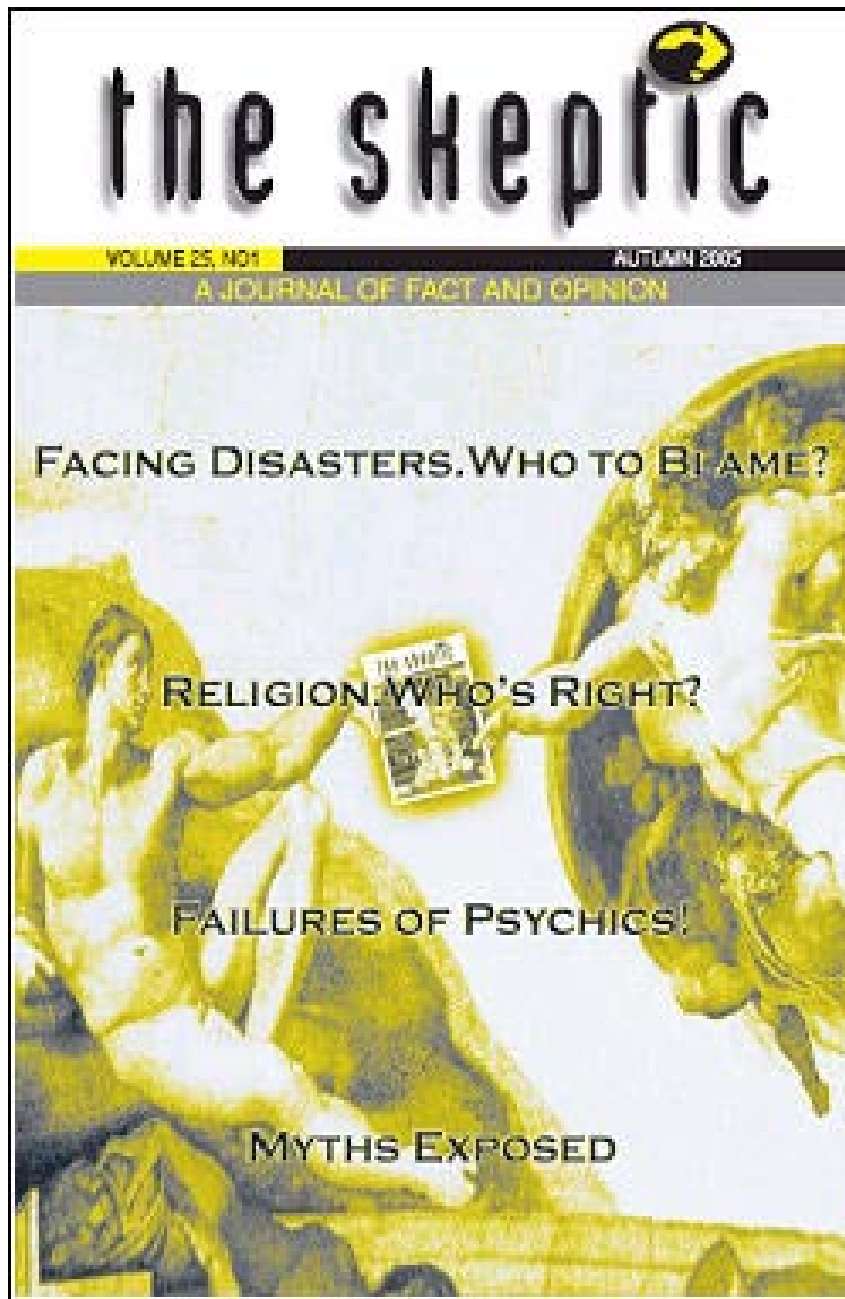


The answers to these and many other questions lie within the covers of *The Skeptic's Guide to the Paranormal*. Guaranteed to liven up any dinner party, this delightful, highly readable book offers color photographs and scientific case-by-case explanations for twenty-seven phenomena that appear to defy known science, including ghosts and poltergeists, the predictions of Nostradamus, and yogic levitation, among many others.

Speaking directly to the reader, and always with respect for those who believe, Kelly gives us a bite-size, nonacademic approach to debunking hugely popular superstitions and mysteries. Did you know that you, too, can bend spoons and read minds? This book will show you how.

