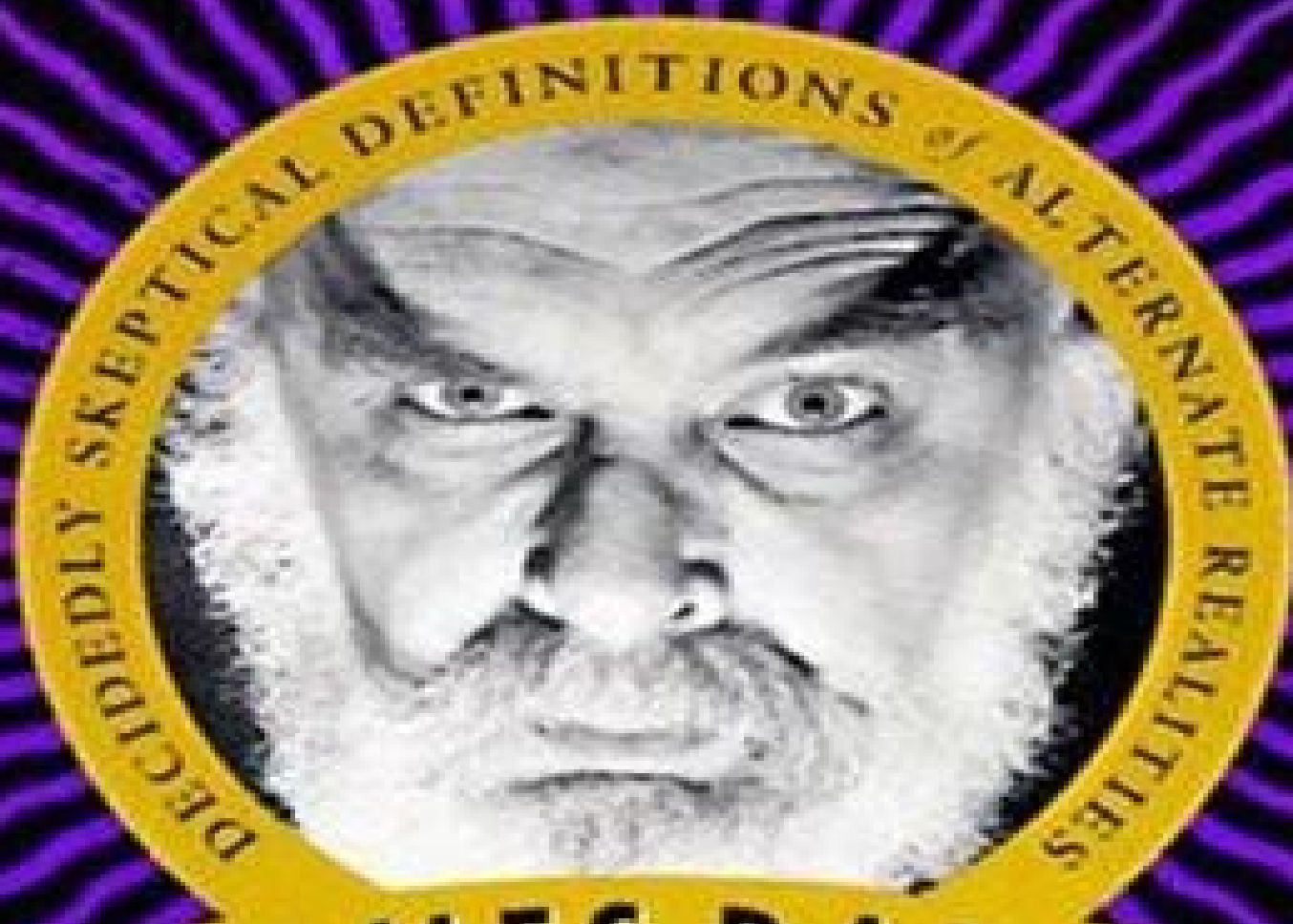


AN ENCYCLOPEDIA
of CLAIMS, FRAUDS, and
HOAXES of the OCCULT
and SUPERNATURAL



JAMES RANDI

"[A] much needed contribution to the nation's unity."

