



Selected articles from
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Merrell Prevails Over Renier in Federal Court

By [Gary P. Posner](#)

The epic legal wranglings between former-Florida "psychic detective" [Noreen Renier](#) and skeptic John Merrell, which have spanned two decades in county, state and federal courts from Orlando to Seattle, may have finally come to an end -- though not with the results predicted by the psychic.

Renier, who has been featured in numerous episodes of Court TV's pro-paranormal *Psychic Detectives* series, probably trails only Sylvia Browne as America's, and perhaps even the world's, best-known self-styled psychic sleuth. But even Browne is notorious for some well-publicized psychic stink bombs, so it's understandable that Renier might have been clueless that she would get killed in court over the publication of *A Mind for Murder*, her 2005 memoir.

Renier's book was promptly pulled when the publisher learned, from Merrell's attorney, that Renier and Merrell had signed a settlement agreement in 1992 prohibiting either party from ever again publicly disparaging the other. Renier had won a \$25,000 libel judgment against Merrell in 1986, which he unsuccessfully contested in two courts, and this settlement, which also included a \$23,800 payment to Renier, was to have finally put their battles to bed. It shouldn't take an attorney, much less a psychic, to recognize that *A Mind for Murder*'s two chapters devoted to Renier's history with Merrell, in which she accuses him of lying in court and other misconduct, was a flagrant violation of that agreement. Merrell thus sued Renier in December 2005 for breach of contract.

As the case played out in U.S. District Court in Washington state, where Merrell now resides, a posting (subsequently removed) by Renier on [her website](#) placed the blame on her publisher's attorney for having "neglected to spot the problem that was to materialize in this latest lawsuit, although they were told to be very careful." I'm no psychic (I don't even play one on TV), but I sense that they might have spotted the problem had Renier spotted them a copy of her unambiguous, legally binding settlement agreement.

Equally clear was the settlement's stipulation that should someone breach it and thus precipitate a lawsuit, the prevailing party's legal fees would be reimbursed by the breaching party. Yet again, Renier's position strained credulity, her attorney insisting that because Merrell failed to claim any substantial monetary damages and his complaints against Renier's publisher and co-author had been dismissed, Merrell was not the prevailing party. This was in spite of the judge's earlier pronouncement that "Ms. Renier breached the agreement."

Judge James L. Robart's final ruling, issued on April 5, 2007, reaffirmed that Renier was the breaching party, Merrell was the prevailing party, and that Renier was obligated to reimburse Merrell for his attorney's fees and other legal costs in the amount of \$39,558. All of Renier's counter claims were denied, her book has not been rehabilitated, and her own legal fees are estimated to exceed \$35,000.

On his own website, Merrell has floated two intriguing, though somewhat fanciful, ideas for Renier to ponder. One has her co-authoring another book, this time with a skeptic like me or [Joe Nickell](#), revealing "how international psychics have fooled the public and media." The second has Merrell agreeing to donate \$10,000 in Renier's name to a children's charity, and erasing her \$39,558 debt entirely, should she in a timely manner be able to "prove under a qualified and sanctioned test something as simple as her claims of human levitation, psychic sight through clothing, or her two-way communication with trees." The former -- if Renier is consciously aware, and agreeable to confessing, that she is no more "psychic" than the rest -- could have best-seller potential. The latter, on the other hand, would require that Renier actually demonstrate psychic ability under properly controlled conditions, and based upon my own personal history with her, my money says she wouldn't dare make the attempt -- not even for [Randi's \\$1,000,000 reward](#). [Note: [Merrell's website](#) was revamped in early 2010, and much material removed, in conjunction with an apparent cease-fire with Noreen Renier.]

The above appears in the July/August *Skeptical Inquirer* as "'Court TV' Psychic Loses to Skeptic in Real Court."

Another View of Skepticism

By James W. Moseley

For a number of years now, I have been receiving (and actually reading!) comp copies of *TBS Report* in exchange for my own sort-of-but-not-quite-monthly UFO-related newsletter, [Saucer Smear](#), which I've been publishing since 1954 (originally as *Saucer News*). Like *TBS Report*, in addition to factual reporting, we inject wit and humor, and even sarcasm when appropriate. But I want to explain here why I think my newsletter presents a more reasonable approach to anomalies than does *TBS Report* or, for that matter, [Skeptical Inquirer](#).

