

The Groom Lake Desert Rat

"The Naked Truth from Open Sources."

Area 51/Nellis Range/TTR/NTS/S-4?/Weird Stuff/Desert Lore

An on-line newsletter.

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Direct from the "UFO Capital," Rachel, Nevada.

Issue #10. July 5, 1994

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Media Communications 101

Or "How I Learned To Stop Worrying And Love *Encounters*"

People often ask us: "Psychospy, you've been interviewed by every major TV network, several national magazines and a dozen local news outlets. What's it like being a big-time media schmuck?"

Some readers may be frustrated that they have yet to receive their own fifteen minutes of fame while Psychospy has monopolized what seems like an hour and a half. Fame is easy, we contend. Just find yourself a Cold War military base the government won't admit, set up permanent residence beside it and write a tourist guide inviting the world to visit. The government will expend great energy in stonewalling you or overreacting to your presence, and you will feed off that energy to generate still more attention. Soon, many reporters will arrive, and your face and name will be everywhere.

Follow those simple instructions and your fifteen minutes will come. Guaranteed. In the meantime, we would like to brief you on what to expect when you arrive at the top. As an aging veteran of over six months of interviews, Psychospy knows what it takes to generate a sound bite or pose dramatically on a mountaintop. As our own media career winds down toward inevitable has-been status, we want to share with the next generation our accumulated wisdom and our philosophical musings on news and how it is reported.

Print Media

As editor of the Rat and other publications, Psychospy has long been familiar with the medium of print. When you read a newspaper or magazine article, you can never be certain the writer is telling the truth or has just made the whole thing up, but if you do trust his honesty, print can convey a lot of information. Print is a medium of ideas. It is not very efficient in conveying emotions or the visual appearance of a scene, but it can describe complex issues and hidden connections more clearly than television can.

When a newspaper reporter visits you at your research center near your chosen secret base, he comes with no tools except his notepad and perhaps a tape recorder. Sometimes he brings a photographer, who just sits quietly in the background most of the time. After talking with a newspaper reporter for a while, it's easy to forget that he is one of "them" and you may quickly revert to your natural, unrehearsed self. Of course, this can be dangerous, because once you relax you may say something casually that you would rather not see in print. You must be particularly circumspect about the topic of UFOs; no matter what you say on this subject, one group or another of your supporters is bound to be

upset. Sometimes, the reporter may ask you if he can contact your parents back in Boston to see what kind of boy you were and ask what they think of you now. At this point, you have to draw the line.

When the article reaches print, some inaccuracies and omissions are inevitable. Due to length restrictions, the article will be, at best, a highly distilled record of a very narrow slice of reality. The words will not convey the full depth and breadth of your personality; they will portray only your social role. To crystallize the issues that you want reported, it is important to say you represent an impressive sounding organization, even if you are its only active member. Give yourself a title, like "President" or "Research Director," and that is how you will be reported. Even if you choose to be only a "Local Representative," do not be surprised if the article portrays you as the sort of heroic, larger-than-life figure that is normally seen only in comic books. This sometimes fawning attention results in part from the refusal of the military to respond to the charges and provide any counterpoint to your own one-sided story.

Talk Radio

In the course of the current Media Feeding Frenzy, Psychospy has had an opportunity to participate in a number of talk radio programs around the country. There are dozens of these shows in every major city and they are constantly on the prowl for new material. If your name appears in the newspapers in any almost any capacity, chances are a host will call you up and ask you to be a guest on his show.

Radio talk shows are usually conducted live by telephone from the comfort of your own home. It is hard to embarrass yourself or do anything wrong on them, because no matter what you blurt out, some callers will make you look good by saying something even more foolish. Radio talk shows are perhaps the most revealing medium because you never know what questions are going to be thrown at you. Many callers will be hostile to your position, and being able to respond to them calmly and rationally greatly enhances your credibility with everyone else.

Television

On the surface, television seems like the most "real" news medium. Television doesn't just report an event; it takes you there. Not only do you hear the subject's words; you see his surroundings, feel his emotions and seem to be participating in his life in an intimate way. In one sense, television doesn't lie. Unless the picture has been doctored by special effects--which is forbidden-- what you would see in person is exactly what appears on the nightly news.