—Martin Gardner, editor of *Simplify America's* "Mathematical Games" for twenty-five years

INTRODUCTION BY ARTHUR C. CLARKE

An Encyclopedia

**of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of
the Occult and Supernatural**

By James Randi



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE JREF

ABOUT THIS ENCYCLOPEDIA

A

Abaris
Abdelazys
Abominable Snowman
Abracadabra
Abraham the Jew
Abra-Melin
Abrams, Dr. Albert
Abraxas
Actorius
Acupressure
Acupuncture
Adalbert
Adam
Adamantius
Adamski, George
Adept
Adoni
Aetherius Society
Aetite
Afreet
Age of Aquarius
AGLA
Agpaoa, Tony
Agrippa
Akashic records
Akkadian-Chaldean Inscriptions
Aksakof, Alexandre
Albertus Magnus
Alchabitius
Alchemy & Alchemists
Alexander
Alfridarya
Alpha Project
American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR)
Amulet
Ancient Astronauts
Angels of Mons
Animal Magnetism
Anima Mundi
Ankh
Anthropomancy
Anthroposophy
Apollonius of Tyana
Applied Kinesiology
Apport
Aquilaeus
Aquinas, St. Thomas
Arcanum, The Great

Archangel

ARE

Arigó, José

Armageddon

Arnold, Kenneth

Artephius

Arthur (King)

Artorius

Ascended master

Asiza

Asmodeus

Asport

ASPR

Association for Research and Enlightenment

Astral body

Astral plane

Astral projection

Astrological sign

Astrology

Astronomy

Athame

Atlantis

Augury

Aura

Aureola

Automatic writing

Avenger bombers

Azoth

B

Backster, Cleve

Bacon, Roger

Bacon, Sir Francis

Balinus

Band writer

Banshee

Barau

Barbour, Nelson H.

Bat

Beelzebub

Behemoth

Belial

Bender, Hans

Bermuda Triangle

Bernadette Soubirous

Besant, Annie

Bezoar

Bible

Bien Boa

Bigfoot

Bilocation

Bimini Road

Biorhythms

Bishop, Washington (Wellington) Irving

Black Art Principle

Black Arts

Black Boxes

Blackburn and Smith

Black Magic

Black Mass

Blackmore, Dr. Susan J.

Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna

Blindfold Vision

Bluebeard

Blue Book

Bohemian

Book of Coming Forth by Day, the

Book of the Dead, the

Borley Rectory

British National Association of Spiritualists

Brown, Rosemary

Broxa

Bunyip

Burt, Sir Cyril

Bux, Kuda

C

Cabala

Cagliostro, Conte Alessandro

Cambion

Cambridge Investigation

Cardan, Giordano

Carrière, Eva

Cat

Cayce, Edgar

Cazotte, Jacques

Cereology

Chakra

Channeling

Charms

Cheating

Cheiro

Chela

Chimera

Chiromancy

Chiropractic

Christian Science/Scientists

Christopher, Milbourne

Church of Christ, Scientist

Clairaudience

Clairvoyance

Clever Hans Phenomenon

Closed medium

Cold Reading

Collins, Doris

Columbus Poltergeist

Committee for Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

Compass Trick

Conan Doyle, Sir Arthur

Confidence Man

Conjuring

Conjuring/conjuror

Control

Cook, Florence Eliza

Cottingley Fairies

Coven

Crandon, Margery

Credophilic

Creery Sisters

Croiset, Gerard

Crookes, Sir William

Crop Circles

Crowley, Aleister

Crucifix

Cryptomnesia

Crystal Ball Gazing

Crystal Power

CSICOP

Curse of Princess Amen-Ra

Curse of the Pharaoh

D

Dactylomancy

Daemon

Davenport Brothers

Davis, Andrew Jackson

Dee, Dr. John

de Freitas, José Pedro

Déjà vu

De la Warr, George

Delphi (also, Delphos)

Demon

Demonology

Dermo-optical Perception

Deva

Devil

Devil's Mark

Devils of Loudun

Devil's Triangle

de Wohl, Louis

Diabolus

Dianetics

Dingwall, Dr. Eric J.

Discovery of Witchcraft, The

Divination

Divining

Dixon, Jeane

Djinn

Doomsday

Doppelgänger

Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan

Dragon Bones

Drawing Down the Moon

Dreams

Drown, Ruth

Druids

Dunninger, Joseph

E

Ectenic Force

Ectoplasm

Eddy, Mary Morse Baker

Edwards, Michael

Egely, György

Eglinton, William

Eisenbud, Dr. Jule

Elemental / Elementary Spirits

Elements

Elixir of Life

E-Meter

End of the World

Enochian

E-Rays

Erdstrahlen

ESP

ESP cards

Eva C.

