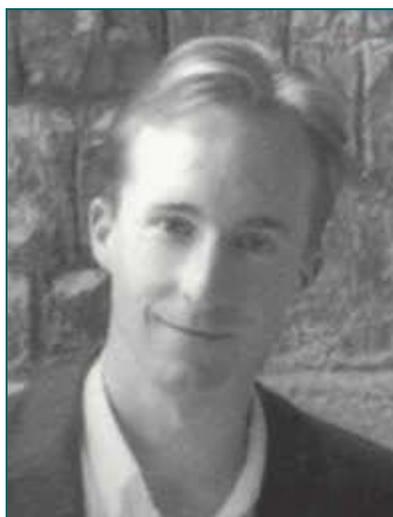


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A READER'S JOURNAL:

The Mind Game
A Novel
by
Hector MacDonald

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A Book Review by Bobby Matherne ©2004

This is a novel in which mind games take place throughout the story from beginning to end. First mind game appears as Ben Ashurst's friends, Piers, explains the rules of a gambling game which might be called "Truth or Pay" or "Lie and



Win" in which the ability to detect lies or lie without being detected pays off:

[page 5] "Rules are: unchallenged truth pays one to the pot, unchallenged lie takes the pot." He pointed to the large heap of chips in a silver ashtray. "Challenger pays two for truth, gets four for lie. OK?"

One notes that each chapter in Part One of the book has a Recording No and information about the conditions of Ben at the time of the recording. The reasons for the recording notes becomes clear as the story proceeds. From Chapter 1, page 3:

Recording No: 4

Date: 15 December **Time:** 7:30 am

Situation: Coral headland overlooking ocean

Sensory Context: Visual: magnificent seascape, early morning sun; Auditory: waves breaking on reef; Olfactory: fresh salt

Cognitive Context: Minimal cognitive activity

Emotional Context: Happiness, sense of peace, relaxation

Somatic Response: None

Facial Response: Musculature relaxed

Global Viewpoint: Optimistic, unconcerned, free

Action Impulse: None

The next game we are led through is the "Prisoner's Dilemma" when Ben meets with his tutor in an Oxford café built into an old church to discuss his essay on that important game of game theory.

[page 31, 32] "I'm sorry I'm late," I said, pulling up a chair beside him. Dr. James Fieldhead looked up from the paper and smiled.

"The FTSE-100 [RJM: UK stock index] went up 308 points yesterday. I can forgive a little lateness after that." He stood up, picked up his papers and sauntered over to a table in the apse.

I looked around and guessed he wanted to move away from the scattered customers at neighbouring tables. Privacy had never previously been a concern to the man who held his tutorials in pubs, trains and punts, but perhaps his views on game theory were even more groundbreaking

than usual. I followed him across to the other table.

To my amazement, he stood up again as soon as I reached him, heading this time for a stool at the bar.

"Am I supposed to keep following you?" I called after him.

"You do whatever produces the optimal final outcome for you. First rule of game theory."

The other customers looked up, curious to hear raised voices on a Saturday morning.

"Well, it's hardly great for me if you keep moving away."

"That's why I do it. According to your essay there is always a winner and a loser in a game, and what's bad for you must be good for me. Incidentally, did you rush this one?"

"I didn't know we were playing a game." I felt myself flushing, trying not to show my irritation at this public lesson.

"But of course we are. I make a decision that influences your decision and vice versa. Our actions are interdependent. It's a game."

"It's not much fun."

Across the nave, Fieldhead chuckled. "Since when have scientific games been about fun? Games are models of rational interaction, that's all. They're full of surprises and paradoxes, certainly: bound to be with the circular reasoning they require. But fun? The Prisoner's Dilemma game that you described so . . . extensively: how much fun would that be in real life?"

Without waiting for a reply, he stood up and returned to his original table. "Tell me," he called to me, "in terms of seating arrangements, what would be our best strategy for this tutorial?"

"To both sit at the same table."

"So there is a choice we could both pick where our best interests would be simultaneously be served?"

I walked over and sat down beside him. This time he didn't move.

His tutor Fieldhead continues to keep Ben off-balance like this throughout the book and you begin to wonder if the entire story is a tutorial. And who's getting tutored by whom. Ben's relationship with a new girl Cara begins to bloom and his almost girl friend Jennifer jumps from a building to kill herself, winding up in a hospital with badly mangled legs. Soon he discovers that Fieldhead has a proposition for him which involves him going to the coast of Kenya for six weeks on an all-expenses paid vacation for which he will get paid five thousands pounds on his return. The catch is that he will be participating in a study of emotions and have to wear a recording device which will be surgically implanted in the back of his head just above his neck. He listens to the proposition and declines outright. Later Cara hears about the offer and suggests it would wise for him to take the offer. Ben changes his mind after talking to Cara, and Fieldhead decides to let Ben and Cara go to Kenya together. At this point we get a clue as to the meaning of the Recording Notes at the head of each chapter.

The device Fieldhead hooks up to Ben records the faint signals from his limbic system. By matching up the recording of the signals to the emotions Ben will be experiencing during his trip, Fieldhead and his associates will be able to correlate the various emotions to the frequency pattern of the signals recorded at the time of the emotions. Ben prepares to leave for Kenya only to discover that a headline that disturbs him, *Kenyan Coast Thrown into Pre-Election Anarchy as Police Station Burns*. He complains but is talked into going anyway. On the flight to Kenya, he reads Fieldhead's instructions about emotions:

[page 69] The science of emotions is in its infancy. We are still a long way from knowing how emotions are generated. We don't even really know how to define an emotion(1). There is obviously a cognitive component — the conscious feeling but that may be just the tip of the iceberg. The unconscious components that impact our muscular and endocrinal systems are probably far more important, and relate to a range of quite distinct physiological functions. This brings us to the core of the dilemma for neurophysiologists: we talk about emotions as a single concept, and yet in reality they are not a homogeneous group. Some have major visceral components; others are entirely in the mind(2).

