

DEAD OF NIGHT MAGAZINE

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**Merseyside's Only Publication Dealing
With All Paranormal Phenomena!!!**

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EDITORIAL

Ghosts And Devils Over Merseyside

*'If this is the stuff dreams are made of..
No wonder I feel like I'm floating on air.'
'Second Skin' - THE CHAMELEONS.*

Ever since I was lucky enough to lay hands on that rather crumpled, dog-eared copy of a *'DRACULA LIVES!'* comic at the St. John's Church Restoration Fund Jumble Sale, (the acute irony that saw Christianity seeking to further its cause by selling publications dealing with Vampires, Werewolves, and all manner of other demonic entities, didn't seem to phase the organisers any), I've found myself fascinated with the concept of the supernatural.

I honestly haven't the slightest inkling *why* this should be, exactly.

A long line of people, my closest friends amongst them, have sought to quiz me on my pretty damn near obsession with the subject, more times than I care to remember.

And I often think even *trying* to drum up a satisfactory response would be as ultimately futile as asking the millions of individuals who choose to play Russian Roulette with the Big C by puffing on 20 a day, why they do it. Or how it can be that the vast majority of people in the 18 to 30 age bracket would far sooner go and see 'The Spice Girls' mime to some pre-recorded backing tape than attend say, a 'Manic Street Preachers' *live* gig.

They can't explain *their* preferences any more than I can explain why it was, when I was seven years old, I raced home from a jumble sale in the misted half-light of a late January afternoon, my hands clutching a faintly musty smelling comic book, my heart pumping with all the excitement of a child who's just found a 'Cat's Eye,' marble glistening amidst a pile of soggy Autumn leaves...



I can explain still less, why it was that I spent a goodly-sized portion of my childhood (in between taking part in more socially acceptable pursuits like playing footy and standing on The Kop cheering myself hoarse for the Mighty Red's) engaged in such activities as balancing my decidedly primitive audio cassette recorder rather precariously upon a stool, and pushing it up as close to the TV speaker as possible on the very rare occasions a horror movie was screened. The idea being, of course, (after I'd ensured all the doors were firmly shut to obscure the sound of my mother washing the dishes or my dad deliberately rattling the pages of his crinkly newspaper in the adjacent rooms) to capture entire scripts and

soundtracks on tape. I knew every single one of the Christopher Lee 'DRACULA' classics off by heart, and I'd often quote aloud whole sections of these, and other similar movies, much to the amusement/annoyance (depending on what kind of mood they were in) of my family and school-friends.

It's very difficult to fathom why it is my bedroom, which I once shared (God, it seems a whole *lifetime* ago) with my two brothers) resembled a veritable Chamber Of Horrors...

And *still* does.

The 'AURORA GLOW-IN-THE-DARK' Monster Model Kits remain on permanent display. Assorted plastic and rubber creepy crawlies dangle from just about every possible vantage point. Hundreds of paperbacks that bring to life the dark imaginings of the likes of Bradbury and Poe. Wheatley and Herbert. Matheson and King, are still stacked upon shelves that quite literally groan beneath their combined weight. And every inch of wall-space is plastered with sci-fi and horror movie posters and stills. (My own personal favourite incidentally, has and maybe always will be, the one that features KONG swatting at the bi-planes that swarm around him like flies atop the Empire State Building in New York...).

And still the question remains, running round and round my head like some terminally scratched vinyl 45

WHY???

I can only repeat it until you're sick of hearing me repeat it, but the answer remains essentially the same: I CAN'T EXPLAIN!!!

Except....

Well, it's only a theory mind, but maybe, just *maybe* it has something to do with the fact that when you are little more than a child, before the joint forces of cynicism and scepticism combine to permanently darken your vision, you tend to view the world through eyes that are more finely attuned to the truly wondrous. Be it the myriad joys of what passes for a seven year old's conception of reality or the unmarked boundaries of a limitless imagination....

Anything and everything can happen when you're a kid.

And very often it does.

Just over the road from where I grew up there is a half-mile or so of rusted, chain-link fencing that is ringed around the foot of what the locals call, for want of a better name; 'The Big Hill.'

The Hill is actually an old fuel storage plant cunningly disguised, so that from the air, it would indeed appear to be a natural formation. It's long been rendered obsolete. Since the end of hostilities at the close of the Second World War, in fact. It serves no purpose now. Like the equally silent dock yards, (once bustling with manpower and the grinding wheels of commerce) that sought the shelter of its gentle slopes, 'The Big Hill' stands redundant.

And yet, to a bunch of kids, these three acres or so of sprawling wasteland, with its endlessly winding footpaths, almost hidden by a tangled mass of undergrowth in high summer. Its diverse landscapes of wooded hillside, rank smelling ponds and fields strewn with the debris of crumbling office blocks, was unquestionably a place blessed with a rare type of magic. The kind that can spirit even the most unimaginative soul far away from the hum-drum of daily existence, to the mythical lands we all dreamt of as children.

It was at once Tolkien's 'Middle Earth'. Lewis's 'Narnia' Conan-Doyle's 'Lost World.' And in the dim and distant past, when I was still in short pants and 'Incredible Hulk' T-shirts, it'd been 'King Kong's Skull Island.'

The place names may have changed with the passing of the seasons and latter-day fads, but the magic with which it was imbued has *always* remained constant. Untainted. Pure.

I remember I used to believe implicitly that absolutely anything was possible the second you crossed over to the other side of that flimsy chain-link fence and stood within the hidden kingdom of The Big Hill.'

The thick clumps of trees that lay dotted here and there like the remnants of some vast primeval forest, could well be home to a manner of exotic wildlife. My friends and I used to call the largest of these copses, 'Sawney Bean Wood' after the leader of the notorious Scottish tribe of cannibals who terrorised the Highlands hundreds of years ago.

The evil smelling sewers at the furthest edge of the wasteland, we believed could well be the lair of flesh-eating, Super Rats, four feet long, with blood red eyes and teeth the colour of moulded cheese.

The pond, where hopeful anglers cast their lines, and sweating 10-year-olds dangled their toes seeking blessed relief from the breathless heat of mid-August, is doubtless teeming with shoals of hungry piranhas, their jaws snapping like a million pairs of castanets, and *Jenny Greenteeth* almost certainly lurks just beneath the pond weed, slimy, sinewy fingers reaching out for the unwary...

There used to be a silver, cone-shaped object almost obscured by a Hawthorn thicket, and my friends and I were only too quick to accept the probability that a UFO had crash-landed. 'Why should New Mexico have a monopoly on all the crashed saucers?' was an argument that made perfect sense back then.

There are other wonders awaiting discovery too. Dragonflies the size of a seagull that glide gracefully amongst the swaying marsh reeds, and huge, oddly-shaped boulders that lie clustered around the top of a ridge that led to the brown, featureless mud-flats. Those grey, somehow threatening lumps of stone always used to put me in mind of 'The One-Eyed Guardians' in the novel/series 'MARIANNE DREAMS,' and were responsible for countless nights of waking with the screaming meemies....And no wonder. Those cyclopean crouching horrors would give Clive Barker a lifetime's worth of nightmares).

The aforementioned mud-flats were a dead ringer for the paintings I've seen of the blasted, poisoned land of *Mordor*, and it was easy to envisage Frodo and Sam struggling across the wasteland as they neared the end of their quest to destroy 'The One Ring.'

Local legend had it that more than one poor soul had sunk without trace when the spring rains had turned the pock-marked earth into treacherous quicksand. A former class-mate of mine once swore blind during a lull in Double English, that his uncle knew of someone who had spent three days and nights stuck up to his neck in the mud following the flash floods in the spring of 1963. Fortunately, he was eventually rescued by a gang of volunteers out searching for him. When he was pulled to safety however, he found that the only reason he hadn't submerged completely was the fact that he's been standing atop a another victim's head, who was stood upon another, who was stood atop another, who was....

There were other, equally horrific stories too.

Like the one about the two teenage boys who, acting upon a dare, actually made their way inside *'The Big Hill'*, armed only with a cheap and nasty flashlight. Almost inevitably, the torch batteries failed and they wound up getting themselves hopelessly lost within its labyrinth corridors. Their bodies were never found, but on wild, stormy nights, it's said you can still hear them desperately screaming for release...

You'll be hearing a story concerning this legend (assuming I haven't already sent you drifting into the land of nod) a little later...A story that was doing the rounds when I was aged about eleven, and which my friends and I believed and accepted as being the gospel truth...Without question.

But we're getting ever so slightly ahead of ourselves here. There's still a mite more descriptive work left to do.

As I stated at the outset, the whole area is bordered on three sides with less-than-secure fencing. The fourth side is separated from 'Reality' by a low brick wall and a thin strip of diseased-looking sand that's known rather euphemistically as New Ferry Shore. On a clear day, you can see the entrance to Cammel Laird's Shipyard, now sadly, in terminal decline. And on the other side of the River Mersey, stands one of the most famous waterfronts in the world...The City of Liverpool.

When I recently walked along the 'shore' a couple of days prior to writing this typically rambling Editorial, it was raining heavily and the grey clouds hung so low they seemed set to crush the city rooftops and turn already murky waters into a river of slate.

Ignoring the unpleasant sensation of drizzle trickling down the back of my neck, I paused, as I had on many previous occasions (although admittedly, not for a good few years) to glance at the reams of graffiti...white paint on red brick...

And as I did so, a sudden wave of intense sadness washed over me. The *'CHOPPER WOZ HERE' - '71,'* and *'ALAN LOVES JACKIE NOW AND 4-EVER,'* writing that I remembered from childhood had all but faded. So too had the tributes to bands like *'THE BAY CITY ROLLERS,'* and *'THE OSMONDS,'* and you could barely make out the *'EASTHAM BOOT-BOYSRULE.'* and *'MAKE LOVE NOT WAR,'* C.N.D slogans...

I suppose it sounds a little over-emotional, getting all worked up about a bunch of stupid words written during an era when platform soles and 'Birmingham Bags' were the height of fashion. Feel free to snigger if you want. The truth is though, I'd come to regard that graffiti as being almost sacrosanct.

Testaments engraved in stone.

Epitaphs.

Yeah. That's *exactly* what they were.

Epitaphs; The final ghostly echoes of a long lost youth that could never hope to be recaptured.

I was unable to prevent myself from wondering what had become of 'Alan And Jackle.' Had they married young, raised a family, and bought a house in leafy green suburbia? Or had they shackled up together in some dingy flat in the North End of Birkenhead, and had '4-ever' proved to be the time it took for 'Alan' to get himself acquainted with his first taste of Smack?

And how about 'Chopper'? Was he climbing his merry way up the social ladder in a firm of chartered accountants? Was he busy trying to raise funds for his fifteenth expedition to the Amazon Basin in search of some fabulous lost city of gold? Or was he propping up the bar in 'The Farmer's Arms,' trying to chat up a barmaid 20 years his junior?

'The Eastham Boot Boys' may have joined the army en masse, seen action in Northern Ireland, the Falklands, or the Gulf, and come back with a shattered personality, a missing limb or two, or in a flag-draped wooden box.

And as for the C.N.D. calls for a saner world...Well, despite the fact that countries borders were coming down faster than Ruby Wax's knickers (allegedly - Legal Ed), and the frightening prospect that more than a few of these 'new' countries have access to nukes...Still the movement had become as obsolete as *'THE BAY CITY ROLLERS'* and *'THE OSMONDS.'*

I figured also, that all these thoroughly depressing thoughts only gave the lie to that famous old maxim; 'Time Stands Still.' It may often seem that way on the surface. But it's the thinnest of veneers. It's like one of those 'Scratch 'n' Win' cards...They all look the same on the surface. But the second you rub your fingernail or a penny coin across their silver-grey boxes, you find what's really hidden underneath. And yeah. You've guessed it. More often than not, you're onto a loser.

The point I'm trying to make here, is that perhaps one of the main reasons I've retained my fascination for the paranormal and the weird and wonderful world of 'MONSTERDOM,' is that it provides me with a direct link back to those innocent, carefree days, before I attained the ignominious station of a mature adult. Nearly all of my happiest memories are centred upon such simple pleasures as being given *'THE HAMLYNHISTORY OF HORRORMOVIES,'* as a birthday present. Attempting to write and direct an epic Vampire play for my junior school English teacher. Embarking upon a bout of ghost-hunting around every single derelict house on Merseyside. Forming a UFO Investigation society. Handing out the classic *'PAN BOOKS OF HORRORSTORIES,'* to my fellow pupils at Church Drive, during Reading Class. Crying buckets when *'MIGHTY JOE YOUNG'* was hit by a chunk of falling masonry at the burning orphanage. Looking for Sea Serpents off New Ferry Shore. Making big mad preparations for an expedition to the Congo to try and find hard evidence for the existence of the legendary 'Mokele Mbembe.'

And a million other memories that I refuse to let go of without one hell of a fight.

Although, it's a fight that I know I'm doomed to lose.

Because love. Beauty. Youth. Even the precious memories of childhood.

Everything fades eventually.

Like white paint on red brick.

The Soft Whisper Of The Dead

A Sunday afternoon in mid-Spring.

It was as near-perfect as it ever gets, this time of year on the NorthWest coast of England.

The skies above New Ferry were a deep, crisp blue and blades of sunlight lanced between the trees in shimmering bars of gold. The horizon all but disappeared in a heat haze as dreamy as cigar smoke caught in the moveless air of a sealed room. There was no wind and scarcely any sound. Just the timeless Sunday ritual of lawnmowers and tinny car radio's.

The chiming of a passing ice-cream van and the distant cries from the playing fields as a game of football or rounders got underway.

For most people, regardless of their age or social standing, the determination to make the very most of the kind weather bordered on the obsessive.

Their heads were filled with the sure and certain knowledge (born of bitter experience) that sooner or later, the blue skies would darken, the rainclouds would gather, and the memory of these sun-drenched halcyon days would seem like some vague, half-remembered dream upon waking.

And so, they embarked in their thousands upon family expeditions to the beaches at West Kirkby or New Brighton, organised barbecues in their back gardens, or sat around the bandstand in Arrowse Park, tucking into picnic lunches whilst the 'Gladstone Players' performed passable renditions of 'Stranger On The Shore' or 'Blueberry Hill'.

It was a time for lounging in a shady retreat and losing yourself in the pages of a good book with a six-pack of 'CAIN'S' close to hand.

A time for sitting on the dock-side, feet dangling over the water's edge, as the merchant ships drifted slowly down the misted river hush.

A time for packing away the timeworn cares of school or work or unemployment. Stuffing them all into some heavy duty trunk at the back of the attic alongside all the other items you really don't need but can never quite bring yourself to throw away. They lie forgotten. Out of sight and out of mind.

At least for a little while.

On a Sunday afternoon in mid-Spring...

One

For Dennis Cartwright, who had finally found work three weeks shy of his 18th birthday however, it may as well have been a sleety, windswept day in mid-November.

Things had started badly; he'd awoken with a king-size hangover (the sort you instinctively *know* is going to hang around for a good while like a decidedly unwelcome house-guest, no matter *what* you try to do to get rid of it) coupled with an obscure feeling of depression, the cause of which had eluded him as he'd showered and shaved and glanced disinterestedly at the morning newspapers. With a sickening flash of revelation, it had finally made itself apparent, just as he'd been about to tuck into his fried breakfast, and he'd hurriedly shoved the bacon and eggs to one side, fobbing his mother off with the excuse that his stomach felt a little queasy.

'Too much ale, last night', he'd said quickly, catching the expression of concern that had creased her face. And just to prove there was nothing seriously wrong, he'd offered up a smile that had felt for all the world as though it were *ironed* on. He'd pushed back his chair and rose somewhat shakily to his feet. 'I think I'm gonna go back to bed for a while. Grab some more sleep.'

And as he'd lain there, staring up at the plain white ceiling, he'd been able to focus clearly upon what had actually happened the night before. Of how he had arrived home from a hard stint on the day shift at 'Land And Marine', where he was employed as an apprentice welder, with his wages burning the proverbial hole in his pocket. (And it was funny. Unemployed since leaving school two years earlier, he'd never thought a time would come when he'd be able to appreciate the true meaning of that saying; '*Burning A Hole In His Pocket*'. God, it may as well have been a proverb written in Swahili or Sanskrit or Hieroglyphics, for all the sense it made. But yesterday evening, he'd been handed his pay packet and after placing it carefully into the front pocket of his old and battered, '*Wrangler's*', he'd been struck with a vivid image of the folded bank notes somehow melting in his jeans. The crisp tenners and twenties had transformed themselves into a corrosive liquid. A fluid that ate its way through the faded blue material as easily as the acid blood of that *Allen* in that scary as hell movie he'd been to see a few weeks earlier. It was crazy, but the vision had proven so powerful, he'd been compelled to reach inside his pockets and withdraw the money, just to make sure it hadn't seeped away...)

After a hot bath and something to eat, (and after paying his mother a week's keep and placing the bulk of his money in the safe box he kept on a shelf in his wardrobe) he'd headed straight out to his local pub where he'd arranged to meet several of his best friends to help celebrate his good fortune.

He'd walked to 'The Three Stag's' in the painfully sweet twilight of a May evening, and had gotten there a little early so as to savour the glory of his hard-earned wages in all but empty pub.

He'd had no one for company save for the pub's staff, a couple of regular bar-fles, heads down nursing their whiskey's, and '*SQUEEZE*' announcing it was '*Cool For Cats*' on the jukebox.

Dennis had smiled to himself as he'd sat down with his pint. He was not normally the most sensitive of people, but he'd been more than aware that *this* evening was one of those all too rare times in life when everything seemed right with the world, and everything was in its place. It was a magic time. *His* time. And nothing, he'd thought, could ever be allowed to spoil that feeling of mystical enchantment.

And then in had walked Julie. She of the long, auburn hair and pale, flawless complexion. Of the knock 'em dead figure and the ruby-red lips, permanently parted in a too-knowing smile. The smile of a young woman who is assuredly aware of her beauty and who has long since learned to take for granted the attention that she draws and the power she holds. She's reminded every time she looks in the mirror and views not only herself, but stretching out behind her, toward some dim and distant horizon, is a sea of nameless faces; the men amongst them leering and lustful. The women grinding their teeth in thinly disguised jealousy.

Dennis, who had secretly fancied Julie (*long-time carried a torch for her*), to use the quaint old phrase of his Great Aunt Catherine) ever since he'd first set foot in 'The Three Stag's', the previous Christmas, had tried desperately not to glance in her direction. He was filled with a dark, and dreadful certainty... That unique brand of pessimism achingly familiar to anyone who has ever lain awake in the wee small hours before dawn, sick to the stomach, convinced they are head over heels in love with the hopelessly unattainable. He'd been sure that if she were to catch him staring, she simply couldn't have failed to see his infatuation for her written plainly on his face. And having done so, that knowing, grin would doubtless have become a world-weary sneer of contempt and she would point and shout at the top of her voice; 'Oh my Gaawwwd!!! Lend me yer ears a second, ladies and gentlemen. Yer see that ugly little turd sitting over there by the

window? The one that looks a dead ringer for John Merrick? Can you *believe* he has actually got the hots for yours truly? And then she'd bray with uncontrollable laughter, and everyone else in the pub would join her, even the bleary-eyed, drink-nursing barflies, and there'd be nowhere for him to hide. No hole into which he could gratefully tumble with a mumble of gratitude. He would have just had to sit there and endure their cruel mockery, like a sickly child forced to take his evil-tasting medicine... And so, he averted his gaze and stared intently at his drink as if the contents of the glass could somehow reveal the answer to the mysteries of life, the universe and everything.

He felt his previous good mood quickly dissipate like an early morning mist, and though he'd known he was over-reacting, he'd been sorely tempted to simply get up and walk out...He may even have done so, but at that precise moment, two of his mates had walked in and not wishing them to perceive his self-induced glumness, he'd mentally shrugged his shoulders and made a great effort to appear sociable. And inevitably, as the night had wore on, and the rest of his circle of friends had arrived, and the ale had begun to flow in ever-increasing quantities, and the conversation level had risen in volume but decidedly lowered in tone...So the mirth became more genuine. The laughter less forced. And by the time Last Orders had been called, he was so happily drunk he'd forgotten all about Julie and his irrational depression.

But she, it seemed, hadn't forgotten about him.

As Dennis had stumbled back from the bar with the final round of drinks balanced precariously on a beer-soaked tray, Julie, who'd been collecting empty glasses, had glanced over and favoured him with a gleaming smile. Had he been even half-way sober, he would quite likely have turned a deeply embarrassed shade of crimson, before sending the tray of drinks crashing to the floor, but he was emboldened by the alcohol he'd consumed. Reassured by the presence of his friends. And so he smiled right back and things had then progressed at a speed that was almost bewildering.. Contrary to what he'd suspected, she'd been really easy to talk to and almost before he'd been aware of it he was climbing into the back of a taxi with Julie at his side whilst the envious eyes of his friends peered out from the pub's doorway.

Julie had suggested they go on to a night-club in downtown Birkenhead, and Dennis had readily agreed. They'd wound up in some decidedly cheesy dive, the name of which Dennis couldn't remember. The truth was, he had trouble remembering a whole pile of anything after they'd set foot in the place. Aside from the fact that the bouncers looked like Neanderthal throwbacks, the dancefloor positively reeked of 'wacky baccy' and the price of the flat-tasting, watered down beer was so exorbitant you could have been forgiven for thinking that the days of Prohibition had come back to haunt this sad, neglected corner of Merseyside.