Evil Eye

Exorcism

Extrasensory Perception

Eyeless Vision

Eysenck, Dr. Hans J.

F

Fairies

Fairy Rings

Faith Healing

Fakir

Falkenstein, Glenn

Familiar

Faustus, Dr.

Faustus, Dr. Johannes

Fay, Anna Eva

Filipino Psychic Surgery

Finger Writer

G

Ganzfeld Experiment

Garlic

Geley, Dr. Gustav

Geller, Uri

Gematria

Genii

Ghost

Ghost Photography

Ghost Portraits

Ghoul

Glossolalia

Gnome

Gnostics

Golden Dawn

Golem

Grand Catholicon

Grandier, Father Urbain

Graphology

Great Arcanum, The

Great Pyramid of Giza

Grimoire

Guppy, Mrs. Samuel

Gurdjieff, George Ivanovitch

Guru

Gypsy

H

Hag Stone

Hag tracks

Hahnemann, Christian Friedrich Samuel

Hand of Glory

Hanussen, Erik Jan

Hare Krishna

Hecate

Hellströmism

Hermes Trismegistus

Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn

Hexagram

Holloway, Dr. Gilbert

Hollow Earth theory

Holy Inquisition

Home, Daniel Dunglas

Homeopathy

Homunculus

Honorton, Dr. Charles

Hopkins, Matthew

Hörbiger, Hans

Horoscope

Hot Foil Trick

Hot Reading

Houdini, Harry

Hoy, David

Hubbard, Lafayette Ronald

Hume, Daniel Dunglas

Hume, David

Hurkos, Peter

Hypnotism / Hypnosis

I

Iamblicus

Iannes & Iambres

I Ching

Icke, David

Ideomotor Effect

Ideoplast

Illuminati

Incubus

Inquisition

Intuition

Imp

immortality

incantation

Iridology

J

Jamblicus

Januarius, Saint

Jardinier, Martinet

Jehovah's Witnesses

JFK University

Joan of Arc

Johnson, Dr. Martin

K

Ka

Kabala

Kachina

Karma

Karrezza

Keene, H. Lamar

Kelley, Edward

Khat

Ki

King, George

Kirlian Photography

Kiyota, Masuaki

Knight, J. Z.

Knots

Koestler, Arthur

Koreshan Unity

Krafft, Karl Ernst

Kreskin

Krippner, Dr. Stanley Curtis

Krishn

Krishnamurti, Jiddu

Kulagina, Nina

Kuleshova, Rosa A.

Kundalini

Kundalini Yoga

L

Lady Wonder

Lapis Philosophicus

Leadbeater, Charles Webste

Lemegeton

Lemuria

Lévi, Éliphas

Levy, Dr. Walter

Ley Lines

Lilith

Lindsay, Hal

Loch Ness Monster

Lodge, Sir Oliver Joseph

Loudun, Devils of

Loup-garou

Lourdes

Lucifer

Lycanthropy

M

Mackay, Dr. Charles

Macumba

Magic

Magic Ashes

Magic Circle

Magician, Mage, Magi

Magic Square

Magic Wand

Magnetic Hills

Magus

Maharaj Ji

Maharishi Mahesh Yogi

Malicious Animal Magnetism

Malleus Maleficarum

M.A.M.

Mandala

Mandrake

Manning, Matthew

Mantra

Map Dowsing

Marduk

Margery

Marrs, Texe

Materializations

Mather, Cotton

Mather, Increase

Medicine Man

Medium

Mentalist

Meridians

Merlin

Meta-Analysis

Metoposcopy

Micro-PK

Millerites

Mirabilis, Dr.

Mirandola, Count Giovanni Pico da

Mitchell, Edgar D.

