



Selected articles from  
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## British documentary on Noreen Renier scrubbed

by [Gary P. Posner](#)

*Editor's note: This is a somewhat revised/expanded version of the original article, employing additional quotes obtained subsequently.*

[As we reported](#) in the Fall 2000 issue of *TBS Report*, the Oxford Television Company of London, England, in association with Britain's Channel Four, was then in the early stages of planning to produce a one-hour documentary on Noreen Renier, the world-famous "psychic detective" based in Williston, Florida. The program was to have been one in a four-part series examining paranormal themes, and was tentatively planned for airing in Britain, and around the world via Home Box Office (HBO), in late 2001.

However, Olly Lambert, one of the directors at Oxford Television, tells *TBS Report* that the Renier project ultimately turned into what he termed a "damp squib." As a result, Channel Four has decided not to fund the four-part series at all.

According to Lambert, of the four topics to be covered in the proposed series, Channel Four's primary interest was in "police psychics," and the person selected to be featured in that program was Noreen Renier. Accordingly, Lambert had made a brief trip to the U.S. last July to meet with Renier and some of her most impressive supporters, among them members of the Williston Police Department and University of Central Florida anthropologist David E. Jones. He also spoke with me regarding my views on Renier, having seen [my writings about her](#) on the TBS website (and on my own site).

Lambert has now informed me that, in the end, Channel Four was not convinced by the endorsements and purported "evidence" that they had been able to accumulate. At best, he says, he and his colleagues feel that Renier may possibly have some psychic ability, but that she was unable to demonstrate evidence of it sufficient to warrant them proceeding with a program about her. Said

Lambert, "We were interested in Renier and had a look, but felt afterward that there was less in the story than we originally thought. She wasn't working on any cases at the time, and it seemed unlikely that she would be in the near future. Also, while I have seen evidence elsewhere of some kind of psychic ability, and while there was a lot to *suggest* that Noreen had psychic abilities, during my visit I saw no evidence of them." (Emphasis in original.)

Added Lambert, "Originally I came across her during a rudimentary internet search (she has [her own website](#) which in itself was quite interesting). She said she had worked on over 400 police cases, and had lectured at the FBI Academy. And David Jones also recommended her very highly, verifying her work with the FBI. As a result, she seemed like the psychic most worthy of further research. . . . Whether or not her help was useful in all 400-plus cases is another matter, as she herself did not know, and in many of the cases she was consulted on, she was not informed later as to how successful she was."

I suggested to Lambert that his company might now consider doing a *skeptical* program on "police psychics," since so many people believe in Renier's type of powers and thus could benefit from hearing what he learned during the course of his research. I knew better than to expect him to reply in the affirmative, but was surprised by his particular "take" on the issue. Whereas I assumed that he would reject the idea out of a desire not to offend a largely "believing" TV-viewing audience, Lambert offered the following explanation: "I agree that there is a deeper film to be made about the police's use of psychics, but that is a very different film, one about the police itself rather than psychics. We always want to make films that challenge preconceptions, and it's my feeling that the majority of people do *not* believe in psychics. That was why we were interested in making a film about how psychics *have* helped police, as it would challenge far more preconceptions." (Emphasis in original.)

Lambert told me that if he were able to locate enough prominent police personnel who "could testify to both the use and success of police psychics," but who do not share a close personal friendship with the psychic they are endorsing, "then we would have a very good project. This was what I ultimately adapted the Renier pitch into, but without much success." He did add, however, that he had met "two former police officers of some standing who testified on camera to Noreen's crucial help in solving crimes."

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## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

by [Terry A. Smiljanich](#)

"Nature's Hues"

*But who can paint  
Like Nature? Can imagination boast,  
Amid its gay creation, hues like hers?*

--James Thompson (1700-1748)

In any competition between nature's imaginative capabilities and that of our own, nature wins hands down. As has often been written about in this column, how can one compare the wonders of evolution or galaxies with the claimed abilities of some to channel your dead grandmother or find gold with plastic divining rods? Do aliens really look like cartoon characters?

This contrast was made evident to me in a recent trip I took to New Mexico. In five consecutive days I visited the following places: 1) Pueblo Bonito, the largest and one of the oldest Indian pueblos, mysteriously abandoned hundreds of years before Europeans arrived; 2) the Very Large Array (VLA) radio telescope at Socorro, featured in the movie *Contact*; 3) White Sands National Monument, with 275 square miles of lily-white sand dunes; 4) Roswell, site of the crashed flying saucer and home to the world's largest UFO museum; and 5) Sky Hill Inn, an astronomy retreat high in the clear, dark skies of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, with large telescopes for nightly rental.

This is not a travelogue. What struck me about these five days was the contrast between Roswell and the remaining sights, and what that contrast says about wonder and imagination.

A thousand years ago at [Pueblo Bonito](#), located in remote Chaco Canyon and accessible today only by 50 miles of rough dirt road (impassable in snow or mud), Anasazi Indians built a huge city that served as a hub for thousands of miles of Indian roads connecting several other pueblo sites across the Southwest. One angular window in one of the largest buildings (now crumbling) allowed a shaft of light to enter a ceremonial room only on the day of the winter solstice. These 11th-century Indians were making solar observations and calculations more sophisticated than their contemporary Europeans. In our confrontations with nature, we inexorably try to understand the way things really work.