None of this had concerned him at the time, however. All that had mattered to him was that he was with Julie. The impossible had happened. His wishes had been granted. And who cared that he'd had to pay for the cab fare and every round of drinks. Just to be in the company of a beautiful girl. To dance away the hours of darkness in the arms of someone you've secretly admired from afar...Dennis was certain he'd never been so deliriously happy.

And he remained feeling that way right up until the moment when they were sat at the bar, enjoying a breather, when a great big hulking brute with the obligatory 'Love' and 'Hate' tattooed on his knuckles had approached and kissed Julie on the cheek.

'Dennis, I'd like you to meet my common-law-husband, Eric,' she'd said, with a smile that never touched her eyes. And then, almost as if she were dismissing a dutiful servant she'd waved him away and said; "Thank you for escorting me down town, sweetie. See you around sometime.' And with that, Eric had whisked her onto the dancefloor and he'd been left alone with nothing for company save a half glass of lukewarm beer and the desperately hurtful knowledge that he'd been taken for a ride. And a hell of an expensive one at that.

Later, walking home in the teeming rain, he'd recalled the bitter words of his father, who had died two years earlier of prostate cancer; *'You have to be careful of some people, Dennis. There are those who have the power to draw you in some way or other...And then, just when you think you're getting close to them. Enough to be able to place some degree of trust in their intentions towards you...It's then that crush the feelings right out of you. As easily and as thoughtlessly as if they were stepping on a bug.'*

'Never a truer word was spoken, dad.' Dennis now muttered aloud to the white, uncaring ceiling 'You were blessed with the wisdom of a latter-day Confucius. I only wish I'd heeded your warning last night.'

He covered his face with his hands and tried to lose himself in sleep. But instead he was plagued with dreams that bade him whimper softly and the sound of it in that sunbright room was hollow and empty. The sound of a wind blowing across a stubbled field in the cold belly of winter....

Two:

He'd been stunned into wakefulness by the shrill ringing of the bedside telephone and had sat bolt upright, feeling a little disorientated as the world seemed to tilt and resetttle around him. He'd glanced over at the digital video clock across the room and was surprised to see that it was already nigh on noon. He'd slept half the day away, but still it required a real effort of will to reach over and pick up the handset.

'Hello?' he spoke in a barely audible croak. 'Whoever this is, it'd be better be good.'

'Dennis, is that you?' a tinny voice answered on the other end of the line. 'Christ Almighty, lad. You sound like death. It's me, Harry Netherton. Your boss. You know, the man who pays your wages?'

'Holy shl...' Dennis began, and caught himself just in time. 'I mean uh, that is, I'm sorry Mr Netherton, sir. Uh, I guess I must be coming down with something.' There was a brief moment of embarrassed silence and, realising what he'd just said, he added quickly. 'Uh, it's nothing that will keep me from coming into to work tomorrow, of course. It's probably just a bug. I'll fight it off don't you worry, I'll be right as rain in no time and...'

'Never mind all that,' Harry had cut him short. 'I'm not ringing you for an update on your medical condition.. I simply want you to do me a bit of a favour....'

Three:

Twenty minutes or so later,, Dennis was standing at the foot of what the locals had called since time immemorial, 'The Big Hill.'

The disused fuel-storage dump and its attendant wasteground were supposed to be private property, owned by 'Land & Marble,' the very same company for whom Dennis had been working this past week. Even if you claimed you couldn't read the huge, red-lettered 'ALL TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED!!!' signs placed at each entrance, then the permanently locked gates and the increasingly fortified fencing were testimony enough of that.

Harry Netherton, he of the 'I pay your wages' speech and the 'Sunday Afternoon Slight Favours Requests,' had told Dennis the day he'd joined the firm that he had big plans to turn the three acres or so of land into another factory or maybe a row of warehouses, thus creating more jobs for a severely depressed area, and of course, making a dirty big fat pile of cash for himself into the bargain. 'I'll give them something of which they can be proud and take great pleasure in,' he'd said puffing on a Havana cigar and rubbing his hands with ill-disguised glee.

But Dennis could have told him there and then that 'The Big Hill' already held a special niche in the hearts of the good people of New Ferry. As someone who'd been born and raised just a stone's throw away, he was more than aware that since time immemorial, the area had been a natural playground for kids, a haven for randy teen-aged couples eager for a spot of privacy and a godsend for tramps and vagrants seeking shelter amidst the ruins of crumbling office blocks. The place also acted as a veritable sanctuary for many species of plant and wildlife, was famed for its spectacular views of the Mersey Estuary, and its deceptively deep pond drew hordes of anglers from right across the County...

He'd have been wasting his breath, though. Mr Netherton wouldn't have cared a crap in a golden shithouse about tradition and what he saw as 'worthless sentimentality.'

All he cared about was making sure the money kept rolling in and jealously guarding his current assets.

Which was why Dennis was here now, of course. His boss had received complaints from the security officers who patrolled the perimeters of the main factory that they'd heard the sound of someone setting off firecrackers over on the far side of the 'Big Hill.' '*And since they can't spare the manpower, right now, Dennis, what with all the incursions we've had onto our property these last few weeks, and seeing as how you live right across the road from the place, I was wondering if you'd be good enough to head over and take a look for me. Now, it may be nothing more than a couple of bored kids acting the goat. But I'd like you to check it out, anyway. I don't want to get the police involved unless it's absolutely necessary. However, feel free to call them if it looks like there's going to be any hint of trouble. The last thing I need is your hospitalisation on my conscience.*'

Dennis strongly suspected that Harry cared less about his physical well-being than the hefty lawsuit that could be filed against him for sending an apprentice welder to do a security guard's task, but he genuinely liked his job and he knew better than to refuse the 'request.' His future career might depend on it.

He hadn't known quite what to expect as he'd unlocked the front gates with his own set of keys, armed with nothing more than a mobile phone and a torch that was seriously in need of some new batteries. But by the time he'd made a full circuit of the hill without encountering a living soul, it had begun to seem that he he'd been sent on a wild goose chase., when he ought to be at home basking in a lake of rancid dreams.

He'd never really believed the firecracker tale, anyway. Dennis thought it far more likely that someone was taking pot shots with an air rifle at the swarms of vermin that infested the litter-strewn wasteground. Tony Davies, one of his friends who'd been in 'The Stags' the night before, swore blind that he'd once seen a rat the size of a small dog while out fishing one late summer evening last year. It had been perched on a rock feeding on the carcass of a dead raven and when he'd thrown a large stone in its direction, narrowly missing its head, instead of scampering out of range it had bared its snagged, razor-sharp incisors and fixed him with a look of such malice and undisguised hatred that he'd been the one to turn tail and run.

He wasn't sure if he honestly leant much credence to this story. Tony only ever seemed to refer to it when the ale had sufficiently loosened his tongue, but what did it matter? The plain and simple fact was there was nobody here now. Neither Super-Rodent or Gun-Toting Human. There was no movement and scarcely any sound. Just the lazy hum of insects and the sigh of a breeze gently disturbing the sun-weary leaves.

The whole place had a strange, end-of-season feel to it - Much like when the New Ferry Fair was over in late September, and had finally moved on leaving nothing in its wake but the dreaded resumption of school or work and the grim promise of another endless Winter. Whoever had been here had long gone. The sweat of high noon heat was rolling off him in waves as he turned to walk back the way he'd come, hands in his pockets, eyes on the ground.

And then he heard the sound of children's laughter that seemed to be come from the thick clump of bushes at the foot of the hill.

Dennis was unable to suppress a shiver, despite the heat of the day. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but there was something deeply disturbing about that sound. There was nothing remotely joyous about it. Rather it was the sly, snicker of a child that is about to torture a helpless insect or play a particularly nasty trick on the slow kid at the back of the class.

Suddenly, Dennis wished he were anyplace else but here.

But when the mocking laughter came again, he knew he had no choice but to do his job.

'Ok, the game's up. You kids had better come out of there,' he shouted as he strode over to where he thought they were hiding, trying desperately to keep the tremor out of his voice. 'Come on out, now. I don't want to have to come in and get you.'

He received no reply.

And when Dennis pulled aside the tangled mass of vines and weeds, he saw there was no one there.

But *somebody* had knocked a jagged hole about five feet high and as many wide, into the thick concrete that had blocked off access to the inside of the hill. Since the early 1950's, the council had ordered that all the entrances be permanently sealed to prevent a repeat of the tragedy that had befallen a couple of teenager lovers who'd entered the hill on a dare one stormy Halloween. Allcia Gettings and her boyfriend Eddie Bryant had apparently gotten lost amid the labyrinth of pipes and endlessly winding corridors, and although their bodies had never been found, it was presumed that they had met their deaths by falling into one of the huge vats of oil-stained water that hadn't then been emptied, but it was part of local folklore that they lay in each others arms somewhere within the very darkest bowels of the hill, together for all eternity.

Dennis, who knew the story well from his schooldays, was unable to suppress another shudder as he switched on his torch and shone its beam into the secret darkness. He'd often tried to imagine what it must have been like for the doomed

couple as they'd frantically searched for a way out, their voices hoarse from screaming for help, the growing desperation as each turning took them deeper and deeper into the very heart of the hill... Maybe they *had* both drowned, but Dennis often wondered whether there had come a point where they'd agreed they'd be better off staying where they were rather than continue to wander aimlessly further away from rescue. Perhaps they'd sought to reassure each other that it was only a matter of time before help arrived. Perhaps too, while the flickering lamplight lasted, their optimism had endured easily enough. But as it had spluttered and started to fade so too would their hope until finally, the awful realisation that they were never going to escape had dawned on them and they'd hugged each other against the descending darkness... And as the light had winked out and they'd screamed until their vocal chords had snapped, there'd been nothing to hear them but the rats and spiders and maybe other things... Unspeakable things that crawled and slithered out of sight of the sun and made their home here in the absence of man...

Now, Dennis didn't have to *brag*.

It was like discovering a great landmark about which you'd only heard or read about from others.

He could see quite clearly for himself how easy it would be to lose yourself in there. He had no idea who had smashed the concrete and brick to create the hole, but even from where he was stood he could see quite clearly that there was a corridor that looked like the unlighted entrance to some flooded crypt. And the blackness seemed to stretch on forever.

Suddenly, from out of that stygian murk, the soft whisper of voices, the words unintelligible, drifted up towards him and he felt perspiration gather coldly under his arms.

'Hey, you kids,' he shouted, his words echoing back at him 'Get out of there, right now. It's bloody dangerous, for God's sake.'

The whispering went on unabated. It was as if he hadn't spoken at all.

He didn't want to go in there. No Sir. No way. No how. The sensible thing now would be to get on the phone to either his boss or the police or both, and allow them to sort this mess out. Even if a couple of kids had stumbled across this hole in the wall and gone inside (he couldn't believe they'd created it themselves - The concrete was at least six inches thick and he figured it would take a team of men armed with sledgehammers a good few hours to knock a breach this size) there was absolutely nothing to be gained by him setting foot inside that corridor to search for them with his less-than-reliable torch.

That made no sense, right?

Dennis right.

And so he took out the phone. Stared at its dialling pads for a few seconds, and actually pressed the 'Send' button before returning it to its leather holder and stepping, almost without being aware of it, over the threshold...

Four:

Dennis was about half-way along the first corridor before he realised he was no longer walking, but wading through a foul-smelling water that came half-way to his knees and was icy cold.

Snapping out of the trance-like state into which he'd descended, he looked over his shoulder and something shrank within him as he saw that already, the light from the opening behind him looked impossibly far away. He mentally committed the jagged rectangle of sunlight to memory, making sure that he could find his way out again, later. As patently crazy as this little adventure was, he certainly did not intend to suffer the same fate as had befallen the 'The Lost Lover's' all those years ago.

With a hand now shaking with the cold, he whipped the flashlight beam over the cobwebby rafters and the large, scabrous hulk of metal that lay directly before him. As he drew closer he could see that it was a squat, rusted machine with tentacles of pipe running every which direction. Its conduits carried hollow echoes and reverberating moans, as if some gigantic mouth were breathing into them from above. Dennis hadn't a clue as to what its original purpose might have been and didn't much care. He just checked to see if there was anyone hiding behind it and satisfied that there wasn't, he moved on.

After he'd encountered his first bend in the corridor, and the opening had been finally lost to sight, he tried desperately to keep a mental count of the number of steps he'd taken. There were no obvious points of reference by which he could later steer himself to the exit. Since passing that bizarre machine, he'd seen nothing other than an endless maze of pipes and dirt-encrusted walls. He'd also tried calling out to the kids he assumed were concealed somewhere just up ahead (although how they could stand to be enveloped in this pitch-dark cocoon without so much as a flickering lighter flame, was totally beyond him) but to no avail. It didn't raise his spirits any that he knew he was being drawn ever deeper into the very centre of the hill.

He learned too that time soon ceased to have any meaning down here. He had an inkling of how people who had undergone total sensory deprivation must feel. Starved of input, the human brain quickly lost all concept of the constraints mankind sought to place upon nature - He might have been under the hill for hours or mere seconds. The number of footsteps taken had already been forgotten. And the dreadful feeling that he was wading his way to his preordained doom was fast becoming a certainty.

But still, he couldn't stop himself anymore than an explorer can turn his back on an expedition to the furthest reaches of Antarctica or the depths of some primeval jungle... Even if he knows it will likely cost him his life.

And so he went on...

And on turning yet another corner, he saw that the single corridor now split into two and he was forced to make a choice as to which one he should take. He stood there for a moment, straining his ears for any sound of movement that would give him an indication which route the kids had taken. The place was eerily silent, though. There was only his own laboured breathing and from somewhere back the way he'd come, the sound of dripping water... For the first time since entering the hill, Dennis found himself at a loss as to what action to take.

'What the hell do I do now?' he spoke aloud and jumped at the piercing level of his voice in that preternatural quiet.

But then, as if in answer, he noticed a change in the quality of light emanating from the second corridor. It was no longer pitch dark in there. Roughly halfway down the passage, he could see a soft green glow, like a fungus or rotting mushrooms in the wild wood at night.

And it was getting closer.

The torchlight suddenly dimmed and he cursed himself for not having thought to equip it with a new set of batteries. In frustration he banged it against his thigh in a futile attempt to knock some life back into it. At that very moment, he felt something touch his lower leg, but he gave it little thought. He was more concerned with the origins of that sickly phosphorescence and the fact that the torchlight was now so weak, he could hardly see more than a few feet in any direction. Almost absently, he reached down to push away what he assumed to be some piece of drifting debris and let out a strangled cry of fear as his hand fell upon unmistakably cold flesh and slick teeth...

He withdrew his hand as though it had been scalded on a hot iron and gazed down at the body of a young boy, aged no more than 16, that floated just below the water's surface. Even allowing for the pitifully weak light, he could easily make out the almost translucent quality of its skin so that it appeared to be little more than mottled flesh on bones. The worm-like lips were pulled back in a leering, rictus grin. Its gums were black and its teeth were rotten and broken, aside from a pair of incisors which looked like fangs.

Mercifully, its eyes were closed.

It bobbed gently against his leg like a motorboat on calm water tied to its moorings, and fighting back a wave of nausea, he bent down to push the body away.

His face was mere inches away from that of the lifeless corpse when it suddenly opened its eyes and Dennis barely had time to scream before the torchlight winked out completely...

Five:

Dennis gave himself up entirely to panic and the basic instinct of self-preservation.

As his wildly beating heart threatened to burst its way out of his chest, he dropped the useless torch, and ran as best he could through waters that swirled round his legs like cold oil.

He couldn't see a thing - it was like charging headlong through a colourless vacuum with nothing to guide him as to which direction he should take. In truth, he no longer cared. He just ran with his arms outstretched to prevent himself colliding with the walls as he imagined the corpse of Eddie Bryant, (for who else could it be) dead these past 27 years, not so much swimming as *floating* after him like some hideously bloated fish drifting belly up on a swift-flowing tide.

It was almost inevitable that he'd lose his footing at some point, and sure enough, as he rounded a bend, he thought he felt a clutching hand tug at the cuffs of his jeans, ready to drag him kicking and screaming back into the heart of darkness. He lashed out wildly, lost his balance, and fell face first into the filthy water. Instantly, his mouth was filled with foul-tasting effluence and he gagged convulsively. A voice seemed to whisper in his head that maybe it would be better to simply lie there and allow the water to fill his lungs. It would be a comparatively quick and easy death. Better than to endure the agonies of madness and eventual starvation if he couldn't find his way out...

The voice was as seductive as a siren song, and it took a supreme effort of will for him not to succumb to its enchanting music. But somehow, he managed to struggle to his feet and as he retched and wiped a shaking hand across his face, he could see the bright rectangle light that marked the entrance, less than a thousand yards away. Filled with new hope, he began struggling towards it. And now it seemed he was trying to escape some nameless horror in a nightmare. One of those ones where the faster you tried to move the slower you went. It was as though he were stuck on a treadmill or a conveyor belt running backwards, and his legs felt like they were caught in thick treacle. The corridor appeared to stretch out into infinity, but he refused to give up now, with freedom so close he could almost touch it.

'I'm nearly there. I'm nearly free,' he muttered to himself over and over as though he were repeating a talismanic mantra to ward off the bogeyman. 'I'm nearly there. I'm nearly free. Just a few more steps. Come on, you can do it...'

And then suddenly, he was racing through the hole to be bathed by the warm benediction of Summer sunlight, and the earth was firm beneath his feet once more, and almost immediately, his fear seemed to drop from him like a discarded overcoat.

He breathed in the deliciously sweet fragrance of Hawthorn and Golden-rod. Of Toadflax and Yellow Foxglove. The bottomland and the sparsely wooded hillside were silent with a Sunday-afternoon hush and he was struck with a vivid image of him curled up on the sofa watching 'PLANET OF THE APES' on the TV, sipping on a cold beer or two and joking with his younger brother, Liam, about how much Tony Davies's sister resembled General Urko. And there'd be hot toasted crumpets and a large plate of assorted cakes, and the room would be filled with that curiously carefree laughter that marks the boundary between the tail end of Sunday and the start of another working week.

The image was so clear, so very real.

Not too long from now he'd be snapping his fingers at the memory of such childish, irrational fears.

And then, he'd felt a pair of thick, rubbery lips caress the back of his neck.

Fear slithered into back into his skin, and for a single, endless second, he was unable to move. He was as surely paralyzed as if someone had pumped him full of thorozone. He was at once, the rabbit caught in the blinding glare of a car's headlights. The bullied schoolkid who'd turned a corner and spied his chief tormentors with their backs to him... Who would surely spot him at any moment. He knew he should make a run for it without ever once looking back. But overcome with some perverse kind of curiosity, instead he wheeled around and saw there were not one but two figures standing on the threshold, both regarding him with pupil-less eyes, as milky as white marble. Things squirmed in what remained of their hair and one of them held a dead rat in its claw-like hands. It lifted it to its quivering mouth and took a bite. The other, wearing the remnants of a tattered floral dress, exhaled the rot of the grave as it whispered softly; 'Stay with us, Dennis', 'Stay down here in the dark with us. We got lost once, aaahhhh, but we know the way now. And Dennis... We've got friends we'd like you to meet. Soooo many old, old friends. Won't you come say hello???

And, oh God, suddenly, the dead thing looked a little like Julie. The decomposed skin was plastered in heavy make up, and the feminine features, though hideously distorted, were nevertheless, painfully familiar. Dennis stared in a dreamy sort of terror as 'she' winked lewdly and flicked a black swollen tongue between 'her' lips in an obscene come-on. 'Why don't finish what we started last night,' 'she' cackled in a voice as scratchy as an old gramophone record.

That was too much for him. His mind all but snapped, and he turned and ran in a blind panic across the sun-baked wasteland and along the rough, dirt track that passed for a road, not stopping until he reached the main gates. He fumbled in his pockets for his set of keys, and not being able to find them, he all but vaulted over the top of them, badly

gashing his hand on the barbed-wire. He jumped the 15 feet onto the hard pavement below and the second he did so his legs turned to jelly and spewing up a lungful of oily black water, he collapsed in a shuddering heap.

He was found, some time later, by old Mr Murphy, (the man known locally and with real affection, as 'The Children's Carpenter,' on account of the fact that he loved fashioning wooden toys for the kids who lived in the area - and who would later hang himself from the top of his banisters after the natural death of his wife, Minnie).

Mr Murphy had thought at first the young man was merely drunk or something and had passed out, but when he turned the body over, he'd been so shocked by the sight of the terribly ashen face, the pair of bulging eyes, and the spray of foam shining on the lower lip, he'd wasted no time in calling an ambulance.

Six:

Dennis spent several days slipping in and out of a shock-induced coma. It took the doctors, and later the psychologists at Clatterbridge Hospital, the best part of a week to get any kind of explanation as to what had happened out of him.

And when finally they *did*, no one gave his story an ounce of credence, of course.

Dennis had, quite literally, become hysterical at their distinct lack of belief, and began babbling on about how they 'had to close the hole - Brick it up, in the name of God. They might get out!'

Their answer had been to pump him full of drugs and place him in a secure psychiatric ward for, as they put it, 'a spell of routine observation.'

To be on the safe side, the local council were persuaded to check out the assertion that there existed an undiscovered 'entrance' to the hill. Acting on Dennis's instructions as to where it was located, they'd sent a team of men out to the site and found a few patches of trampled grass, a series of snapped Hawthorn branches, and a slightly damaged mobile phone, which Dennis later confirmed was his. He must have dropped in the mad dash rush for the main gate...