In another sense, television can tell as many lies as print can. There are two important factors that aren't obvious on the screen that can transform the story into total fiction. One is editing. A crew can shoot an hour's worth of tape of a speech or interview, but due to the time constraints of broadcasting, only a few seconds of it is likely to air. For the person being interviewed, the benefit of editing is that you can muff your lines repeatedly and only your best ones will be used. Even if you are a babbling idiot, the show can make you look infinitely wise by editing out most of your drivel. The downside is that it is also easy for the editor to take your quotes out of context and make you seem to be saying something you never intended. A classic case is that of a local Sheriff's deputy who was once interviewed near the Black Mailbox by a crew doing a UFO story. His actual quote was something like: "I've seen the sky alive with activity--flares, dogfights, bombing runs--but everything I've seen is routine military maneuvers."

The quote that actually aired was missing all the qualifiers. It was something like: "I've seen the sky alive with activity..." In the context of the show, the truncated quote implied that the policeman believes in UFOs and sees them here all the time.

The other invisible factor influencing the story is the presence of the camera itself. When a print reporter hangs around for a while, it is easy to forget he is reporting on you, and you soon return to your natural behavior. A television camera is impossible to ignore. It is big and the lens is often just a few inches from your face. Nothing can really be natural as long as the camera is present. Due to the constraints of lighting and space, you can't do much of anything the way you normally do. Often, the cameraman offers "suggestions" about where to stand and which way to look as you go about your "natural" activities.

As a transitional element in the story, you may be asked to drive up in your car and walk into your research center--and

do it repeatedly until it comes out right. Most scenes of moving from place to place and performing routine actions are timed for the camera. The cameraman sets up first and then tells you when to go. The only rule that most reputable organizations observe is that they can't tell you to do something you wouldn't do normally. Sometimes, they'll ask you to repeat an action several times, but they want it to be consistent with your real personality and with what you would do if the camera wasn't there. Of course, they can only take your word about what your real actions would be. The charge of "staging" a scene usually makes cameramen bristle. They'll admit to doing it for routine movements but insist they wouldn't do it for anything important. Unfortunately, what constitutes an "important" action that shouldn't be staged varies from crew to crew.

The Structure Of Television

The crew for a local television station usually consists of just two people: the reporter and the cameraman. Their function is straightforward: The reporter collects the facts and asks the questions, and the cameraman handles the camera and sound.

A network TV crew usually adds at least two more people: a sound technician and a producer. There can also be others: production assistants, writers, maybe even a second cameraman and sound guy. At that point, it's hard to call the story news anymore. It's show biz.

In a national news program, the reporter is called a "correspondent." This is the person talking into the camera and interviewing the subjects. The viewer would think, when watching the report, that the correspondent is the person in charge. He must be the one who conducts the research, sets up the interviews, rakes the muck and comes up with the startling conclusions reported in the piece.

Wrong. In most cases, the correspondent joins the story only on the day of the shoot. The correspondent is the high paid "talent," hired as much for his screen presence as his reporting skills. The person who really assembles the story is the producer. He or she rarely appears on camera but could have been working on the story for weeks. The producer does the research, handles the logistics and briefs the talent. When the correspondent conducts an interview, the producer is usually lurking just off camera to feed him questions and make sure he hasn't forgotten anything. When it comes time to do a "stand up," where the correspondent talks into the camera, he first huddles with the producer to decide what to say.

One news program, like *60 Minutes*, can have many producers, each working on a different story. The business is highly competitive, and enemies are everywhere. The opposition is *PrimeTime Live* and *20/20*, but each producer is also competing with others on the same show and within the same network to get their story on the air. Whenever a new producer calls us about the Groom Lake story, the first thing we have to do is brief them on who else in their own organization has already been looking into it; otherwise they might never know.

We get the impression that the news business regards producers as expendable and eats them alive in mass quantities. The only time you see a producer on screen seems to be when he or she is carrying a hidden camera into a crack house or some other dangerous place where they would never send Mike Wallace. Many of the producers we have met have been young, idealistic former film or political science students willing to work 14 hour days for what we suspect is a lot less money than they deserve.

