



Selected articles from
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TBS "\$1,000 Challenge" aspirant fails to demonstrate telepathy

By [Gary P. Posner](#)

After viewing video of a Kathy Fountain TV show debate over the new Florida public school science standards with regard to the teaching of evolution, followed by lively oral presentations on the same from TBS's Terry Smiljanich, Bill Hall and Jack Robinson, our March 29 quarterly meeting's agenda turned to testing a young man's claimed telepathic ability.

19-year-old William A. Blake III of Orlando, who made the trek to Tampa with his father, gave it the old college try. But when the results were divulged, it was apparent that TBS would not be petitioning to have telepathy added to Florida's school science curriculum.

[The protocol](#) for this TBS "\$1,000 Challenge," which also served as a screening/pre-test for the James Randi Educational Foundation's \$1,000,000 prize, had been negotiated via e-mail by Mr. Blake and myself. The only stumbling block was the selection of the person to "receive" Blake's telepathic transmissions. He had suggested his father, but I explained that the person had to be someone whom we could be certain had no possible way of receiving information via some other covert means.

With limited time to search for a mutually agreeable party before the meeting date, Blake agreed that he would select someone from among the attendees, even though the person chosen would likely be a skeptic. I assured him that TBS would love nothing more than to be the first scientific group to prove the existence of a paranormal phenomenon -- we have no reason to want any of our Challenge aspirants to fail *unless they are cheating*. This was reiterated to Blake at the meeting, and it appeared that all in attendance nodded in agreement with this sentiment.

Blake's initial selection was a colorfully dressed fellow who was attending a TBS meeting for the first time, and was therefore deemed by us an unacceptable choice. He turned out not to be an

acquaintance of Blake's, but we couldn't take any chances. To my surprise, Blake's second choice was me! It wasn't until the test was completed and the results were about to be discovered that I realized, and mentioned to the audience, that I really hadn't been the best possible selection -- not because I had a vested interest in him *failing* (which, as previously explained, was certainly not the case), but precisely the *opposite*! What if he and I had worked out a scheme such that we could cheat and then split the \$1,000 between us? I guess I have an honest face (or, more likely, a reputation for honesty that has been scrupulously earned over the decades), since the notion of chicanery on my part was unanimously dismissed out of hand in a way that Blake's claimed telepathic ability was not.

As detailed in the official [test protocol contract](#), which was signed by Blake immediately prior to conducting the test, as well as by Terry Smiljanich and me (representing TBS), Blake's task was to telepathically transmit to me, from an adjacent room, one of the words in a two-word set (e.g., "heads" vs. "tails" in one set, "even" vs. "odd" in another, "up" vs. "down" in another). Twenty such sets were pre-determined, numbered 1 through 20, printed, and distributed to both parties. Blake would flip a coin before each transmission: if heads, he would circle (on his printout of the sets) and transmit the first word of the pair; if tails, the second word. There was a 50% chance of my simply guessing the correct word in each of the 20 sets, and +/-50% of my 20 selections (i.e., approximately 10) would be expected to match Blake's transmissions by chance alone.

To achieve the standard million-to-one degree of difficulty threshold (by chance alone) that TBS has adopted, in order to "win" the Challenge my selections needed to match Blake's transmissions for all 20 sets. I was informed by an intermediary of the start and stop points for each of the 20 numbered transmissions, and at the end of each I circled the word that popped into my mind as having been received (or imagined).

Following Blake's final transmission, after I marked my selection for the 20th set, the group congregated as Blake's sheet and mine, each now containing 20 circles, were compared. For set #1, Blake had transmitted (and circled) "tails," and I had received or imagined (and circled) "tails." But, alas, in set #2, Blake's sheet had "black" circled, and mine "white." In all, we matched 9 out of 20 (sets 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15 and 19) -- almost exactly as expected by chance alone.

Blake had failed the Challenge. But perhaps his transmissions were perfect and I had failed him. We encouraged him to continue such testing with his father, taking as much care as we did to avoid any cues/clues, and to let us know if and when they succeed to the point of desiring a retest by TBS.