But the original doorway remained completely sealed up.

No one appeared to have interfered with it in any way.

It was exactly as it had been since the end of the last war.

There was no hole.

Dennis's 'condition' became progressively worse after being told of this by his distraught parents. He seemed to withdraw into himself, gradually, inexorably, losing touch with reality in the space of their hourly visit. The conversation had grown ever more bizarre, and by the time they'd left the hospital, his mother had been reduced to tears by Dennis's crazy talk of dead people constantly following him. How they tried to get into his room at night. How they wanted him to join them in eternal darkness, under the hill...

The final straw had come when his former boss, Harry Netherton, had called to see him wearing a typically expensive Italian designer suit and a huge, counterfeit smile. Immediately on seeing him, Dennis had leapt off the bed, pulled the pin out of Harry's silk tie, and rammed it into his left eye, blinding it with an audible pop.

And as the orderlies had dragged him off the howling Mr Netherton, and bound him in a strait-jacket, Dennis had screamed at him, over and over, the exact same set of words;

'You *knew*. You bastard Harry, you *knew*. You *knew* and you still sent me there. *YOUKNEEEEEEWWWWW!!!*'

Seven:

FROM A LETTER FOUND IN CELL 128b
SPECIAL SECURE WARD 10 - CLATTERBRIDGE PSYCHIATRIC UNIT
BEBINGTON, MERSEYSIDE
DATED 17th July, 1979.

Dear Mum and Dad.

By the time you read this it's very likely that I'll no longer be here, and that you'll never see me again.

I know you don't believe my account of what happened that May afternoon that now seems about a billion light years in the past. I don't blame you. Sometimes even I have my doubts. I get to thinking, perhaps the shrinks are right. Maybe I am as crazy as a bedbug, after all. I mean, why else would I be sitting here in a padded cell, with nothing to write this final note with but a piece of blunt crayon?

I'm not allowed a pencil, or anything remotely sharp, y'see. Not after what happened to Harry. They're scared I might injure myself. or worse, attempt to take my own life. Who knows, on this last supposition at least, they may well be right.

If such an admission sounds terrible to you, I can understand. I've often heard it said that suicide is a coward's way out, and as a Catholic (albeit, a lapsed one), I accept it means damnation... But If you knew the truth, I swear you'd consider it a blessing...

Ah well, we'll never know now, will we?

Already I hear their ceaseless whispering as they seek me out. They've been frustrated these past few nights... For some unknown reason, they haven't been able to find my cell. But they were just 'next door' yesterday evening, I know because I heard the inmates terrified screaming. I'm not ashamed to say I closed my hands over my ears and fervently prayed they'd take him instead...

But of course, they didn't.

And in just a little while, they'll peer through the eyehole in my door and see me all cowering and helpless and they'll rub their claw-nalled fingers together, and they'll turn and grin at each other knowingly, and they'll whisper my name, so softly... So very softly...

And, oh God, I can hear them scratching at the door...

The chief warden found the cell door standing wide open on his midnight round and before raising the alarm, he stared at the windowless, white-walled room in sheer disbelief.

The placard on the front of the door announced that this was the 'home' of Patient No. 54: Dennis Michael Cartwright. And the warder knew from experience that the patient was a high risk paranoid schizophrenic. He was kept under constant lock and key, 24 hours a day, and was very often heavily sedated, due to his increasingly violent behaviour. Yet, incredibly; aside from a crumpled piece of paper lying in the centre of the floor, the room was completely empty. And of Patient No 54, there was not a trace.

Shaken out of his reverie, he reached for the alarm button, and as he pressed it, he saw there was something else over in the far corner, gleaming in the coldly, clinical light. . He crossed the room and stooped to examine it more closely. It was a gold locket, the chain of which was snapped, as if someone had yanked it off in a hurry. Intrigued, the warder opened it up and saw that inside, there was a grainy, black and white photograph of a teenaged boy with a cheeky, freckled face and his hair all done up in a 1950's D.A. style.

And on the back, inscribed in a beautiful flowing script were the words;

'To My Sweetheart, Alicia Gettings.

May We Never Part. .

All My Love, Eddie. 1952. '

Lee Walker. New Ferry, Merseyside. June 17th, 1997.

Faerie Rings

Faeries are said to come in two distinct sizes. There are human-sized Faeries, who live inside hills or mounds, often Neolithic burial grounds, and dance around stone circles to enchanting music.

A farmers daughter I know, used to dance around one such stone circle on her father's land.

She called it a Faerie Ring. However, a 'Faerie Ring,' usually means a small circle of Toadstools, and the Faeries that dance there are obviously tiny little people, as diaphanous as butterflies.



(Above): Faeries cavorting around a classical depiction of a Faerie Ring. Note the curiously UFO-shaped object in the foreground doubling up as a 'Toadstool.' Janet and Colin Bord, in their excellent book; 'THE SECRET COUNTRY,' point out that the mound on the left is a Faerie Hill, probably a tumulus.

Perhaps the larger Faeries are in reality, a confused race memory of the Neolithic people themselves. An old print of Red Indians in New England, shows a group of braves dancing wildly around a 'wooden henge' circle of wooden posts. Many stone circles in Britain are, according to folklore, said to be maidens turned to stone for daring to dance on a Sunday. A single stone standing outside the main circle is said to be the petrified piper.

It seems certain that God, or gods, were worshipped in dance outside or inside circles of upright, post-like stones. Similar circles of Toadstools reminded people of stone circles, in my belief, and so gave rise to the idea of groups of miniature dancers. In the stories about human-sized, mound-dwelling Faeries, an unwary mortal is sometimes lured to a fantastical 'Middle Kingdom' - A Faerie-Land, if you will, which existed 'under the hill.'

If while they were there, the victim should eat or drink anything whatsoever, he or she can never leave. Is this because the mound's original use was known to the storyteller, who regarded it as a 'Home Of The Dead?'

Or is it because the vanishing tribes and races of pre-Roman England were hospitable to strangers in the overdone, possessive way of some Africans and Red Indians, whose hospitality to the first white people they encountered amounted almost to taking them prisoner?

Another kind of circle often seen in our present age is not of stone or of fungi.

It seems obvious to me that Corn Circles are caused by the Faeries dancing.

Except of course, for one or two, which are outright hoaxes perpetrated by Aliens from outer space....

Roy Kerridge. London. June, 1997.

CHASING THE UNKNOWN

Part Two

CAN WE NOW RESURRECT THE DEAD?



The 'nightmare scenario' of the clinically dead once more waiking the earth might well become reality according to a report in the much-respected journal 'Nature.'

What at first glance, sounds like the well-worn plot of a thousand 'mad-scientist' horror movies, takes on a little more credence when you consider that the people responsible for the creation of 'Dolly', the first ever sheep to be cloned from an adult mammal, have revealed they froze live tissue as part of the creation process.

Granted, it does still require something of a leap of faith to accept that the cloning of animals, no matter how amazing an achievement, can have any bearing on the resurrection of the dead...But, there is talk of a technique that could be used to replicate babies who tragically die at birth or pretty soon afterwards. It follows, that even the parents of somewhat older children who are terminally ill might easily be tempted to clone a frozen sample of their tissue.

So convinced are they of the potential for resurrection, certain 'experts' have gone so far as to raise the spectre (pun fully intended - Ed) of people donating their own tissue samples so that they can be stored away in freezers for cloning after their death.

This frightening scientific 'breakthrough' has, quite naturally, caused various levels of concern amongst the hails and palaces of the mighty....President Clinton has reportedly ordered a full inquiry into what has already invoked unsettling images of Nazi 'Master Race' experiments and of maniacal egg-heads clustered round a mortuary slab, rubbing their hands with glee as they successfully create an army of clones incorporating the greatest mass murderers in history.....

With typical, self-righteous gusto, Liberal Democrat MP, David Alton, (the man who hysterically called for the banning of the pathetic - if largely inoffensive 'CHILD'S PLAY III', in the wake of the tragic death of James Bulger), was calling for all experiments on involving cloning to be suspended while the ethical problems surrounding the issue were given chance to be properly assessed. Donning his Nostradamus glasses, he was quoted as saying:

'We have trivialised human nature and denied natural law. We are heading for a 21st Century which will see the emergence of a genetic underclass of the uninsurable, the unbreedable and the unwanted.'

The overtly cynical amongst us might suggest Mr Alton cares less about the ethics involved here, and more about keeping his 'pro-life' eye firmly fixed on the election campaign. But maybe. Just maybe, he's right on this occasion.

Not that the scientists responsible for this 'unprecedented breakthrough' would have any of it. They are far too wrapped up in the success of their achievement to worry about a little thing like immorality or the future good of mankind.

Science and Technology Minister Ian Taylor was just one of the official spokesman trundled out by the scientific establishment to try and help allay the public's alarm about the implications of cloning.

'All developments will be closely monitored.' he insisted in the pages of the popular press. *'As long as we keep a close eye on genetics and encourage a full and open debate on the new findings, there is much about which to be optimistic. There is considerable potential for it to enhance the quality of our lives.'*

He seemed determined to emphasise that the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act expressly forbids the techniques employed by the Edinburgh scientists who first succeeded in cloning 'Dolly', currently being applied to humans.

'For those that fear science fiction will one day come true they should be clear that a broad range of regulatory controls have been put in place to prevent what is undesirable becoming a reality.'

Sensationalist newspaper reports rendered these (ahem) doubtless sincere words somewhat hollow however, when they reminded us that whilst human cloning is currently illegal in Britain (and one would presume, just about everywhere else in the Western World - although I wouldn't put any money on it) it might be feasible for other, less 'morally responsible' nations to have already developed the technology for human cloning. The usual xenophobic nonsense about shadowy forces at work in the cities of Eastern Europe and Asia is dredged up, with just enough of a whiff of plausibility to appeal to our deep-rooted sense of paranoia. It certainly ensures that you don't sleep easily, tucked up in your bed at night.

Has the time truly arrived when we must seriously consider the notion that science may soon have the capability (the Conspiracy Theorists say we have it *already*) to allow genetic twins to be cloned for spare organs, or for infertile people, desperate for children, to resort to cloning themselves?

A long line of 'experts', Dr Richard Dixon (author of *The Genetic Revolution*) amongst them, have warned that geneticists could very soon carry out exactly that which has been described. Namely; the cloning of frozen samples of human tissue. The good Doctor Dixon says: *'That means we will be able to reproduce those who pay to put their bodies into deep-freeze storage....It is only the method of freezing that is critical.'*

Over in the States, it is common knowledge that untold thousands of people have taken advantage of this 'service.' They chose to be cryogenically frozen at the very point of death in the now, not so forlorn hope, that they will be revived. That is scary enough.

Even more disconcerting is the news that according to a recent survey, a total of six per cent of Americans would actually like the opportunity of being cloned....Can you believe that? As someone remotely famous once said, *'Only in America!'*

The most oft-asked question since news of this discovery broke, is what exactly would these clones, these exact replicas of ourselves, actually be like?

Well, the scientists have gone on record as saying that whilst cloning can certainly produce a genetically identical person, there is, so far as we know, no way that the 'new' individual can possess the original's consciousness, memories or personality. This would not be a total replication process like that carried out by the alien seed pod's in Jack Finney's sci-fi classic *'INVASION OF THE BODYSNATCHERS.'*

Of course, these revelations helped spark something of an outcry within political circles. Tory MP Bill Cash was calling for a Commons select committee to be set up to investigate the issue, whilst at the same time, the newly formed 'Human Genetics Advisory Commission' was organising its first meeting. The ten-strong group - nine commissioners and chairman Professor Sir Colin Campbell, set out to advise the Government on ways to help reassure public opinion with regards to this substantial scientific breakthrough. Sir Colin was quoted as saying: *'These advances are going to open wonderful possibilities and the most terrifying possibilities. Science in this country and in every other country will not stop. We cannot stop it. But we will try to control and guide science rather than let scientists impose their solutions on us.'*



Perhaps not surprisingly, the German press provided the origin for all the talk about Nazi eugenics experiments, when scientists at concentration camps attempted to create a new breed of Aryan...A blue-eyed, blonde-haired 'master race.' *'DIE WELT,'* reported that *'the cloning of human beings would fit precisely into Adolf Hitler's world view. There is no doubt that he would have used this technology intensively.'* And the business paper *'HANDELSBLATT'* was moved to comment: *'We have crossed a barrier we should have left standing. The birth of Dolly is an event not unlike the first nuclear explosion.'*

Okay...As the girl from the hit TV series *'FRIENDS'* says in that shampoo advert, 'Pay attention! Here comes the science bit!'

The whole process of cloning is made possible because every cell in an animal or human body contains a complete set of

blueprints for life: Namely DNA. If tissue is removed and placed on ice quickly enough, DNA can then be exploited, even after death.

Dolly was created from a single cell taken from the udder of a live adult ewe. The scientists removed one nucleus, the part of the cell which contains DNA, and placed it in a 'coma' by soaking it in a chemical bath. This slowed down the nucleus and made it 'forget' it was responsible for producing milk.

The newly deprogrammed nucleus was then injected into an unfertilised egg from another ewe - from which the genetic material had been removed - and placed between two electrodes.

A tiny electric current kicked the embryo into life before it was implanted in a foster mother. A few months later, Dolly was born.

Previously, scientists were able to clone sheep only from immature cells found in embryos. The real breakthrough, published in *'NATURE'*, was in persuading the DNA to start its own growth programme again from scratch.

The Roslin team say that human cells are far more complicated than sheep cells and years of research are needed before a nucleus taken from a man or woman can be put into a similar 'coma.' Attempts to use the process on frogs and mice have already failed because it is more difficult to put their cells into the required form of genetic 'coma.'

But judging from the speed of change in recent years, technology that works with human cells may be just a couple of years away.

American scientists have already cloned human embryos in a test-tube by mimicking the way nature creates twins. Primitive embryos, made from a handful of cells, were split and allowed to grow separately. They survived only a few hours, but the 1993 experiment provoked a bitter row over ethics.

THE FIRST MONKEY CLONING

In the wake of this less-than-cheery news came a report that two monkeys, male and female, became the first apes to be cloned.

They were created from eggs taken from the same mother and fertilised by the same father. Unlike other test-tube babies, clones were then made of the eggs and implanted in different females. This amazing breakthrough provided yet more evidence that we now only a step away from cloning humans. It's a common fact that we share over 90 per cent of our DNA with monkeys.

The experiment was different from the cloning of Dolly the sheep, but the principle remains the same.

Scientists at the Oregon Regional Primate Centre believe they have the technology to clone more than eight monkeys from the same embryo. The two Rhesus Monkeys came from different embryos - which explains why they are not completely identical.

The scientists at present have no plans to produce clones from adult monkeys. Senior scientist, Dan Wolf, who is also director of the human in-vitro fertilisation laboratory at the state's Health Services University, said his team wanted to produce genetically identical animals so that they can test drugs on the animals - and know the results are not distorted by each animal's individual differences.

The outcry against the possibility of human cloning, and that this development was merely a stepping stone towards achieving that end, was led by Shirley McGreal, director of the International Primate Protection League:

'For scientists, the last stage before carrying out experiments on humans is always to perform them on monkeys.'

Scientists were also predicting that by the year's end, they would have succeeded in cloning an animal containing some human genes.



The first two primates ever to be cloned - The herald of a new age of human cloning???

These 'humanised animals' will be created to produce milk or blood containing other vital hormones such as human insulin. The medical market for such (ahem) 'Manimals', would of course, be enormous.

Alan Coleman, research director at PPL, was staying understandably tight-lipped about whether or not the boffins had actually created an embryo for such an animal, but he did give out enough hints to suggest that they were working on producing a cloned sheep with human genes.

Hot on the tail of this, came further news that Danish scientists were attempting to clone cows from dead cattle. But with world-wide concern mounting over genetic engineering, the team claimed they would not try to transfer cloned

embryos into live animals until the ethical dilemma has been successfully resolved.

And finally, for this issue at least, comes news that will send shivers down the proverbial backs of the male population....

According to reports in the popular press, a team of Japanese scientists have taken the first step towards a world without men!

They have created pregnancies in cattle using female eggs treated with chemicals, instead of sperm.

Some 'experts' now believe that the technique could well be adapted for humans.

Not a very nice thought to wind up on for the likes of yours truly....

28th February, 'DAILY MAIL' 6th March, 'DAILY EXPRESS,' 21st March, "LIVERPOOL ECHO."

UNCOVERING THE ANOMALOUS Birds May Be Descended From Dinosaurs

It looks like the palaeontologist played by Sam Neill in 'JURASSIC PARK', may have been right, after all.

Chinese fossil-hunters have reportedly found the remains of a 121-million-year-old feathered Dinosaur, that they say provides hard evidence that birds, are in fact descended from these huge, prehistoric titans.

Photographs of the fossilised creature shows an unmistakable downy white stripe running down its back. If the feathered Dinosaur is confirmed, palaeontologists say, it provides almost irrefutable proof that today's birds did indeed evolve from Dinosaurs.

'As soon as they showed me this specimen, it just blew me away,' said Phil Currie, a fossil-hunter who recently saw the fossil for himself in Beijing.

Nobody has ever found feathers on anything other than where you'd expect to find them: i.e.; on a bird. The theory that Dinosaurs gave rise to birds is now based mostly on the similarity in the shape of bird hip bones to those of one Dinosaur group.

Chen Pei-Ji of the Nanjing Palaeontology Institute showed photographs of the fossil at the American Museum of Natural History.

Arrayed down the Dinosaur's back, from the nape of its neck to the tip of its tail, is what appears to be a row of feathers that have left their impression upon the rock.

Currie was quoted as saying that the feathered Dinosaur was about three feet long and it was closely related to Compsognathus, a relatively small Dinosaur that ate insects and other small animals.

21st October, 1997. Beijing, China. 'SAGINAW NEWS'

The Legendary Amazons: A REAL Display Of Girl Power!!!

Evidence for the existence of the legendary race of super-women known as The Amazons has been obtained by archaeologist Jeannine Davis-Kimball.

Jeannine, who hails from the Centre For The Study Of Eurasian Nomads, in Berkley, California, stumbled upon what appear to be the graves of warrior women high on the Russian steppes. These graves contained a cache of military weapons, including daggers, arrowheads and sword, all of which appeared to have seen a good deal of active service. The swords and daggers were fitted with unusually small handgrips. Jeannine was excited enough by the find to inform 'NEW SCIENTIST' magazine. They [the weapons] were probably made specifically for women.'

The graves were among burial mounds left by the nomadic Sauronian and Sarmatian which inhabited the steppes of Central Asia from about 600 to 200 B.C.

The enterprising Miss Davis-Kimball is firmly convinced that the armed women may well be the original Amazons first depicted in the annals of Greek mythology. They were given their name by the Greek historian Herodotus, who wrote of encountering a tribe of fearsome female warriors north of the Black Sea around 450 B.C.

It has now been suggested that the descendants of these semi-mythical fighters may well have ended up visiting the shores of Britain. In A.D. 175 the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius sent 5,500 Samaritan cavalry to Northern Britain to work alongside his own troops defending Hadrian's Wall.

Jeannine supposes; 'It could have been that, with their fighting tradition, women were an accepted part of the cavalry by then. So it would not surprise me if some of these troops were women.'

And, there is apparently evidence that at least some Sarmatians did in fact settle on the banks of the Ribble River in Lancashire, near to what later became the village of Ribchester.

6th February, 1997. Russian Steppes. 'DAILY MAIL.'

*** And staying within the field of palaeontology, the bones of what is generally believed to be one of the oldest specimens of Duck-Billed Dinosaur have been found in the wilds of North America by an amateur fossil-hunter, Gary Bird. 9th December, 1997. USA. 'LIVERPOOL ECHO.'

*** Also in America, this time South Dakota, the fossilised remains of one of the largest known sea turtles, probably 20ft wide, were unearthed, according to the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology.

The animal, called Archelon, lived 70 million years ago and had a 120-foot wide shell.

1st October, 1997. South Dakota, USA. 'USA TODAY.'

SCREAMING GRASS AND SINGING SAND

The next time you're forced to take a mower to that drastically overgrown lawn in the stifling heat of midsummer's day, you'll have the perfect excuse for refusing: All kinds of plants have now been found to emit terror-induced shrieks when they are being placed under intense stress.

Scientists (with presumably, nothing better to do) have now invented a machine which listens to these screams when they are exposed to salt, ozone or cold.

They actually utter an audible cry for help in the form of ethylene gas and the experimental device uses its infra-red laser to make the said gas detectable.

When the gas comes into contact with the beam, it releases tiny shock waves which can be amplified using a tube, not at all dissimilar to the pipes found inside a church organ.

A sensitive microphone fixed to the tube picks up and broadcasts the release of the gas as a series of shrieks. The louder the scream, the more ethylene is being produced.



According to a report in the 'NEW SCIENTIST MAGAZINE', the machine will allow scientists to study living plants for long periods of time under stressful conditions. Researchers are already using the device to study stress levels of tobacco plants deprived of water and exposed to high concentrations of ozone.

Boffins at the University of Bonn also hope the invention will help reveal what causes so many Geranium seedlings to die after their long trip from their nurseries in the Mediterranean. Recent research has also shown that plants use gas as a form of communication.

Tobacco plants under attack from a virus have been found to send out methyl salicylate as a warning to neighbouring plants. 6th March, 1997. General. 'DAILY MAIL.'

