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## Pegasus Awards

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Written by Jeff Wagg

### Pegasus Awards

The **Pegasus Award** is the name of an annual tongue-in-cheek honor recognized by noted skeptic James Randi. The awards seek to expose parapsychological frauds that Randi has noted over the previous year. Randi usually makes his announcements of the awards from the previous year on April 1.

The awards are announced via **telepathy**, winners are allowed to **predict** their victories, and the Flying Pig trophies are sent via **psychokinesis**. We send; if they don't receive, that's probably due to their lack of paranormal talent.

### History of the Award

The award was originally called the Uri Award, after asserted psychic Uri Geller and was first announced in the appendix of Randi's book Flim-Flam!. The 1982 book listed the award's "recipients" in 1979, 1980 and 1981.

In **Flim-Flam!**, Randi states:

"The trophy consists of a stainless-steel spoon bent in a pleasing curve (paranormally, of course) and supported by a base of plastic. Please note that the base is flimsy and quite transparent. I am personally responsible for the nomination of the candidates. The sealed envelopes are read by me, while blindfolded, at the official announcement ceremony on April 1. Any baseless claims are rationalized in approved parapsychological fashion, and the results will be published immediately without being checked in any way. Winners are notified telepathically and are allowed to predict their victory in advance." (Randi 1982:327-28)

The bent spoon trophy is a reference to Geller's claimed spoon-bending abilities.

The logo of a winged pig was designed for Randi's website by German artist Jutta Degener in 1996. The name "Pegasus" was chosen by Randi from suggestions e-mailed to him. The term is a portmanteau pun combining the word pig with the mythological Pegasus, a reference to the expression "when pigs fly" (see Pegasus).

Randi did not make any Uri Award for a number of years after its inception in Flim-Flam!, but in 1997 it was revived and the name was changed to "Pegasus" after the winged pig. Randi announced the recipients through his e-newsletter SWIFT! in which he said: "The awards are announced via telepathy, the winners are allowed to predict their winning, and the Flying Pig trophies are sent via psychokinesis. We send; if they don't receive, that's probably due to their lack of paranormal talent."

### Categories Awarded

**Flim-Flam!** specifies the four categories under which winners of the Uri (Pegasus Award) may fall, in 2005 a fifth category was added:

#### The Current Categories:

1. To the Scientist who said or did the silliest thing relating to parapsychology in the preceding twelve months.
2. To the Funding Organization that supports the most useless parapsychological study during the year.
3. To the Media outlet that reported as fact the most outrageous paranormal claim.
4. To the Performer who fools the greatest number of people with the least effort in that twelve-month period.
5. For the most persistent refusal to face reality.

## This Years Winners

**Category #1:** To the scientist or academic who said or did the silliest thing related to the supernatural, paranormal or occult:

Dr. Colin Ross, a psychiatrist in Texas. He is a lettered man, having published many articles in peer-reviewed journals, and you might think he would be the last person to earn a Pigasus... until you look a bit deeper.

Dr. Ross claims that he can send electromagnetic beams out of his eyes.

Now, to be fair, this was long thought to be how vision worked... in the Middle Ages. However, we now understand that light emitted or reflected by external objects enters the eye, and that's how we see. But Dr. Ross claims to have reversed this process, and not only can he send EM beams from his eyes, but he has rigged up a system to detect it. He applied for our famous Million Dollar Challenge with this idea, and when we sent it to our team of experts, they objected, saying it was the movements of Dr. Ross's eyes that triggered his system. ~~He has since put his application on hold while he works on this, still claiming, of course, that there is "definitely a beam" emerging from his eyes. [It has come to our attention after posting this originally that Dr. Ross has re-activated his application. -Ed.]~~ Oh, and did we mention he's writing a book on this as well? Or maybe you already guessed that-- but even if you did, you don't win the million.



Links:

[Swift article on Dr. Ross](#)

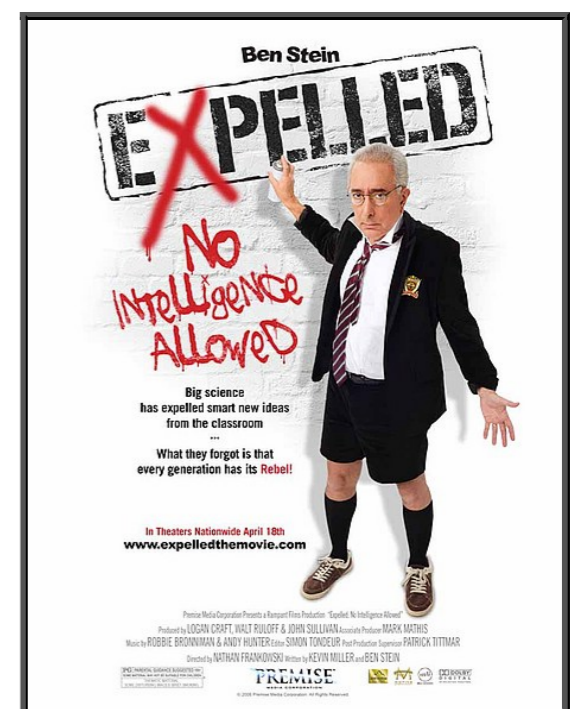
[Dallas Observer Article 1](#)