The next day, at the [VLA radio telescope](#), I saw our current efforts to continue in that same struggle to understand "what's out there." Scattered over twenty miles of bare desert soil are 27 large dishes, working together as the world's most powerful radio telescope to collect data from the farthest reaches of deep space. Imagery from the VLA shows whole galaxies, containing billions of stars, colliding with each other in paroxysms of cosmic rays and agitated matter. In the movie *Contact*, based on a novel by Carl Sagan, the VLA served as the centerpiece of our search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

Then on to [White Sands](#), where countless huge sand dunes composed of pure-white gypsum march slowly (a few feet per year) between stark mountains, and sustain an ecology of plants and animals evolved specifically for this one-of-a-kind environment. Gypsum, deposited in a shallow sea 250-million years ago, is trapped in a basin that no river drains.

Just a half-day's drive from the VLA and White Sands is Roswell, a mid-sized city surrounded by stark, dry landscapes. In 1947, debris from an Air Force experiment was briefly described as a "crashed saucer," thereby generating books, movies, speeches and endless speculation about an alien traffic accident. The [International UFO Museum](#) at Roswell is popular and crowded, and has a large gift shop. According to a *Time* magazine poll, 65% of Americans believe a saucer crashed at Roswell.

The museum has, however, a problem on its hands. How do you showcase that which does not exist?

Well, you put up "timelines," "artist renderings" of unfortunate aliens and their damaged equipment, and storyboards about the events. A diorama depicts a crashed saucer with blinking lights and four alien dolls. This attempt to understand "what's out there" is just plain silly when compared to the VLA or even that primitive observatory at Pueblo Bonito. The museum evidences the pathetic limits of our imaginations in attempting to create in our heads the weird and unusual, rather than relying on nature's creations.

A welcome dose of reality was found at Star Hill Inn. At 7,000 feet on a clear fall night, far away from ugly cities and their obtrusive lights, the Milky Way consists of thick, bright clouds of stars, and your naked eye can pick out the Andromeda galaxy, two million light years away (not bad for an eye evolved through nature's evolutionary processes!). Through a 24-inch telescope, I saw the [Einstein Cross](#), which consists of faint dual images of one galaxy, unimaginably distant, whose light was split and bent around an invisible intermediate galaxy and thus appears to the eye as two galaxies -- just as Einstein predicted with paper and pen eighty-five years ago.

The Roswell museum, and its crowds of credulous visitors, faded from my view, overwhelmed by nature's hues . . .

## RheoTherapy Follow-up

*Editor's note: A ["Snippet"](#) in our Spring 1998 issue dealt with a local clinic in Largo that was offering a controversial therapy for macular degeneration called RheoTherapy. This item was followed with a more lengthy [Winter 1998-99 article](#) by attorney and TBS member Robert Buesing, who was at the time representing biochemist Philip Filner of the Macular Degeneration Foundation, whom the clinic had sued for libel (that suit has since been dismissed). See [this item](#) on the [Quackwatch.com](#) website.*



## Florida's Legendary "[Skunk Ape](#)"?

Steve Otto's February 12 *Tampa Tribune* column contained the above photo (click on it for enlargement), which had been delivered to the Sarasota County Sheriff's office. In an anonymous note, the woman who took the picture said that she suspected the creature in her back yard to have

been perhaps just an orangutan on the loose. But how would that explain the "awful smell that lasted well after it had left my yard"? Otto says that he's considering organizing an expedition to follow up on this stinky story.

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## Snippets



Las Vegas' Triple-A-league baseball team is changing its name from the "Stars" to the "51s" -- as in nearby "Area 51," the secret government facility at Nellis Air Force Base where some of the UFOs and aliens (in whom Marilyn Vos Savant does not believe) are allegedly housed. Said team creative director Aaron Artman, "We figure if we get a cease-and-desist order from the government we'll really make news." But Nellis spokeswoman Lt. Col. Joan Ferguson says, "We simply do not discuss [our base's classified] activities. The Air Force has never officially had an Area 51."

*(St. Pete. Times, Dec. 29)*

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Hillsborough County Circuit Judge Cynthia Holloway has thrown out the case against Paula Zorka Costello, a Tampa "fortune teller" accused of bilking a New York woman out of more than \$60,000. According to court records, while in Tampa on business, twenty-seven-year-old Laura Belvedere decided to "cleanse all the evil and bad negativity" from her life. She claimed that Costello told her that her "curse" could be broken only through the use of a large amount of money that (ha-ha) would be returned to her later. Costello's attorney Joe Ficarrotta successfully argued that Belvedere was not "elderly," suffering from "dementia," or otherwise requiring special legal protection against being "taken advantage of." Assistant State Attorney Mark Lewis announced his intention to appeal.

*(St. Pete. Times, Dec. 5)*

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## Letters to the Editor

Editor: My professor, Dr. Farha, is very interested in your comments on skepticism and Noreen Renier. He is also a fan of the Tampa Bay Skeptics. I am looking for a copy of the TV special starring Noreen called *Put to the Test*. I would like to show it to my fellow students in my skepticism class on December 5th. Do you know where I could purchase a copy?

*[Editor's note: I responded by referring the writer to [my critique](#) of that program and sending her a videotape of the show free of charge. She later reported the following.]*

My presentation went very well. After showing the tape I let my class critique Renier themselves to see what good skeptics they have turned into. I then read them your critique and had them compare yours to their own to see if they came up with any of the same conclusions. Although they did not catch everything you did, they did do considerably well in finding possible natural explanations for Noreen's so-called paranormal ability.

My classmates and I are new to skepticism, and several of us feel the class has pulled the wool from over our eyes, and that we are now learning to think for ourselves and question everything along the way. Thank you so much.

--Amy Walton  
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