Reader Dennis Middlebrooks of New York writes:

The History Channel aired a program called "The Next Nostradamus" Sunday night. The show began by claiming Nostradamus was right on target with his predictions and was "a mortal man with immortal insights into the future." Incredibly, the show equates astrology with astronomy and states that Nostradamus developed a method to predict the future by casting horoscopes for the entire globe! The show also claimed that Copernicus and Galileo were astrologers and described alchemy as the "science of converting lead into gold." I kid you not.

No surprises here at all, sir. That show was obviously written and edited by high school dropouts, who are ignorant of science and easily find employment with the History and the Learning channels...

The program then highlighted NYU Political Science professor Bruce Bueno de Mesquite, whose "secret algorithm" allegedly predicts the future with 100% accuracy and who has been used by the CIA to foretell looming disasters. Among his predictions: unless Israel and Palestine come to an agreement within ten years, there could be dire consequences; we are facing a severe energy crisis; North Korea may develop nuclear weapons; Al Qaeda will remain a threat, as foretold by Nostradamus (who also predicted 9/11!), and the like. The show says that Nostradamus and the NYU Prof. are "two men with second sight separated by centuries." BTW, the Nostradamus predictions cited in the show are all very general and were dealt with in your book on him ["The Mask of Nostradamus"] - "fire in the sky," etc.

In the paragraph above, following "Among his predictions," we find four startling facts that Professor De Mesquite is said to have determined by using his secret "algorithm." Well, I think I've uncovered that secret: read the news, state the obvious using provisionary terms, *et le voilá,* the History Channel will scramble to make a show about your "discovery."

I think Prof. De Mesquite (aptly named!) must have read Isaac Asimov's "Foundation Trilogy," in which "psycho-historian" Hari Selden used mathematical models to predict the future. Those books were written about 60 years ago! De Mesquite guards his "proprietary algorithm" very closely. Surprise, surprise! The man has hoodwinked a lot of people, apparently.

What a disgrace. I used to respect The History Channel. What a load of garbage it puts on now. Do you know anything about this charlatan?

I must say that I think reader Middlebrooks may have judged the professor far too harshly. Remember that writers and producers will subvert any and all data in order to create the effect they want, which is to represent this man as a claimed miracle worker. Mr. Middlebrooks admits that he only watched a small portion of the show, so he does not know what more the professor might have said. I would hardly label him a "charlatan." I still have to see this show myself, so I'll have further observations when I've done so.

But, I continue to be astonished at the lack of talent shown by the History Channel's writers and producers. They're unskilled in logic, they know nothing about researching techniques, and what shows up on TV is clear evidence that truth and reason have no part in their protocol. Sensationalism and sponsor satisfaction is all they aim for.

Ethics, integrity, and responsibility be damned...