Moons of Mars

Moses, Rev. William Stainton

Mu

Murphy, Bridey

Muscle Reading

N

Native Healer

Necromancy

Necronomicon

Nelson, Robert

Nessie

New Age

Nichol, Agnes

Nostradamus

Norns

N-rays

Numerology

Nymph

O

OBE

Obeah

Obsession

Occam's razor

Occult

Odic Force

Ointment

Olcott, Henry Steel

Om

Omens

One-ahead Method

OOBE

Open Medium

Order of the Golden Dawn

Orgone

Osteomyology

Ouija Board

Ouspensky, Peter Demianovich

P

Palladino, Eusapia

Palmistry

Paracelsus

Paranormal

Parapsychological Association

Parapsychologist

Parapsychology

Parsimony

Pendulum

Pentacle / Pentagram

Perpetual motion

Petrie, Sir William Matthew Flinders

Phantom Leaf Effect

Philosopher's Stone

Philtre

Phrenology

Physiognomy

Piddington, Sydney and Lesley

Pike, Bishop James A.

Pio, Padre

Piper, Leonora E.

PK

Placebo Effect

Planchette

Police Dowzers

Police Psychics

Poltergeist

Poppet

Possession

Potion

Poughkeepsie seer

Powder of Projection

Prabhupada, Swami

Prayer

Precognition

Prediction

Premanand

Premonition

Presidential Curse

Price, Harry

Prima Materia

Project Alpha

Prophecy

Prophet

Prophet, Elizabeth Clare

Psi

Psi Gap

Psychic

Psychic criminology

Psychic Portraits

Psychic Surgery

Psychography

Psychokinesis

Psychokinete

Psychometry / Psychometristx

Psychotronics

Puharich, Dr. Andrija

Pyramid Inch

Pyramid Power

Pythagoras

Q

Qabala

Qi

Qi Gong

Quack

R

Radionics

Rampa, Tuesday Lobsang

Ramtha

Rapping

Rasputin

Reflexology

Reich, Wilhelm

Reincarnation

Relics

Remote Viewing

Rhodomancy

Rhine, Dr. Joseph Banks

Rhine, Dr. Louisa Ella

Richet, Dr. Charles

Roberts, Jane

Roll, William G.

Romany

Rosicrucians

Royal Touch

Runes

Russell, Charles Taze

S

Sabbat

Sai Baba

Saint Elmo's fire

Saint Germain, Claude Louis, Comte de

Saint Joseph of Copertino

Saint Malachy's prophecies St. Malachy

Salamander

Salem witch trials

Sasquatch

Samhain

Satan

Satanism

Scapulimancy

Scarab

Schmeidler, Dr. Gertrude

Schneider, Rudi

Schrenck-Notzing, Dr. Albert Freiherr Von

Science

Scientology

Scot, Michael

Scot, Reginald

Scrying

Séance

Séance Room

Second Sight

Secret Gospel

Semothees

Serios, Ted

Seth

Shaman

Shaw, Steve

SHC

Shiatsu

Shipton, Mother

Showers, Mary Rosina

Shroud of Turin

Shut-Eye Medium

Siddhis

Sign, Astrological

Silva Mind Control

Simon Magus

Sitter

Skeptics Society

Slade, Dr. Henry

Slate Writing

Smith, Hélène

Smith, Joseph

Smyth, Charles Piazzi

Soal, Dr. Samuel George

Society for Psychical Research

Sorcery

Sortilege

Soubirous, Bernadette

Southcott, Joanna

Speaking in Tongues

Speculum

Spell

Spirit

Spirit Bell

Spirit Guide

Spiritism

Spirit Medium

Spirit Photography

Spirit Sortraits

Spiritualism

Spiritualitis

Spondylotherapy

Spontaneous Human Combustion

Spoon-Bending

SPR

Sprite

Steiner, Rudolf

Stigmata

Stokes, Doris

Subuh, Pak Muhammad

Succubus

Summerland

Survival-After-Death

Sylph

Sympathetic Magic

T

Tabard

Table tipping

Taboo

Talisman

Talking Plants

Tantra

Tart, Dr. Charles

Tea Leaf Reading

Telekinesis

Telepathy

Tenhaeff, Wilhelm

Testing Psychic Claims

Tetragrammaton

Thaumaturgy

Theosophy

Thoughtography

Thouless, Robert Henry

Thumb Writer

Trance

Transcendental Meditation

Transvection

Trial By Ordeal

Trigram

Tut, curse of King

Twenty-year curse

U

UFO
Umbanda
Unicorn
Universal Alkahest

V

Vampire
Vibration
Von Däniken, Erich
Voodoo
Voodoo doll
Vril

W

Waldorf Schools
Walpurgis Nacht
Warlock
Warner, William
Water-witching
Weeping statues
Weishaupt, Adam
Werewolf
Weyer, Johannes
White, Ellen G.
Wicca
Willard, Frances
Witch
Witchcraft
Witch Doctor
Witches' Sabbath
Witch of Endor
Witch's Garland
Witch's mark

