

Psychics and Serial Murder

An Excerpt from The Killers Among Us

by Steven A. Egger

The extent to which the area of parapsychology or the utilization of a psychic has contributed to serial murder investigations has not been well documented. In fact, other than a survey by Sweat and Durm (1993), there are no empirical data on the police use of psychics in any type of investigation. Although the use of a psychic in a criminal investigation always receives a great deal of publicity in the press, psychic involvement in a serial murder investigation has generally received notice and attention only in the more publicized and infamous cases. Also, in many instances, regardless of the nature of the criminal investigation, police agencies have been reticent to admit to the use of psychics during or following the completion of an investigation given the risks of criticism from the public as well as other members of the law enforcement community. Psychics often become involved in highly publicized serial murder investigations. They either make predictions about the killer to the media or secretly provide advice to agencies or individual investigators.

During the early stages of searching for a missing teenage boy in December 1978, Des Plaines, Illinois, police began to strongly suspect that John Wayne Gacy was responsible for the boy's disappearance. A local psychic was utilized to uncover information about the missing youth. Information given to the police by this psychic was subsequently interpreted as very accurate in describing John Wayne Gacy, his method of killing his victims, and his disposal of their bodies. Gacy was arrested and convicted of killing 33 young men and boys in Cook County, Illinois. The young boy missing in Des Plaines had been one of Gacy's victims; however, the boy's body was still missing. (According to Gacy's confession to the police, the boy's body had been thrown off a bridge into the Des Plaines River, about 55 miles south of Chicago.)

Search for the missing boy's body continued until April of 1979 when his body was found floating in the Des Plaines River in Grundy County, Illinois. During the intensive search for the body, the local psychic and a well known psychic from the east assisted the Des Plaines Police.

The psychics used by the police did provide investigators with some "very pertinent information" (Kozenczak and Herickson, 1989, p. 24) regarding the location of the missing boy's body. Had weather conditions not been prohibitive, investigators argue that the boy's body might have been found earlier as a direct result of psychic assistance.

Peter Hurkos was well known to the law enforcement community in the early 1950s. This famous Dutch mystic had reportedly helped solve a number of murders in the United States and Europe. He also claimed to have helped Scotland Yard recover a famous painting that had been stolen.

In January 1964, at the urging of an anonymous citizen who offered to pay his fee, Hurkos was asked to assist the Massachusetts Attorney General's office in their investigation of a series of homicides occurring in and around Boston since 1962. The homicides were already being referred to as the "Boston Strangler" case.

After spending a week in Boston, Hurkos identified the killer as a 56-year-old shoe salesman with a history of mental illness. Hurkos assured the police that they need look no further. Boston police then coordinated an exhaustive investigation of this suspect, ruling him out as a suspect in the killings. Not long after this, Albert DeSalvo confessed to these killings (see Frank, 1967).

Over five years later in 1969, Hurkos, who by this time was working as a psychic detective in California theaters and nightclubs, was contacted by private citizens from Ann Arbor, Michigan, and asked to assist police in Washtenaw County in solving the "Coed Murders." At this time, these murders consisted of the deaths of six young females in the

Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti areas between 1967 and 1969.

Although there was a great deal of controversy as to whether the three major police agencies involved would cooperate with Hurkos, the Ann Arbor police finally agreed to provide some limited cooperation to the psychic. Hurkos agreed to come to Ann Arbor provided that his travel expenses were paid. With a great deal of fanfare and media publicity, Hurkos arrived in Michigan in late July 1969. For almost a week Hurkos was accompanied by two homicide detectives in his efforts to assist the investigation. Following the finding of a seventh homicide victim during this time, Hurkos left Ann Arbor claiming that the police were too hostile to his presence in the investigation (see Keyes, 1976).