***The Skeptic's Guide to the Paranormal, available from;***

**Australia:** [www.allenandunwin.com](http://www.allenandunwin.com) - [www.angusrobertson.com.au](http://www.angusrobertson.com.au)  
**USA:** [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) - [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com)



Australian Skeptics appeals to rational individuals of common sense, intelligence and with a social conscience, who are interested in actively pursuing the truth about claims of paranormal or pseudo-scientific phenomena and other irrational popular beliefs, from a responsible and scientific perspective. For more than twenty years it has established a national network of likeminded groups which, by investigation and the application of critical thinking, aims to help free our society of the results of fear bred by irrational thinking.

*We seek the evidence.*

*We challenge the claims.*

*We don't believe everything we hear.*

*We encourage the public to adopt a critical attitude towards these claims.*

Our quarterly journal, *the Skeptic* is the voice by which we have offered the public and the news media the opportunity to find out what science and reason have to say about paranormal and other irrational claims.

*It conducts investigations and publicises the results.*

*It opposes the generally uncritical sensationalism presented by the popular media.*

*It draws attention to the possibility of natural and ordinary explanations of such phenomena.*

*Its findings are sometimes humorous, often sobering and always fascinating.*

**Subscribe online!**

**[www.skeptics.com.au](http://www.skeptics.com.au)**

# Inside the mind of a Mind Hunter

## Profiling and crime scene analysis – Solving Murders for real! **Monica Duré**

Channel 10's 'Sensing Murder' and the claim that 'psychics' help police solve crime prompted me to write this article. For those interested in serial killers and how they are actually caught, I highly recommend Mindhunter.<sup>1</sup>

I've read a few books on serial killers and this one stood out for me. Not only is it written by an authority on the topic, but it also describes his personal struggle to firstly prove the effectiveness of profiling, and then once its use was validated, his agony at having to reject cases due to overload.

John Douglas, an expert in serial killers, pioneered the technique of profiling in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He was the head of the elite FBI Investigative Support Unit at Quantico from 1990 until he retired. John was the inspiration for Special Agent Jack Crawford in the book *Silence of the Lambs* and he was the consultant on the film.

Mindhunter not only details many famous American cases from the 1970s and 1980s but it describes how the FBI developed this behavioral approach to criminal-personality profiling and crime analysis. Profiling is the only strategy, to date, that has been successful in helping police catch serial killers.

So how is profiling done? The profiler must not only examine a wide range of evidence and information but it is also necessary for him/her to 'walk in the shoes' of both the offender, and the victim. What seems like 'magic' or 'psychic powers' is actually based on studying thousands of similar crimes.

Interviewing the serial killers has also been invaluable in gaining understanding of why they commit the crimes and how. Knowing as much about the victims as possible is just as important. This is because knowing the victim allows profilers to understand how s/he would have reacted. This in turn tells us more about the behavior and motivation of the serial killer.

The foundation of profiling is that behavior reflects personality. By learning to interpret the clues at the crime scene, patterns emerge. Profilers can then know what kind of person committed the crime. Similar to how a doctor weighs up all the symptoms of an illness to diagnose the condition or disease.

John reassures us that although we may fear that serial killers can read books like his and thus know how to evade capture, he explains that the more the killer does to 'cover his tracks', the more behavioral clues he leaves behind. The result is that

the profiler has more information to work with. This allows for a better profile to be given to police. The police can thus narrow down the type of person they are looking for.

Furthermore, it takes an already experienced, highly skilled FBI agent up to 2 years to be trained in profiling. Not everyone can be a profiler, not even if they're already FBI agents.

Which brings me to the common misconception that 'psychics' can assist police in solving these types of cases. John cautions police that if they are considering enlisting the help of a 'psychic', it should be as a last resort AND that police must take great care not to expose the 'psychic' to any police who know the details of the case. The reason: Good 'psychics' are expert at picking up small, nonverbal clues. The 'psychic' could astonish the police and create trustworthiness by providing facts the police already know, without giving any insight into what is not known.

However John presents a balanced and fair evaluation of 'psychics'. He admits that he has seen some 'psychics' who are able to focus on subtle details at a crime scene and draw *logical* conclusions from these. Just like the profilers do. But these instances are rare.

He mentions many examples of 'psychics' getting it wrong or being useless. In one particular case, the Atlanta child murders, hundreds of 'psychics' offered their services. All sorts of descriptions of the killer were presented, many of which significantly differed from each other. When the killer was finally caught, he matched none of the 'psychics' descriptions.

