WOO IN REVIEW: Criminal Profiling Contest

After reviewing the television show Criminal Minds, I was surprised to discover how many people do not believe that criminal profiling has a value to criminal investigation better than, say, psychic detectives.

According to research conducted in the early 1990's, out of 192 cases where profilers had been called in as investigation support, only 88 were ever solved, and only 17% of that number were cases where criminal profiling was deemed a helpful element of the investigation.

It's important to remember, when examining that statistic, that criminal profilers aren't called in often, and only are when other investigation methods (such as forensics) have failed. The crimes investigated are hard to solve – harder than most.

There is also a misconception that profiles are intended to be used as evidence, or to directly lead to an arrest.

This isn't the case. Criminal profiling can be used, however, to eliminate suspects from a pool. And in order to review criminal profiling on the whole, I've designed a case of serial murder for you to participate in.

I am aware this doesn't prove whether profiling is or is not an effective tool. Much more study would have to be conducted for that. What I'm hoping to do is put you in the shoes of a profiler

and find out if the possibility for an individual to help an investigation based on the type of person they believe must have committed a crime is possible.

And this is also a contest.

You, as a profiler, will be competing against all other participants for a signed copy of *Conjuring* by James Randi.

In order to enter, you must, in the comments, state which of the suspects you believe was responsible for the fictional crimes described below. Not only that, you must say why you believe they did it, and why you don't believe any of the other suspects did.

You must give your e-mail address within your submission, or you must simultaneously copy your submission to alison@randi.org. You cannot just send an e-mail. You MUST post your submission in the comments as well.

You must be willing to give your mailing address. Otherwise your prize cannot be sent to you should you win.

The first person with the correct answer and the correct reasons will be deemed the winner.

Keep in mind that the crimes described are graphic. If graphic violence doesn't suit you, you really might want to reconsider entering the contest.

Also, be aware that these crimes and these suspects are fictional. The elements of the crimes described have similarities to true crimes, but are not identical.

And, as with any good contest, there is a BONUS ROUND.

If you would like, with your submission for the culprit of the crimes described, you may also participate in the bonus round.

In addition to the perpetrator of the crime described, there are individuals that you, the profiler, speak to in the course of your investigation. You believe that it is possible these individuals have committed, or will commit, other crimes. Who are they, and what are the crimes that suit them? I'm not going to tell you how many individuals there are for the bonus round. You'll have to figure that out yourself.

The winner of the bonus round will receive a signed copy of James Randi's *An Encyclopedia of Claims, Frauds, and Hoaxes of the Occult and Supernatural*
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Remember – these crimes are designed. They are the perfect conditions for a profiler. They are manufactured crimes, and manufactured suspects.

Now. Let the profiling begin.

The Crimes

The bodies of twelve women who disappeared between 2003 and 2008 have been discovered (at various times) in the Saline Valley area of Death Valley National Park in California. The women all went missing from Las Vegas, Nevada in accordance with the following time line.

October, 2003
August, 2004
March, 2005
September, 2006
January, 2007
April, 2007
October, 2007
February, 2008
May, 2008
July, 2008
November, 2008
December, 2008

All the women were abducted from off-Strip dance clubs. Cameras, when available, show each of them having a drink with a twenty-five to thirty-five year old male wearing a fedora. Particular features are obscured, but witness accounts say that the individual was white, had dark hair, and was attractive, charming, and well-dressed. Parking lot cameras show the male in the fedora helping the abducted females into a black Honda CR-V as though they were heavily inebriated.

The Victims

All the victims are between the ages of twenty-two and twenty-eight. All are white females. All were above-average intelligence with steady, well-paying jobs. All have blonde hair and blue eyes, and their hair is cut short. All were very attractive. All attended the clubs alone. The latest victim showed rohypnol in a toxicology screening, and it is assumed that all victims were given it

in their drinks and that decomposition masked that fact.

Witnesses at the clubs say that the women seemed sober for most of their interaction with the man, which lasted for up to half an hour, and that only in the last ten minutes or so of conversation with him seemed to become incapacitated despite having fewer than four drinks during the course of the night. The women all drank high-end drinks, and one even convinced a man to buy her champagne, though she was off with someone else before she finished the first drink. The women and the man who is thought to be the perpetrator did not dance together at the club, but sat at a table and talked instead.

Witnesses say that the women were extremely social before meeting the man, and danced with quite a few people. They were flirtatious and charming, yet seemed like strong women who were getting more than they were giving.