In briefly discussing a psychic consultant brought in by the Atlanta Police Department to assist them in the Atlanta "Child Murders," Detlinger and Prugh (1983) states: "The Atlanta police did everything possible -- including providing official police escort service -- to facilitate her 'communion' with the killer(s) or the spirits driving the killer(s) (p. 60). Detlinger is no less strident in his criticism of this psychic consultant and others who attempted to assist the Atlanta police in investigating a serial murder, which would officially list 30 victims. Media hype and self promotion was apparently a major problem in utilizing psychics during this investigation.

Notwithstanding the tendency of law enforcement and to a lesser extent, the public to be very negative regarding the use of psychics in a serial murder investigation, psychic consultants are often used in these investigations. The extent to which psychics are forced on the police or the amount of cooperation that police provide to these people is not well understood. In some cases, when all leads have been exhausted, turning to a psychic may be necessary, if only to show that the agency is willing to use any and all sources that might lead to resolution of the murders.

There has been no known or credible evaluation of psychic effectiveness in assisting a criminal investigation. A review of a number of serial murder investigations conducted over the last 20 years reveals the presence of psychics (invited and uninvited) in a large number of these cases. A number of investigators claim that psychics are very useful, but the majority appear to remain skeptical. However, the involvement of a psychic in a serial murder investigation may provide an unintentional benefit. Psychics approach the investigation from a very different perspective and this may, through the questions asked by the psychic, cause investigators themselves to begin to ask questions that have not been asked before. These answers may produce new information that provides further progress in the investigation.

REALLity Check

by David Bloomberg

It's been a few months since my last column, so Editor Bob called and told me I'd better get moving for this month. Not wanting to upset him, I've put together the following tidbits, several of which deal with the big topic of the day, alternative medicine.

TT in Springfield

A couple months ago, we had an article which summarized some information about Therapeutic Touch (TT) and its availability through St. John's Hospital's Center for Mind-Body Medicine. That article made its way to the desk of the State Journal-Register's health writer, Tony Cappasso. He did some digging and question-asking (including the questions I'd planned on asking St. John's -- thus saving us some work) and ended up writing not one, not two, but three full articles on St. John's and some of their less-than-scientific practices.

While the TT article made the front page (September 7), the only downside is that the front page (and much of the rest of the media) was dominated by Di's funeral coverage. To date, I've seen one letter in response to the article (essentially attacking it for daring to rely on scientific evidence instead of anecdotes), and no other media response at all. Even without that media response, though, we can hope that it just might affect the way St. John's practices in the future.

For those of you who didn't see the article (or were overwhelmed by Di coverage), Cappasso did a good job of explaining TT, which deals with practitioners claiming to be able to adjust the "human energy field" to treat medical problems. He talked to or quoted several experts across the U.S., including Dr. Stephen Barrett, the head of Quackwatch; Dr. Henry Claman, professor of immunology at the University of Colorado (where a study on TT was

done); Dr. John Renner, of the National Council Against Health Fraud (NCAHF); James "The Amazing" Randi; and us here at REALL.

The overwhelming opinion from those listed above is that TT = quackery. There is little or no scientific evidence that it does anything, and certainly no evidence that a "human energy field" even exists. So how did St. John's medical director, Dr. Ronald Deering, respond? "I'm keeping my mind open to the concept." What?! Keeping your mind open to what? This man is supposed to be a doctor; doctors are supposed to use scientific evidence; there is a definite lack of scientific evidence here; so what is he doing?

As we often see with these types of claims, the proponents say there is all sorts of evidence to back them up. But when questioned, they come out somewhat light on facts. Here, we have a nurse who made that claim, but could only point to a single study when Cappasso asked her about it. Unfortunately, that study has been reviewed quite critically, along with others. The Questionable Nurse Practices Task Force of NCAHF found that "the more rigorous the research design, the more detailed the statistical analysis, the less evidence there is that there is any observed -- or observable -- phenomenon here." Dr. Claman wrote a report that noted that claims regarding unmeasurable energy fields "are a disservice to science and the practice of healing, and demonstrate a commitment to metaphysics and the mystical view of life rather than to a scientific or rational view of life."