*** And those redoubtable collection of egg-heads have also dreamed up a plausible explanation for the mystery of the 'Singing Sand' out in the desolation of the Sahara.

These Canadian 'experts' have theorised that silica gel on sand grains causes them to clump together, making them resonate tunelessly, when they fall down dunes.

5th March, 1997. Sahara Desert, Africa. 'DAILY EXPRESS.'

Exploding Toilets, Telephones, And Car Windshields

In Los Angeles, USA, there have been over 120 reports of rear windshields being inexplicably blown out completely on the Great American highways. And that was within a mere three week time period. No one has yet been hurt, but neither has any realistic explanation yet been forthcoming.

3rd October, 1997. Los Angeles, USA. 'USA TODAY.'

*** Brazilian military police Colonel Walcir Ferreira, was carrying a cellular phone on his belt, when he suffered third degree burns.

The burns spread across his leg and hip when the phone suddenly blew up of its own accord.

Police later said the manufacturer had a great deal of explaining to do.

5th January, 1997. Brazil, South America. *THE BOSTON HERALD.*

*** And finally, residents at a housing block in Caracas, Venezuela, were being told not to use their toilets after reports that nine people were very nearly sucked into them!

15th February, 1997. Caracas, Venezuela. *'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'*

Medical Anomalies

Four identical baby girls were born to a New York couple in Long Island...An event that is apparently, so rare, it is believed to happen only once in every 11 million births.

9th March, 1997. Long Island, New York. *'LIVERPOOL ECHO.'*



*** And when baby Daniel Tatham was born he seemed to be just like any other new arrival in the human race. But at the age of one he weighed in at a massive two stone. He's now aged five, and he has since shot up to eight stone...Heavier than his ten-year-old brother, Sean.

The average weight for someone his age is just under three stone. And at 4ft, he is 8 inches taller than most of his friends and is forced to don clothing more suited to a 13-year-old. But despite his strictly controlled diet, doctors admit to being completely baffled as to the cause of his extraordinary growth. His mother Allison, 31, of Shildon, Co Durham, said; *'We just don't know how big he will eventually get.'*

25th March, 1997. Shildon, Co Durham. *'DAILY EXPRESS'*

*** X-ray photographs had to be used to find the cause of Tom Stuivenberg's blinding headaches...a chunk of ball-point pen in his head. The 37-year-old from Amsterdam claims he swallowed it when he was a young boy.

6th February, 1997. Amsterdam, Holland. *'DAILY SLUR'*

ICE FALL IN MANCHESTER

In Edgeley, Stockport, a roof was badly damaged by one of those pesky blocks of ice that are apt to fall from the sky every now and then.

Once again the blame was laid upon frozen debris from a passing aircraft, although we know from experience that there was very likely no plane flying over the area at the time. (to say nothing of the many accounts that have been reported in the days before modern aviation).

A probe was ordered after two tiles were dislodged on the house during the afternoon of 5th September. 1996.

6th September, 1996. Edgeley, Stockport.. *'DAILY MANC.'*

Back From The Dead

Two sets of undertakers in Germany and Italy respectively, were the victims of intense shock as they were wrapped up in the process of preparing bodies for burial

In Hamburg, a woman was actually lying in state in her coffin when she suddenly swallowed and woke up. The unemployed nurse had been, 52, had been pronounced dead by German doctors an hour earlier after being taken in for a drug overdose.

She was later said to be recovering in hospital.

Meanwhile, in an entirely unrelated incident in Taranto, Italy, Giulio Sanca sat up after spending 25 hours on a mortuary slab. He was just about to be embalmed when he quickly came back to life after the embalmer stuck a great big needle in his arm!

21st February, 1997. Hamburg, Germany. *'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'* 9th March, 1997. Taranto, Italy. *'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'*

Strange Human Behaviour

THE FAMILY THAT SLAYS TOGETHER

In a case that has shocked a nation almost immune to such horrors, comes news that a whole family of cannibals managed to murder 22 youngsters aged between 13 and 15, before mincing up their bodies and selling them on as rissoles at a street market.

The poor unfortunates were lured to the family's apartment, there to be stabbed, butchered, and finally fed through an electric meat mincer.

Detectives investigating the case believe that there is evidence that some victims were forced to help the cannibals prepare human snacks before being killed themselves. The latter-day Sawney Beans' sold their flesh to the destitute (of which there are many in Yeltsin's post reform Russia), mainly in the city of Novokuznetsk in Western Siberia.

Ludmila Spesivtseva, her son Alexander, 26, and daughter Nadezhda, 28, even used human remains to feed their pet dog. When the police finally managed to track down the killers in their council flat, they were appalled to discover the remains of three mutilated children and dying 15-year-old Olya Galtseva.

An article in the *'SUNDAY PEOPLE'* related in sickening detail, the extent of the horror that awaited the detectives.

Apparently, Olya's body had been ripped wide open, but she lived long enough to pass on to police a graphic account of her ordeal.

She said she'd been tricked into entering the apartment along with a friend of hers, 13-year-old Zhenya Barashinka. Once captured, they had been forced to help prepare the rissoles made exclusively from human flesh.

One of the officers in the case was quoted as saying; *'Everywhere inside the flat was covered in blood. The floor, carpets, wallpaper, even the tiles in the bathroom.'*

remained blissfully unaware that it was only being played full blast to drown out the screams of the dying children.

Detectives say that the victims were somehow lured into their apartment by the 53-year-old hag, Ludmila, and were then stabbed to death by Alexander. Ludmila, (a real-life Baba Yaga, if ever there was one) would ask the unwitting youths to help carry her bags and invite them into the family's three-room apartment for a cup of tea and a slice of cake.

Alexander, an unemployed radio technician, duly confessed to the murder of nine children, although police believe he and his family are responsible for at least another 13 killings.



Ludmila: A real-life Baba Yaga - The Russian equivalent of the Night Hag that devours the flesh of children.

Just to add to the feeling of revulsion this case engenders, comes news that an administrative error may well have added to the family's reign of terror.

Alexander was sent to an insane asylum in 1992 after killing his ex-girlfriend. He set about kidnapping her and held her in his flat for a week or so before scalping her.

He then phoned the girl's parents and proceeded to boast openly about that which he'd done. Doctors at the asylum described him as being 'Super-evil' but then went ahead and freed him anyway barely 15 months later.

Police have now admitted that they somehow failed to make a note of his release and when five butchered bodies were found in May, 1995, they eliminated Alexander from their list of potential suspects because they assumed he was still locked away for the good of society.

The family's awful crimes were only discovered when council engineers tried to get into the accursed flat to inspect the heating system. Not surprisingly, Alexander refused to open the door and the police were called to help them gain entry. Ludmila and law student Nadezhda were arrested there and then, but Alexander managed to escape and was on the run for four days, before he was eventually captured.

The family are now locked up in Novokuznetsk Jail awaiting trial for their terrible crimes.

15th February, 1997. Novokuznetsk, Western Siberia, Russia. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Also in Russia, a cannibal who fed on the internal organs of three men has finally been brought to justice.

Ishyat Kuzikov killed the men after inviting them back to his St Petersburg home for a drink. After he'd finished with them he dumped their somewhat deflated corpses in the local rubbish tip.

26th February, 1997. St Petersburg, Russia. 'DAILY EXPRESS.'

Weird Crime

Popping Out For A Bite.

In Groton, Connecticut, USA, a 26-year-old woman named Lisa A. Markie, was accused of biting a total of four people, and at least two of the victims had to be hospitalised.

The lady elected to take a chunk out of two employees of a night club before she was taken home by a companion. She then allegedly bit the said companion in the car, forcing him to pull over. A passer-by in a pick-up made the mistake of stopping to assist them and was also bitten for his pains.

Lisa was later charged with four counts of third-degree assault.

20th November, 1996. Groton, Connecticut, USA. THE BOSTON GLOBE.'

A Host OF Hopeless Burglars And Robbers

Ohio bank robber Norman Curtis was easily arrested after he took the time and trouble to hang around and watch the police arrive after his raid.

24th November, 1996. Ohio, USA. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Whilst on trial for theft in Lyons, France, Jacques Louvet appeared in court having the bare-faced cheek to be wearing the prosecuting lawyer's stolen jacket. Not surprisingly, the theft did not go unnoticed for long, and was soon added to the list of charges brought against him.

29th December, 1996. Lyons, France. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Raiders who decided to break in and steal aviation equipment and sell it for scrap to earn themselves a measly £1,000, later discovered that the 'scrap was in fact worth £4.5 million.

They had grabbed engine parts from a factory and had quite merrily melted them down. The gobsmacking revelation was only made clear after the case against Thomas Hodgkins, 20, was heard at Portsmouth Crown Court.

1st September, 1996. Portsmouth, England. 'DAILY MANC'

*** A burglar who was on the run for over three years was finally caught after he reported a break-in at his own home.

When the police later checked John Mitchell's fingerprints to eliminate them from the intruder's, they were shocked to discover that they matched the prints of a man who had long been wanted for a string of unsolved crimes.

He was duly arrested and later sentenced to a year in jail at Norwich Crown Court.

21st February, 1997. Bedford, England. 'DAILY MAIL.'

*** Nicholas Orpin decided to rob a bank a mere few yards away from his home, simply because he didn't have access to a getaway car.

Unemployed Orpin, 28, didn't even bother wearing a mask as he threatened Midland staff with a starting pistol. And, jeezly ol' crows, he even managed to drop part of his £10,000 haul as he sought to make good his escape.

Orpin of Ealing, West London, admitted robbery and was jailed for seven years at the Old Bailey.

13th February, 1997. Ealing, West London. 'DAILY MANC.'

Giving Them The Slip

Warders made a complete pills of security when they issued suntan lotion to convicts working outdoors at the San Carlos Prison in Venezuela.

The inmates later smeared themselves all over with the lotion and managed to slip out of their cells....And 49 actually made good their escape

8th December, 1996. *San Carlos, Venezuela, South America.* 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Two prisoners were very easily re-arrested after the accidentally left behind a list of their plans...Including where they would eventually stay in New York...in their abandoned getaway vehicle.

26th January, 1997. *New York, USA.* 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** And former prisoner James Knapp elected to confess to the police that he had just robbed two Oklahoma stores simply because he missed his old cell-mates. The law enforcers were only too happy to oblige Mr Knapp. He'll be meeting up with them real soon.

23rd February, 1997. *Oklahoma, USA.* 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Neil Turley surely is a thief with a conscience. He stole a Peugeot 205 and used it for a 350-mile round trip, but later felt more than a mere twinge of guilt about what he had done. And so, he returned the car and left a box of chocolates on the front seat to replace those he had previously stolen together with a note saying he was dreadfully sorry.

Unfortunately, he managed to write the apology on the back of a bail form - which of course, included his full name and address. The car's owner promptly called the boys in blue before writing back and thanking Mr Turley for returning the vehicle in good condition.

4th April, 1997. *Coleford, England.* 'DAILY MAIL.'

*** And dozy bank raider Franco Patozzi was very easily recognised by cashiers in Licata, Sicily.

He was a council election candidate whose face was featured on posters that were plastered all over the town.

30th March, 1997. *Licata, Sicily.* 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Meanwhile, over in the good ol' US of A, gunman Simon Kingtree failed in his attempts to rob a bank not due to any degree of incompetence, but simply because staff were sent into gales of laughter by the sight of his huge, jug ears.

They couldn't take him seriously, not even when he threatened to shoot one of the cashiers!!!

2nd March, 1997. *Carolina, USA.* 'SUNDAY EXPRESS.'

Tomorrow's Just An Excuse Away

A priest who was charged with squeezing a young girl's breast told police that it wasn't actually him that had done the fondling, but the 'Hand Of God.'

Father Jean Ricateau, 47, groped the choir singer, 27, then asked her to touch him through his cassock. 'I couldn't help it, he informed a court in South-West France. 'My hand was being guided by the Lord.'

Despite this apparent blasphemy (not to mention, indecency) he was given a three-month suspended prison sentence.

And there was I thinking only Diego Maradona could get away with blaming the 'Hand Of God.'

6th February, 1997. *South-West France.* 'DAILY MANC.'

*** And finally, for this issue at least, one of the worst excuses I've ever heard was put forward by two gunmen who killed a jeweller in a botched robbery in Boynton Beach, Florida.

In all seriousness, they had the gall to claim they simply needed the money to join the police academy.

6th February, *Boynton Beach, Florida, USA.* 'DAILY SLUR.'

TOTAL OVERREACTIONS

Amy van der Heuvel, 55, was charged with the murder of her husband after she confessed to stabbing him to death. The reason? He refused to stop singing 'The Barber Of Seville' at their home in Amsterdam....

Now, if he'd have serenaded her with non-stop renditions of 'Back With Another One Of Those Block Rockin' Beats, by the Chemical Brothers, we could have understood her losing her marbles.!

7th February, 1997. *Amsterdam, Holland.* 'DAILY SLUR.'

*** Seeing in the New Year didn't prove to be a particularly happy occasion for a hot-headed family in Edmonton, Alberta. As 1996 slipped inexorably into 1997, Nim San, 26, got into a kicker of an argument with her mother-in-law, which she promptly ended by biting off the middle finger of the 60-year-old woman's right hand...Right up to the first joint.

That's some way of ending an argument!!!

5th January, 1997. *Edmonton, Alberta, USA.* 'THE BOSTON HERALD.'

The Way The Cookie Crumbles

In Long Hill, New Jersey, someone who rejoices in the name of Veen Thacker, aged 50, was facing a thorough mental examination after he apparently attacked a Girl Scout...All because the cookie selection failed to whet his appetite. Thacker invited the girl, 9, inside his home and then proceeded to drag her screaming into the bathroom, stifling her yells for help with a towel. Fortunately, the girl's father and brother were able to secure her rescue before any real harm could be done.

We hope Veen finds the selection of biscuits on offer at the state prison more to his liking...

11th October, 1996. *Long Hill, New Jersey, USA.* 'USA TODAY.'

FEUD OVER A DOWRY

And from Agra, near New Delhi, India, comes the incredible story of a wife who was terribly mistreated by her husband because he was somewhat less than satisfied with her dowry. She was so depressed that she went and hung herself - prompting her three younger sisters to follow in her suicidal footsteps.

The police discovered the sisters aged from 12 to 24 hanging from a staircase inside their home in Agra. The married elder sister, Amita Kumari, left a suicide note saying that her husband and her in-laws had taken to mistreating her because they were worried that their parents had provided a small dowry at the time of her wedding.

Her three unwed sisters left elected to join the pact because they grew to worrying that their parents would provide similar meagre dowries in the future.

Their position should have been helped by the fact that in July 1996, India's Supreme Court toughened punishment for breaking a 1961 law which banned dowries, but the practice remains prevalent throughout India. Husbands and in-laws very often impoverish the wife's family by insisting that expensive gifts should be donated, including cars, large amounts of cash, and electronic appliances. If these dowries aren't met, then the new bride is entitled to be horribly mistreated. At least 7,300 women were killed by their in-laws in 1995 alone.

All because of arguments over dowries.

Young brides whose families cannot meet their in-laws' quite often outrageous demands, are sometimes doused in kerosene and set ablaze. The deaths are then usually passed off as common of garden household accidents.

14th October, 1996. Agra, near New Delhi, India. 'YORKSHIRE POST.'

THE CRAZIES ARE OUT THERE... Spacemen, Gnome-Liberators, Testicle-Biters And Other Assorted Lunacy



A ticket collector by the name of Mikel Hemmer was kicked out of his job with Finland's rail service for refusing to wear regulation uniform. Instead he turned up for work decked out in a space suit.

He took to walking through the carriages pretending to be in zero gravity...He was only brought back down to earth by the arrival on the scene of an inspector who promptly gave him the sack.

15th September, 1996. Finland. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

Owners of garden gnomes in France were being terrorised by the self-styled 'Gnome Liberation Front', who have taken to

stealing the garden ornaments so that they can 'carry them to a new life free from the horrors of suburbia.'

2nd February, 1997. France. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** A Santa Claus who was certainly filled brim full with Christmas spirit bashed a couple to the ground with his sack because they refused to dip in their pockets for charity.

22nd December, 1996. Milan, Italy. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

The Maniac Dwarf

As someone who has lived in mortal fear of grinning, evil-looking dwarfs ever since watching Nicholas Roeg's classic chiller 'DONT LOOK NOW,' the following, typically lurid article in the 'DAILY SLUR,' provided me with a whole week's worth of nightmares.

A psychotic dwarf reportedly went on the rampage with an axe and chopped the heads of 31 men, women and children after lining them up for execution.

The dwarf was reported to be only 3ft, 6in tall and he was said to have cut the throats of his victims, then decapitated them in less than half an hour. The massacre was alleged to have taken place in Algeria, a country plagued with marauding bands of Muslim fanatics intent upon toppling the country's ruling party by inflicted terror amongst the populace...More than 500 people; including children and even a 13-month old baby, were murdered in less than three weeks in late January, 1996, alone. The incident that caused the tabloid press to take an interest however, was the one in which the aforementioned dwarf, along with 50 heavily-armed extremists, raided the formerly quiet town of Medea, outside Algiers. They dragged whole families from their beds out into the street and then forced them to line up for execution.

And the axe-wielding maniac did the rest.

A witness to the atrocity, was a nameless woman who very wisely hid from the gang. These men wanted to exterminate the entire town. No one was allowed to speak as they were dragged out into a back street. Then the victims were made to stand in a queue to be killed. At the head of the line was a dwarf, wearing a canvas hood and a scarf covering his face. He had a large knife in one hand an axe in the other. As people were brought forward he slit their throats then chopped off their heads with the axe.'

The massacre was said to have continued until an army patrol arrived on the scene and the terrorists predictably headed for the proverbial hills.

The ubiquitous, faceless 'experts' were quoted as saying that this was the first time the 'Dwarf Killer' had been used for summary executions. 'We have never heard of this man before, but he will definitely terrify the population even more.'

After waking up on countless nights with a dose of the screamin meemies, I can certainly vouch for that.

4th February, 1997. Algiers, North Africa. 'DAILY SLUR.'

The Phantom Trousers Stealer

Police were baffled by what the press were calling, the Phantom Of The Operating Theatre who steals doctors' trousers whilst they are busily engaged in their work at Brighton General Hospital.

The mysterious thief strikes once the surgeons have changed into their hospital gowns to perform an operation, leaving their trousers draped over chairs outside the theatre.

21st February, 1997. Brighton. 'LIVERPOOL ECHO.'

*** An unmarried man aged 25, was, at the time of going to press, facing charges in Pennsylvania after biting the testicles of a stray dog that was annoying his pet Alsatian...

12th March, 1997. Pennsylvania, USA. 'DAILY SLUR.'

THE CIGARETTE SABOTEUR

Police in Athens, Greece, are hunting a man they have christened 'The Cigarette Saboteur' after a string of attacks on people he sees smoking. Once he spots a victim he races over and forces them to eat their remaining ciggies. There have been at least seven reported incidents in just six months.

It's just occurred to us that maybe he works for 'QUITTERS INCORPORATED?'

23rd February, 1997. Athens, Greece. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** And German police are even more baffled by the discovery of hundreds of photographs of different penises that were left for some unexplained reason, in a library in Paderborn.

9th March, 1997. Paderborn, Germany. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** After a whole stack of washing went missing from various lines in Matsue, Japan, police later arrested the person responsible, one Fumio Ogawa. He was wearing a total of 11 bras and 27 pairs of knockers.

16th March, 1997. Matsue, Japan. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

The Trance Of A Lifetime

A woman has elected to sue her former psychiatrist, after claiming he convinced her she had a total of 120 personalities and then had the cheek to charge her insurance company a whopping big £185,000 for them all to have group therapy.

Amongst the host of personalities Nadean Cool says Dr Kenneth Olson invented for her under hypnosis were those of a duck, several angels and Satan. Miss Cool and her insurance company have reportedly filed court papers in Appleton, Wisconsin, accusing the shrink of gross malpractice.

13th February, 1997. Appleton, Wisconsin, USA. 'DAILY MAIL.'

THE REALLY BAD IDEA DEPT

The tragic story of Kathy Change merited only a few short lines in the American press. A woman who carried the courage of her convictions, Kathy spent a large chunk of her life trying to bring to the attention of an uncaring world just how important a concept global peace is.

She would promote this message by dressing in tight T-shirts and thong bikinis, waving flags and playing music around the University of Pennsylvania campus in Philadelphia. No one could be bothered to listen. They were far too busy trying to get laid, obtain a car, score some weed and generally live out the rock'n'roll dream of the all-American college kid.

And so, one Tuesday morning in October (The Fall - the only Americanism I've ever truly appreciated), the 46-year-old idealist calmly walked towards a large metallic peace symbol in the very heart of the campus, doused herself with gasoline and then set herself ablaze.

The suicide, carried out in front of over 50 shocked students, was apparently meticulously planned as a final attempt to gain the attention she rightly felt her beliefs deserved.

'My real intention is to spark a discussion of how we can peacefully transform our world,' Kathy wrote in a statement she delivered to fellow students a short time before her suicide. 'I offer myself as an alarm against Armageddon and a torch for liberty.'

What a pity that torch was all too soon allowed to burn itself out...To flicker fitfully, to sputter and finally wink out of existence...

A portent for the fate that awaits us???

24th October, 1996. Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA. ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH.