First, the *TBS Report* masthead defines "skeptic" as "a person who searches for truth through questioning and reasoning." Fair enough, except that my dictionary defines the word as "a person disposed to skepticism, especially regarding religion or religious principles." Here we see a problem already. The "skeptics" seem to be incredibly anxious to avoid anything that smacks of religion in any

form whatsoever. I am an agnostic, but I do not fear or avoid religion.

Next I'd like to point out something that most people seldom if ever think about. Science (which I will capitalize throughout because of the way I am using the word) is, for sure, our most reliable road to knowledge, and yet its conclusions (always tentative) often run absolutely contrary to common sense. The human body is not a solid object at all, but a mass of billions of tiny atoms which in turn consist mostly of empty space. Various forms of energy run through our bodies endlessly, at the speed of light, without doing any damage. The universe consists of not three dimensions, but at least four, and perhaps as many as thirteen, according to current mathematical theories. No one in his or her right mind would believe any of this except that it comes from Science, so we assume and blindly believe it to be true!

Interestingly, Darwinian evolution is one scientific discipline that does not violate common sense, as apes do look a lot like humans, and we're all on the same planet together. But here an opposite problem occurs. Religion has a lot to say about the creation of mankind, but nothing at all to say about atoms, etc. Thus most religious people refuse to believe in evolution or even consider the evidence in an unbiased manner. Yet these same people accept most of Science without a second thought!

If we choose to believe, or even open-mindedly consider, any phenomenon that has not, at least as of yet, been proven true (though always tentatively) by Science, we are considered by "skeptics" to be credulous, or worse. Why can't we, without shame, look into the areas that Science has overlooked or "damned" for one reason or another? Most people don't care to study anomalies because they occur infrequently and thus are not part of daily life, and, no doubt, also because there's very little money in it. And yet it is, in my opinion, a fascinating intellectual exercise to look into things which may or may not prove to be true in the long run.

Admittedly, it is extremely hard to find a proper balance between "skepticism" and credulity. The Internet is loaded with material on off-beat subjects that are nothing more than an utter waste of time. It takes a great amount of patience to separate the wheat from the chaff, as they say, but I think it is well worth the effort.

I don't believe that psychic powers are anywhere nearly reliable enough to solve crimes or predict the future, and as far as I'm concerned TBS is merely "beating a dead horse." Yet there is strong evidence (not "proof") that some sort of psychic realm does exist, and (god help us -- and note the small "g"!) many people including myself have had unexplainable personal experiences with it. And let's not forget flying saucers, which in my opinion do not originate from another planet, but do exist. Most UFOs can be explained, but some definitely cannot be.

Saucer Smear reports the latest news and gossip related to UFOs and many other anomalies, including the paranormal. We've been publishing for more than half a century, so we can't last much longer. But while we're still around, perhaps readers would consider sending a generous "Love Offering" (at least enough to cover my printing, mailing and Scotch expenses) for a year's non-subscription to: *Saucer Smear*, P.O. Box 1709, Key West, Florida 33041. You just might learn something new -- or at least be entertained!

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Gary Posner replies for TBS: While the [Center For Inquiry Tampa Bay](#), of which TBS is a Special Interest Group, deals more with ethics and religion, TBS restricts itself to scientifically testable claims. Yet we have conducted a [highly publicized investigation](#) of a "weeping icon" in Tarpon Springs, and have questioned Clearwater's "[Virgin Mary](#)" window image and other such religious claims. *Skeptical Inquirer* has even published a "[Special Issue](#)" devoted to "Science & Religion."

Jim makes it sound like we have a "blind belief" in atoms and multiple unseen dimensions because Science so orders and we uncritically obey (akin to religious dogma). But as Jim himself points out, scientific theories are "always tentative." As better data come to light and survive Science's critical scrutiny, today's most strongly held beliefs are subject to revision and potential reversal tomorrow (unlike religious dogma).

TBS is dedicated to the "open-minded consideration" of purported paranormal phenomena, and we even [dangle \\$1,000](#) to entice proponents to bring us their evidence. However, there are difficult hurdles to be crossed between "open-minded consideration" and "belief." Until a paranormal claim has been supported by evidence of comparably extraordinary quality, proclaiming "belief" would seem a credulous exercise.