The abductions all occurred between 10 PM and 2 AM.

All the victims were well-dressed at the time of their abductions, and their clothing was found neatly folded beside them at the dump site, and had no bloodstains. All the bodies still had on jewelry. All the bodies were found nude, all had been raped with a foreign object that was not found at the scene. All the victims were suffocated to death with what forensic analysts believe was a plastic bag though no bag was found at the grave sites. All the bodies were buried in shallow graves. All the victims had severe pre-mortem facial wounds that appear to have been inflicted with a hammer.

There are at least five more women who fit the victimology of this crime and went missing within the past year. Police are still searching missing persons records to see if there are more.

You, The Profiler

Police work has built a suspect pool, which has been narrowed because of witness constructed sketches of the perpetrator. All the following ten people own or have access to black Honda CR-Vs. All had the ability to commit the crimes. It is up to you to decide whose personality fits the crimes.

You are FBI Special Agent Blank, and you work for the Behavioral Analysis Unit as a criminal profiler. You have been called in to interview the ten people in the narrowed suspect pool. You do not solve crimes, and the profile you give will not be considered evidence. It will only further narrow the suspect pool, and give the police direction in their interviews. However, after interviewing the ten individuals and those close to them, you believe you know who did it. And you have reasons to back up your claims.

Read the list of ten people and their stories, then, in the comments, submit your answer along with the reasons you believe the individual you have chosen was responsible for the crimes.

1. **Jeffrey Gacy** – Jeffrey is a Las Vegas native, is twenty-six years old, and loves extreme sports. He rock climbs, paraglides, and has taken courses in survivalist camping. He owns an ATV, and often rides it in Death Valley. Jeffrey is not currently employed. He is the son of rich parents, and lives mostly off his trust fund (a fact that he doesn't mind proudly sharing). Jeffrey says he survives on Power Bars and Gatorade. He had a serious girlfriend for a while, but she caught him cheating and broke off the relationship. Now he just has a series of one-night stands, but doesn't mind because it frees up his time for travel and also frees him up for “special encounters” with bikini babes when he visits the beach to surf. Jeffrey went to school at the University of Texas at Austin, and majored in art history. He never graduated because in his third year he left school to pursue a more philosophical lifestyle. He tells you that murder isn't really the killing of another soul, but an attempt to absorb the power of the universe. Jeffrey's friends don't have a lot to say about him beyond superficial things, like that he enjoys listening to Creedence Clearwater Revival and often talks about his exercise regimen. When Jeffrey meets with you, he is wearing bike shorts and a muscle shirt and has a pedometer wrapped around his ankle and sunglasses perched on his head. A background check reveals that Jeffrey once had a complaint filed against him for domestic abuse. The complaint was filed by his ex-girlfriend, who Jeffrey says started the dispute after she caught him cheating. He claims that he shoved her, and she slipped and fell and broke her wrist. The complaint was never acted upon, and Jeffrey has no actual record. Jeffrey's parents say that he is a free spirit, and would never intentionally hurt anyone.

2. **John Wayne Zodiac** – John is thirty-five years old and works as a clown at Circus Circus hotel and casino. He is unmarried and does not have a steady girlfriend. When he meets you, he is wearing a black shirt, black jeans, and a Barry Manilow hat, which he insists he wears as a joke. Even though the topic of conversation is very serious, John can't help but make jokes often. He says he is never really off the job. John attended Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Clown College, and went on to tour with the circus for three years. He decided he wanted a more stable life, and moved to Vegas. He says that Circus Circus is a great place because it's one of the few remaining casinos that has a family-friendly theme. John admits to sometimes gambling too much (he loves blackjack), and is a recovering alcoholic. He has a record for driving while intoxicated. He says he has been alcohol-free for six years, but you contact Holly, his last girlfriend (from four years ago), and she claims that John continued to go on drinking binges until the end of their relationship. She worked as a cocktail waitress at Circus Circus, and claims that John would often go to off-strip clubs to avoid being seen by their acquaintances when he was drinking. Holly also says that John would claim that he was going camping in Death Valley, but would just as often go on binges in Pahrump, a nearby town, and also obtained the services of prostitutes while there (it is, it should be noted, legal for him to do so). John came from a single-parent household – his mother, a receptionist, struggled to support him while they were living in California. John and his mother have since lost contact, and according to her, John was always the picked-on child in school and never got over it, using his clown act as a way to compensate for his sadness. John has no record.

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