*** Meanwhile, in the sub-zero temperatures that descended upon the town of Glenwood Springs, Colorado, USA, 9-year-old Hunter Cunningham decided he would try and find out what would happen if he touched a metal pole with his tongue. He'd been urged on by a so-called friend, and as kids will do when they've been challenged to a dare, Hunter duly obliged. Not surprisingly, his tongue firmly stuck.

Luckily, a group of bystanders managed to pull the stricken boy clear, leaving a goodly-sized pool of blood and a strip of skin behind.

22nd December, 1996. Glenwood Springs, Colorado, USA. THE BOSTON HERALD.'

The Woman From Under The Stairs

It reads like something from out of the very darkest of children's fairy tales...A woman named Lola was locked in a darkened cellar for over 40 years by her cruel, sadistic mother. From the age of four, the poor unfortunate was kept in a room that amounted to little more than a cell, into which no sliver of sunlight was allowed to enter. She was fed on mere scraps of food thrown onto a filthy, excrement-strewn floor.

Her torment was only ended when social workers were tipped off by neighbours after they'd heard mysterious noises emanating from the cellar (What? Where they temporarily deaf for the previous 40 years???)

Not surprisingly, Lola's 'mother' was immediately sent for psychiatric tests.

Lola herself, meanwhile, can only grunt and eat like an animal and is almost blind from her years of enforced confinement in what must have seemed the very heart of darkness...

10th February, 1997. La Coruna, Spain. 'DAILY MANC.'

MARRIAGES MADE IN HELL

Lucinda Lawton has wisely decided to divorce her husband after he 'jailed' her at home for over 18 months. And whilst she was chained to the proverbial kitchen sink, he went on the town with a string of other women.

A somewhat distraught Linda was quoted as saying; 'God, he even made me get his clothes ready for his dates.'

The last straw however, proved to be when he Phil (the eternal chauvinist) forced her to wash and blow-dry his mistress's dog!

9th October, 1996. New Haven, Connecticut, USA. 'DAILY MANC.'

*** And, also granted a quick divorce was Christina Fesneau, whose husband refused to speak to her for more than two years...The reason, if you can call it that, was that he hadn't liked the way she'd said 'I do' at their wedding.

23rd February, 1997. Quebec, Canada. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Jealous wife Olga Racynski was forced to strip naked in a last desperate bid to stop her husband with the roving eye staring at young girls in mini-skirts.

*** An angry groom found himself being arrested for punching his mother-in-law at the wedding reception all because she elected to give him a prepaid burial plot voucher as a gift.

8th December, 1996. Illinois, USA. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Mike Ballama decided to move into a tree after fighting with one of his two wives. He remained there for over three years, but finally agreed to come back down to earth.

It wasn't to be for long, however.

He went straight back up to the highest perch after another spat, this time with his other wife in Lagos, Nigeria.

3rd October, 1996. Lagos, Nigeria. 'DAILY MANC.'

*** A grieving bride married the man she loved despite the slightly disconcerting fact that he was stone cold dead.

Patricia Mortenez's fiancé, Claude Darcy, was killed by an armed robber two years ago. After the ceremony in France, Patricia, 37, was quoted as saying; 'We've never been closer.'

1st September, 1996. Marseilles, France. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

DIVORCED FROM REALITY

A judge granted a divorce to Percy Quemin for the very good reason that his wife, Thelma, had organised a lottery with herself as the prize. After selling an amazing 600 tickets at £20 each in Los Angeles, the winner turned out to be a 73-year-old.

2nd March, 1997. Los Angeles, USA. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** And Joann Arnot divorced her husband Kurt in Munich, when she found out he'd been stone deaf for 15 years....Without telling her!

16th March, 1997. Munich, Germany. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

THE COSMIC JOKER'S LATEST PRANKS A SHARK ATTACK ON DRY LAND

Paul Stephens managed to reach the half-way point of his BT Global Challenge yacht race without suffering any degree of harm whatsoever...But was finally put out of the contest by a shark attack on the harbour side in Sydney, Australia.

The 34-year-old accountant from Reading, was recuperating from the rigours of traversing some of the most dangerous waters on the planet and decided to visit an aquarium in Darling Harbour. The aquarium was home to a group of 6ft long Reef Sharks.

'I'd only been there for a couple of minutes when there was this large crackling sound and suddenly people were screaming and water was everywhere,' he said. 'One of the tanks had shattered for some reason and glass and Reef Sharks were flying all around. As I picked myself up and saw the creatures I thought, "Sharks! I've got to get out of here!" 'It was then that someone pointed out that I was bleeding profusely from my arm.'

It turned out that a jagged shard of glass had gashed him, damaging muscles and disabling his wrist and fingers.

He was later stitched at the local hospital and put in plaster. He was told the tragic news that he could not continue his voyage on the Ocean Rover, for which he paid £20,000.

'Expert's' believed that the Sharks' thrashing about in the glass cages caused the tank to burst.

Poor old Mr Stephens was left to shake his head ruefully;

'It's all quite ridiculous really when you consider I've sailed halfway around the world through the treacherous waters of Cape Horn and the Southern Ocean.'

28th February, 1997. Darling Harbour, Sydney, Australia. DAILY MAIL'

pearls in the shell

Sally Flack cooked her family their favourite seafood namely mussels, and as she and her partner Daniel Stevens and their children tucked into the meal they all noticed something rather strange about its texture.

They at first assumed that there were bits of grit in the shellfish, but soon discovered that what was contained within was as far more unusual: A collection of pearls.

'We were amazed - Sally and Harriet nearly Swallowed them,' Mr Stevens was quoted as saying. *'We often have mussels but this was the first time we've ever found anything. There were five mussels with little pearls in, although I suppose there could have been a few that we accidentally swallowed.'*

Miss Flack, a 40-year old teacher, bought the mussels from a fishmonger's in Wells, Somerset.

'I had no idea we were in for something really special for tea,' she said. The pearls were between one and three millimetres across and pinkish-white in colour, but unfortunately they are only said to be worth a few pence.

Debra Beazley of the Sea Life Centre in Weston-super-Mare said; *'Pearls in mussels are pretty rare but are not unknown. These pearls are known as Blister Pearls and differ from ones found in oysters as they are not as perfect.'*

6th March, 1997. Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset. 'DAILY MAIL'

A Mind-Blowing Coincidence!!!

Part of a 100ft coastal landmark was said to be posing a threat to beach visitors and as such was blasted to smithereens on 26th March of this year.

What made the incident ironic was the fact that the smaller of the two stacks, left after the natural arch of Marsden Rock on Tyneside, should have been demolished on exactly the same day as suspected IRA bombs exploded in Cheshire. For the arch which used to connect the two stacks crumbled and plunged into the sea in February, 1996. Coincidentally (?) the very same night that the IRA blew apart their cease-fire by devastating London's Canary Wharf.

National Trust warden Peter Collins was moved to exclaim; *'This is quite uncanny.'*

27th March, 1997. Marsden Rock, Tyneside. 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST.'

Of All The Cabs In All The World...

*** Taxi driver Nico Economou, 39, discovered that his wife was having an affair after a male passenger asked to be taken to the cabbie's Athens home...He then calmly let himself in. Nico was quite literally, gobsmacked; *'I couldn't believe what I was seeing. After a few minutes had slipped by I ran after him, stormed inside and caught them on the sofa.'*

Not surprisingly, after confronting them, he immediately initiated divorce proceedings.

1st March, 1997. Athens, Greece. 'DAILY MAIL'

*** Inventor Uzo Kagashuki hit upon the prototype for what he called a 'Friendship Spray', and it was somehow intended to make people more polite and generally affable.

A noble notion, you might say. But unfortunately, when the time came around to test it in Japan, the children who acted as guinea-pigs wound up bursting into tears as soon as they were exposed to its smell.

16th February, 1997. Osaka, Japan. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

An aspiring Romeo was serenading his girlfriend who lived in a third-floor apartment of a block of flats in Amsterdam.

Unluckily for him, a sudden gust of wind blew him off the roof and sent him whirling to his death.

23rd February, 1997. Amsterdam, Holland. 'DAILY EXPRESS.'

*** Rain dancer Jose Carquiere was charged with manslaughter after six people died in a veritable flood that struck Arcos, Brazil.

23rd February, 1997. Arcos, Brazil. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** Charles Hurden was so terrified after he'd thought asteroids had landed in his garden in Sydney, Australia, that he locked himself away in his shed for three whole days.

It turned out however, that the 'asteroids' were actually luminous balloons that had floated over from a party that had taken place ten miles away.'

2nd March, 1997. Sydney, Australia. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

SISTERS DIE TOGETHER

Devoted sisters Annie Rogers, 87, and Doreen Jones, 78, from Cwmbran, Gwent, died within mere hours of each other on the same hospital ward from absolutely identical heart conditions.

24th March, 1997. Cwmbran, Gwent, Wales. 'DAILY EXPRESS.'

VAMPIRES ON THE PROWL AGAIN: IV

Well, 1997 has so far been quite a year for the reported rise of fanatical cults, both religious and 'Satanic'. And we can't say we weren't warned. (see #11 for a remarkable prediction on the increase of cult membership and their increasingly bizarre behaviour as the end of the millennium approaches at roughly the speed of light))

Just a few short months prior to the 'HEAVEN'S GATE' mass suicide grabbed its share of the world headlines, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA, was catapulted into the American public consciousness when news broke that a Vampire cult was being blamed for the death of Richard and Ruth Wendorf..

Five teenagers who apparently 'honestly believed they were Vampires' were arrested for the bludgeon slaying, including the murdered parents daughter, Heather, aged just 15.

Police from the Lake County, Florida, sheriff's department arrived in Baton Rouge to question the five youths captured whilst they were trying to book into a downtown hotel on Thanksgiving Day. The bodies of Richard, 49, and Ruth, 54, had been discovered a week earlier in their home in Eustis, Florida. The teens were well known as being members of the self-proclaimed 'Vampire Clan', a cult of about 30 members.

At first the police feared Heather had been abducted, but they soon concluded that she was in fact a fleeing suspect and they charged her along with her former boyfriend.

'They apparently like to cut their arms and suck the blood.' said Murray Police Sgt. Mike Jump. *'In a ritual in a remote*

graveyard, they've been known to kill a small animal and suck the blood out of it, supposedly to give them more power.'

The authorities learned of the cult two months earlier during an investigation into a routine break in at an animal shelter. Two puppies had been horribly mutilated and their body parts were partially eaten.

'They had stomped one of them to death and one of them, they pulled the legs off,' said Calloway County Sheriff Stan Scott.

Former schoolmates were quick to come forward and tell the morbidly fascinated press all about the cult's alleged activities. They said the group members wore startling costumes and liked to brag of how Heather was a reincarnated Demon who could communicate with spirits during the human blood-drinking rituals. Ironically enough, Heather is a granddaughter of James Wendorf, a retired lawyer for the Billy Graham organisation.



Another cult member, Roderick Ferrell, 16, a classmate of Wendorf, also boasted of immortality as a Vampire. His mother, Sondra Gibson, had been recently charged with trying to coerce a boy of 14 into a sexual relationship and helping him become part of the 'Vampire Clan.'

Prosecutors allege that she wrote to the boy, urging him to 'become a Vampire, a part of the family.'

The cult's origins were said to have their roots firmly based in a fantasy-role playing game that somehow transformed into a full-blown secret society. Defence lawyers have at least, tried to introduce some degree of sanity into the case. They claim that the five youths are nothing more than a bunch of badly scared individuals.

With more than 500,000 copies sold, the game, created in 1991, has its own jargon, hierarchy and dress, all related to an elaborate system of Vampire clans. *'What are we? We are Vampires...'* the game advertises. *'Call your damnable hunt. We shall see whom I drag screaming to hell with me.'*

Masqueraders role-play in full Vampire costume - usually at night on darkened streets. Enthusiasts were quick to point out that thousands of players enjoy the game with no ill effects. *'I doubt seriously if there is going to be any tie between these individuals and our role-playing game,'* said Greg Fountain, spokesman for the game's Atlanta-based maker, 'White Wolf.'

The case also drew comment from sociologists and psychiatrists. *Twenty or thirty years ago, Vampirism wouldn't even have been in the repertoire of the average teenager,* claimed Jack Levin of Northeastern University Program For The Study Of Violence And Conflict. *'Now they've seen every atrocity possible in movies; people skinned alive, decapitated, disembowelled. Not only have they become desensitised to violence, but they've also been given plenty of role models to emulate.'*

The other youths who have been charged with murder are Dana Cooper, 19, Scott Anderson, 16, and Sarah 'Shea' Remington, 16. All five of them face the death penalty if convicted. (Whether they will be the first convicts to be sentenced to death by having a stake driven through their heart however, is a matter for pure conjecture).

30th November - 9th December, 1996. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, USA. 'USA TODAY/ST LOUIS POST & DISPATCH.'

Witchcraft And Demonology In The World Today



'Satanic Ritual Abuse' Rife In Danville

According to reports coming out of the tiny, industrial hick town of Danville, 130 miles or so south of Chicago, the somewhat ambiguous subject of 'Satanic Ritual Abuse' against children has reared its ugly head.

Authorities in the town arrested Robbie Moore, 28, and Kimberly Harris, 26, in June, 1996, after having accused them of molesting children as young as four years of age, on the pretext of forming a club to teach them about Witchcraft.

Not surprisingly, the furore caused by the case inspired lurid front-page headlines in the local press (and we only have to look at the media interest surrounding the infamous Orkney and Rochdale 'witch hunts' to get a good idea of the credulity, and lack of objective reasoning that attaches itself to this emotive issue).

Moore pleaded not guilty on charges that he sodomised a boy twice, molested another boy and assaulted a girl aged 13,

although he did admit fondling the girl and was serving a seven-year prison sentence at the time this current case came to trial.

Sgt John Howard, the investigating officer in the case, was at least dispassionate enough to decline to elaborate on the previous reports that the children had been abused during mysterious, esoteric rituals.

All he did say was that *'there seemed to be a connection between the sexual abuse and certain Occult activity.'*

Ritual Abuse gained world-wide attention when certain, less than reliable social workers and child counsellors made the assertion that there existed an underground network of Devil Worshipers who preyed upon innocent children. These evil, perverted acolytes would subject their victims to rape and other forms of sexual depravity, and in some cases, they would even be sacrificed.

Thankfully, we are not living in the midst of the Dark Ages, when superstition was rife and reasoned argument against credulity was taken to be proof that you yourself were in league with the 'The Father Of Lies.'

Researchers and journalists who remained sceptical of these claims, studied the subject for themselves and were unable to come up with any evidence to support the Satanic Conspiracy theory. Of course, that was not to say that they failed to encounter *some* sexual abusers who engaged in somewhat bizarre practices...But they carried out these rituals alone or in comparatively small groups. Certainly, however depraved they may have been, they did not seem to be involved with any devilish plot to subvert humanity.

Over in the States, a survey of thousands of psychologists and police for the American Psychological Association came to the conclusion that there existed no hard evidence for any type of conspiracy.

However, lead researcher Bette Bottoms of the University of Illinois-Chicago was quoted as saying; *'One of the results of our study was that there were some acts of child abuse that were "ritualistic," and I think what you have in Danville could be a good example of that. But we did not find that an intergenerational, national Satanic child abuse network exists, and that's the idea that set the county on fire.'*

Moore actually claims to be a Warlock, and is insistent that his religion has nothing to do with any criminal case against him. He took the step of writing to the judge in July, 1996:

'I am writing to inform you in my own words that myself and Kimberly Harris are being accused of practising Witchcraft (which on my part is in fact true, yet irrelevant to the allegations against us). Here it is the 1900's, not the 17 or 1800's and people are still trying to Witch Hunt and convict people of practising Witchcraft.'

The case against Kimberly and himself was still unresolved at the time of going to press.

27th January, 1997. Danville, USA. 'BELLEVILLE NEWS-DEMOCRAT.'

Exorcist Seeks To Drive Demons Out Of California

Meanwhile, in Riverside, California, Tom Powers of the Prayer Partners International, has embarked upon a personal holy crusade to rid the Southwest of the USA of all demonic entities.

Donning his Father Shandor robe, the zealous pastor claims that God has spoken to him and provided him with a list of cities in Southern California and Arizona that may be at the mercy of these servants of the Devil. They had apparently been summonsed inadvertently from the very depths of Hell and were now wreaking havoc upon the cities residents.

In late October, 1996, he headed for Moreno Valley acting upon God's instructions. The entire community, including several respected civil leaders joined him to pray for their salvation from the 'demonic spirits' that had conspired to cause the city's social problems and political turmoil.

The prayer meetings were said to be intended to focus upon getting rid of 'demonic spirits', 'demonic establishments' and 'demonic social and behavioural activities,' plaguing the metropolis.

The one-man crusade has already visited many other California communities, including San Bernadino. Disappointingly for Bowers, however, the Mayor of San Bernadino was less than impressed with the pastor's efforts. *'The same Demons that were there before are still here,'* he said.

19th October, 1996. Riverside, California. *THE BOSTON HERALD.*'

WHEN THE SEX IS TRULY MAGICAL

A couple who made love on an ancient fertility symbol in the hope of becoming parents have discovered that it worked.

Karen and Andrew Sutton, from Dorchester, carried out the pagan ritual on Midwinter's Day at the famous Cerne Abbas Giant (the chalk engraving on the Dorset Downs).

The 2,000-year-old carving has always been linked with fertility magic.

17th January, 1997. Dorset. *LIVERPOOL ECHO.*'

The Number Of The Beast - A Lottery Winner

In Madison, Wisconsin, USA, lottery players were blessed with the Devil's own luck when on Halloween, last year, the *'WISCONSIN DAILY'* Pick 3 Numbers came in at 666.

The Reverend Thomas Caldwell of Marquette University was moved to say that the Devil is often linked to the magical number 666, because of course, the Book Of revelation refers to it as the Number Of The Beast.

In all, 436 players managed to select the winning numbers, for a payout of \$178,000, a total four times the average.

2nd November, 1997. Madison, Wisconsin, USA. *'ST. LOUIS POST & DISPATCH.'*

VOODOO TAKES HOLD IN MIAMI

Inside a dimly-lit night-club tucked away in one of Miami's industrial areas, a group of Haitians watch as a Voodoo priest and priestess prepare to honour the African Spirit Of The Dead.

Followers kneel before a black cross wrapped with purple and white sashes. On top of the altar, a candle drips blood-red wax. Paper skeletons lining the wall sway back and forth in the breeze as if to the beat of the Tamboo drums. The air carries the aroma of burnt offerings. But this isn't the ritual as practised for centuries in graveyards or fields in Haiti.

For a measly \$8, anyone can watch the priest or priestess perform their rhythmic dance, making offerings to the spirits, and appear possessed by the Gods. Some Haitians make a little money while worshippers meet one another and practice their religion without disturbing their neighbours in suburban Miami. In short, Voodoo is going commercial.

'You have a lot of immigrants coming from rural parts of Haiti who have a difficult time adjusting to American

culture,' says Claude Charles, an assistant professor of Anthropology at the University of Miami.

'This commercialisation is just another way to adapt to the society at hand.'

The ceremony of Gede (pronounced ge-day), held every November, is one of several Haitian religious holidays and can be traced back to the Yoruba-speaking tribes of West Africa.

When slave-traders stole the Yorubas from their home and took them to the Caribbean, the slaves struggled to keep their culture of Voodoo alive. Today, followers believe that by honouring Gede - or death - they honour life and independence from their captors.

'It is important to remember where we came from, whether we are living in Haiti or Miami,' says Yvette Pierre Louis, a 51-year-old Voodoo priestess who has been in Miami since 1972. Another priestess, 27-year-old Carline Pyrame, said Voodoo holidays are held several times a year to worship African Gods and seasons. But it is a myth that the rituals are performed to cast spells or to awaken Zombies, she claims.

For the 65,000 Haitians living in Miami, rituals have become a way to unite the community, a community often overshadowed by the area's Hispanic majority.

Some worshippers still sacrifice animals in people's homes during some ceremonies, but the practice rarely makes it into public rituals where admission is charged. Participants fear they will be prosecuted.

Haitians have repeatedly avoided trouble with the police and residents who object to the sometimes noisy and gruesome rituals, according to Miami police spokesman Delrish Moss.

'We used to get lots of work in Little Haiti with complaints of noise and finding dead chickens on railroad tracks. But new Voodoo practitioners rent a space to hold these events and there are seldom any complaints.'

Inside the night-club, about 150 Haitians and other spectators take their places. The Mambo, or priestess, and Houngan, or priest, bow to the altar - a black cross in the middle of a tyre decorated with purple and white scarves - the colours of Gede.

The two carefully spread commel around the altar in a triangular design meant to both honour Gede and bring the spirit into the room for the six-hour ritual. After the design is laid, they burn food and place the offerings in gourds in front of the altars and four drummers. The priestess gives the followers candles to hold. She passes a flame around the room for each candle to be lit.

'Come, Gede, Come,' the priestess says in Creole.

Drummers begin to beat the Tamboos, summoning the spirit of Gede into the room and initiating the sacred dance. The Mambo and Houngan are joined by other Voodoo followers for the dance, which begins with slow, swaying movements to the pounding beat.

The priest sings a Haitian song that tells of the first Haitians brought to the Caribbean islands from countries such as Togo and Benin. The drum beats get faster and a man starts to unbutton his shirt, displaying a painting covering his chest and stomach with white eyes and beet-red lips. He begins to gyrate his hips and roll his belly back and forth, bringing life to the caricature on his stomach.