Soon after arriving in Kenya he is on a roller coaster ride of highs and lows, from lounging on the beach with Cara to being thrown into solitary confinement in prison for drug trafficking and threatened with having his fingers cut off. When Fieldhead arrives to get him out of prison, he is alienated from Cara who slept with her diving instructor, is suspecting his tutor of some nefarious scheme, and has paranoid suspicions about the uses of the device to control the minds of citizens by coercive bureaucracies.

As Part Two of the book begins, Ben has barely escaped with his life and hands intact from Kenya and now he plots his vengeance against Fieldhead and Cara who betrayed him, used him, and basically lied to him in order to get him to make some interesting recordings for this scientific project. How could they spend so much money on a project like this? — This thought troubles Ben who begins his own research project into uncovering the layers of deceit which become like a Gordian knot to untangle.

With each chapter more and more of Ben's friends seem to be involved in this plot, Piers, Jennifer, Sammy (his brother), and so on. In the midst of rampant paranoia Ben presses on to find the truth in a world where everything seems to be a game in which he can only learn the rules by playing. Along the way he gets invited by Fieldhead to play an interesting game of tennis using a unique set of rules, quite a relief for Ben from playing games without knowing what the rules were. Since this game of tennis is scored depending on moves of cooperation and defection, it can be seen as an application of the Prisoner's Dilemma to tennis. Keeping score, as Fieldhead does while leading a discussion with Ben, seems to be a rather incredible feat on his part.

[page 302, 303] "I really don't know how this game will go, so this is a genuine test," he said. "Richard Dawkins came up with it the other day and reckoned it might have some useful biological application, but for now let's forget about that." He threw a clutch of balls over the net. "Basic rule of the game: we count the number of strikes in each rally and the winner of the rally receives that number of points. We both therefore have an incentive to keep the rally going, but ultimately we both want to play the winning shot. The challenge is to anticipate your opponent's defection from cooperation so that you can defect just before he does. Of course, as in any repeated game, your actions in one rally will influence his actions in the next. We'll play exactly thirty rallies and alternate service. The object of the game is to maximize the number of points you have — not necessarily to get more points than the other player. It is therefore effectively a cooperative game, although spiced by the increasing temptation to indulge in uncooperative behaviour as rallies get long. Is that clear?"

I nodded.

"Assuming we are both excellent tennis players, the maximum score that fully uncooperative behaviour will yield is 15 each. That is the result if we both serve aces every time. Of course if we choose to serve more gently, we both have the potential to reach much higher scores. Shall I start?"

Near the end of the story Cara reappears and explains an interesting aspect of the device her company is making which uses the results of the recordings made on Ben:

[page 351] "Creating artificial emotional states isn't just about injecting what you want. It's also about removing what you don't want. The RX582 is designed to suppress negative emotions as well as enhance positive ones. It will emit opposing frequencies that cancel out those negative emotions we measured in you(3)."

The implication is that if Ben feels bad about losing Cara, he can use his personal RX582 to get rid of those bad feelings and even inject some good feelings in their place. Certainly those he recorded in Recording 45 lying next to Cara in bed on the Kenyan coast would qualify.

Ben leaves us this idea which he arrived at the hard way, *It's always easier to influence someone's decision if they don't know they're being influenced.* And with human beings this is often the most difficult

thing one can endeavor to do because as a species we seem to have a built-in deceit detection apparatus. Ben certainly did, for if he did not, there would have been no tale to tell.

This is a gripping tale, a real-page turner, as Ben peels away one paranoiac onion-skin fantasy after another until he reveals the core truth.

----- *Footnotes* -----

Footnote 1. Hector MacDonald can be forgiven for claiming we don't know how to define an emotion since he has likely not discovered the nascent [science of doyletics](#) which simply defines an emotion to be "the complex of physical body states, i.e., doylic memories, stored before one is five years old and recapitulated thereafter upon a suitable trigger." Simply put, emotions are composed of doyles, otherwise known as doylic memories to distinguish them from cognitive memories.

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**Footnote 2.** The theory of doyletics makes the difference between visceral components and those in the mind. The visceral components are doyles or doylic memories which are stored in the limbic system between early fetal growth stages and five years old; those components in the mind are identified as cognitive memories which are stored in the neocortex which only reaches full storage and retrieval capability around the age of five years. A doylic memory can later be converted into a cognitive memory through a process called the speed trace. This can be used to remove unwanted emotions, i.e., visceral components or doylic memory.

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Footnote 3. One doesn't need to wait for the mythical RX582 to be invented to remove emotional states that one doesn't want -- help is available today in 2004 from the science of doyletics. A speed trace can quickly, easily, and without cost remove unwanted emotional states after a short training session explained here: <http://www.doyletics.com/training.htm>. It is, however, not possible to inject or create new emotional states in someone over five years old as explained in the basic tenants of doyletics. Emotions are composed of a substrate of *doyles* — physical body states stored in the limbic system before five and merely recapitulated thereafter upon suitable stimuli. As such no new doyles can be created post-five-years-old. One may inject some novel experience by a device but such novel experiences will not be stored as doyles. Thus, once the injection is over, that experience can never be recapitulated without using the external injection device.

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