Perhaps the most humorous part of the article describes a scientific test so simple that anybody who believes in TT should be begging to be a part of it. In this case, the test was put together by a 4th-grade girl who asked 15 TT practitioners to determine if the girl's hand was above their right or left hand while their vision was blocked by a screen. If they can truly detect and manipulate a "human energy field," this test should be a snap. Instead, the results showed that they got it right 47% of the time -- no better than randomly guessing! Similar tests done by and for others have shown similar, or worse, results.

So where is the science behind the claims? It simply isn't there? So why does St. John's continue to offer TT? That is the real mystery here.

AMA = Alternative Medical Association?

Even more mysterious than a given hospital offering an unscientific and unproven "therapy" is the idea that the main organization representing doctors might publish a book about alternative medicine. Yet that's exactly what might have happened were it not for the American Medical Association's (AMA) recent fiasco.

You've probably heard about how the AMA was going to license themselves to Sunbeam. That caused a great deal of internal strife and led to the "resignations" of several officials. It turns out that those very officials were in plans to publish a book on alternative medicine -- and apparently not a very critical one! Now that those guys are gone, the AMA has put that book on hold, an action that apparently should have been taken a while ago, considering the "strong concerns [that] were voice by its top scientific committee," according to the Chicago Tribune (9/25).

Apparently, the AMA Council on Scientific Affairs expressed serious concerns about the book a year ago (it had been okayed by two of the executives who resigned), but even though the council was asked to write a foreword for the book, they never were given the opportunity to review it! Thankfully, now that those who approved the project are gone, its being reviewed carefully (it had been virtually completed) to make certain it "is consistent with the best standards for scientific integrity," according to an AMA official.

Remember that Warning?

We haven't talked too much about false memories lately, hopefully because the tide has turned and people (and therapists) realize the dangers of the types of therapies that led to such problems. Well, maybe not.

Reuters reported (8/19) that people can be influenced under hypnosis to develop false memories even after they had been warned that false memories could result! The study showed that 28% of those who were put under hypnosis did develop false memories about recent events even though they had been specifically warned that "hypnotized participants may confuse what they imagine with what really occurred." It does look like the warning helped a little, because a study done without the warning showed 44% of the participants developing the false memories.

So while the warnings can help, it certainly doesn't remove the possibility of false-memory formation. Indeed, the only way to avoid creation of false memories is for therapists to stop using the methods they use for "recovering" memories.

Quantum Spookiness

This isn't so much a report on the paranormal as it is a report about a report that will likely be used by paranormal proponents.

The journal Science reported that a test of "quantum action at a distance" showed that some strange "spooky actions" can seemingly occur and that links between quantum entities can persist even though they are separated by several miles.

Some background: quantum theory allows a pure quantum state, such as polarization, to be spread across two objects. Therefore, a pair of simultaneously-created photons are "entangled" such that the measurement taken on one photon will influence the measurement of its partner, even though it may be quite a distance away. Einstein never liked this idea (he is the one who called it "spooky actions at a distance") and it is rather difficult to fathom, given that it appears to be at odds with special relativity's prohibition of faster-than-light effects. However, laboratory tests have seemingly backed it. Those tests were fairly short range, but a more recent test using fiber-optic lines and testing stations almost 11 kilometers apart showed evidence of "quantum spookiness." Apparently, some of the properties of the photons are not determined when they are created, but when one of them is measured; the photons acquire a particular state at that time, and the "entangled" twin instantly acquires the same property.

