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CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

The Full Facts on Cold Reading

By [Terry A. Smiljanich](#)

A recent article in *The New Yorker* magazine related the history of "criminal profiling" in reviewing a new book by famous FBI profiler John Douglas. "Profiling" is the use of behavioral analysis in attempting to create a psychological portrait of a serial killer based on the pattern of his acts and the nature of his victims. The reviewer compared criminal profiling to the art of cold reading, a process used by many psychics and seers in making seemingly incredible observations about their subjects/victims. "How did she know that about me?" "How could she possibly have known that I had a one-armed uncle named Rudy?"

The difference between criminal profiling and psychic readings, however, is that FBI profilers are not consciously trying to fool their audiences, whereas many (if not most) psychics are. This newsletter has mentioned on several occasions the art of cold reading by fortunetellers, who use tricks and "hot and cold" strategies in getting clients to believe that the psychics are able, through paranormal means, to discern personal attributes and past histories about them. What caught my attention in this review, however, was a reference to a book by the British magician and mentalist Ian Rowland called *The Full Facts Book of Cold Reading*. Self-published by him and available through [his website](#), the book is a comprehensive treasure trove of information about the entire subject. Since skeptics are often faced with allegations that psychics (John Edward, Sylvia Browne, etc.) can perform paranormal feats of fortune telling, I highly recommend that TBS members go online and order this fascinating book.

What struck me most in reading this book was the depth of knowledge and training needed to become a really good cold reader. We all know that a cold reader uses vague statements and guesses to get the subject of the reading to provide feedback and allow the psychic to zero in on specific facts. I had no

idea, however, of the many techniques that a good reader must have in order to be able to appear genuine. The successful psychic should have a gift of gab and be a smooth talker exuding confidence.

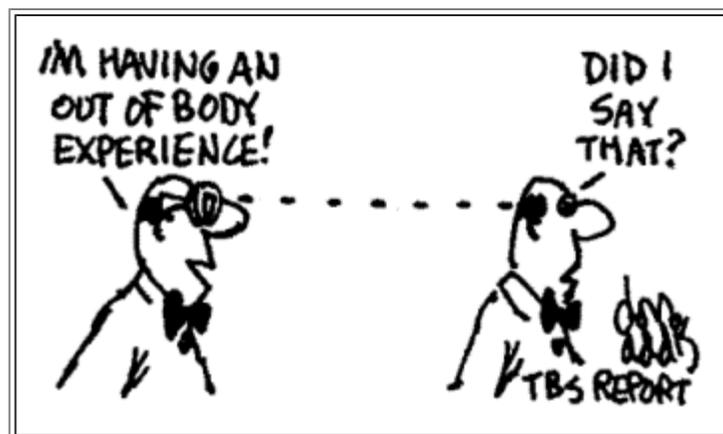
The first step in a successful cold reading is a proper set-up, the aim of which is to get the subject in a relaxed and cooperative mood. Rowland describes several examples of how this is accomplished. A typical refrain: "Sometimes the dead are talking to me as if through a cold mist, and the meaning of what they are telling me may be clearer to you than it is to me, so please bear that in mind, will you?"

The meat of Rowland's book is a description of over 38 different cold reading techniques, with names such as the "Rainbow Ruse," "Sugar Lumps," "Barnum Statements," the "Diverted Question," and others. A Rainbow Ruse, for example is a statement that gives the subject both a personality trait and its opposite. Many of these techniques are followed with a question soliciting more feedback, such as, "Is this making sense to you?"

Rowland also describes several ways for making even bad guesses look good, with names such as "I am right, but you have forgotten," and "I am wrong now, but I will be right soon." All of these, of course, must be couched in wordy assurances sprinkled with lots of jargon. Just reading the countless examples of psychic patter is worth the cost of the book (about \$45 due to the currently poor exchange rate of the U.S. dollar). He also reveals many ways in which the psychics deal with skeptics -- How many times have we heard from one of them, "I'm a real skeptic, too"?

Reading this book makes one appreciate that famous psychic readers are genuinely gifted craftsmen who have used years of practice to become expert at what they do -- fooling gullible people into thinking that they possess paranormal powers rather than just an armament of good psychological insights, tried-and-true scripts, and a host of other tricks.

Snippets



Remember the good old days, when the only reliable way to undergo an "out of body" experience was to come within a whisker of death? Well, no more. Scientists are now able to induce OOBs in perfectly healthy people. As reported in the journal *Science*, the test subjects wear virtual reality goggles through which they see an illusory projection of their own image as viewed from behind from

six feet away. When the experimenter strokes their back with a stick in synchronicity with the same action being projected, the subjects momentarily report the sensation of actually inhabiting the illusory body. Shirley MacLaine, you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours!

(*N.Y. Times* via *Tampa Tribune*, Aug. 24)

"Sylvia Browne is famous for telling distraught parents where their missing children are -- but she gets it wrong. A lot. So why does she still have such a massive following?" So begins a devastating exposé of the iconic American "psychic medium." British journalist Jon Ronson had seen an ad for a late September cruise around the Mediterranean featuring Browne, during which fans could attend four lectures and a cocktail party with her, so he decided to sign up and do some non-psychic sleuthing. [His article](#) is a must read!