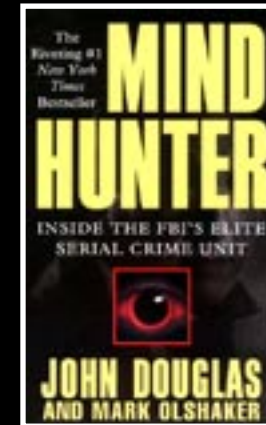
In contrast, John's profile was very specific. It detailed: the killer's motivation; his personality; his age (25-29); his skin colour; that he was a police enthusiast; that he drove a police type car; that he had a dog (Doberman or German Sheppard); that he didn't have a girlfriend; that he would have involved himself in the police investigation very early on etc etc. All this was confirmed when the killer was arrested.

In the murder of Karla Brown in Madison County, a famous 'psychic' was brought in but was completely unhelpful. 'I hear water dripping' and 'the killer lived near the railroad tracks' was all that was offered. In fact, most people in the area live near the railroad tracks! The crime remained unsolved for four years.

When John was finally asked to assist the investigation, he said the killer: was local, was mid to late 20s, knew the victim well, knew he wouldn't be disturbed, was not experienced at killing. Furthermore, the killing was not planned but the position of the body was staged in order to make the murder look like something it wasn't. As always, John also detailed the motivation for the killing and the personality of the murderer. The list of specifics goes on and on. Needless to say, John was spot on and the killer was finally caught.

To sum up, the technique of profiling is supported by research and objective methods. 'Psychics' do not solve murders.

1. Douglas, J., and Olshaker, M (1996). *Mindhunter: Inside the FBI Elite Serial Crime Unit*. Heinemann: London.



# Mystery Investigators

## LIVE

For the 3rd year in a row, The Mystery Investigators headed for Abbotsleigh School for Girls in Sydney to perform their "That's a Good Question" science show. - Alynda Brown

Performing at Abbotsleigh is always a great joy and it's where Mystery Investigators really began with our very first show in 2003. It's a great venue and a great audience. The purpose of Mystery Investigators is to demonstrate how an understanding of scientific principles is useful to everyone – not just the students who intend to follow a scientific career.

In order to achieve this we have created an entertaining show that tests "paranormal" claims. The reason we choose paranormal is that they are fun to perform and to examine. It's also fun to put them to the test in front of an audience and find whether there is really anything to it. The best part is that all sections of the show tie in to the school curriculum, so not only are we having fun and helping students realise that science is useful in every day life, we are also helping them to understand the concepts they are studying in school which will later help them in their exams.

The Bed of Nails is always fun – for Richard. If you haven't seen the show this part consists of me falling on to of a bed of nails with a bare tummy. Richard then stands on my back and pretends to surf. This always gets a great reaction, especially when the students see the marks left in my skin. Of course after a while they just turn red and I'm left looking like I've been infected by some strange form of orderly, even-spaced measles! I get the Bed of Nails and he gets to juggle. - The purpose of the Bed of Nails

is to give an example of the concepts of surface area and pressure.

We also examine how to conduct experiments and the differences between high quality testing techniques and others with less or no validity. Our Water Divining test demonstrates the concept of the double blind test. These parts of the show involve the students as it is they who conduct the experiments. They are the ones who not only perform the water divining, they are the ones who also conduct the test. They tell us before we can tell them how the procedure makes it a high quality testing procedure.

This experiment shows how something that appears to have some validity due to the masses of anecdotal evidence fails when submitted to the rigours of proper testing. Whilst we have a lot of fun during the show there is also a serious side. This section of the show demonstrates the basis for much of the



medical/drug testing we rely on. I feel that if more people understood this then many people would not be wasting a considerable amount of money on untested and useless, yet well marketed, "treatments".

Since we first started performing the show at Abbotsleigh we have added to the presentation considerably. We have found over the last couple of years that magical effects interest the students and bring a new dimension to the show. On this occasion we were performing a few tricks as the girls started drifting into the hall after lunch. We started entertaining them with a few magic tricks. One of the girls said to me,

"Hey you're really good....is your husband a magician or something?" - Hmmmmmm.....

My favourite part of the show is the section we have for questions at the end. There is never enough time for all of them and we can see how the kids have responded to what we have shown them - we haven't yet had a bad response. Every audience is different but usually we have plenty of questions concerning "Talking with the Dead" and psychic readings so we have started to add some more mentalism to the show. We too can appear to be psychic.

Thanks again Abbotsleigh and we're looking forward to seeing you again next year.