Now, this doesn't mean that information can be sent faster than the speed of light, because the quantum correlations cannot be controlled. But don't expect that to stop paranormal proponents. I have heard them argue before, trying to use quantum mechanics and scientific-sounding jabber to justify their claims. This will only add fuel to the fire. After all, if this is possible, why not faster-than-light speed? Or psychic power? Or astrology? Of course, what will likely be missing from these claims is the most important factor: evidence. Yes, Einstein doubted that "spooky actions at a distance" could be real. But I'd bet that if he were here today, he'd look at the evidence and change his mind. Do we understand why this occurs? I know I don't! But there is evidence that it does, indeed, happen. If paranormal proponents want our attention, then they, too, need to focus on proving that something actually happens.

Tribune Continues To Promote Nonsense

Longtime readers of this column will find it no surprise that the Chicago Tribune promotes nonsense (generally in its "Tempo" section). But now they've taken it to new heights by using the Web.

Many newspapers have Web sites, and the Tribune is no exception. Many newspapers have astrology columns, and the Tribune is certainly no exception. However, I haven't yet found another newspaper that has several whole pages devoted to astrological nonsense (okay, I'm being redundant)!

The Tribune isn't satisfied by just providing horoscopes. No, they apparently feel the need to miseducate and misinform as well. So they have an "Astrology 101" page that readers can go to in order to learn about astrology. And what does this page say? Things like, "The tools used in astrology are based on astronomy." What?! The only thing they have in common are the first five letters of the words! Astronomy is a science; astrology is baloney.

It goes on by saying, "Astrology studies the effects of planets on people." Not at all! Astrologers don't study the effects of anything -- they just claim that distant bodies have some effect that can't be measured.

"It has been used throughout history," the article continues. But so what? So has the reading of sheep entrails (indeed, when I posted this information on the Internet SKEPTIC listserv, another participant sent a letter to the Tribune saying that they should be promoting the reading of sheep entrails, just to be fair to all beliefs).

I could go on about the twaddle contained in this homepage, but I think it's fairly clear what I'd say. The point here, of course, is that we have a major media outlet pushing nonsense as if it had some factual basis, and the owners apparently see no problem with this.

REALL on the Web

by David Bloomberg

As most of you know, REALL has an unofficial presence on the Web at www.reall.org (run by Wally Hartshorn). At that site, you can find a lot of interesting material and links, including an archive of The REALL News.

And the great thing is that anybody with Web access can see the same material! Recently, our site has gotten a fair bit of attention from various people. In one case, a believer in paranormal phenomena used me as an example of an "extreme skeptic" in a discussion that not only was I not involved in, but I wasn't even a participant in that message conference! He pointed to an article about my appearance on Morton Downey Jr.'s now-defunct attempt at a talk show comeback in Chicago, along with Investigator Bruce Walstad and several "psychics," including Dorothy Allison. For those of you who don't recall, during this show, I made Allison so mad by questioning her claims of great success that she actually stood up and pushed me. So the believer was trying to claim that I was an "extreme skeptic" because I made her mad; he further claimed that I was not using scientific methods. Unfortunately, he misrepresented pretty much everything in the article, and I plan to jump into the discussion (now over a month old, unfortunately) and point this out. I must say, though, that it is somewhat amusing to be pointed to as an "extreme skeptic" who doesn't use the scientific method!

More often, believers who are upset with our articles post directly to us, rather than about us. The most frequent source of e-mail has been therapeutic touch (which is interesting because, until very recently, we've only had a couple of minor mentions of the subject). One woman was very mad at us, but didn't want her letter published (she had ignored a number of facts, such as accusing us of being against therapeutic touch because we were anti-nurse and anti-women; the problem was that the letter/article she was responding to was written by a female nurse!).

Perhaps the most amusing incident happened just today, and it is what prompted me to write this short article. Bob Smet received a call at work from a guy in Arizona who is teaching some magic courses, including one on cold reading. It seems that he did a search on the Web and found an old REALL article by Bob about the subject, and that article noted where Bob works. Bob had mentioned that he would be willing to lend out the books he used for research to any interested party, thinking it would be another REALL member. Well, this guy was trying to do some research and wondered if he could borrow the books! Bob, being the nice guy he is, is, in fact, sending them out.