(*The Guardian*, Oct. 27)

[February 27, 2020: Any readers who have recently been unable to find Richard Hoagland's "enterprisemission.com" website should try adding an "s" in the URL (changing "mission" to "missions"), as I have done in this item's link. Per a January 23 post on his Facebook page, Hoagland "recently moved the site to a new hosting company and links have been broken." On the next line he adds that the site has now been "fixed," but that is not the case as of today's date. If he does "fix" his site before I then "refix" this item's link to it, try removing the "s" from the URL.]

On October 30, "Face on Mars" promoter [Richard Hoagland](#) sponsored a conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., to show the world the "large, nearly invisible glass objects hiding in the background of some classic NASA shots from the Apollo [moon] missions." [According to Hoagland's website](#), the event was "packed to the bursting point" with reporters, including "a number of mainstream American press entities such as the *Washington Post*. . . . They didn't actually write anything, but they were obviously curious." Only the Russian media seem to have gone gaga over these grainy blow-ups of apparent film processing smudges and scratches. And though Hoagland alleges "NASA cover-ups to suppress the truth," he acknowledges that "You can go and find these images -- the frame numbers listed above -- on the official NASA websites." You can also buy Hoagland's official (and unsuppressed) book, *Dark Mission*.

(Enterprise Mission website)

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[Here](#) is a report on the conference on the "Space Review" website.

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Hoagland's Hero: A Zero?

At Richard Hoagland's October 30 presentation (see immediately above), his main attraction (in addition to the moon photos) was Ken Johnston, who claims to have been in charge of the Apollo program's photoimagery. But space journalist [Jim Oberg](#) reports that Johnston was actually a low-level clerk at NASA and that his Ph.D. diploma says that it is from "Reform Baptist Seminary" (in Colorado), the very existence of which is now in dispute. See Oberg's related [web postings](#).

Renier/Merrell Update

Having lost to John Merrell in federal court in April (see [Summer 2007](#)) and owing him \$39,558 (now \$55,158) for his legal fees, "psychic detective" extraordinaire Noreen Renier is now seeking Chapter 7 bankruptcy protection. In papers filed on August 28 in the United States Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Virginia, Renier has declared that "after any exempt property is excluded and administrative expenses paid, there will be no funds available" to pay Merrell.

In an exclusive interview, Merrell tells *TBS Report* that in pleading poverty, Renier certified in her petition that her income in 2005 was \$25,299, \$6,371 in 2006, and \$8,874 so far in 2007. Renier did not list [A Mind for Murder](#) as an asset or income source, which Merrell thinks may have netted her many thousands of dollars before being pulled due to his lawsuit (it is now scheduled for re-release by another publisher in April, presumably without the defamatory references to Merrell, and orders are already being accepted).

Merrell believes that Renier's 2005-07 income from her \$1,000 "psychic phone sessions" alone, unmentioned in her bankruptcy filings despite having boasted to the press of "more work than I can handle," could be staggering. "I have provided my specific dollar estimates to the bankruptcy court trustee and also to the U.S. Department of Justice," Merrell said. "I believe Noreen failed to list many significant sources of income, including earnings from her association with Court TV's *Psychic Detectives* series, and this may cause her petition to be denied. If so, I could potentially garnish her funds and/or collect assets. This could even include taking possession of her rights to *A Mind for Murder*, which she spent more than 25 years getting to print -- an outcome that would be particularly ironic, and satisfying."

The disposition of Renier's bankruptcy petition is pending at press time. We will follow up in the next issue and will update the TBS website with later information.

Letters to the Editor

Editor: I have the ability to detect the presence of a 12 x 12 x 12" mirror box or aluminum box hidden inside a 14 x 14 x 14" cardboard box without touching the boxes or coming within 12 inches of them. I have demonstrated this ability repeatedly with a high accuracy percentage. I leave my physical body to do this, and am more effective with mirrors than aluminum due to the mirror's ability

to stop my lifeforce/plasma/entity from moving in that specific direction.

--Gary G. Greenwood
Grand Junction, CO
gary.g.greenwood@gmail.com

Editor's note: Mr. Greenwood is already lined up to be tested by the North Texas Skeptics, CFI/Los Angeles, and a group in New Zealand. He expects to win one or more of their monetary challenges and thereby qualify for the James Randi Educational Foundation's \$1,000,000 Challenge.

Editor: I can tell the future 100%, while using my material while talking to you. Could you please help me with this? Thank you.

--David Long
paws@cenpanet.net

Editor's note: Despite his 100% accurate visions of the future, David seemingly forgot that on Jan. 4, 2007, he sent us a nearly identical claim by U.S. mail (presumably before he had e-mail), to which we replied by letter on Feb. 10 inviting him to send us some predictions. We're still waiting.

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