[Dallas Observer Article 2](#)

**Category #2:** To the funding organization that supported the most useless study of a supernatural, paranormal or occult claim:

The Producers of "*Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*": Logan Craft, Walter Ruloff, and John Sullivan.

"Expelled" was a movie destined for this award. Its premise was to show that Intelligent Design -- a rebranding of young Earth creationism in an attempt to circumvent multiple court decisions not to teach religion in public schools -- is a viable alternative to evolution, and that ID is being actively censored in academia. Hosted by Ben Stein, the movie was an atrocious web of distortions, ridiculous accusations, bad logic, and out-and-out falsehoods. They interviewed several notable academicians, including Richard Dawkins, PZ Myers, and Genie Scott under false pretenses so that they could get quotations used out of context, and then spun it all into a movie so truly awful that The Onion's famed AV Club said it was "odious" and one of the worst movies of 2008. Roger Ebert penned a tour-de-force debunking of the movie for his Chicago Sun-Times column as well, a must-read evisceration that slam dunks "Expelled" into the dust bin of Hollywood.



So, to the producers of "Expelled" goes the Pigasus, and a little free advice: next time, invest in a project that has a more grounded basis in reality. Perhaps unicorns, fairies, or Atlantis.

Links:

[IMDB listing for "Expelled"](#)

[Roger Ebert's review](#)

[The Onion's A/V Club Review](#)

**Category #3:** To the media outlet that reported as factual the most outrageous supernatural, paranormal or occult claims:

The makers of Enzyte. If you watch TV late at night, you're no stranger to woowoo infomercials, which pitch everything from psychic hotlines to pills which will increase, um, various parts of your body (also, see #5 below). This has been true for years, but recently things took an odd turn. You may be familiar with Enzyte, the "male enhancement" "supplement", shilled by Berkeley Premium Nutraceuticals, which used the irritating "Smiling Bob" commercials. In September 2008, the company's CEO and founder, Steve Warshak, and his mother, Harriet Warsjhak, were found guilty of conspiracy to commit all kinds of fraud. They were thrown in jail, had to forfeit half a billion dollars in assets, and went bankrupt.



Case closed, right? Wrong. The Smiling Bob Enzyte commercials are still running. If you watch Comedy Central, for example, they shows these ads nearly ever commercial break.

Maybe they should win an award for talking to the dead.

So, for years of promulgating pseudoscientific piffle, the Pigasus goes to the TV cable industry.

Links:

[Wikipedia entry for Enzyte](#)

We note the Enzyte website no longer exists, and redirects to another "male enhancement" product.

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**Category #4:** To the Performer who fooled the greatest number of people using the least talent:

Jenny McCarthy, the well-known model and actor, who in recent days is getting far more publicity for her stance that vaccines cause autism. She has a son who may be autistic, and of course we are sympathetic to her plight. But that can only go so far when Ms. McCarthy appears on endless chat shows, is interviewed in magazine articles, and even writes books encouraging people not to vaccinate their children.

Numerous, well-done studies have shown conclusively that there is no causal link between vaccines and the onset of autistic spectrum disorders - the claim that they are connected is spurious, based on anecdotes and the fact that vaccines are given to children around the same time that ASD symptoms begin to appear.

The antivaccination movement has been directly linked with outbreaks of various vaccine-preventable diseases such as measles, and there have been numerous illnesses and even deaths associated with these outbreaks. The evidence is in, and has been for quite some time: vaccines are an overwhelming modern medical success story, having eradicated such scourges as smallpox, and hugely lowering rates of other diseases such as measles, mumps, rubella, polio, Hib, and diphtheria. The evidence also overwhelmingly against any link between vaccines and autism as well.

Yet all that evidence has been overturned in the public's mind with ease and alacrity by Ms. McCarthy, so she wins the Pigasus award for her contribution to the country's ill-health.