**Above: The Mystery Investigators explaining how Astrology really works - Surfing on a bed of nails is not as hard as it looks!**

**Left: Abbotsleigh students line up to test water divining and learn how to conduct a double-blind test.**

# Berzerkeley Psychics

**Karen Stollznow is one of Australia's most experienced investigators of the strange and paranormal and a member of Australian Skeptics. Now based in California, Karen has wasted no time in checking out the local 'psychic' action.**

Berkeley, California, was the birthplace of the Free Speech Movement during the 1960's, and one of many sites of the American counter-culture. Fondly and aptly nicknamed 'Berzerkeley', the city has many reminders of its past. The legendary Telegraph Avenue spills off the University of California, Berkeley campus and here, every religion and belief is united into a new age jumble.

Every day, markets line the footpaths, selling everything for the spiritually indecisive; incense, Buddhist statues, Catholic jewellery, gothic art, fake Egyptian artifacts and street prophets announcing Armageddon. Everyone fights for your belief, offering free Bibles, books on scientology or free 'healing'. But the most popular of all are the psychics. Unlike Australia, where psychics perform 'readings' from their lounge room or kitchen, in the US, psychics operate from their own offices! Nudged between ordinary restaurants and clothing stores, psychics advertise with huge neon signs, promising to unlock the secrets of your future, offering business and financial guidance, pet readings and to lift or place curses! They use tarot cards, rune stones, astrology and even tasseography - reading tea leaves!

Why are psychics so popular in Berkeley? Well, it's a 'university town',

of approximately 30 000 students, all undergoing the stress of studying and the uncertainty of their future. What better audience than young, anxious people, seeking guidance and advice? Berkeley psychics have a constant stream of student clients. Can people really possess psychic abilities and if not, are these 'psychics' deceptive or deluded? I decided to sample the psychic fare on offer in Berkeley. Fortunately, Nasta of The Psychic Reader was offering a special. \$5 palm readings.

As soon as I entered the room, Nasta asked, "You're psychic, aren't you?" With complete honesty, I told her I'm the last person to have psychic abilities! Sitting across from Nasta, she asked that I think of two wishes. Would she then ask me to blow out the candles on a birthday cake? No. I was to hold out my hands, with my palms facing upwards. Nasta told me that I have "a long life line and a long success line". This was a comforting statement! But is it immediately provable? No. Can people really predict the future by looking at the markings on someone's palms? Other psychics claim to be able to read the markings on feet, faces, or even bottoms! Can a 'psychic' know all about a client's personality on the basis of these markings? There is no connection between random marks on the body and

unknowable future events. The whole idea is really quite silly!

The reading became sillier still. Nasta said my hands 'told' her that I would have one child in the future while my face 'told' her I would have two children! More information that I couldn't confirm or disprove then and there. It's easy to make guesses!

One technique that psychics use is flattery. Nasta told me that my palms reveal that I am a happy and honest person. Who would disagree with that? Would I refute this compliment and say, no, I'm sad and a liar? Apparently, my palm lines also promise good news. Nasta, now playing genie, told me that the wishes I had made would be granted. I didn't even have to rub a lamp or throw coins into a wishing well!

Finally, Nasta made some guesses about my past. She 'sensed' that I wasn't from Berkeley, was I? With my Aussie accent, it doesn't take a psychic to work that one out! Again, Nasta told me that she was convinced that I am psychic. If I didn't already know of my powers, I would soon discover them! She continued that I had a future ahead of me, using my psychic abilities. As I am a skeptical writer, Nasta had no idea how wrong she was!

On the basis of my appointment with Nasta, did I think she had psychic abilities? No, she gave me no reason to think that she did. Then, was she lying? Hopefully not, she seemed very

sincere. She also acted very friendly, caring and wise. Perhaps Nasta had convinced herself that her natural talent for counselling people was a paranormal phenomenon. Perhaps, when her clients return, seeking more comfort and sweet talk, Nasta's belief that she has abilities is re-confirmed.

Nasta did not amaze me with revelations about my past or present. Her prophesies for my future were no more profound than what might be suggested by a school career counsellor! I would have been much better off seeking the advice of a friend, someone who knows me well and doesn't have to make guesses about my life. So, the next time you need some guidance and want to feel good about yourself, grab a good friend and have a chat over coffee, not tea leaves!