A woman drops to the floor and begins shaking. Her head rolls back and her arms and legs go limp. She has been possessed by Gede. The woman is embraced by the priest while followers take swigs of alcohol, spitting mouthfuls at her to quench the spirit's thirst.

The ritual goes on for hours.

'With the Tamboo drums, you have problems,' says Ms Pyrame, who arrived from Port-au-Prince 12 months earlier. *'Police come if you beat them too loudly. Neighbours complain of the noise. You can't have sacrifices. People look at you strangely if you have altars. It has become very*

difficult to practice our religion here as it is practised in Haiti,' she concluded.

But they seem to be having a pretty good go.

22nd November, 1996. Miami, USA. *THE STANDARD TIMES.*

DEVIL-WORSHIP IN MODERN-DAY EGYPT

In Cairo, forty-five students suspected of drinking one another's blood and generally worshipping the Evil One, were charged with scorning religion, amazingly, a criminal offence in Egypt.

The Interior Minister Hassan el-Alfy was quoted as saying that he felt sorry for the individuals concerned; *'It's a pity. They are well-educated and are from good families.'*

The police however, were not quite so liberal-minded and promptly arrested the students, saying that they frequently staged orgies out in the desert, and had also taken drugs at these gatherings (you would have thought that if anyone wanted to take part in a forbidden ritual in total privacy, you could hardly choose a more suitable venue than out in the godforsaken wastelands of the desert, but there you go).

And the real shock horror news was the revelation that the women amongst the group when arrested were found to be wearing their nails excessively long and seemed to be rather fond of black lipstick.

The mind boggles, it really does!!!

24th January, 1997. Cairo, Egypt *'DAILY MAIL.'*

THE 'KING OF THE WITCHES' CRUSADE

Kevin Carlyon received a visit from the local council after he was accused of trying to conjure up a spell to save a school playground.



Southwark council's head parks, Colin BRAND, and his colleague Robin Hatworth rather gingerly told him that there was no hidden agenda behind the plans to move the playground a few yards in Honor Oak, South-east London.

Residents had been worried that the council planned to sell the site to developers, and elected to call upon Mr Carlyon, the self-styled 'High Priest Of British Witches' to cast a propitious spell.

Not surprisingly, there were more than a few dissenters to this course of action, not matter how effective this ancient method may prove to be. especially amongst the God-fearing in the community.

'All we were intending to do was perform a ceremony to keep the place green, we certainly weren't planning to put a curse on it,' said Mr Carlyon, who in his slightly less esoteric

moments is a printer. The Witch was instead forced to postpone the 'blessing way' until February 22nd - the night of the New Moon.

Wearing his ceremonial robes, he planned to make a 9ft circle of flour and *'invoke the positive forces of nature'* from a candle lit altar. A council spokesman was quoted as saying that some of the local residents were a little worried about all the talk of rites and spells. *'So all we did was go up and see this chap and explain the situation. He then decided that what we were doing was in fact, a jolly good thing.'*

13th February, 1997. Honor Oak, South-east London. *'DAILY MAIL.'*

Sacrifice In The Name Of Magick

A young mother who was apparently fascinated by the subject of the Occult, strangled her six-year-old son, and then laid him out like a sacrificial victim.

Ruth Neave, 28, killed Rikki in a perverted and ultimately futile, attempt to win back her estranged husband, Northampton Crown Court was told. Police found a book entitled 'Magick' written by the notorious Aleister Crowley, in Neave's home in Peterborough. Even more (ahem) shocking was the discovery of the famous Leonardo da Vinci drawing that shows Christ in a cruciform position within a pentangle.



Ms Neave denied the allegations that she had murdered her son in November, 1994, and left him naked and laid out exactly like the aforementioned drawing more than 100 yards from their home in Redmile Walk, Peterborough.

The court heard how Rikki was strangled by having his clothes wrapped and twisted around his neck. There were no signs that the boy had been attacked by a violent gang, and he had not been the victim of a paedophile. Each limb had been precisely positioned, again like the drawing - even the fingers and the hands were the same.

Mr James Hunt, the prosecuting barrister told the jury; *'She had an interest in the Occult and Black Magic, reading Tarot Cards at neighbour's homes. She was fascinated by that Aleister Crowley book so much, that when a visitor picked it up to read it she became angry and said it would come back at him.'*

4th October, 1997. Peterborough. *'YORKSHIRE POST.'*

CHASING THE UNKNOWN

The Latest Weird And Wonderful News From Around The World
Touched From A Distance:



COMETS, CULTS, UFO's AND THE ENTRANCE TO HEAVEN'S GATE

With the benefit of hindsight, I guess we should have known that the arrival in our skies of the Comet Hale-Bopp, would spark a large degree of paranoia and talk of imminent disaster for the people of the Earth.

Ever since man first looked toward the heavens with a mixture of fear and wonder, he has regarded the appearance of celestial bodies such as comets as being harbingers of doom. Throughout recorded history, self-styled prophets have issued dire warnings of death and destruction in the wake of a blazing comet and ancient superstition decreed that they were the presage to every major war. A forebearer of Hale-Bopp, Little Bull, (a comet that passes us by every 2,500 years) has been labelled as the root cause for the fire and brimstone so prevalent in The Old Testament. Dr Victor Chube, a senior research fellow in astrophysics at Oxford University believes that the heavenly body was responsible for the fall of the Holy Roman Empire and succeeded in plunging Europe into the midst of the Dark Ages.

It will strike again in about 1,000 years, causing crop failure, climate change and mass panic, he claims. So no change there, then.

However, there will also be storms lasting 200 years and fireballs streaking across the sky, exploding with the force of several atom bombs.

'It would be the most terrifying thing imaginable. People would try and hide up mountains, disappear into deserts or throw themselves off cliffs in despair.' At first sight, Dr Chube's theory may sound like he's been exposed to a goodly-sized bout of Pre-Millennial Tension. But nevertheless, his theory would perhaps account for the otherwise unexplained collapse of Bronze Age civilisations in Ancient Egypt. The Old Testament, that less than cheery chronicle of Divine Retribution taken against the faithless, says *The Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire.'*

Researchers, like the redoubtable Dr Chube, claim that this narration of events may well be a latter-day description of a meteorite storm.

Reputable scientists have taken the theory so seriously that they currently looking at dust deposits in ocean sediment and icebergs, where they claim to have discovered evidence of space particles. Dr Chube went on to say, *The vast stream of material has been evolving in the Solar System for 50,000 years. The earliest stages of this evolution affected Earth 40,000 years ago and were responsible for the Ice Age. We know that there is approximately a 2,500-year-cycle of global warming and cooling and this theory could explain where the cycle comes from.'*

Comets were also said to have portended the murder of Caesar, the destruction of the Second Temple, the Norman Conquest of Britain, the Black Death, Napoleon's invasion of Russia, the First World War, and the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl. They were said also to have a particular affinity for members of the World's Royal Families. Therefore, their appearance was said to predict sudden upheavals in the halls of the mighty and bring down entire governments (*that would not seem to augur well for the Conservatives then - Ed*)

THE ORIGINS OF 'THE HIGHER SOURCE'

When news filtered through from America that 39 people had committed suicide in order to free their spirits and rendezvous with a huge UFO hiding behind Hale-Bopp, there was a predictable wave of disbelief and incomprehension amongst the media, and the general public.

Those of us not familiar with the ways of fanatical cults, found it all but impossible, even in this age of miracle and wonder, to even begin to understand the motives of a group, who in the midst of life, chose to abandon this Earth and seek some unattainable dream on the other side of the Styx.



But the truth is, although this cult had hardly achieved any degree of notoriety in this country, over in the States, 'The Higher Source' group had been proclaiming their beliefs since at least the mid-1970's.

They first shot to some kind of prominence in October, 1975, when in Portland, Oregon, news broke of the rise of a shady organisation run by an anonymous couple known only as 'He' and 'She.'

'THE OTTAWA JOURNAL' reported that a father was forced to fight for the custody of two children on the grounds that their mother had apparently chosen to take the less than maternal decision to leave on a UFO voyage to the furthest reaches of the universe....And never came back.

Stephen Barlow was granted the two children by the court after filing an affidavit saying that the mother had chosen to leave them behind and follow 'He' and 'She'. At the time, the cult was said to number about 20 members in Oregon, and they had successfully managed to induce all of them to dispose of their possessions and loved ones for a planned trip aboard an extraterrestrial spacecraft.

By October 16th, the identities of the mysterious couple had been revealed as Marshall Herff Applewhite, then 44 years old, and Bonnie Lu Trusdal Nettles, then aged 48. Melvin Gibson, Oregon Criminal Investigator for the State Police at Newport, had elected to investigate the mini-exodus of approximately 24 people, all desperately keen to secure their place on that interstellar flight.

No charges were laid against Applewhite and Nettles. After all, they had committed no wrong at that stage.

Stories continued to emerge as the Fall rolled on, and by the 26th October, news came that a wealthy Colorado land developer decided to leave his business, his wife and his family to join up with the cult. John M. Craig, then aged 41, was a partner in the Colorado Land & Cattle Company upped sticks and headed for the proverbial stars after he'd taken the name Simon Peter. Craig used his connections to rent halls for the group and arranged for the printing of cult propaganda. He

became of the group's leaders, the numbers of the cult membership having by now swollen to over 70. Craig had been recruited by Dale F. Mackey, formerly a film editor for MGM Studios in Hollywood.

Craig's wife, Mary Ann, was quite understandably shell-shocked by her husband's actions. *'It's the craziest thing I've ever heard of,'* she was quoted as saying. *'It surprised all of us. I don't know what Mickey's problems are and I had no forewarning of this.'*

Even more alarming than the stories of family desertion in the name of a less-than-realistic cause, was the account of the total disappearance of 20 members of the cult. Dismissed by newspaper columnists as nothing more than a hoax, it nevertheless shows just how easy it is for the wonder surrounding such a fantastic subject can reach a level bordering on outright hysteria

THE SAD-EYED LIES OF THE BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN

As Autumn turned to Winter, the rumour-mongers were having a field-day. They were alleging that up to 23 people had simply vanished without a trace, following a UFO group meeting on September 14th, 1975, at a campsite in Waldport, raising speculation that they had, in fact, literally flown off the planet.

Columnist Doug Baker of *'THE OREGON JOURNAL'* attempted to bring some degree of sanity to the proceedings by affirming that the story was nothing but a hoax dreamed up by a pair of college students preparing a paper entitled *Psychological Reactions To Panic In A Small American Community.*

Baker said in his column that police and the news media had been set up by the perpetrators who had confessed being behind the scheme to a prominent Waldport citizen, who chose to remain anonymous.

However, despite the allegations of a hoax, the 23 people were still missing. Any suspicions that they had taken to the skies in a UFO were soon dashed though, when it emerged that several family members of those reported as missing had received very earthly telephone calls to reassure them that they were alright.

It seems that they had elected to set up a new life out in the sticks far from civilisation whilst they awaited salvation the shape of an extraterrestrial spacecraft. Tom Becker, operator of a radio station in Newport, where the reports originated, said he got a call from one of the group stating that *'they are all happy.'* He agreed not to reveal their whereabouts, but of course, there was no way to confirm that the caller was who he said he was. And so, the mystery remained.

By now, the cult had christened itself with a suitably impressive-sounding title; 'The Human Individual Metamorphosis Cult' or HIM for short.

Further news on the 'The Two' cult leaders; their life-stories and their esoteric beliefs, also began to become public knowledge, as media interest in HIM reached fever pitch. It transpired that Applewhite claimed to be thousands of years old, was born in Texas, and had served a jail sentence for car theft in St. Louis County. Bonnie Lu Truesdale Nettles, the woman who accompanied him to group meetings in California, where 'THE TWO' were said to have talked more than 100 people into believing they would be granted salvation courtesy of the intervention of Aliens, was also originally from Texas. Mrs Nettles was, at the time, apparently being investigated for fraudulently using credit cards.

'THE TWO' were identified from photographs taken of them at one of their meetings where they reportedly told those attending to give up their earthly possessions, sever their human relationships and give away their children if they

Metamorphosis (HIM) process, then had broken with 'THE TWO.'

Applewhite was charged with theft of an automobile in 1974, and spent four months in the county jail, awaiting trial.

Other information comes from Edmond, Oklahoma. UFO and paranormal investigator Hayden Hewes. He recalls that he was writing letters in his office when the pair appeared in the open doorway. The 18-year veteran UFO investigator and his associate Dan Garcia spoke to them for several hours and tape-recorded a one-and-a-half-hour cassette of their conversation in July, 1974.

They had come seeking his help in letting people know they were abroad, they told Hewes, who recalls that they had been dressed casually and sported identical 'Buster Brown' haircuts.

Although they didn't seem to know much about UFOs and Herff declined to demonstrate the supernatural powers he said he had, the pair claimed they had their 'graduation' from different planets. "He was from one, I was from another," Bonnie said.

'THE TWO' told Hewes and Garcia that they "eat fruit and sleep some...do a different kind of work," and request that their needs be filled with a thought. "This is a process that you have to learn to move into," Herff said.

When Garcia wanted to know why they couldn't have that information without going to the next kingdom, Herff retorted, "What good would it do for a dog to build Coca-Cola plants?"

At that point they told Hewes they would be assassinated in about three months.

Then Herff announced. "This is directed to the highest authorities in the Earth human offices. If you nations do not immediately stop interfering in the natural evolutionary process...then the civilised structure around the Earth will be destroyed post-haste...We are being forced to tamper with your efforts because of your ignorance in this matter and we will go to any end to set this wrong right. Your actions will be your answer to this message.'

In April, 1975, the pair was still working the psychic circles. At the Hollywood, California home of Joan Culpepper they held what may have been their first large conversion. The couple would see that on that occasion, they made one too many conversions. Joan Culpepper would convert, then later become one of their most voracious critics.

Then the HIM group reached Oregon and its place in the headlines. First, 22 people put their affairs in order and dropped out of sight after attending HIM meetings held in August, 1975, along the Oregon seacoast. They reportedly joined other recruits journeying to a camp in Colorado where they would wait until their metamorphosis was completed.

A meeting in San Jose, California, was cancelled amid indications 'THE TWO' were a bit taken aback by the publicity their story had generated. A large crowd showed up anyway, hoping to see the mysterious pair.

Meanwhile, the HIM group had passed through Colorado and headed into Illinois, leaving a trail of rumours, speculation and tantalising postcards. Only after they left a place did the public learn where they had been.

Then somebody wrote a letter to the 'OAKLAND TRIBUNE' announcing a meeting for October 30th. The letter was a hoax. But a former follower read it, decided it sounded like 'THE TWO' and felt he was directed to publicise it widely. He sent notices to every newspaper and TV station in the Bay Area.

Disciples flocked to the meeting from afar (there were 16 from the "Denver Group" alone), sensing a chance to spread the message. They handed out literature and arranged a real

meeting for the next day (Halloween) in nearby Tilden Regional Park.

There, still more gathered - 35 to 40 from HIM, 200 of the curious and the press. 'THE TWO,' HIM converts said, were in seclusion, "Preparing a statement for the media." There had been a big meeting near Chicago, where 'THE TWO' had said their demonstration was near. the crowd was told, and the followers should gather as many candidates as possible.

The Oakland meeting brought the interested face-to-face with the tragic and frightening implications of this movement. Dr C.A. Leonard, a Vale, Colorado optometrist, travelled close to 1,000 miles to Oakland for the chance to spend a half-hour with his wife, Jackie, who left in August to follow 'THE TWO.' "There's always the chance that I won't see her again," he told THE SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE'S George Williamson. "Maybe they know something that I don't."

Then there were the parents of the Marin County, California, girl who reportedly had written that the path to the kingdom might depend on "getting rid of the human body." And the family of John Holland of Conyers, Georgia, who had sent a postcard which said he couldn't tell where he was because it would mean severe punishment from forces outside this world. Equally unnerving are the experiences Hewes and a monk at the Christ Of The Desert Monastery in northern New Mexico had with the pair. When the Oregon disappearances occurred, Hewes decided to call upon the system the pair had given him for contacting them. He had been told he need merely pray to 'The Father,' directing his efforts towards the truth in their names, in order to contact them. Twice Hewes did this, and twice he was contacted by HIM representatives. The second time, Hewes said, two young people claiming to have been sent by 'THE TWO' were on his doorstep three minutes after he had finished 'the prayer.'

At about this same time, the pair popped in on the monk. Apparently they had walked to the remote monastery. They called the monk by name, and advised him to read the eleventh chapter of REVELATION. Then they walked off, vanishing from view in the canyons of this red-rock country. The confused monk refused to give his name to 'SAN FRANCISCO EXAMINER' reporter Don West, who travelled several thousand miles on the trail of 'THE TWO.'

Such demonstrations of amazing powers are interesting but not as interesting as the stories told by converts and others who had run-ins with HIM. In August, after a meeting in the Sunnyvale, California, Civic Centre, Danny Coleman, a UFO enthusiast, joined up. As he later told it, he joined because HIM's first campsite was to be in Mount Madonna Park in Santa Clara County, and a huge UFO had been sighted there two days earlier. The camp was moved when hecklers invaded one of the recruiting meetings. 'THE TWO' reportedly didn't want any more trouble.

Coleman, along with five other San Francisco Peninsula residents, travelled to HIM's camp in Oregon. A week later, Coleman and Fabian Williams walked away and hitchhiked back to San Francisco. Said Coleman; 'They made Christ out to be some nit-picking moral type.'

He also spoke of Bonnie, indicating that she 'really knew a lot,' and used 'heavy terms. Everyone up there was frightened. It was an intense psychological game that she was playing.'

He told of the day he asked to see a UFO and was told that he might in three weeks or ten years. 'They said the harvest occurs only every 2,000 years. That's a lie. There have been millions of people removed from the Earth who are active in celestial government now.'

The 'lies' angered Coleman even more than having to beg for gas and food, supposedly to incur resentment as part of the 'process.'

wanted to board the saucer and leave for a better life on another planet.

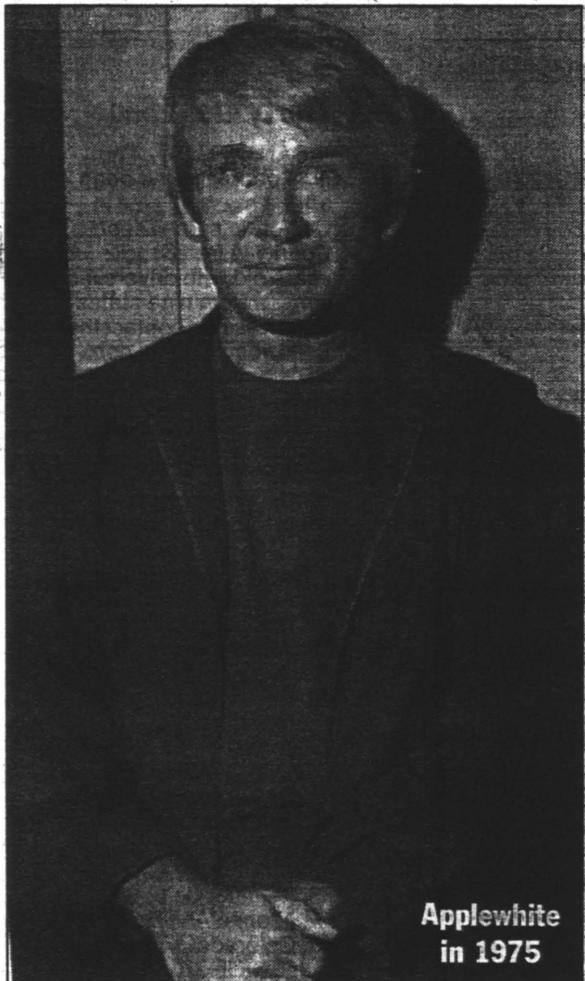
For a deeper insight into the background and beliefs of 'THE TWO', we feature the following article that appeared in the March, 1996, issue of the paranormal magazine 'PROBE THE UNKNOWN.'

For about three years, a pair of cheeky metaphysics teachers criss-crossed the country preaching a new gospel of butterflies and UFOs with little noticeable effect. Then 22 Oregonians disappeared after encountering the couple, and suddenly, 'THE TWO' were headline grabbers, celebrities. As the number of disappearances grew, interest in the twosome intensified. Even NBC's 'TOMORROW SHOW' has invited the pair to appear.

Calling God 'Daddy,' 'Bossy' and 'Chief Of Chiefs', they introduce themselves as 'Shril Pravaha' and 'Shaki Devi' and 'Guinea' and 'Pig,' 'Bonnie' and Herff,' 'Mr and Mrs Joseph Simon,' 'Porky' and 'Pig,' 'Mr and Mrs Starlight,' or 'Bo and Peep,' depending on the occasion.

Their message is that humans can 'flake' away everything human, leave behind all possessions and relationships and go through a process in which they use all of their energy including that formerly used in sex to change into beings of "The next level above human."

When this is finished they will be invited aboard a spaceship by Jesus Christ and whisked to a place where there is no death.



Herff Applewhite, the leader of the HIM Cult photographed as he was way back in 1975.

The twosome claims to be the two witnesses who, according to the eleventh chapter of THE BOOK OF REVELATION, will prophesies for 1,260 days, be killed and rise again.

Recently, the mysterious couple was identified as Bonnie Lu Nettles, an obscure Baptist-raised nurse from Houston, Texas, who reads astrological charts with the reported aid of a long-dead Franciscan monk, and Marshall Herff Applewhite Jr, son of a Spur, Texas., Presbyterian minister and a not-so-obscure former opera singer and music professor.

