

'Rather' a matter of indecision

I give up. After wading through about 3,000 readers' solutions to the mysterious beating of Dan Rather, I have to mark the file "unsolved."

As you may remember, I became intrigued by the Rather case — which involved two well-dressed strangers pummeling him on Park Avenue, while saying "What is the frequency, Kenneth?"

So I invited any would-be Sherlock Holmes to play armchair detective and offer a logical solution.

I've discovered there are far more Stephen Spielberg and George Lucas movie fans out there, than followers of Holmes' adventures.

I estimate that at least one-fourth of the solutions went something like this:

Aliens from another planet came to earth and took human form, as they so often do in science fiction films.

But in order to return to their native galaxy, they must radio their mother ship to come get them or somehow transport themselves along an electronic beam.

However, one of the aliens — the only one who knows the electronic frequency — enjoys being an earth creature and doesn't want to leave. As one writer put it: "Maybe on his planet, they didn't have sex, booze or pizza."

So this alien, who has taken the name Kenneth, sneaks away and leaves his pals stranded. They hang around New York until they spot someone resembling him — the unfortunate Dan Rather. They attack and demand that he reveal the frequency.

I bounced the Stranded Alien theory off a female investigative reporter. She shook her head and said: "No way. If these creatures are intelligent enough to travel through space, with the power to assume human form, why the heck would any of them want to look like Dan Rather, when they could just as easily look like Robert Redford or Paul Newman?"

So much for that solution.

Another large group of sleuths came up with various drug peddling theories. Someone who looked like Rather knew the radio frequency to signal a plane or ship that carried a load of something to sniff that it was OK to land.

I asked a narcotics cop about it. He said: "Why would anybody go to all that bother? You can go to South America, dress up like Santa Claus, fill your bag with coke, get on a commercial flight, land in this country, and walk right in saying ho-ho-ho."

Then there is the loan-shark theory. A New Yorker assured me that the local loan sharks use the word "frequency" to describe payments. So Rather was mistaken for a dead-beat named Kenneth, etc., etc.

The trouble with that theory is that several New Yorkers — including a cop — told me they have never heard the word "frequency" used that way. The cop said: "When they want to describe a payment, they use the word payment. Do you think we have illiterate



MIKE ROYKO

loan sharks?"

Several dozen others saw it this way:

Someone named Kenneth knows a secret radio frequency that is essential to some sort of criminal activity. But Kenneth cannot be found. The criminals want to get word to him that they urgently need the frequency.

So they decide to bash a famous person while asking the strange question, knowing that it will receive nationwide publicity and Kenneth will get their message.

In arguing for this theory, one writer said: "Look at the money they saved in not having to place all those ads in the personals sections."

And there were the many suggestions that the thugs weren't really saying: "What is the frequency, Kenneth." Rather, his brain addled by the punches, misunderstood them.

They included:

A couple of visiting conventioners who drank too much, didn't like New York, and punched him for the fun of it, while saying: "What freaks in this city, Kenneth."

A pair of dope fiends who mistook him for a dealer and were asking: "Where's the freakin' C, Kenneth?"

Two ordinary, New York sadists, out to satisfy their cruelty on any helpless stranger, and while bashing him, one says: "Watch the freak wince — see, Kenneth?"

So we don't have a clear-cut solution. But at least one reader came up with a better name for the mystery."

He wrote: "I think Dr. Watson might have called it: 'The Case of the Dropped Anchor.'"

And I'm grateful to Wayne Wille, a Chicagoan, for correcting me on my usage of "Quick, Watson, the game is afoot."

He said that isn't what Holmes really said.

"Watson walked in one day and found Holmes lying upon his sofa and playing This Little Piggy with his toes.

"Watson asked Holmes: 'What are you doing?'

"Holmes replied: 'Quick, Watson, the foot is a game.'"

The Chicago Tribune.

M. TRUZZI
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Oct. 27, 1986
Ann Arbor News