



Selected articles from  
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## Florida's "Dolphin Therapy" to be featured on the BBC

by Miles W. Hardy, Ph.D.

CSICOP recently received an inquiry from Vanessa Colosi of the British Broadcasting Company in London. She was seeking skeptical input about claims of "Lourdes-like" physical healings attributed to human-dolphin interactions, a popular subject in the British press and a phenomenon that, as I came to learn, is allegedly occurring on a regular basis in south Florida.

Colosi was referred by CSICOP to TBS and then specifically to me, in my capacity as a clinical psychologist and TBS vice chairman. Within a few days I received her preliminary call, and not long thereafter a follow-up and an invitation to participate in a BBC documentary on the subject.

On the morning of August 13 I was flown, at BBC expense, to Miami, and met their team at their hotel. The crew of five consisted of Ms. Colosi, two additional female producers/interviewers, a cameraman and a soundman. They had all just returned from what they referred to as the Dolphin Treatment Center in Key Largo, having interviewed both dolphin trainers and individuals who gave testimony of amazing observations and treatment successes involving dolphin-human contact, particularly with children.

I felt my role was to provide a skeptical view and alternative explanations regarding what was clearly a primary story about the special, even paranormal, powers of dolphins to sense (perhaps in part by use of their echo-locating or sonar abilities) and treat illnesses in humans. I stressed that the skeptical position is not to deny such possibilities, but to point out the need for proper scientific research and evidence/proof of the purported elements that may or may not actually be evident in such claims. I discussed a variety of possible psychological explanations that might be playing a role in reported healings, including the desperation of parents to explore any and all possibilities for healing their children (or themselves), the drama of flying to another country for therapy (e.g., from Britain to Florida), the water and sunshine, the glamour of swimming with exotic animals, and other

manifestations of suggestibility and the placebo effect.

My interview lasted about an hour, and left me impressed with the BBC's professionalism and technical skills. I felt support from them for my skeptical position, as they clearly exhibited an "open-minded" approach as opposed to one of total belief. I requested a videotape of the program, which is expected to air on the BBC in October, and they agreed to provide me with one. It will be interesting to see how they edit my interview in their presentation of the skeptical position on dolphin-healing therapy.

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

by Terry A. Smiljanich

### Science Fiction and Skeptics

I am a big fan of science fiction. When I was young, I devoured books by Robert Heinlein and Isaac Asimov. *The Foundation Trilogy* and *Starship Troopers* were my favorites. The movies that came out in the mid-fifties were some of the greatest science fiction movies of all time -- *Forbidden Planet*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Conquest of Space*, *Invaders From Mars*. I could go on and on.

I have noticed over the years that fellow skeptics often share this love of science fiction. This should not be surprising, since skeptics usually are fascinated with science. We love a good flying-saucer movie even if we know that an actual reliable UFO sighting is non-existent. Our belief that this big universe might harbor many other life forms does not color our healthy skepticism when someone reports a UFO abduction or shows up with a photograph of "strange lights."

In fact, I often wonder whether believers in paranormal phenomena are themselves fans of science fiction. If they are, their built-in "fact vs. fiction meter" must be broken.

Some recent science fiction movies, such as *Men In Black*, rely less upon realism and more on fantasy. *Contact*, however, is a realistic portrayal of the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI). One would expect no less from the imagination of Carl Sagan, on whose book the movie is based. Although far from a perfect film, *Contact* captures the full wonder of science, from the beginning sequence, which runs the clock back to the Big Bang, to an ending that epitomizes the eternal questioning that is science.

It was also refreshing to see a positive portrayal of a scientist (played by Jodie Foster) for a change -- in fact, a scientist who did not believe in God. When was the last time you saw a Hollywood movie with a non-religious central character? In fact, her non-belief is a central idea in this film. The movie also does a good job of illustrating the silliness that would surround a genuine contact with extraterrestrials.

This leads me to a discussion of *The X-Files*, a Fox television series based upon the exploits of an FBI team devoted to investigations of paranormal phenomena, UFOs, etc. CSICOP recently invited

the creator and executive producer, Chris Carter, to its convention to discuss the series. The discussion included several criticisms of Mr. Carter for pandering to dangerous beliefs in government conspiracies and UFO abductions. Carter defended himself with the simple proposition that his series is science fiction and is not presented as fact.

I had never seen *The X-Files*, but when my local video store started carrying past episodes, I checked out a few. Even though the plots fall more into the fantasy mode, I confess I got hooked. The exploits of agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully are rousing good science fiction -- well written, well acted and well photographed. Yes, there are stories of channelers, of UFO abductions, of crashed Roswell aliens -- but this is fiction and I accept it for what it is.