From the Chairman

David Bloomberg

First, the bad news. Due to unforeseen circumstances beyond our control, Professor Steve Egger, the author of this month's cover article/book excerpt, won't be able to give his planned presentation to us this month. So instead we'll be having a general meeting to talk about issues of the day, plan for the future, and just have a good time talking to one another! In addition, we'll see a short video about the Center for Inquiry in New York. If there's something you want to discuss, or a question you've been wanting to ask, this meeting will be the best time for it!

And speaking of meetings, our September one featuring our own Wally Hartshorn was quite interesting and amusing. Wally found some of the weirdest Web sites out there (and "out there" is definitely the appropriate term) and shared them with us.

At that meeting, we also held our somewhat delayed elections. Only two positions switched, as Wally moved into the Secretary/Treasurer spot while Kevin Brown moved back into a general Board position. I'd like to thank Kevin for his several years of serving in that position! Wally is no stranger to the job, which he held at the very beginning of REALL's existence, and he's already hard at work making cool color charts and graphs to help us further plan our finances.

Even if you weren't able to join our Board, we're always looking for people who are willing to help in one way or another. If you've got a few minutes of time that you just don't know what to do with, let us know!

See you at the meeting!

From the Editor

Bob Ladendorf

During the past couple months, a number of shocking events have occurred -- the tragic death of Diana, the week of Air Force plane disasters, and the manhunt for serial killer Andrew Cunanan. You'd think that psychics would have predicted such major historical events. I doubt that a review of the record would show any hits. As for the Cunanan pursuit and subsequent suicide, you'd have expected that the so-called "psychic detectives" out there would have been able to pinpoint Cunanan's location during his three-month spree. That apparently didn't happen.

Which brings us to our main article this month, a book excerpt on "psychic detectives" by serial murder expert Steve Egger. His second book, *The Killers Among Us*, has just been published by Prentice Hall, and we are pleased to reprint the excerpt. Steve delves into reasons why psychics are consulted in murder cases but points out that there is little solid evidence to demonstrate that the psychics really help in solving the crimes. Thanks go out to Steve, who also is a REALL board member, and his publisher.

Thanks, too, to Chairman David for providing a new "REALLity Check" this month. Our recent newsletters have been so filled up with other articles that I could not fit in his media monitor column!

Ten Important Criteria for Determining What is Science

from *Science versus Pseudoscience*, by Natan Aasey

- Science is logical and rational.
- Science makes well-defined claims.
- Scientific hypotheses are falsifiable.
- Scientific experiments are repeatable.
- Science requires that claims be examined by peers.
- Science views unexplained gaps in theories with suspicion.
- Science requires caution in examining evidence.
- Science requires objectivity.
- Science does not accept coincidence as proof.
- Science does not accept anecdotal evidence as proof.

Masthead Information

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Purpose

The Rational Examination Association of Lincoln Land (REALL) is a non-profit educational and scientific organization. It is dedicated to the development of rational thinking and the application of the scientific method toward claims of the paranormal and fringe-science phenomena.

REALL shall conduct research, convene meetings, publish a newsletter, and disseminate information to its members and the general public. Its primary geographic region of coverage is central Illinois.

REALL subscribes to the premise that the scientific method is the most reliable and self-correcting system for obtaining knowledge about the world and universe. REALL not not reject paranormal claims on a priori grounds, but rather is committed to objective, though critical, inquiry.

The REALL News is its official newsletter.

Membership information is provided elsewhere in this newsletter.

Board of Directors: Chairman, David Bloomberg; Assistant Chairman, Prof. Ron Larkin; Secretary-Treasurer, Wally Hartshorn; Newsletter Editor, Bob Ladendorf; At-Large Members, Prof. Steve Egger, Kevin Brown, and Frank Mazo.

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