Human Lie Detectors

By Valerie Grey

Many people believe that they have an infallible ability to determine whether or not they're being lied to during personal contact with another human being. I'll never forget a phone call I received in the early days of Caller ID from a woman who claimed to be calling from Miami, when the CID box showed she was calling from her home in Tampa. It was an ongoing shock to realize, as I spoke with

her, that if I hadn't been staring at proof positive that she was lying, I would never have guessed it from her voice. (The kicker was that she was being considered for a position handling large sums of money and this was a completely unnecessary lie.)

The most reliable indicator of falsehood is, of course, logic: when people contradict either themselves or other known facts. Beyond that, you're left with body language, voice quality, speech content, micro-expressions, and inconsistencies between them, all of which can be affected by stress. But those indicators are not infallible. Yes, lying causes stress, which can cause suspicious behaviors, but not all stress is caused by lying. Interrogation consultant and law-enforcement instructor Stan Walters describes common misconceptions, based on folklore, that are not only believed by the general populace but are often taught to police officers. Most of these deal with watching a person's face and listening for verbal cues, e.g., that people tend to avoid direct eye contact when they are lying.

"Another interesting misconception, which has invaded even the academies of law enforcement, is that you can determine if a person is lying by watching whether he breaks eye contact to the right or left." Other "gimmicks" like arm- and leg-crossing or frequently saying "um," "uh," "er," etc., are also erroneously believed to be strong indicators of deception.*

Magician James Randi has often been told by viewers of his sleight-of-hand illusions that he *must* have genuine paranormal powers -- that he *can't* be doing nothing more than magic tricks. These people's *certainty* that Randi is lying is apparently bolstered by their belief that there's no trick they aren't smart enough to fathom. So, if they can't figure out how something *could* be a trick, it *can't* be a trick. Or maybe their smug certainty that they're too *smart* to be deceived by trickery assures them that Randi is *not* deceiving them with trickery. Thus they "know" that Randi *must be lying* when he says he has no paranormal abilities. And if Randi can have psychic powers, why can't they?

But where does the *certainty* that one can't be fooled come from? You might *think* you've never been fooled when you've just never *found out* you've been fooled, and then extrapolate that since it's never happened in the past it won't happen in the future. But this is all empirical, subject to refutation, and doesn't address the confidence many people have in "gut feelings" and intuition. I'm not even sure what intuition is really supposed to be -- an emotional bottom-line assessment of all sensory data and reasoning applied to it, or some kind of ESP? But even Walters, an acknowledged expert on detecting deception, admits that no matter how well you think you know someone, and have thus established the person's track record and normal "constant," there can always be anomalies that are not due to deceit. Although his bio lists him as an adjunct instructor for the Dept. of Defense Polygraph Institute, he doesn't even discuss polygraphs in his book. But most skeptics know that while polygraphs are not admissible in court (because they can produce both false negatives and positives), they can nevertheless be an extremely powerful intimidation/stress-producing tool for interrogation. (I'm guessing that's the context in which he teaches polygraph techniques.)

Decades ago, an eminent British physicist was convinced that he had found children who could bend spoons psychically, but only if they weren't under observation -- no doubt because of the "shyness effect." A test was finally made with an adult observer in the testing room who after a while appeared to fall asleep, at which point a hidden video camera caught the children "physically" bending the spoons against the edges of shoes and tables. But the physicist refused to believe he'd been duped, and maintained that the children truly had psychic powers but just weren't using them in that particular instance. To explain his incredibly naive hubris, someone (I think Randi) sagely remarked afterward, "Atoms don't lie, but people do."

**The Truth About Lying*, Stan B. Walters, Sourcebooks, Naperville, IL, 2000, pp. 25-27.

Noreen Renier's Book Republished -- With Extremely Revealing Alterations

A Mind for Murder, renowned "psychic detective" Noreen Renier's lively memoir (see our [Summer 2005 review](#)), which was withdrawn in the aftermath of skeptic John Merrell's lawsuit (see [Spring 2006](#)), has been reborn by another publisher. Though essentially the same book (save for her two chapters about Merrell being replaced with two new ones), this incarnation contains alterations of some key "clues" (such as in her famous "missing plane" case) so as to now comport with the facts of the case, whereas in the book's first edition they did not. Do these brazen changes constitute "smoking guns" that speak to Renier's credibility? Our next issue will contain a full report, as well as an update on the status of her ongoing bankruptcy dispute with Merrell.