We skeptics shouldn't take ourselves so seriously that we cannot accept good entertainment as such. In fact, in what other TV series will you hear CSICOP itself being mentioned (as I did in one episode), or a reference to the "Gulf Breeze hoax?" The series has as its theme, "The Truth is Out There." As Agent Scully (the more skeptical of the duo) said in one episode, however, "There are lies out there, too."

So, as long as we keep our perspective on the difference between fact and fiction, there's nothing wrong with enjoying a good science fiction story, even if it is based upon current myths such as alien abductions. Congratulations on the quality of your series, Mr. Carter. But remember, it's all just make believe.

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### **"Psychic" [Noreen Renier](#) addresses international "crime investigation" seminar in Britain**

Upon performing a world wide web "Yahoo" search in May on "Noreen+Renier+psychic," I got this "hit": <http://www.britcoun.org/seminars/science/isef7021.htm>.

I had stumbled upon the web site for the non-profit British Council which, according to its literature, is "the United Kingdom's international network for education, culture and development services." The page containing reference to Florida "psychic detective" Noreen Renier was entitled "British Council: International Seminars," and was promoting the Council's "second international seminar on advancing the scientific investigation of crime," to take place July 6 through July 18 in the medieval city of Durham, England.

As the text stated, "The need for scientific support to the police investigator has never been greater. This seminar is designed to bring delegates up to date with new technology for crime scene investigation and forensic analysis. In addition, delegates will learn about initiatives being taken for the training of crime scene examiners and forensic scientists. There will be formal presentations by national authorities in each field, together with workshop sessions in which there will be opportunities for delegates to participate fully in group discussion."

The text continued: "The programme will include visits to the National Training Centre for Scientific Support to Crime Investigation and to the Laboratories of the Forensic Science Service. Main themes will include the organisation and structure of scientific support to the police investigator, the training

of crime scene examiners and fingerprint experts, academic accreditation and National Vocational Qualifications in scientific support skills, the training of forensic scientists in DNA profiling technology, fingerprint enhancement techniques, automatic fingerprint recognition, offender profiling, facial identification techniques, and quality management and external accreditation."

The list of expected speakers included a Sergeant, an Assistant Chief, a Chief Constable, and a Trainer in Cognitive Interview Skills (from various Constabularies), a forensic examiner of tape recordings/speech/language samples, a professor of pathology from the University of Sheffield, a pediatrician from Royal Victoria Hospital, a document examiner, the National Director of Police Training, a DNA specialist and the Director General from the Forensic Science Service, the Head of Fingerprint Training at the National Training Centre, and, oh yes, "Ms. Noreen Renier, Psychic Detective, Florida, USA."

The seminar was designed to be "of interest to chief officers of police, senior police officers who have responsibility for the scientific investigation of crime, forensic scientists, crime scene examiners, and those responsible for training in the field of scientific support to crime investigation."

The chaps who organized this important seminar did a jolly good job of bringing together a distinguished team of experts in various scientific disciplines related to crime investigation. And, as far as "psychic detectives" are concerned, Noreen Renier enjoys a stellar reputation among a number of influential law enforcement experts, as I documented in the chapter on Renier that I contributed to *Psychic Sleuths* (Prometheus Books, 1994). But what does the participation of a so-called "psychic detective" have to do with advancing the *scientific* investigation of crime, which, after all, was this seminar's stated purpose?

After reading their material, I sent an e-mail (to [International.Seminars@britcoun.org](mailto:International.Seminars@britcoun.org)) in which I did not explicitly request that they reconsider their invitation to Renier, but simply referred them to my chapter on Renier (available on America Online) and to the more recent articles on Renier posted both on TBS's and my own web sites. I received no response to indicate that my note was received or followed-up on. After the conference's conclusion, I again wrote for confirmation as to whether or not Renier had indeed participated. Once again, I received no reply.

--Gary Posner

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## Snippets

The CIA recently released a study concluding that most UFO sightings in the 1950s and '60s were the result of glimpses of U-2 and SR-71 spy planes, launched from secret U.S. bases during the Cold War and flown across the world. But some of this report's harshest critics are UFO skeptics, including Philip J. Klass, the semi-retired senior editor with Aviation Week magazine and author of the bimonthly *Skeptics UFO Newsletter*. In a well-intentioned yet off-target effort of the government to "come clean," this CIA report claims that the Air Force had systematically lied about the source of most UFOs by explaining away the spy plane observations as "natural phenomena such as ice crystals and temperature inversions." But as Klass points out in his September issue of *SUN*, the "Mirages & [Temperature] Inversions" and "Clouds & Contrails" categories accounted for only 1% of the UFO reports catalogued by the USAF's Project Blue Book from 1955 into the early 1960s. The CIA report

can be found on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.odci.gov/csi/studies/97unclas/ufo.html>

(*N.Y. Times* via *St. Pete. Times*, Aug. 3; [Skeptics UFO Newsletter](#), Sept.)

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