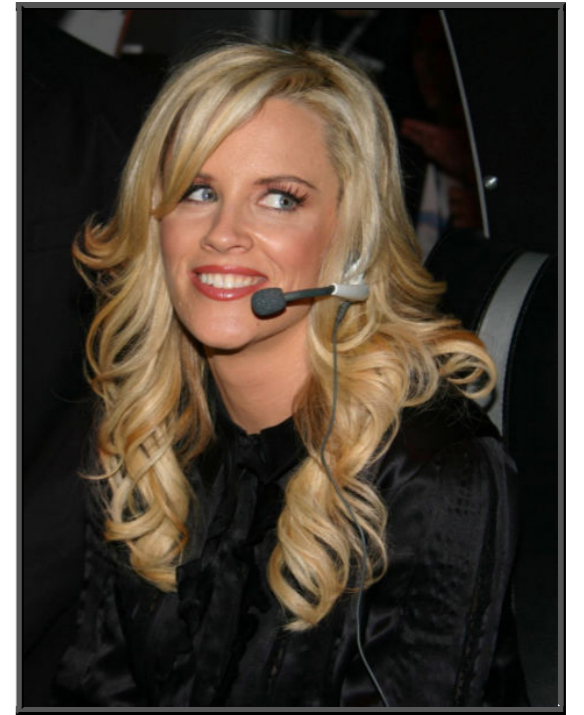
NOTE: At The Amaz!ng Meeting 7 in Las Vegas on July 9, we will be sponsoring a vaccination clinic to help the children in the area get the shots they need to stay healthy. Las Vegas has some of the lowest vaccination rates in the US, and this clinic is critically needed. To find out more, please go to our [events page](#).

Links:

[Dr. David Gorski's review of the antivax movement](#)

[Dr. Steven Novellas' antivax review](#)

[Phil Plait's review of Jenny McCarthy](#)



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**Category #5:** Most persistent refusal to face reality:

Kevin Trudeau. If you watch late-night cable TV, you could hardly have missed our final Pigasus awardee. He hit the airwaves in the 1990s shilling his book "Natural Cures 'They' Don't Want You to Know About", where he claimed eating coral calcium cured cancer. Alliteration aside, in 1998 a court ordered not to make this false claim, and in 2003 the Federal Trade Commission charged that he knowingly violated the 1998 order. So he's been charged twice for lying in his ads and has had to pay hefty fees and fines due to them... which is why it's even more astonishing that in 2008 he was charged once again for false claims, this time about his book "The Weight Loss Cure 'They' Don't Want You to Know About" (not to mention the two years he spent in federal prison for credit card fraud).



In his informercials, Trudeau claims the diet in his book is easy to do, and "ultimately allows readers to eat whatever they want." It turns out this is not really quite true, and instead the book advocates severe

dieting, taking non-FDA approved drugs, and maintaining the diet for life.

Because of this small breach of reality, and also his past violations, this time the FTC fined him a whopping \$37 million! While we applaud the FTC and are glad of the huge sum, we don't think that will replace the lives of the people who read his book and believed the snake oil he knew he was selling. Caveat emptor always applies, certainly, but in this case that doesn't extend to out-and-out fraud.

So Kevin Trudeau is the recipient of the Pigasus for purposely and with contempt storming right through several FTC court-ordered fines and convictions. We suppose his next book will be "Felonious Actions 'I' Don't Want You to Know".

Links:

The [FTC 2009 Statement](#)

The [FTC 2007 Statement](#)

The [Skeptic Dictionary entry on Kevin Trudeau](#)

## Previous Winners

**For the Performances in the year 2007** - Full page ([Here](#))

- **Scientist:** Michael Behe
- **Organization:** George Bush's White House
- **Media:** Montel Williams (again)
- **Psychic Performer:** Vincent Williams

**For the Performances in the year 2006** - Full page ([Here](#))

- **Scientist:** Rupert Sheldrake
- **Organization:** Templeton Foundation
- **Media:** Montel Williams
- **Psychic Performer:** Uri Geller

**For the Performances in the year 2005** - Full page ([Here](#))

- **Scientist:** Brenda Dunne
- **Organization:** Auckland City Council of Auckland, NZ
- **Media:** ABC "Primetime Live" for Airing the special *John of God*
- **Psychic Performer:** Allison DuBois, NBC-TV show "Medium."

**For the Performances in the year 2004** - Full page ([Here](#))

- **Scientist:** Dr. Rogerio Lobo
- **Organization:** United States Air Force Research Laboratory
- **Media:** the film "What the #\$\*! Do We Know? *John of God*"
- **Psychic Performer:** Sylvia Browne

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