

for example to a "pocket pyramid," constructed by a Czechoslovakian engineer, Robert Pawlita, capable of "magnetizing matches and hypnotizing flies." Then there is mention of the "scientifically minutely tested and confirmed" event of the shifting of matchboxes by the mind alone, a feat performed by the Russian housewife Nina Kulagina. We are told that psi research is taken more seriously behind the Iron Curtain than in the West. Yet a Greek medium, Tatjana Karitida, is reported to move psychokinetically heavy pieces of furniture.

Among the hundreds of similarly astounding manifestations reported, perhaps the somewhat improvident discussion of biorhythms ought to be mentioned. Apparently unacquainted with the massive data proving biorhythms to be an invalid hypothesis, Speer unforgivably urges readers to arrange their lives according to this illusionary theory, without any word of caution. The same may be said of his exposition of the effects of the moon and stars on man's destiny.

The alleged phenomena forming the major part of this volume are on the whole unconvincing. As far as they are intended to underpin the theory expounded of the universe and of life, they leave that theory without tangible support. Moreover, since the theory has been derived essentially from testimony of clairvoyants, and from visions obtained during astral trips, it remains untestable. This renders it akin to fiction; and while it may be thought entertaining, it hardly satisfies the conditions of science. ●

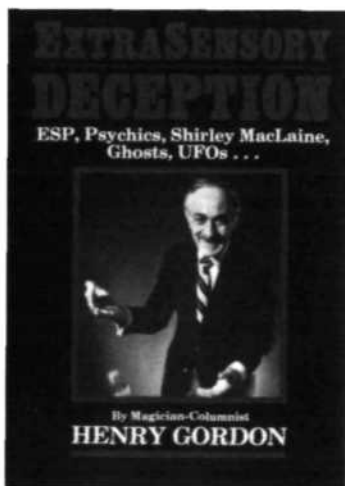
Adventures of a Skeptical Magician

Extrasensory Deception. By Henry Gordon. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y., 1987. 227 pp. Cloth, \$18.95.

Wendy Grossman

THIS BOOK is a compilation of three years worth of Henry Gordon's skeptical columns for the *Toronto Star*, plus a few miscellaneous feature articles.

A magician, broadcaster, and columnist, Gordon is a CSICOP Fellow and chairman of the Ontario Skeptics. He writes to debunk, inform, and entertain a mass audience on an unusually wide variety of subjects: Shirley MacLaine, parapsychology, the superstitions surrounding Friday the 13th, UFOs, faith healers, gadgets, the skepticism of Woody Allen, and so on. Some of the pieces are reviews of current books; others are about CSICOP, and phenomena familiar to readers of the *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*. Because



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these are short pieces, written by a journalist rather than a scientist or academic, they are not deep, scholarly treatises with extensive (or, for the most part, any) references. Rather, they are light, entertaining pieces written by a magician who knows his stuff.

Gordon tells the story of how he appeared as “Elchonen” the psychic and then debunked himself in front of a theater full of believers. He tells about his frustrating interview with Shirley MacLaine, in which he discovered he was only part of the reality she created for herself, a figure in her dream (like the Red King, in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*). He describes his experiences meeting psychics head-on in public, analyzes holiday superstitions, lambastes his own *Toronto Star*’s printing of baseball players’ biorhythm charts, and cites his test of a Ouija board that showed that spirits can’t read through brown paper to produce meaningful messages. When this liveliness bubbles through, the book is at its best.

One of the pieces I found particularly enjoyable and interesting was Gordon’s discussion of superstitions. He details the origins of some of the most common ones. He traces the practice of knocking on wood back to the Druids, and cites a British psychology class experiment in which students watched 70 percent of the local pedestrians walk out into the street to avoid walking under a ladder that had been placed across the sidewalk. And he finishes up with a warning for those who might prefer to stay safely in bed on Friday the 13th: “Be careful. People have been known to fall out of bed.”

Unfortunately this book has neither references nor an index. One can understand why a journalist would not want to put his audience off by quoting references; it is less understandable that they have not been added for publication in book form. The lack of an index is only partly offset by the fact that the table of contents is fairly detailed. Prometheus is *the* publisher one turns to when one is building a skeptical library, and their books *ought* to have indexes!

To the well-informed skeptic, most of Gordon’s material will be familiar in kind, though probably not in detail; such a skeptic will find the book to be an entertaining account of the adventures of a skeptical magician. For someone who belongs to the great mass of people who have “never thought about it,” or for someone who wants to know what the skeptical point of view is all about, it would make a great gift. •