The Psychopath Test
by Jon Ronson
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**Summary:**

In this madcap journey, a bestselling journalist investigates psychopaths and the industry of doctors, scientists, and everyone else who studies them.

*The Psychopath Test* is a fascinating journey through the minds of madness. Jon Ronson's exploration of a potential hoax being played on the world's top neurologists takes him, unexpectedly, into the heart of the madness industry. An influential psychologist who is convinced that many important CEOs and politicians are, in fact, psychopaths teaches Ronson how to spot these high-flying individuals by looking out for little telltale verbal and nonverbal clues. And so Ronson, armed with his new psychopath-spotting abilities, enters the corridors of power. He spends time with a death-squad leader institutionalized for mortgage fraud in Coxsackie, New York; a legendary CEO whose psychopathy has been speculated about in the press; and a patient in an asylum for the criminally insane who insists he's sane and certainly not a psychopath.

Ronson not only solves the mystery of the hoax but also discovers, disturbingly, that sometimes the personalities at the helm of the madness industry are, with their drives and obsessions, as mad in their own way as those they study. And that relatively ordinary people are, more and more, defined by their maddest edges.
Jon Ronson

Jon Ronson (born 10 May 1967) is a Welsh journalist, documentary filmmaker, radio presenter and nonfiction author, whose works include The Men Who Stare at Goats. He has been described as a gonzo journalist, with his work appearing in British publications such as The Guardian newspaper, City Life and Time Out magazine. He has made several documentary films for television and two documentary series for Channel 4.

Jon Ronson's first book, Clubbed Class, was published in 1994. The book is a travelogue in which Ronson bluffs his way into a jet set lifestyle, in search of the world's finest holiday.

His second book, Them: Adventures with Extremists, was published in 2001 and chronicles his experiences with people labelled as extremists. Subjects in the book include David Icke, Randy Weaver, Omar Bakri Muhammad, Ian Paisley, Alex Jones, and Thom Robb. Ronson also follows independent investigators of secretive groups such as the Bilderberg Group. The narrative tells of Ronson's attempts to infiltrate the "shadowy cabal" fabled, by these conspiracy theorists, to rule the world.

Ronson's third book, The Men Who Stare at Goats, deals with the secret New Age unit within the United States Army called the First Earth Battalion. Ronson investigates people such as Major General Albert Stubblebine III, former head of intelligence, who believe that people can walk through walls with the right mental preparation, and that goats can be killed simply by staring at them. Much was based on the ideas of Lt. Col. Jim Channon, ret., who wrote the First Earth Battalion Operations Manual in 1979, inspired by the emerging Human Potential Movement of California. The book tells how these New Age military ideas mutated over the decades to influence interrogation techniques at Guantanamo Bay.


The Psychopath Test: A Journey Through the Madness Industry is Ronson's fifth book, published in 2011. In it, he explores the nature of psychopathic behaviour, learning how to apply the Hare Psychopathy Checklist, and investigating its reliability. He interviews people in facilities for the criminally insane as well as potential psychopaths in corporate boardrooms.

Discussion Questions

1. Which "psychopath" did you find the most interesting? (Constance Toto/ Tony (at Broadmoor)/Al Dunlap/other) Why?

2. According to Bob Hare, Psychopaths cannot be cured. If there was a way to be 100% sure of detecting a Psychopath, should we lock them up before they commit a crime? What about the "crimes" that are legal, like CEOs of corporations that walk away with their fat bonuses after they lay off hundreds of workers?

3. According to Al Dunlap, all these traits on the Bob Hare checklist are signs of a great leader and should be looked at as a positive. Do you agree?

4. Do you agree with Scientologist that psychologists/psychiatrist should be considered "the enemy"?

5. What are your feelings about Tony (at Broadmoor)? Do you think he is innocent or do you think he really is a psychopath?

6. What were some of your favorite Laugh Out Loud moments in the book, or did you not find the book funny?

7. Do you, like the author, feel you now have a "secret super power" of detecting psychopaths?

8. Was there a specific passage that left an impression, good or bad? Share the passage and its effect

9. Was the purpose of the book to bring to light an issue? If so, did it make you more aware and knowledgeable about the particular issue? How did earlier opinions about the issue change after reading this book?

10. The way a non-fiction book is written can impact a reader's enjoyment and understanding of it. Was the book written in a way that was easily accessible? Did the language make you lose interest in something that would have otherwise been an exciting subject?

11. What is the author's attitude toward his subject? What is the author trying to persuade you to think or do? How do you think the author was changed by the experience of writing the book?