The correspondent lives more in the show business sphere. His pay may be negotiated by an agent, and it is more likely to be based on the star system than objective abilities. Networks want a familiar face that the viewer can bond with, in essence creating brand loyalty. Many people feel attached to Hugh Downs and Barbara Walters and the nice correspondents on their show and will tune in on these familiar faces even if they have nothing to do with producing the stories. Many correspondents are highly professional, do their homework, ask good questions and deserve at least some of their rewards. A few others are whiny prima donnas who haven't a clue as to what the story is and who are despised even by their own film crews. Nonetheless, the unbroken rule is, the correspondent has to look good--smart, tough, insightful--and through the magic of editing, it always comes to pass.

When the correspondent arrives for the interview, you are supposed to bond with him like he's your old buddy even though you've already bonded with the producer and don't know this guy from Adam. You are supposed to pretend there

is no one else in the room. The big camera, the bright lights, the microphone on a boom floating six inches above your head, the half dozen people lurking behind the cordon of cables.... Like the secret base itself, they all are not supposed to exist.

In practice, though, focusing on the correspondent makes the interview relatively easy. You do forget the camera with time, and you don't have to remember any lines, just respond to the questions. You know that the interview will be edited down to a couple of sound bites, so verbal stumblings aren't a problem. You are not going to be able to cover any complex issues here because, of course, this is television. Your only job is to provide an inventory of pithy, self-contained statements--a sound bite library--to be chopped up and used as fodder for the editing process.

As long as you stick to the facts and pick the right secret base to complain about, you can't go wrong. Editing will make you look good, and as long as the military declines to respond, the report will be supportive. The limelight will be all yours until the public grows tired of your story and spits you out like used chewing gum.

An *Encounters* Encounter

After the article on Groom Lake appeared in the *New York Times* last week [Synopsis [DR#11](#), visit [DR#6](#)], we felt that an apex had been reached and now was time for the story to evolve into something different. We wanted the focus to shift to Washington and to serious issues like the hazardous waste injury lawsuit. We feared that after hitting the Times, there was no place to go but down. We felt the Watchers-on-Freedom-Ridge story had achieved saturation in all the respectable markets. We almost wished that the government would just take the damn land and be done with it.

The MFF was becoming tiresome, and we wanted to put on the brakes, but that was easier said than done. The Times story itself generated additional media interest. On Monday, we got a call from ARD German television. Germans, we were told, have a special interest in Cold War relics, and our secret base reminded them of how they used to be. Their film crew came a few days later, and we were happy to cooperate with them. (Aired 7/4.)

On Tuesday, we got a call from a new Fox UFO/paranormal series called *Encounters*. They had talked to us in previous weeks about doing a segment on Area 51, but the project did not interest the Fox executives and was shelved. When the Times story hit, it rose again from the dead, this time on a fast track schedule.

Upon hanging up the phone, we were filled the same feelings of dread and foreboding we last experienced several months previous when a reporter and his psychic from the *Weekly World News* came to town in a white limousine. (Yes, we were as surprised as you are: They DO have reporters who actually leave the office.) In that case, we were able to hide under our bed until the limo left town. When the story hit the streets ("SPACE ALIENS HANG OUT AT NEVADA BAR"), we were elated to find ourselves not in it.

It was harder to hide from *Encounters*. At the time of the phone call, only two episodes had been aired, but we already knew their style. A stern anchorman introduced slickly produced segments on an ominous government conspiracy to keep UFO information from the public. While we are as interested in UFOs and government secrets as anyone, we felt that *Encounters* was more fiction than news. Our main objection was the unscrupulous editing. Interviews and footage from unrelated UFO cases were meshed together as though they were from the same case. Sound bites from credible UFO researchers were interspersed with those of hucksters we have met personally and regard as completely unreliable. The production was breathlessly paced, visually compelling and overlaid with a sinister soundtrack, but after watching each segment, we felt that no reliable information had been conveyed and no real investigation had taken place.

We had also been interviewed in January for the *Encounters* pilot. They really wanted underground alien bases. "Proof" wasn't necessary; all they needed was anecdotes. We sensed that simply the fact that somebody had said something was enough to put the claim on the air. Evidently, we did not provide the quotes they wanted, because none of our interview made the cut. Only our hands were seen opening a road sensor.

Now, they were baaaack, like the unkillable monster of a "B" movie, and they wanted to interview us again. We spent a sleepless night or two trying to figure out what to do. We finally decided that our participation would probably do no lasting harm. We would stick with the script we were comfortable with--on the land grab and perils of government

secrecy--and let others speak about UFOs.