Y

Yeti
Yin and Yang
Yoga / Yogi

Z

Zancig, Julius & Agnes
Zener, Dr. Karl
Zodiac
Zombie

APPENDIX I

APPENDIX II

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ABOUT THE JREF

The mission of the [James Randi Educational Foundation](#) is to promote critical thinking by reaching out to the public and media with reliable information about paranormal and supernatural ideas, which are widespread in our society today.

The James Randi Educational Foundation was founded in 1996 to help people defend themselves from paranormal and pseudoscientific claims. The JREF offers a still-unclaimed million-dollar reward for anyone who can produce evidence of paranormal abilities under controlled conditions. Through scholarships, workshops, and innovative resources for educators, the JREF works to inspire the investigative spirit in a new generation of critical thinkers.

Your support helps the JREF to . . .

- Expose paranormal and pseudoscientific frauds in the media, and hold media organizations accountable for promoting dangerous nonsense.
- Support scientific research into paranormal claims.
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- Organize major conferences and other gatherings that bring the entire skeptical community together.

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You may support the JREF by joining us as a contributor online at [randi.org](#). You may find that you can be more generous by making a pledge of monthly support. For more information about pledge support, please contact development@randi.org.

ABOUT THIS ENCYCLOPEDIA

An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural was originally published in 1995 in both the United States and United Kingdom (the U.K. version was titled *The Supernatural A-Z: the Truth and Lies*). This E-book is based on the online version of the encyclopedia and includes updated and expanded content not found in either print version.

The online HTML version was created with [David Joffe](#)'s dictionary compilation software [TshwaneLex](#), with the generous assistance of [Gilles-Maurice de Schryver](#). We are very grateful for their generous donation of talent, time, and dedication. The JREF Digital Edition converted and formatted by Michael Blanford.

What is wanted is not the will to believe
but the wish to find out, which is the exact
opposite.

Bertrand Russell

Abaris

Said to be the teacher of Pythagoras, Abaris was a magician of Scythia, an ancient culture on the northern shore of the Black Sea. He claimed to possess a golden arrow, given to him by Apollo, by means of which he could travel through the air and become invisible. It is not clear how this was supposed to be accomplished, but such details are unimportant in comparison with the basic claim.

Abaris is said to have lived without eating or drinking. This, coupled with the fact that his pupil Pythagoras is supposed to have stolen his golden arrow, must have resulted in a certain dissatisfaction with his life.

Abdelazys

(also, Alchabitius) A tenth-century Arabian astrologer whose book on astrology, *Alchabitius cum commento*, was first published in Latin in 1473, and then in 1503 in Venice. The book is no clearer or more useful than any other book on the subject. It is merely old.

Abominable Snowman

Known in various localities by names such as Yeti, Bigfoot, Meh-Teh, and Sasquatch, this unsubstantiated creature is said to be seven to ten feet tall, with feet twice the size of a human's, and with a noticeably disagreeable aroma. It has been reported in Tibet, Nepal, China, Siberia, Canada, and the U.S. Northwest.

In 1832, a report from the U.K. representative in Nepal described a hirsute creature who reportedly had attacked his servants. The natives called the beast “rakshas,” which means “demon.” This appears to be the first report of the Snowman made by a Westerner.

An impressive report was made by mountaineers who crossed a Himalayan glacier in 1951 and photographed giant footprints measuring thirteen by eighteen inches. However, tracks left in snow tend to enlarge when exposed to direct sun, and this may well explain many of the accounts of Snowman tracks, since smaller tracks of native animals tend to spread under warmth.

Other tracks found in Canada and the United States are the admitted results of hoaxers, even though the “experts” called in have sometimes validated the artifacts as genuine tracks of an unknown species. A short piece of movie film made in 1967 by Roger Patterson at Bluff Creek, California, appears to show a female Bigfoot casually walking away from the camera. The film has been hotly contested over the years and is the best of all the evidence ever offered.

