I just met a CalTech cognitive scientist--a self-proclaimed genius and world's foremost authority (again, self-proclaimed) on optical illusions. His name: Al Seckel.

Because he is at CalTech, I gave him the benefit of the doubt, but I found him to be pompous, defensive, and credit-grabbing (among his claims in the course of a 30-minute conversation: invented the Darwin fish, "got" Randi the MacArthur Fellowship)--qualities more typical of the intellectually insecure than of the genuinely gifted.

He also alluded to his past involvement in the skeptics' movement, and when I mentioned such names as Randi, Michael Shermer, and Penn Jillette, he was ax-grindingly critical of each. At that point, my curiosity (and skepticism!) kicked up. I seached the I'net and found that Seckel was a rising star in CSICOP until someone discovered that he had completely fabricated his academic credentials and milked the organization for lots of money, which he apparently pocketed.

Now his personality makes sense to me, but I suddenly have more questions than answers. I'm new to the skeptics' community and don't know the history. Could any of you veterans shed some light on this bizarre little character named Al Seckel?

I realize the issue might be delicate; I'm happy to talk off the record. Also, this is strictly a matter of morbid curiosity on my part! (ie, no book writing, reporting, or even gossiping.)

Thank you!
Topaz