

## BOOK REVIEW

**The Lonely Sense: The Autobiography of a Psychic Detective** by Robert Cracknell and Colin Wilson. Anomalist Books, 2011. 330 pp. \$16.95. ISBN 978-1933665511.

Robert Cracknell is a British psychic who won fame in the 1970s and 1980s as a psychic detective. *The Lonely Sense* is a record of his life, originally published as *Clues to the Unknown* in 1981, here expanded and updated. The book makes interesting reading. Cracknell comes across, as author Colin Wilson accurately remarks in a Foreword, as “totally down-to-earth, blunt, aggressive, and impatient,” also “intelligent, honest, and obsessively, almost self-destructively, devoted to his own vision of the truth.”

The first chapters describe a difficult working-class childhood, first as a foster child suffering deprivation and then being brought up by his mother and stepfather, and then service in the British Royal Air Force. Early experiences of isolation, hunger, and occasional brutality turn him into a loner, but he also discovers within himself an unexpectedly deep sensitivity toward others, to which he attributes the first stirrings of his psychic awareness. There follows a failed marriage and a stint as a student nurse in a psychiatric hospital.

This is not the story of seeing dead people, commonly described by spirit mediums—there are rather fewer such incidents than one usually finds in such books—but rather of developing and learning to trust his inner intuitions. In fact, after an initial period training as a medium Cracknell develops a marked antipathy to spiritualism, with its focus on afterlife and spirit guides. He is adamant that anyone and everyone is psychic to some degree, and is scornful of the mystique surrounding mediumship—a theme he returns to throughout the book.

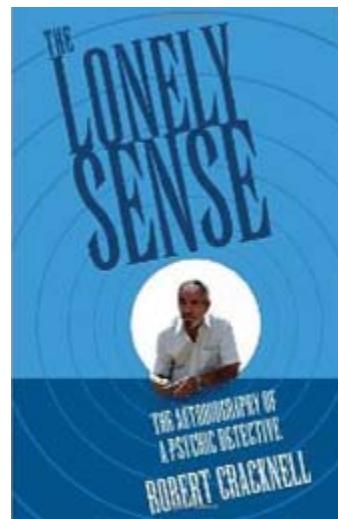
There are several exhibitions of his psychic ability. In one striking episode he agrees to try to identify a person who will be sitting in a particular chair at a meeting that will take place several weeks in the future, the venue yet to be decided. He tries to visualize the meeting and tapes himself describing his impressions, then hands the tape to the organizers, who keep it in a safe until the meeting, at which time he stands on the stage as the tape is played. Cracknell feels anxious that he has bitten off more than he can chew, and minutes before the meeting he is convinced that he has failed, as the person sitting in the target chair does not at all match his taped description. But

by the time the event begins, more rows of chairs have been added, changing the target chair, which now to his relief is occupied by the person he visualized. As the tape plays, various other predictions about audience members and their circumstances are all triumphantly vindicated.

Cracknell is reluctant to profit directly from his gift, but eventually finds a use for it in his job as a financial fraud buster, first as an employee of an agency and then running his own business. Later chapters describe how he also uses it to help solve high-profile police cases, which brings him to the attention of the national media. One of the most striking cases takes place in Italy, when Cracknell is persuaded by the father of a kidnapped girl to go out to his Lake Como residence to help the police search for her. He starts with the conviction that it will end with the girl's safe return, and eventually declares that it will be next Friday, five days away, giving time for the girl's somewhat venal father to sell the story of her homecoming as an exclusive to a British Sunday tabloid. The girl is duly recovered on the Friday, although apparently without any direct help from Cracknell himself.

There's a curious encounter with Uri Geller in New York, where he is disillusioned to find his fellow-psychic more interested in fame and money than in using his gifts for people's benefit, for instance in healing. In a street meeting in front of news photographers, Geller does his key-bending trick, which he finds impressive. Cracknell suggests they try a joint public event, he in the UK repeating his chair trick for a future event to be held in New York while Geller in the U.S. attempts to interfere with a computer in London. Geller seems keen. But after the media has been hooked on the idea, he suddenly pulls out without any explanation.

First-person accounts by psychics are always suspect to a degree, in the sense that the reader has no way of determining how accurate the descriptions of successful cases actually are, and what details may have been tweaked or massaged—whether consciously or unconsciously—to make the outcome look more impressive than actually was the case. Self-proclaimed psychic detectives are a particular target for skeptics. In this instance, readers who acknowledge the genuineness of psychic functioning, either from experience or from responsible research, may be willing to acknowledge that Cracknell is a psychic of uncommon ability. It's true



that his descriptions show the ambiguities and complexities involved in detection work, for instance having to persuade skeptical policemen to follow up apparently nonsensical hunches and often coming up with predictions that prove to be accurate but that however do not necessarily contribute directly to a resolution. However, in these and other ways the book provides valuable insights into a psychic's inner development and the realities of life in the public eye.

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