The *Encounters* expedition was lead by "[Agent X](#)", a frequent visitor to the area whose real identity is no more secret than Psychospy's. X readily admits to being "shameless" with regards to publicity, but his claims about Area 51 are relatively rational. He does not predict earthquakes, heal the sick or claim any psychic communication with the aliens. X is the sort of powerful screen presence we feel honored to hide behind.

Agent X escorted the *Encounters* crew to the top of Freedom Ridge on Friday night (7/1), while Psychospy was at home and sound asleep. Through the magic of editing, however, Psychospy will become part of this expedition on the small screen, along with the *Encounters* correspondent who wasn't there either. In industry parlance, this story was shot "out of sequence." First, they filmed the scene on Freedom Ridge, then, on a different night at a location many miles away, they shot an imaginary hike to the top. Later, back in Las Vegas, they would shoot the correspondent meeting Agent X to prepare for the expedition that had already taken place.

As X put it: "They're even more shameless than I am."

On Saturday afternoon, the correspondent arrived in Rachel in a white limousine, the first one we've seen in town since the *Weekly World News*. He was supposed to be here in the morning, but his driver took a wrong turn, and they ended up taking the LONG way from Vegas, through Beatty and Tonopah, a six hour drive instead of two and a half.

After the correspondent arrived, Psychospy participated in two of the location shoots: "Rachel Departure" and "Base Camp". In Rachel, the crew energetically loaded their equipment cases onto the top of the four wheel drive vehicles and lashed them down while the camera rolled. The idea was to convey the appearance of a very serious and professional *Encounters* expedition just getting under way. It was the mythical start of our journey to Freedom Ridge, which had actually been conquered the night before. We did three takes of the convoy turning onto the highway and heading out of town, Then we returned to Rachel, gassed up, had some snacks, and REALLY left town with no camera running.

We didn't go to Freedom Ridge but to a location near Hancock Summit that was closer to the highway and judged more visually interesting. Here, we set up a "base camp" for our imaginary hike. We propped up some camouflage netting in a tent-like structure, built a campfire and stacked our equipment cases in an impressive-looking configuration. The sole purpose of this exercise was to provide an out-of-focus backdrop for the correspondent's interview with Agent X. Psychospy and three members of the seven-man crew served as extras for this scene. Our job was to move around the campsite doing serious and purposeful looking things. We moved cases around and pointed at maps as though planning our next move. At one point, Psychospy walked around with a clipboard and pretended to take inventory, an action that has always impressed us on TV.

After the interview had ended and dusk was falling, we commenced our "hike". In several takes, X, the correspondent and we four extras, marched up a nearby hillside in tight single file, deliberately taking the most rugged route. We marched down again, then up again, then down again, and during each leg of the journey the director actually said "Action" and "Cut." At one point, Psychospy was asked to stand on a ridge, silhouetted by the setting sun, and look through his binoculars at an empty sky. It's the sort of dramatic posturing we do so well.

Lest you ask, there is no reason at all to hike to Freedom Ridge if you have a four wheel drive. The road goes all the way to the top, and this is indeed how the crew got there when they visited on Friday night. There is also no particular reason to set up a "base camp" when Rachel is less than an hour's drive away. Hiking seems much more dramatic, however, and our camouflage tent, no matter how shoddily constructed, made an impressive looking backdrop.

After darkness fell, the night vision lens was attached to the camera, and we climbed the hill yet again to film our arrival at "Freedom Ridge." We stood on a rocky outcropping and X pointed out to the correspondent the features of the base below. Of course, we were looking only a blank hillside--a TRULY nonexistent base--but the magic of editing will fix all that. At one point, Psychospy was invited to point out the locations of the nonexistent security patrols. We politely declined this opportunity and passed it to the shameless X. We were happy enough to be a extra in this drama; something told us we didn't want a speaking role.

At the time of filming, the *Encounters* segment was expected to air on July 15. Check it out.

[Actually aired July 22.]

Reader Responses: [Media Feeding Frenzy](#)

Intel Bitties

TRESPASSER TRIAL DATE. The oft-delayed trial of the four of seven accused trespassers is now scheduled for July 6 at 1 pm at Alamo Justice Court. (The June date was canceled when one of the defendants was hospitalized.) Best to confirm with Psychospy or call the court before you show up.

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