## ASK FOR Aust R

It's a fact of modern day life that pharmacies and chemists shops in Australia, especially those that are part of a chain, need to sell all manner of products in order to stay in business. Many of these newer products seem to be medicine of one kind or another. They are packaged like medicine, they give dosage advice, they even use words like **Medicine**, **Medication**, **Healing** and **Remedy**, they are even on the shelves mixed in amongst other medicine. So, what's the problem?



The problem is that you cannot be sure that these 'medicines' are in fact really medicines. Many products found in pharmacies and chemists are, to say the least, unproven.

This sad state of affairs must surely frustrate many trained, qualified and dedicated pharmacists who, due to the pressure to having to run a profitable business, have to stock what in many cases is pure quackery. Some even sell you magnetic healing devices, electronic acupuncture kits and will happily 'diagnose' your ills by using Iridology!

How do you, the average consumer, tell what is what? You could ask for advice from one of the sales assistants. Well, no, that's not such a good idea as many of them do not have the training to know what is real medicine and what is not. It's also possible you'll be asking someone who will simply give you advice based on a pseudo-science such as Homoeopathy. They will also feel obliged not to criticise what they are trying to sell.

There is a simple guide that will help you in determining what is what. Just look on the packaging of the medicine in question. You should, if the product has been manufactured in Australia, see a Registration Number or Listing Number from the TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration). This number, usually found on the bottom right, can be identified by the code '**Aust R 12345**' for Registration, or '**Aust L 12345**' for Listing.

## Aust R

**AUST R medicines are assessed for safety, quality and effectiveness. They include all prescription only medicines and many over-the-counter products such as those for pain relief, coughs and colds and antiseptic creams.**

Source: TGA - <http://www.tga.gov.au/docs/html/buymed.htm>

## Aust L

**AUST L medicines are much lower risk self-medication products. They are used for minor health problems and are reviewed for safety and quality. They include sunscreens over SPF4 and many vitamin, mineral, herbal and homoeopathic products. A purpose must be included on the label.**

Source: TGA - <http://www.tga.gov.au/docs/html/buymed.htm>

**Aust R medications have been scientifically tested and shown to live up to the claims made on the package.**

**Aust L medications need only be safe and made to TGA standards of quality.**

**In the end, what you buy is up to you. The unfortunate truth is that you can no longer trust the products sold by or the advice given in the once highly respected institution of the Australian pharmacy or chemist shop. They might as well be regarded as convenience stores that happen to sell prescription medication on the side.**

# Yellow **Bamboozled**

The Martial Arts have an exotic appeal. My first awareness of martial arts was watching David Carradine in the 1972 series "**Kung Fu**" triumphing over all opponents with a mere flick of the wrist....amazing. I began learning Judo when I was 13 years old and I've kept up my interest in Martial Arts ever since learning quite a few different styles. Of course, Martial Arts are a great way to learn to defend yourself but the other benefits of fitness, flexibility and learning to focus and concentrate are the reasons why I have continued practicing old skills and learning new ones. There is nothing magical about the techniques, only the magic of being able to do something you love well through desire, hard work and application.

Unfortunately the world of Martial Arts is also full of people who make ridiculous claims. "**Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon**" was a great movie but I really don't believe people who study Martial Arts are able to run across the tops of trees any more than I believe that Hogwarts is hidden away from muggle eyes somewhere in England. In the same way that many magicians are offended by seeing "psychics" abuse their entertainment art, a person who claims extraordinary powers due to some mystical chi offends those of us who work hard to learn our art.

I first heard about **Yellow Bamboo** two years ago. This group claims, amongst other things, to be able to knock over an attacking opponent without touching them using the power of some mystical energy. They wanted to apply for Randi's \$1M prize. You can find clips demonstrating their claims here.

[http://martrix.org/video\\_clips.html](http://martrix.org/video_clips.html)

They were making a lot of noise at the time on various newsgroups about how Randi refused to test them etc. etc. etc. All of it was very tedious and quite normal amongst those who make these sort of claims when for some strange reason Randi just won't take their word for it. To the tutored eye of a martial artist it was easy to see that their "opponents" in these videos were simply "taking a dive". In some of the videos they even fell the wrong way – towards the supposed force instead of being repelled by it.

Well, a few weeks ago a test did in fact take place in Perth, Australia. The results were laughable and not at all what Yellow Bamboo were expecting.

See for yourself

<http://members.iinet.net.au/~ftrust>

 *Alynda Brown*



Yellow Bamboo devotees practice their mystical art



Still from a Yellow Bamboo video - Looks dangerous!