Snippets

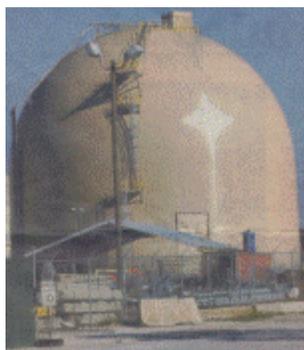


Police in Rome, Italy, are looking for a man who reportedly has been stealing money from banks and retail stores with the assistance of hypnosis. A bank teller tells of the man leaning into her and exhorting, "Look into my eyes." According to her story, when she emerged from her trance, her till was empty. Surveillance video shows the perp working his magic on a supermarket cashier before relieving her of her cash. A second cashier reported a similar scenario and gave up more than \$1,200 while mesmerized. His spells are said to leave his victims with no memory of having handed over the dough.

(WKMG-TV 6 (Orlando) website, March 24)

We all know about weather balloons as UFOs -- but *wedding* balloons? Several residents of St. Augustine Beach reported seeing two round objects, which appeared to be on fire, passing overhead in formation along the coastline at about 9 p.m. on Saturday, April 19. Perhaps they were extraterrestrial craft carrying some hot aliens! Other locals, however, have poured cold water on that idea. Apparently they identified these flying objects, which made national news, as nothing more than sky lanterns lit at a wedding in St. Augustine that night. But these close-minded debunkers failed to explain this: observers in Germany reported what sound like similar flaming orbs flying overhead at about 9 p.m. their time on the same night!

(WTLV-TV 12 (Jacksonville) website, April 19)



Shortly after sunrise, a large radiant image becomes visible on the eastern side of the Tampa Electric Company's power plant in Apollo Beach. Though to me this newspaper photo resembles a kite trailing a long string, those inclined to see the Virgin Mary on windows (or grilled cheese sandwiches) seem to perceive something else. Some see a four-pointed star (historically associated with warnings of impending doom). Fred Jacobsen, who has [posted videos](#) of the phenomenon on YouTube, has dubbed it the "TECO Sun Cross" and also describes "a robed figure standing with outstretched arms." But USF physics professor Randy Criss sees no cross, and referred to the image as most likely

"a standard property of reflections. . . . I don't see anything terribly miraculous."

(*St. Pete. Times*, March 15)

Letters to the Editor

Editor: I am a psychic medium and I am interested in your [\\$1,000 Challenge](#). Could you please send me some information with regards to how this will take place?

--Deborah Hall
nymph33@hotmail.com

Editor's note: Our reply, which follows, has gone unanswered: "You would first need to explain what you think you would be able to do in our presence that could prove your alleged psychic ability. Please be specific. Doing readings like the famous TV psychic mediums (John Edward, James Van Praagh, etc.), which are merely variations of the parlor games 'Hot and Cold' and '20 Questions' in that they rely on information received via feedback from the person receiving the reading, would not suffice."

Editor: Hello my name is allen i live in leesville south carolina well i am i guess a sensitive i talk to

the dead all the time i have over 300 hundred evps and also i have pics and videos of the spirits there self i can in a controlled environment produce voices that of not of this world the dead speak to me a lot like i am talking to you now. I would really like to take you challenge to prove that life exist after death if you would like to see or hear some of the evidence i have collected already then goto www.youtube.com/lunaticn2006 for videos some of the videos i put together with some of my evps and goto www.putfile.com/lunaticn2006 for pics there is also a evp or two on there also i promise you everything i have is 100 percent authentic its all real to damn real i would appreciate a response thx.