'Herff' Applewhite graduated from high school in Corpus Christi, Texas, and went on to Austin College to study philosophy. Later, he studied sacred music at Union Theological Seminary and got an advanced degree from the University Of Colorado, where he sang the lead role in Summer productions of OKLAHOMA, SOUTH PACIFIC, and ANNIE GET YOUR GUN. Charles Lauterbach, professor of theatre arts at Boise State College in Idaho, was stage manger for the productions and remembers Applewhite as "seeming to be a very, very stable individual"

After a couple of months as choir director at Presbyterian Pan American School in Kingsville, Texas, Applewhite started a very successful career as an opera singer and symphony soloist in Corpus Christi and Houston.

A 1964 divorce failed to slow his progress, and soon Applewhite was director of choral activities at the University of Alabama, then director of music at St. Andrew's in Houston. He started directing the student choir at the University of St Thomas in 1966 and soon founded the college's music department. There he was known as a very persuasive teacher. "If anyone could talk me into getting into a UFO, it would be Herff Applewhite," a former student reportedly told Sunshine Overkamp, the university's information director.

Clearly, Herff's star was on the rise. But it would not remain in the stratosphere for long. Applewhite left the college after Rev. Patrick O' Braden, the college president, concluded he was "close to a nervous breakdown." Braden had refused Applewhite the job of vice-president in charge of development and "immediately, on the day I told him 'no,' he got considerably worse," Braden said.

Applewhite was later given a year's salary. He went to New York, but soon was in Taos, New Mexico, reportedly operating a sandwich shop. By 1971, he was back in Houston, serving as director of music for the Houston Music Theatre's School, Studio 7.

While much is known of Applewhite, little is known of Bonnie Lu Nettles until she teamed up with Applewhite. According to Herff, they met when he visited a friend in a hospital. They felt an immediate affinity. Applewhite rushed out to his car to get his birth certificate so she could do an astrological chart on him. She then told him she did it with the help of a long-dead Franciscan monk. Later, Herff reports, he saw the monk himself.

They became convinced they had known each other in prior lives and together opened the Christian Arts Centre, where they taught astrology, mysticism, healing, metaphysics, theosophy and comparative religions, as well as musical and artistic instruction. In the 'HOUSTON POST' article announcing the opening of the centre, Herff confided, 'A lot of people are going to say "Old has finally flipped."

Later they reportedly moved in together but "renounced sex in preparation for our journey."

Information for the period between the opening of the centre and their presence in Oregon during the later Summer of 1975 is sketchy and uneven.

Bonnie and Herff began courting spiritual groups first. They started in Corpus Christi in January 1973, according to a Houston woman interviewed by Lynn Simross for the LOS ANGELES TIMES.' The woman admitted that she had spent three months undergoing their Human Individual

Standing At The Threshold Of Heaven's Gate

From the aforementioned advert that happened in 'USA TODAY' on 27th May, 1993:

'The Earth's present "civilisation" is about to be recycled - "spaded under". It's inhabitants are refusing to evolve. The weeds have taken over the garden and disturbed its usefulness beyond repair.

*** The True Kingdom Of God is the "Headquarters" of all that is, a many-membered Kingdom which physically exists in the highest, most distant Heaven - a non-temporal place (outside of time, and with eternal life).

**** The reason the term "true" Kingdom of God is used repeatedly is because there are many space alien races that through the centuries of this civilisation have represented themselves as "Gods." We refer to them collectively as "Luciferians," for their ancestors fell away from the True Kingdom of God many thousands of years ago.

*** These Luciferian space races are the humans' greatest enemy. They hold humans in slavery...They even try to make deals with human governments to permit them (the Luciferians) to engage in biological experimentation (through abductions) in exchange for technically advanced modes of travel - though they very seldom follow through.

** Humans were, from the beginning, given a "prime directive" not to kill other humans. "In defence" or for righteousness are no exceptions. Righteousness is what most frequently causes conflict.

*** A small box at the end of the advert warned;

CAUTION! *If the above information is consumed or assimilated, you may experience such side-effects as loss of marriage, family, friends, career, respectability and credibility. Continued use could even result in the loss of your membership from the Human Race...*

FROM THE 'HIGHER SOURCE' WEB SITE:

*** 'The individuals at the core of our group have worked closely together for over 20 years. We try to stay positive in every circumstance and put the good of a project above any personal concerns or artistic egos. By sustaining this attitude, we have achieved a high level of efficiency and quality in our work...'

AND FROM 'HEAVEN'S GATE' WEB SITE

'The joy is that our Older Member in the Evolutionary Level above human (The Kingdom of Heaven) has made it clear that Hale-Bopp's approach is the 'marker' that we have been waiting for...Our 22 years of classroom here on Planet Earth is finally coming to a conclusion - 'Graduation' from the Human Evolutionary Level. We are happily prepared to leave "this world."

*** Two thousand years ago, upon instruction, a member of the Kingdom of Heaven left behind his body in that Next Level and moved into (or incarnated into) an adult human body (or vehicle) that has been 'prepped' for this particular task. The body that was chosen was called Jesus...Remember the one who was incarnated in Jesus was sent for one purpose only, to say; "If you want to get to Heaven, I can take you through that gate - it requires everything of you."

***We fully desire, expect and look forward to boarding a spacecraft from the Next Level very soon (in our physical

bodies). There is no doubt in our mind that our being 'picked up' is inevitable in the very near future.

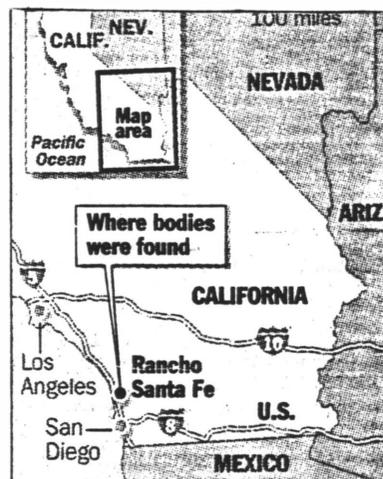
*** Unless you are currently an active student or are attempting to become a student of the present Representative from The Kingdom of Heaven - you are STILL "of the world" having no significant separation from the worldliness, and you are still serving the opposition to the Kingdom of Heaven.'

The signs were there, alright. If anyone had thought to take them half-way seriously, that is.

Unfortunately, the Internet is so jam-packed with messages and hints of impending doom that no one thought to cast more than a cursory glance at the contents of the Web Site. Not even when it was suddenly updated with the statement that Hale-Bopp's appearance meant that their time had come.

Nor did anyone give any degree of credence to what they were being told in the video release from the group featuring Applewhite, now bald-headed, as he beckoned his followers to leave the Earth, and a woman who says she has nothing to live for, and bids the World farewell.

And yet, sometime before Wednesday 26th March, 1997, 39 disciples of the 'Higher Source' cult, their former leader, (who had now changed his name to 'Do') systematically took their own lives by a lethal cocktail of drugs and Vodka.



Any doubts about the motives behind the mass suicide were firmly dismissed when a former cult member received a package containing a video tape and a letter on the Tuesday before the deaths. The letter was actually a warning that read; "By the time you read this, we suspect that the human bodies we were wearing have been found, and that a flurry of fragmented reports have begun to hit the wire services. We'll be gone. Several dozen of us. We came from the Level Above Human in distant space, and we have now exited the bodies that we wearing for our earthly task, to return to the world from whence we came - task completed.'

And on the video, a woman with short-cropped hair sits next to a younger man with a buzz haircut. He sits and occasionally fidgets.

'Maybe they're crazy for all I know, but I don't have any other choice than to go for it because I've been on this planet for 31 years, and there's nothing here for me,' the woman says.

And they are just about the saddest words your humble Editor has ever heard.

When police and medical authorities who arrived at the cult's headquarters in Rancho, Santa Fe, California, they found a scene straight out of a horror film.

They discovered the bodies of 21 women and 18 men, all with closely cropped hair, aged between 20 and 72.

In mid-August, 'THE TWO' visited Victor Boc, moderator of a popular FM-radio talk-show in San Jose.

Boc made a 15-minute tape, felt it was too kooky and destroyed it without ever using it. He then broadcast two other tapes, from Peninsula recruiting meetings. Boc was kidnapped after broadcast and taken to San Francisco. He was reportedly only able to escape when he feigned illness, locked himself in a service station restroom and yelled for help. His abductors fled. The police took the kidnapping quite seriously but were unable to apprehend the kidnapers.

Both abductors claimed to be members of a group who were going to kidnap newsmen and coerce them into espousing the belief in the existence of extraterrestrial spacecraft and the HIM doctrine.

Since August, some converts have drifted back home. Joan Culpepper is in Los Angeles, charging that 'THE TWO' practice 'mental kidnapping'. In addition, she stated that her contacts still with HIM have told her that Bo and Peep are now saying that the whole group will have to be prepared to die, that Daddy has changed his mind...

She also said that while she was with HIM, she was asked to turn over her money into a common fund, which, she believes, may have grown to \$30,000. If this is the case, it certainly was not born out by HIM's recent appearance in Salt Lake City. If they had large caches of money, they were not flashing them. In addition, they charged the sparse Salt Lake City crowds \$5 a head to hear their lecture.

A source told Don West that they were running short of money. These facts either totally dispute Culpepper's charge or lend credence to another point she hinted at in an article in 'THE LOS ANGELES TIMES.' In that story she implied that a former HIM member had absconded with the funds.

When HIM held a meeting on October 20th, 1975, in Oklahoma City, the pair addressed the charges. Hayden Hewes was again on hand to observe the changes that time has inevitably brought.

At that time, Bonnie confirmed the number who left Oregon with HIM as 22 (a magical number according to the cabalists and numerologists - Ed). 'They are out doing their Father's work. They are still on this planet and they are working very hard to make this a better place. They are beautiful children and they are faithful to their Father. They do not commit mass murder or kill themselves. They are all safe and the others who have left their lives behind are all safe and they are doing a beautiful job of spreading the truth,' she said.

The pair went on to deny making any threats against Joan Culpepper's life of the kidnapping of Boc. Herff further denied that the group had ever mutilated cattle. Nor, he said, have they expressly told anyone to abandon their children.

The last thing they would do is mesmerise anyone, the Oklahoma City audience was told. 'Members of that next level would be totally the opposite of aggressive. They would never plant a thought in your mind, influence your mind,' Applewhite explained. Questions from the Oklahoma City audience then turned to elements of their message. When asked if she had actually ridden in a UFO, Bonnie replied, 'Yes, before coming here. We had to come through the birth process in order to function as a human. If we had dropped off a spacecraft, we would not know how to cope with the human mind.'

Another wondered whether one sees Jesus at the next level. To this, Bonnie retorted, 'Do we see Him? He's involved in this work. That's all we can say. We are limited in our knowledge as long as we are here. He's on this trip. He's overseeing it and He will greet you as you leave.'

Will they be killed? 'If they choose to kill us...It is true we will then demonstrate death overcome again if they take that option, and if that happens, we will leave in a craft and the World will witness it,' Herff told the crowd.

When Two Become One

By the close of 1976, Applewhite's dreams of leading mankind along the shining path of salvation had all but died. He had grown increasingly disillusioned with what he saw as the media's misrepresentation of his ideology. It wasn't long before the majority of the cult's membership began to drift away, equally disillusioned. The couple decided to take the loyal remnants underground, out of sight out of mind. 'THE TWO' severed all ties with their loved ones and disappeared from the public's eye.

Sociologists who originally tracked the group estimated that it had shrunk considerably by this time, comprising fewer than 100 stalwarts.

Bonnie Lu Nettles died in 1985, and 'THE TWO' suddenly became one.

In 1992, Applewhite decided it was high time for a cult revival. Calling itself 'HEAVEN'S GATE,' they put aside their self-imposed seclusion and once more took their message to the general public.



They undertook a series of satellite TV broadcast throughout '92, and took out an advertisement in 'USA TODAY' the following year. This included reference to a brief description of the cult's new philosophy, titled; 'Last Chance To Advance Beyond Human.'

They published a book, in which the group said the advert was reprinted in alternative newspapers and publications overaeraa, allowing them to enter into correspondence with a far-flung audience.

In 1994, the group claimed to have sold all its worldly possessions 'except for a few cars and changes of clothing, and set out across country holding free public meetings,' in various cities. News reports from that time suggest this tactic met with mixed results.

Five members who gave a two-hour lecture on the group's philosophy at the University of Chicago in July, 1994, drew only 40 people, some of whom left when a video-tape of Applewhite was shown, according to 'THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE.'

But then, with the coming of the comet Hale-Bopp, 39 members of that group earned everlasting immortality (of a sort) in a mass suicide that shocked most of the World.

Apparently, they'd killed themselves in three separate groups. The second group cleaned up after the first, the third after the second. The last two alive, removed plastic bags from the last seven bodies and then joined their partners in death. Each victim had a packed suitcase at the foot of their bed or cot, and each had \$5 bills and quarters in their pockets. Their personal rubbish had been piled neatly behind the house.

Most of the bodies had identification folded carefully in the pocket of the baggy black shirt they were wearing; drivers licences, birth certificates, even passports.

They were all dressed in black - identical Nike running shoes, long-sleeved shirts and pants.

'It appeared as if it were almost a uniform attire,' said Sheriff's Commander Alan Futner.

All had purple shrouds covering their upper bodies. Computer equipment filled the ~~near~~ bedroom house.

Nick Matzorkis, a Beverly Hills businessman who hired the former cult member who received the farewell letter and the videos was quoted as saying that another member had told him several months earlier that a spaceship following the comet was coming with the express purpose of picking up the faithful.

'They did not say they were going to commit suicide, but they did indicate to me that they would be leaving the planet,'

Matzorkis, president of Interact Entertainment Group, further stated that he and an employee he would only identify as Rio, drove to the cult's mansion on that dreadful Wednesday after opening the package and viewing the tape. They called the police after they made the hideous discovery of the bodies.



Covered with a purple shroud, most of the 'HIGHER SOURCE' victims were found with little pieces of paper containing a suicide recipe. All of them had closely cropped hair, and they were wearing identical black outfits.

'Heaven's Gate' Still Standing Ajar.....

Even more bizarre, was that in the wake of this tragedy, former cult members stated that they were actually envious of the 39.

Nick Cooke, the husband of one of the suicide victims (Suzanne Cooke), and a former cult member himself, told CBS's '60 MINUTES' that he wished he had *'had the strength to remain... To have stuck it out and gotten stronger and continued to be a part of that group.'*

Cooke and other ex-members said that countless other people still have faith in the cult's ideas, including that most incredible of beliefs, the hope that they will be rescued from this life by an alien spaceship.

An editor of a UFO newsletter said he was contacted in the week after the mass suicide by 13 other devotees of the cult known as 'THE GROUND CREW.' They stated that cult leader Applewhite will soon be returning for those he left behind in that fanciful UFO.

Lee Scargel, editor of 'THE GALACTIC OBSERVER' and science-fiction author, said he feared that they may be contemplating suicide *'to join Applewhite'*.

They believed the rendezvous would happen on Easter in the 'Four Corners Area', where Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah meet. They added that another group were fully expecting a further rendezvous on April 24th.

And then there was the even more disconcerting revelation that there are other cults out there who have beliefs not a million miles distant from that of the 'HIGHER SOURCE.'

From San Diego, USA, comes the following report.

In a corner storefront in downtown El Cajon decorated with pastel murals of UFOs, Charles Spiegall holds forth his vision for the future of the Earth.

The approaching millennium means *"We're going into fifth gear,"* says Spiegall, 76, a retired psychology professor at San Diego State who heads the Unarius Academy of Science, a non-profit educational centre. *'We're like a rotor on a motor that's been picking up energy for 150,000 years.'*

The climax, he says, will come when a UFO from the planet 'Myton' will land slap bang in the middle of the infamous (and I thought, thoroughly discredited - Know-all Ed) Bermuda Triangle on a submerged, but soon to rise land mass that was once home to the mythical lost city of Atlantis.

And no one need commit suicide to join with these extraterrestrials, Spiegall says.

'It'll be evident to everyone on Earth. It will be on TV,' he says, warming to the pitch. 'These are humans like us but highly evolved. They came as consultants like the Peace Corps, just to help us join in with the other 33 other Earth-like planets.'

And just how does he know all this, you may ask?

'This is information that has come to me. I've lived on those planets before, millions of years ago.'

Spiegel's predictions match his surroundings. With funding from wealthy donors, he runs the Unarius Centre primarily for people seeking insights into past-life experiences. But UFO buffs are also welcome.

Roman statues and columns stand amid cheap plastic flower garlands draped from the ceiling. Gaudy scale models of Atlantis and futuristic 'crystal' cities vie for space with cut-outs of flying saucers.

Oil portraits of the Glendale, California, couple that founded the academy 43 years ago, Ernest and Ruth Norman, hang high on the walls. Unarius is an acronym for 'Universal Articulate Interdimensional Understanding of Science.'

Ernest Norman, who believed he had lived the life of Jesus, read palms at churches and dance halls during World War 2. He died at the age of 67 in 1971. Or as the academy's literature says; 'he made his transition to a higher plane.'

Ruth Norman believed she was the Biblical Mary as well as Socrates, Charlemagne and Queen Elizabeth I. She ran a cafe and was a clerk at a department store. She died in 1993 at the age of 92.

Around the corner are huge posters of her posing like a beauty queen, with heavy make-up, flowing robes, tiara and royal sceptre. In her '70's, she commissioned a portrait of herself as Mona Lisa., believing she had once been the model for Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece.

The area is a hot-bed of New-Age dogma. Groups promote everything from aromatherapy and self-realisation to past-life experiences and contact with aliens.

'We get the full spectrum,' says Dick Marsden, a sociologist at the University of California, who has studied cults closely. 'People come out here and they like the sun and the surf and they just hang out.'

What has happened in San Diego and elsewhere on the West Coast, Marsden says, is in some ways, a distinctly American trait.

'The U.S. is a place where there is an enormous amount of religious creativity,' he says. 'Because there's no established national church, it's become a spiritual supermarket, and there's a constant bubbling up of entrepreneurs. Most of these are relatively harmless.'

Spiegel says there are 90,000 people on the mailing list for Unarius books and videos and pins. The centre's video programmes have been aired since 1978 on 25 cable stations throughout the USA. Spiegel says that about 500,000 people world-wide have got the Unarius message.

Devotees bristle at any comparisons with the apocalyptic cult 'HEAVENS GATE.'

'We are all living normal lives,' says Marian Keymas, 45, of Chula Vista, California, who has received material from the centre for 20 years and moved to El Cajon seven years ago.

'I defiantly believe there's going to be a landing in 2001, but I'm not making any special plans. I'm just staying positive.'

Keymas, who works with a travel management company, says she saw a UFO 15 years ago in the desert near Victorville, California. 'It was a starship from one of the planets.'

Unarius has predicted other UFO landings, notably one atop a California hillside in 1976, that didn't materialise. If the same result occurs in 2001, Spiegel says, it must mean that Earth isn't ready yet to receive alien visitors.

'They can't land in an inhospitable environment.'

NOW PAY ATTENTION! HERE COMES THE SCIENCE BIT...

Meanwhile, back in what passes for the *real* world, the following scientific facts regarding the illustrious Hale-Bopp, were being bandied about like confetti...

The comet was said to be spewing forth tons of organic chemicals of the type certain scientists believe may have been the building blocks of life itself.

'Most of what we are seeing is water and ice, but there are also plenty of hydrocarbons and organic molecules that you would need for the genesis of life,' said Harold Weaver, at John Hopkins University, an astrophysicist who specialises in comets.

'One of the major new findings from Hale-Bopp is that all of these chemical molecules are erupting from the comet as it heats from the Sun.'

Hale-Bopp, like other comets, is of course, made up of an aggregation of ice, dust and chemicals. A sort of giant, dirty snowball.

One that can fly through the airless vacuum of space at incredible speeds, that is.

Only when a comet approaches the Sun do the ices warm up and send geysers of material streaming away as the comet tail. What makes this comet so special, however, (aside from its penchant for acting as a guide to Earth for gigantic UFO's, and subsequent mass suicides, of course) is its size; 19 to 25 miles in diameter, and the fact that never before in the history of mankind has such sophisticated technology been available to enable us to study a comet passing across the face of the Sun.

'We've never had a chance to examine a comet in this much detail. What makes this comet so special, however, (aside from its penchant for acting as a guide to Earth for gigantic UFO's, and subsequent mass suicides, of course) is its size; 19 to 25 miles in diameter, and the fact that never before in the history of mankind has such sophisticated technology been available to enable us to study a comet passing across the face of the Sun.'

He also stated that comets were thought to have formed near the edge of the Solar System - the outer edges of infinity - an image impossible for the human mind to conceive. They have their origins at the dawn of time itself, alongside the creation of the Earth and the other planets. Because the comets are so very distant from the Sun, they may be composed of the original, unchanged matter that made up the stellar cloud that gave birth to the Sun and the Solar System bodies.

Instruments on telescopes are able to determine the composition of cometary ice by analysing the clouds formed when the ice turns to gas, according to the eminent Mr Weaver.

'By figuring out what ices are in a comet nucleus, we hope to get insight into the physical and chemical conditions at the time of the formation of the Solar System 4.6 billion years ago.'

A humbling thought indeed.