It is possible that Patterson himself was hoaxed; the figure he saw and filmed might have been a person in costume. In the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, most viewers were not aware that the

apes shown were actors in costume holding real baby chimpanzees. The 1989 film *Gorillas in the Mist* used actors in costumes that were totally convincing. The Patterson figure is nowhere nearly as good as those representations, though we cannot expect that a genuine Bigfoot must move like an ape, and may very well move like a human dressed in an uncomfortable costume.

While the existence of such a creature is not at all impossible, two elements speak against it: First, there would need to be a very considerable number of them available to maintain the gene pool and thus ensure survival of the species; it is difficult to imagine that a population of such a large animal could so successfully avoid detection. Second, the fact remains that to date, not one bit of material evidence (hair, skin, bones, droppings) of this creature has ever been produced, though a chimpanzee scalp was once offered and is still occasionally brought up by devotees of this fascinating legend.

Abracadabra

While the actual origin of the word is uncertain, it has been said that it was the name of the supreme deity of the Assyrians, but it may also be an Aramaic phrase. It is a magical word often appearing on amulets, and was first mentioned by the third-century physician Quintus Severus Sammondicus. It is often seen in the configuration of a diminishing triangle:

A B R A C A D A B R A
A B R A C A D A B R
A B R A C A D A B
A B R A C A D A
A B R A C A D
A B R A C A
A B R A C
A B R A
A B R
A B
A

It was believed that certain evils would diminish and vanish in the same way the word did. The word was often used by conjurors as an exclamation at the culmination of a trick. Now not so often employed, and in any case totally ineffective.

See also charms.

Abraham the Jew

(1362?-1460?) An alchemist/magician from Mayence, a town west of Koblenz, Germany. He came from a family of magicians and traveled through Austria, Hungary, Greece, the city of Constantinople, Arabia, Palestine, and Egypt, where he met and studied with a mentor magician, Abra-Melin. He finally settled in Würzburg, Germany, where he married.

He performed his wonders before Henry VI of England, Pope John XXIII (the first one), and Emperor Sigismund of Germany.

A tome supposed to have been written by Abraham titled *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abra-Melin, as delivered by Abraham the Jew unto his son Lamech*, tells the reader how to “excite tempests,” have visions, “retain familiar spirits,” raise the dead and walk under (not on) water. Instructions on how to summon these convenient powers are followed by observations on “comedies, operas and all kinds of music and dances.” All these abilities are said to be attained by means of the kabala.

Abraham was intolerant of other magi, believing himself — and his hero, Abra-Melin — to be the only performers worth consideration. This is a common delusion among such folks.

Abra-Melin

Teacher of Abraham the Jew, *which see*.

Abrams, Dr. Albert

(1863-1924) The consummate quack, Abrams was a medical graduate of the University of Heidelberg (in 1893) who moved to the United States to become a professor of pathology at Stanford University, a post he held for five years. Then he developed a diagnostic idea he called “spondylotherapy” which consisted of striking the vertebrae with a hammer. This rather alienated him from his colleagues at Stanford, and perhaps from some of his patients as well.

Dr. Albert Abrams, the “dean of twentieth century charlatans.”

Abrams left Stanford and began teaching spondylotherapy to other physicians for a fee of \$200. Next he originated the idea of diagnosing disease by means of a sealed, scientific-looking black box he called the Dynamizer. This device, he said, worked at any distance by analyzing a drop of the patient's blood and, he said, could even determine the religious affiliation of the patient! Many persons, including some doctors, believed him.

Soon, for a healthy fee, Abrams was broadcasting cures to his patients by radio waves through another quack device he called the Omnipotent Oscilloclast. Other varieties of these boxes were named the Biodynamometer and the Reflexophone. His customers actually took all this seriously and paid well for his services.

Abrams's various boxes were available for rental by would-be instant healers, but were thoroughly sealed up. The agreement was that the renter could not examine the innards of the device. When a few skeptics did open the boxes, they found simple wiring, a few resistors, a small motor that only made humming noise, and nothing that could in any way perform a diagnosis or “broadcast” or even produce radio waves.

Investigators even sent Abrams drops of red ink in place of blood, but he was still able to find human diseases in the samples. A spot of chicken blood brought back a diagnosis of cancer, malaria, diabetes, and two different venereal diseases. The chicken, it appeared, had gone through an unusual existence in its life of just less than one year.