--Allen

hauntedn2008@live.com

Editor's note: The preceding e-mail appears in all its unvarnished glory. TBS photo/video consultant Guss Wilder looked at Allen's web pages and offered us (and Allen) the following analysis:

I have spent some time looking over the videos and still shots you referenced. I would like to throw in my opinions which you may forward to the originator if you think it will help him find some solutions to his mysteries.

First let me take on the subject of the "orbs" which are the main feature of most of his pictures. As you know from my past submissions, I can usually create these orbs at will, so I don't regard them as anything special. An explanation follows.

The digital sensors inside cameras usually have infrared and ultraviolet filters over them so they sense pretty much the same spectrum of light as we see. So on those occasions when the camera shows up something that we are not seeing with our own eyes as we take the picture, we have to start asking ourselves what is different about the camera's view of things.

In the case of point-and-shoot cameras with orbs, the unique thing from the camera's point of view (that we don't see with our eyes) is that the flash goes off just a fraction of an inch from the lens. This flash is then reflected off any microscopic dust or smoke particles that are very close to the camera's lens. Those dust particles are much too close to be focused, so they appear as little white blurs. Larger cameras with separate flashes attached to the top do not have the orb problem, because the flash beam is then high enough above the lens that it doesn't strike the dust particles close to the lens.

Turning now to some of the other still pictures . . .

In the picture of the grandmother with the "ghost," the EXIF information with the image indicates that the shutter exposure was over one second. What probably happened was that the person who pressed the camera shutter thought that the picture was done when the flash went off and immediately lowered the camera with a twisting action of the right wrist. During the time the camera was being lowered, the shutter was still open, producing a streaked blur above grandma. The blur is just grandma herself as the camera is moved.

Something similar happened with the "reaper" image, which was also exposed for over a second. During that time, the flash went off weakly and then the camera got pointed in a different direction.

The picture of the white light on the wall of the darkened room looks like white light on the wall. Did he walk over to it to see where it was coming from?

The fuzzy Jesus ghost looks like something very near the lens (loose camera strap?) that picked up some light from somewhere.

In the two outdoor pictures with the winter leaves, the orange reflections appear to be just that --

especially since they showed up in two consecutive pictures. A little poking around with a flashlight would have found exactly what they were. In the version of the picture with the ghostly(?) haze, the camera flash has probably picked up the breath vapor of the photographer on a chilly January 4 evening (or tobacco smoke).

In some other pictures, I can see that the flash has been reflected by something in the room to create a pattern on the wall. If the photographer notices these reflections as he is taking pictures, he can repeat the picture from slightly different angles, take note of how the position of the reflection changes, and gradually narrow down where it is coming from.

Turning now to the videos . . .

I did not watch all of the videos, but the flying "weird orb" looks like something that could be killed with Raid.

The dark "ghost" on one video looks like something on the lens. It might be the flying bug landing on the lens. Call Terminix, not Ghostbusters. I would suggest he try putting a small object directly in front of his lens to see what it looks like.

The video of a shadow quickly sliding across the ceiling looks like the shadow of a bird going by the window. He could test this possibility by walking around outside and seeing what kind of shadows are cast.

In summary, I'm just not seeing anything even vaguely paranormal here.

Allen's reply (again unedited): "for one thing most of them pic like the angel pic and reaper was taken on a nikon cool pic 3200 and you cant change settings like that and as far as that it would be the same color as her not bright light.the thing that flyes across living room is half see through and makes a tick tick tick noise before it come out and made a whooshing noise flying across room no bug does that and it flew from one side of my trailer all the way around the ceiling fan in less then a second.as far as the shadow thing it come flying across my living room making a noise on the original there is a evp right after it.as far as the dark ghost could not be no insect crawling on lense because at the time frame it took to get down there and just be gone like that no sound of wings no kind of residue from the bug or nothing else also if you notice the light in the hallway seems to dim at one point and when it went away for a sec if you listen a contestant had just won on the price is right like it got her attention i see that you just try to see what you want to see and nothing else you want to try to explain some of the easy videos and pics to and cant do it there is no way for there be anything like that to show up on the wall with what appears to be a trail coming from it and a face right below it with something that look like i dont know what on the side.have closer look next time before you go saying what you see."

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