

# Psychic crime fighters lead cops to dead ends

According to Saturday's Gazette, psychics have become involved in an unsolved Colorado murder case. This is, to put it bluntly, appalling.

The Los Angeles Police Department "has not, does not and will not use psychics in the investigation of crimes ... It is a waste of time." Scotland Yard says that they "never approach psychics for information", "do not endorse psychics in any way" and "there is no recorded instance of any psychic solving a criminal case."

What do we know that they don't? Are the effects of psychic powers different at altitude?

The James Randi Educational Foundation has a \$1 million prize for anyone who can demonstrate the existence of any paranormal ability, including psychic detection. (Got to [www.randi.org](http://www.randi.org) and read the conditions yourself. You'll find they're quite reasonable). No well-known psychic has even attempted to take our test. Including the two who came out to Summit County.

Laurie Campbell and Pam Coronado came to the Rockies as part of the TV show, "Sensing Murder." Coronado said she "had no information about the case." Is it beyond the realm of possibility to think that Coronado might have been less than truthful? Which is more likely: Having ESP or lying?

Coronado supposedly came up with details that only people close to the case knew. Again, is it beyond the realm of possibility that she learned those details through non-supernatural means? Which is more likely: Psychic power or cheating?

On a previous episode of "Sensing Murder," Campbell and Coronado worked on a brutal 1978 Orange Country murder case. When asked if they cracked it, they said "yes," but the lead detective said "not really." Who is more credible: The psychics or the detective?

Asking these kind of questions gets to the real problem of investigating the paranormal. When you try to be a good critical thinker, you come off like a jerk. Here are what seem to be two very nice ladies trying to help people. How dare I accuse them of lying? What the heck is my problem?

If I had to admit to one, it would be a com-



OPINION  
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mitment to truth that exceeds my social skills. But it's undeniable that psychics, mediums and faith healers lie all the time. There are plenty of techniques they've used throughout the ages to pull the wool over people's eyes. Our only defense against them is education.

One of the oldest and most effective techniques is practiced by Laurie Campbell, Coronado's partner. Campbell is a "cold reader." She throws out questions like "Is there a John or a Jonathan?" to an audience as she attempts to communicate with the dead. Do this enough and you'll get some "amazing" hits. It's a very old trick. Penn Jillette does it in his stage show, and he's much better at it.

Why does any of this matter? If the exposure generated by the TV show gets the case solved, isn't that really what's important? Does the end justify the means? Maybe so.

But I still wish people wouldn't watch shows such as "Sensing Murder." Why not make it something like "America's Most Wanted" or "Unsolved Crimes: Can You Help?" Isn't it possible to get the exposure for a cold case in a more ethical way, one that people would still want to watch?

Clearly those of us who are passionate about critical thinking have an uphill battle to fight. Competing against sensationalist media, along with our tendency to come off as mean and negative, means that we need some serious help. So I'm going to get some.

Next week, I'm off to Las Vegas to present a paper at the largest skeptical conference in the world. Some of the most creative and persuasive people on the planet will be there, including Penn and Teller, Trey Parker and Matt Stone (the creators of "South Park"), Eugenie Scott (director of the National Center for Science Education), Julia Sweeney ("Pat" on "Saturday Night Live"), tons of professional liars (sorry, stage magicians) and maybe a Nobel laureate or two.

I'll let you know what I find out.

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