The American Medical Association called Abrams the “dean of twentieth century charlatans.” He died wealthy in 1924, leaving an estate of millions of dollars.

See also George De la Warr *and* Ruth Drown.

Abraxas

(also, Abracax or Abrasax) The supreme god of the Gnostics, pictured with the head of a king and with serpents for feet. Also, Abraxas is a Gnostic “word of power” and a divine name with magical significance. Vulgar rumor has it that it was once used as a trade name for a household cleaner made by Proctor & Gamble, but was quickly withdrawn from the market after *Bible* thumpers raised the usual din about Satanism.

Actorius

A stone found in the gizzard of a capon, worn as an amulet, or charm, to bring courage, though due to surgical intervention, capons are not generally known for their courage. This is simply a concretion of various mineral substances, and can be defined as an avian pearl. Not in demand as a gemstone.

Acupressure

See acupuncture.

Acupuncture

The (probably mythical) Chinese ruler known as the Yellow Emperor (Huang-ti, circa 2704 B.C.-?) is said to have brought the bow and arrow, writing, the water well, shoes, and the calendar to his subjects. It is said that he also wrote a medical manuscript, *Nei Jing*, that is still used by modern healers.

Repeating material that was considerably older, the book postulated a theoretical fluid/gas/plasma labeled qi (pronounced *chee*). The study of this substance or influence is known as qi gong (pronounced *chee gung*). The qi is believed to circulate through the body by means of pathways called meridians. There are twelve or fourteen major meridians. (Since dissection of the body was forbidden in the old Chinese culture, it was probably the veins and arteries that they occasionally saw following catastrophic accidents, which they mistook for these conduits for the qi.)

A great number of “acupuncture points” are specified on the body, and very fine needles, traditionally of gold or silver, inserted into these points on a properly oriented (north-south) patient and twiddled about rapidly between the fingers, are said to bring about analgesic, anesthetic, or curative effects.

One form of acupuncture uses only the ear, which is regarded as a homunculus. Needles are inserted into various specific parts of the ear that represent parts of the entire body. Dr. Lester Sacks of California has developed a staple-in-the-ear treatment that he claims will help patients lose weight, stop addictions, and serve in various other helpful ways. Many very fat addicts swear that this system works.

A form of the art in which finger pressure is substituted for the needles is known as acupressure, also called, “shiatsu.” This form is understandably more popular than the needle version.

Adalbert

An eighth-century French mystic who was fond of giving away parings of his nails and locks of hair to his disciples and admirers. He said an angel had given him various holy relics, but it is not known whether those mementos included nail parings or locks of hair.

Adalbert always carried with him a letter from Jesus Christ that he said had been delivered to him by St. Michael. The church finally lost all patience with him for borrowing their miracles and threw him into prison, where he died.

Adam

In the *Bible*, the First Man. He was mated to Eve, the First Woman. Their sons were Cain and Abel. In a Talmudic legend, however, Adam's first wife was Lilith and she bore him demons. Parenthood, it seems, is an uncertain art fraught with various problems.

Adamantius

A Jewish physician, circa A.D. 300, who espoused the study of physiognomy (reading character from facial features) and wrote copiously on the subject in Greek. The first translation of his work (into French) was published in Paris in 1556, and then in a 1780 book titled *Scriptores Physiognomici veteres*. Perhaps by design, no portrait of Adamantius survives by which we might determine his own character.

Adamski, George

(1891-1965) A traveling wine salesman of Greek origin who brought the subject of UFOs to worldwide attention with his wild tales of having traveled into outer space with extraterrestrials. Tales of his having oversampled his wares are not substantiated.

The Adamski books *Flying Saucers Have Landed* (1953), *Inside the Space Ships* (1955), and *Flying Saucers Farewell* (1961), which described civilizations on the planets Venus, Mars, and Saturn, are still in print in several languages and are still extolled by believers. This, even though we now know that the physical scenarios described by Adamski are quite impossible.

Facts seldom interfere with belief.

Adept

As a noun, the word refers to a person said to be skilled at using magical or occult powers as a result of studying various practical mystical techniques. Adepts are also known by great names like the Great White Brotherhood, Mahatmas, Rahats and Rishis. A chela is an apprentice to an adept. The profession is not taught at most centers of learning. Not yet, that is.

As an adjective, the word denotes one with the abilities of an adept.

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