If there is "strong evidence" that any "psychic realm" exists, or that some UFOs are as exotic as Jim believes, TBS will pay \$1,000 (as noted above) for a successful demonstration or other convincing evidence that passes scientific muster. I would normally mention the James Randi Educational Foundation's [\\$1,000,000 offer](#) as well, but I have known Jim Moseley for many years and am well aware of his skepticism of Randi's willingness to ever pay off under any circumstances.

As for Jim's "unexplainable personal experiences," I'm all ears and "open-minded consideration," although the psychological literature is replete with proffered prosaic explanations for perceived paranormal events. I'll "believe" if and when the quality of the evidence so merits.

However, I do agree with Jim that [Saucer Smear](#) is well worth checking out, as is his book, [Shockingly Close to the Truth!](#). There's no fixed price for *Smear*, but Jim does appreciate those love offerings.

Snippets



The Rev. Janet Reynolds, a 65-year-old ordained minister at Harmony Church in Tampa, further identified as a "clairvoyant" and an "intuitive counselor for more than 10 years," offered these eerily precise predictions for 2007 at the end of last year: "I believe it's going to be the best year. The last

four, it's been hectic. I think there's going to be a wonderful change in society. There are a lot of coming events and they're coming soon and they're going to make people very happy."

(St. Pete. Times, Dec. 31)

As mentioned in this issue's "Chairman's Corner," former Arizona Gov. Fife Symington now claims to have seen the 1997 "Phoenix Lights" UFO and that it was "enormous. In your gut, you could just tell it was otherworldly." At the time, however, Symington had ridiculed the case at a press conference by introducing a captured alien -- his chief of staff in full ET garb. Why the ex-Gov's "gut" is now growling is a mystery, but the lights are not. Tucson astronomer James McGaha, a retired Air Force pilot, confirms the A-10 aircraft flare explanation and adds that "what [Symington] feels in his gut doesn't make any difference."

(St. Pete. Times, March 24)

Remember the Quadro Tracker? (You will if you attended the last TBS meeting.) The handheld device was marketed in 1996 to locate such things as bullets, drugs hidden in school lockers, and even lost golf balls! Police and school systems spent millions on what James Randi exposed as nothing more than an empty piece of plastic with a projecting antenna that simulated a divining rod. Well, it's déjà vu all over again -- this time with Sniffex, which can allegedly "pinpoint explosives from a football field away." The Defense Dept. purchased eight of them for nearly \$50,000, even though it has flunked a U.S. Navy test involving two trucks hauling a half ton of explosives within 20 feet of the device. Randi offered Sniffex CEO Paul B. Johnson \$1,000,000 for a successful test and was instead sued for libel (the case was later dropped). But how can you discount testimonials from customers like one Belgian Minister of Interior who claims his Sniffex success "exceeds 90%"? Gesundheit!

(Dallas Morning News, April 16)

TBS "\$1,000 Challenge" Follow-up

In our last issue, we mentioned our negotiations with Carl David Ritchie of Malden, Missouri, who claims the ability to detect water by use of a dowsing rod.

Mr. Ritchie had also contacted a number of other organizations, including CFI-West and its Independent Investigations Group, based in Hollywood, CA, which sponsors a ["\\$50,000 Paranormal Challenge"](#) and expressed an interest in testing him.

TBS has therefore sent our draft protocol, which included input from James Randi, to CFI-West, to

assist them in formulating their own test, which will involve PVC pipes, some filled with water and others with sand.

If and when the test is conducted, we will report the results. However, until you also hear about it in *Time*, *Newsweek*, the *New York Times*, CNN, and the Drudge Report, you can safely assume that Mr. Ritchie has not yet demonstrated that his rod can differentiate the ocean from the beach.

TBS in the Media

Gary Posner was interviewed by *Creative Loafing* for its May 23 cover story, "[The ghost whisperer](#)," about paranormal investigators Laurie Champion and daughter.

On May 14, Ch. 8's *Daytime* (syndicated in eight other markets) contained an interview with Terry Smiljanich about "chupacabras" -- blood-sucking dog-like animals first reported in Puerto Rico in the 1990s after dead goats were found with strange bite marks on their necks. The legend has since grown and spread to the U.S. "There's as much evidence for the tooth fairy," argued Terry. We haven't yet seen the tape, but we assume this comment made the final "cut."

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