'Studying the composition of comets also helps us to find out and attempt to determine exactly what type of chemicals other comets may once have delivered to the

Earth. They may well be the building blocks for life.' Dale P. Cruickshank, a scientist at the Ames Research Centre of NASA, was quoted in 'SCIENCE' magazine as saying that the chemical analysis of Hale-Bopp supported an emerging idea that comets may have provided the Earth with its water and carbon dioxide and the complex organic material that helped get things started. The findings boost a new paradigm that through cometary messengers from far beyond the planetary region of our Solar System, life on Earth is connected to stardust.

And just a few short days after making this announcement, astronomers then found a third tail behind Hale-Bopp - a thin, straight jet of sodium gas unlike any other seen before. The discovery was made by a team of scientists in the Canary Islands and they were at a complete loss to explain how the tail was created.

And Still They Take 'The Gateway To The Stars...'

Sadly, even as the bodies of the 39 deceased cult members were being laid to rest (their spirits, of course, may well be somewhere else entirely, assuming they haven't got it hopelessly wrong about the comet-UFO), news came down the wires that others had tried to join them in death.

On April, 2nd, a 58-year-old recluse in northern California was found dead in a remote mountain canyon in an apparent copycat suicide.

And then, just a few weeks later, on May 6th, a man believed to be a member of the Heaven's Gate cult also took his own life behind the featureless walls of a Holiday Inn in Encinitas, California. A spokesman for the San Diego County Sheriff's Department was quoted as saying that another man who tried to commit suicide was saved by the police and was being treated in a local hospital.

So that's 41 who's misplaced faith has taken them to some imaginary utopia way beyond the boundaries of planet Earth. That we know about, anyway.

As we rush headlong down the road to the end of the Millennium, we wonder what other terrible deeds will be committed in the name of some less than noble cause...

The only certainty, is that mankind's uncertainty will grow as the clock ticks inexorably towards that mythically magic date...

October, 1975 - May, 1997. 'USA TODAY,' ST. LOUIS POST & DISPATCH,' 'LIVERPOOL ECHO,' 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST,' 'DAILY MAIL,' DAILY TELEGRAPH,' COUD-I.

The Days Of Miracle And Wonder...

The following article appeared within the pages of a throw-away Sunday magazine, alongside the usual writer of True-Life Confessions, emotional hang-ups solved, and adverts for everything from astrological futures foretold to Sex Change salons and 'Hot Babes In Action' videos....

We include sections of the piece here for those you who may have by-passed it, first time around. For those more interested in the porno videos and transsexual clinics may I direct you to the top shelf of your nearest, less-than-reputable newsagent's....

CASE ONE:

A Miracle Cure

Sylvia Blank laughed with delight as she watched the TV ad for of the Andrex puppy rolling around with a loo roll.

But she cried the next day when her husband Louis unravelled a toilet roll too, believing it would make her laugh.

Louis, an intelligent, hard-working man, had been struck down by Alzheimer's disease. He couldn't dress himself, add up figures or remember names and faces.

'The crunch came when I didn't recognise my own daughter,' admits Louis. 'I agreed to see a doctor and my condition was recognised in 1990.'

For Sylvia, 61, it was devastating to see him resort to such childlike behaviour. Especially when experts told her that Alzheimer's - which affects about 450,000 people in Britain - is incurable and progressive.

But Louis, from Rochdale, was not too be beaten. And now, five years later, he's a medical miracle - a fit and healthy 60-year-old who writes books, poetry, cycles 100 miles a week and handles all the household accounts. He has fought - and believes has beaten - Alzheimer's disease.

During his illness, he became unable to swallow solid food and was prone to outbursts of anger and violence. But by following a regime he worked out in the first days after the diagnosis, he has returned to full health.

Louis went to the library and read a textbook that suggested too much mercury and aluminium in the brain can cause Alzheimer's. 'Then I glanced at a book that had been left open on the desk and a sentence leapt out at me; "Magnesium attaches itself to aluminium and the body will automatically expel magnesium," 'The book was called Toxicology, but when I returned to the library, I couldn't find it and haven't found it since. But I felt I'd miraculously been given the key piece of information. My body was awash with aluminium as I'd been swigging a stomach ulcer treatment which contained it.' So Louis eliminated all aluminium from his life - cooking pans, foil food wrap, even deodorants.

He also had his mercury fillings removed and started to take magnesium supplements. 'I worked on the theory that the magnesium would help expel the excess aluminium. There were a few setbacks, but Sylvia kept me going. After two years, we started to see gradual signs of improvement and now I've been completely well for three years.'

CASE TWO:

The Power Of A Prayer

Delma Bowen's grandson had a miraculous escape from death - and Delma believes the uttering of a simple prayer saved him.

In 1991, Lee, then 16, was about to climb into a car with a group of joyriders but at the last possible second, a boy pushed Lee away and scrambled in. Soon after, the car plunged from the Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol, killing all but one of the youths in it.

At the moment that Lee was being pushed aside, Delma was saying a prayer at the top of her voice. For the previous day, Lee's mum had phoned Delma, 65, to say she was worried about Lee as she suspected his friends of smoking cannabis.

'Some church members had told me to try praying out loud, even shouting. So I asked God to show me the right passage in the Bible for Lee, and it fell open at, "Snatch them from the fire,". So I shouted, "Snatch Lee from the fire Lord, and save him from bad friends."

Lee, a student in Bristol lost his best friend in the tragedy. Says Delma, from Weston-Super-Mare: 'The next day Lee came to see me in shock. Although it was terrible for the

families of the other boys, I was so relieved that Lee was safe - and I know prayer power saved him.'

CASE THREE:

Tears Of The Virgin Mary

It is just one of thousands of cheap, mass-produced statues of The Virgin Mary. Yet there is something amazing about the figure Mary Murray keeps in her living room. It all started three years ago when Mary, 81, noticed the robe on the statue had apparently turned a different shade of blue. Then her daughter, Attracta O' Hara, 57, who helps Mary run the post office in Granecon, Co Wicklow, witnessed an equally extraordinary sight.

'She called me into the room and I saw that the statue had red eyes,' says Mary. 'From the left eye a red liquid was trickling. From the right a liquid like tears. They were opening and closing and the figure was moving.'



Mary called friends and word spread until up to 500 people a day came to visit, she says. The statue wept for a few months, now it only happens occasionally. 'It wept in 1996, the night before the bomb went off in London. I believe it's my sacred duty to care for the statue. People have been cured after touching it and one man put a picture of it above his bed and the eyes moved. He had cancer but he's getting better. I don't know why I've been so blessed, but I'm delighted to have brought healing and happiness to so many.'

CASE FOUR:

The Well Of Answered Dreams

Ian White had no idea that the metal object he found at the bottom of a well would help him fulfill a dream. When it was cleaned up, the icon showed a figure of a three-headed pregnant woman, which is an ancient pagan fertility symbol. And nine months to the day after he touched it Ian's wife Sharon gave birth to their first child Emily, after a series of miscarriages.

In the six years since the fertility symbol was found at the bottom of the well on the Isle of Sheppey, Kent, at least 20

babies have been born to couples who have touched it - and who'd previously experienced problems bearing children.

Ian, 36, from Sheerness, was one of the amateur archaeologists who found the well - and was the first person to touch the triple goddess fertility symbol in thousands of years. The couple have since had another daughter, Hannah, now four.

'We can't prove that the fertility goddess had anything to do with it, but it is odd that Emily must have been conceived at the time the symbol was discovered,' says Ian. 'Because I had no idea what the piece of metal was and Sharon didn't know about it at all, there's no question of us being psychologically influenced by it.'

Sharon, 31, had four miscarriages before Emily was born and specialists were baffled: 'I'd started to feel I was never going to have a child,' she admits. Life seemed to revolve around the struggle to have a baby. I almost miscarried Emily but she was born healthy - Perhaps we're being helped by the goddess, I've seen the symbol but I won't touch it - I don't want anymore children!'

The well was discovered on the site of a 6th-Century nunnery near Minster Abbey, by Brian Slade, 62, president of the Sheppey Archaeological Society. His team of enthusiasts began digging in the area in 1990.

'The well goes back to pre-Christian times, but we can't put an exact date on it,' says Brian. 'Near the bottom we found some small beeswax objects. They were broken but when we put them together, we found that they showed the image of a three-headed pregnant woman. Then Ian found the metal object. We think the metal icon was thrown into the well by a wealthy person as an offering to the fertility god. And the beeswax images were thrown in by those with less wealth - but just as determined to have a baby.'

Although the well was capped, the local council are planning to reopen it as a tourist attraction.

Meanwhile, the fertility symbol is kept at Brian's home. Word of its powers has spread and he has often opened the door to anxious couples wanting to touch it.

'I leave them alone with it for a minutes, then sometimes hear they've been successful in having the baby they've wanted. I don't make any claims for the symbol but perhaps we've released some long-forgotten power.'

CASE FIVE:

The Sound Of The Voice

Nine years ago, Tony Budell felt he was of no value to anyone. He'd been divorced twice and had no contact with his two children. He'd lost his home and was sleeping in the cab of the lorry he drove as a long-distance truck driver.

Twice, speeding between Paris and Lyons, he tried to end it all by aiming at a bridge - but straightened the wheel at the last moment. Says Tony, 'I was lonely and loneliness is a like a spring that gets tighter and tighter. You become even more alone.'

Finally, he sat on the Dover seafront thinking how to take his own life. 'I heard a voice. There was nobody around but I heard it again, calling out my name. I knew that it was the voice of God.' He said, 'Tony, I have given everyone a cross to bear.

I will give you the strength to carry other people's crosses and while you do this, I will carry yours.'

Tony cried for two hours and then felt as if two great weights had been lifted from his shoulders.

'My new life started at that moment,' says Tony, 53, who lives in Canterbury, Kent. Nine years on, he works for the charity he set up, British Humanitarian Aid.

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'My new life started at that moment,' says Tony, 53, who lives in Canterbury, Kent. Nine years on, he works for the charity he set up, British Humanitarian Aid.

It runs Convoy Of Hope which helps thousands of orphans and handicapped children in Bosnia, Romania and the Ukraine.

Tony leads lorries carrying tons of aid into Europe's trouble spots. Currently raising money to take 1,000 terminally ill Ukrainian kids on holiday, he's also helping 75 deaf and dumb youngsters living in desperate conditions.

'I met my wife Valerie seven months after bearing God's voice and we've been happily married for seven years. She works full time, so that I can give myself entirely to our real work - helping the kids.

What happened to me is a miracle. From a wasted life, I'm now fulfilled and able to help others.'

CASE SIX:

Let The Music Play...

John Markham had piano lessons as a boy but like most kids, didn't practice and gave it up. And when he sang, his teacher told him he was tone deaf.

For over 50 years, John had no interest in music, but in the past seven, he has written 600 pieces - inspired by the Virgin Mary who, he says visited him after the death of his son Jimmy, 34, in a car crash.

John, 71, a semi-retired Isle Of Wight dentist, says: 'I was lying awake in bed feeling numb, when a tube of light came through the wall and hit me. I felt myself travelling past the Moon and into a tunnel of light. Then I blacked out.

I felt a great peace and was floating down from a great height - I was in Heaven. I was in a beautiful garden and on a bench was a lovely lady. A voice told me that it was the Virgin Mary.'

The vision faded and John woke up later feeling at peace for the first time since Jimmy's death.

'It changed my life,' he says. 'When I woke, I could hear a voice singing "Ransom, Ransom." I had no idea what it meant but I've since found it's another name for Mary.'

John says Mary sings to him three times a week and he writes the songs down. 'I've gone from knowing nothing about music to writing hymns. But I'm not the composer - they're sent from Heaven.'

CASE SEVEN:

From The Brink Of Death To A New Life

The propeller slashed through the water a few millimetres from Fiona Nicholson's face. Trapped in its wash, she cried: 'Please don't let me die.'

A second later, the speedboat turned and Fiona, from Exmouth, pushed herself away to escape.

'But as I tried to swim away, I found that I couldn't use my right leg,' shudders Fiona, 30, who sustained wounds that needed 100 stitches. An inch higher and she'd have lost her leg. But the accident has had an enormous impact on her life. 'I'd been feeling miserable for some time,' says Fiona. 'But when I stared death in the face, I knew I had to build a new life.'

I now work as a counsellor for young people with problems - it puts everything into perspective and made me realise that life is worth fighting for.'

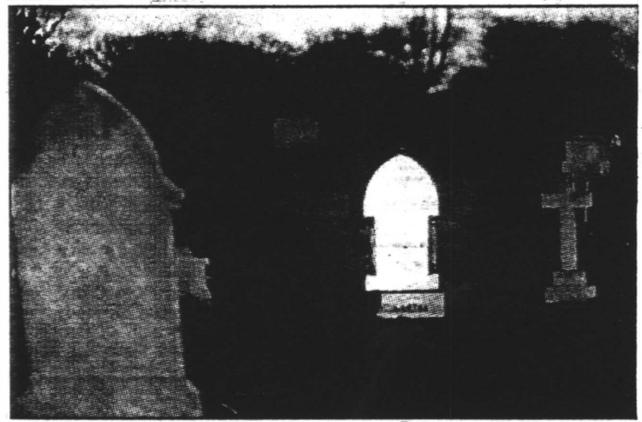
December, 1996. 'SUNDAY MIRROR MAGAZINE'

THE MYSTERY OF THE GLOWING GRAVE

According to accounts in the national press, the grave stone of a former soldier in Wingate, Co Durham, has been seen to glow with a 'strange, supernatural light'.

Proof, if it were needed that we live in less than reverent times, was provided by the locals who rather than gaze upon the phenomena with a suitable degree of awe and wonder, decided instead to promptly jot down the figures carved on the gravestone to use them in the National Lottery.

The gravestone began revealing its luminosity early in 1997, and as news of the phenomenon has spread, the predictable hordes of gawkers have begun arriving in their hundreds.



(Above): A photograph purporting to show the mysterious 'Glowing Grave Of Wingate Village. Ghostly phenomena or plain old light reflection?

Jackie Newton, 31, runs a pizza parlour directly opposite the cemetery, and was quoted as saying: 'It's done wonders for business because the street outside is so busy. Some people think the numbers will win the Lottery and copy them down. I saw one man who was so stunned he ran home and dragged his wife out to see, even though she was wearing her dressing gown and slippers.'

Even the police were admitting to being baffled as to the cause of the glow. Sgt Paul Ewart, of Durham police said 'The mysterious gravestone has become a big talking point in the village of 3,000. Before we knew about it we might have been tempted to breathalyse anyone who came to report it'

The gravestone is a memorial to Corporal George Henry Longstaff of the 18th Hussars who was killed in action on the Western Front in March 1918.

The priest at in charge at Wingate, near Peterlee, the Reverend Martin Valzey, doesn't think that there is anything remotely ghostly about the illuminated gravestone. He has a rather more prosaic explanation: 'It is very impressive but I'm afraid there is a rational, down-to-earth explanation. There is a streetlight or security light to a house whose reflection is caught by the gravestone at a particular angle. If you stand in the right place near the wall it appears to be glowing. It is so bright I can understand why people might think it was illuminated.'

But I can assure you there is nothing other-worldly about it.'

5th March, 1997. *Whitage, Co Durham. 'DAILY EXPRESS'*

The Crying Virgin Of Civitavecchia-A Bloody Hoax?

At the time of going to press, real doubt was being cast upon the claims of Bishop Girolamo Grillo, that a statue of the Virgin Mary had wept human blood into his hands.

Girolamo was furious about the allegations that he had hoaxed the whole thing. He said; 'I didn't believe such a thing could happen. I was only convinced when it started to cry into my own hands.'

The Italian town is now firmly split between the believers who accept unquestioningly that the tears of blood are real and are a sign from God, and the sceptics who are equally certain that the story was dreamed up to help inject cash from the faithful into a severely depressed area.

As thousands of pilgrims flocked to the town, the 'unbelievers' were calling loudly for Bishop Grillo to take the dreaded ~~lie~~ detector tests. There was no news as to whether he had agreed to be subjected to the said tests, which of course, are never entirely foolproof anyway.



The 15 inch, white plaster figure was bought from the Bosnian town of Medjugorje, a site famous for its visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary since 1981. (There are even those who believe that the BVM gave warnings - that tragically went unheeded - of the coming civil war that would engulf the entire region that then incorporated the former Yugoslavia). The statue sparked off a bout of

religious fervour when, two years ago, a young girl claimed that she had seen blood in its eyes.

Soon after, a further fifty witnesses came forward to confirm that they too seen the weeping miracle - including the mayor, the traffic warden and two policemen.

And top forensic experts gave some degree of credence to the claims when they announced that after carrying out a body scan on the figure at Rome's Gemelli Hospital that the red streaks on is in fact *male* blood.

One scientist, Professor Angelo Flore, said; 'It is unlikely to be a hoax.'

And a religious commission was reported to have concluded on February 15th, this year, after hearing 14 meetings and 15 eyewitness accounts of the Crying Virgin. Its report was due to go to the Vatican's Doctrinal Department before a miracle could be officially declared.

Meanwhile, the stream into Civitavecchia of hundreds of pilgrims continued unabated. The religious tourist boom is putting much-needed cash into the depressed area, adding fuel to the cynics fire that this is all nothing but a well-meaning scam aimed at making money for the needy.

There are plans afoot to open up two hotels, a religious sanctuary and a new shopping centre in the town.

16th February, 1997. *Civitavecchia, Italy. 'THE SUNDAY PEOPLE'*

THE DOOMSDAY BOY

Vera Zaitseva has a four-year-old son named Ilya who, according to the Sunday Tabloids, has a rare gift or a curse, depending on how you look at it.

What the reports refer to as 'an intense little boy with haunting blue eyes and a shock of golden hair,' is apparently constantly predicting some terrible catastrophe every time he picks up a crayon and sets about drawing. 'All his drawings are tortured visions of hell.'

His mother, Vera, readily admitted; 'We're all scared of him. He seems to want my daughters to die and he has turned all our relatives against him. He's only four, but he has become master of my house.'

Doors are always locked and the curtains drawn at the family apartment in the southern Russian city of Georgievsk.

The only people who visit are said to be strangers - inexorably drawn like moths to the flame by the tales of the so-called 'Baby Prophet.' They are hoping against hope that he may be able to provide them with the answers to life's insoluble problems, detect missing relatives or predict the result of a less than certain gamble

Ilya is said to have already predicted the death of two relatives, the jailing of his father, plus a series of fatal accidents and, just for good measure, a whole bunch of major world disasters.

He seems to possess the power to read people's minds, whether they like it or not. On the positive side, he has apparently managed to locate up to 15 missing persons.

Grandmother Katerina, 73, said; 'Doctors told Vera she was carrying triplets because she was so large. Ilya weighed more than 11lb at birth and had the longest white hair you've ever seen. One night I was at home, talking about Ilya, when the phone went. It was Vera screaming; "Stop talking about Ilya. He knows what you're thinking."

The wonder-baby could reportedly speak coherent sentences at nine months, and began to make predictions about accidents and disasters that always seem to come true. Last October, he drew a picture of a blood-stained young woman in a crash, saying; "Olga has a bang, bang." Two days later, Vera heard that her sister Olga had died in a car accident.

Another morning, the 'Baby Prophet' woke up crying at 6am and shouted; "Dead man in the house!"



(Above): What truly lies behind this child's eyes? Ilya Zaitseva - 'Baby Prophet' with a penchant for predicting the disastrous future, or merely the victim of ignorance and superstition???

Next day, Vera learned that her husband's father had died. Ilya, who can already speak five languages, hates his teenage sisters and (gulp) hisses whenever their names are mentioned.

Asked to explain his apparent powers Vera can offer up a mental shrug and say; "His potential is frightening. I just hope he uses it to do good."

23rd March, 1997. Georgievsk, Russia. *SUNDAY PEOPLE.*

Of Crucifixes And Talking Mango's

Following a report that a crucifix shape had appeared in the frosted glass of a bathroom window in Louisiana, the police have been forced to run regular patrols around Warren Ougel's house, just to keep the crowds at bay.

16th February, 1997. Louisiana, USA. *SUNDAYMANC.*

*** Meanwhile, over in India, thousands of civilians were reported to be flocking to worship a talking mango tree. Disciples of the tree claim that they heard it distinctly screech the word; 'Stop,' when a lumberjack foolishly tried to cut it down.

26th February, 1997. India. *DAILY EXPRESS.*

WHEN FATE TURNS ITS BACK...

Luckless In Crime

In Andover, New Jersey, Paul Stiller, 47, and his wife, Bonnie, 38, were slightly injured after attempting to light a stick of dynamite whilst still in their car. They tried to throw it out the second it was ignited, but unfortunately for them they forgot to open the window first. Not surprisingly, the police later discovered that the couple had been drinking.

1st October, 1996. Andover, New Jersey. *USA TODAY.*

*** A gang who spent the whole night trying to bore their way into a bank vault in Chon Buri, Thailand, were blissfully unaware that it had been closed down for business three years earlier.

19th January, 1997. Chon Buri, Thailand. *SUNDAY PEOPLE.*

*** Otto Beck was dealt a literal hammer-blow of fate after he was ordered to pay £500 compensation for smashing up his wife's car with a hammer.

Just to add to the fun and frolics, he later discovered that the car wasn't, in fact, his wife's after all.

16th March, 1997. Hamburg, Germany. *SUNDAY PEOPLE.*

*** Burglar Torge Czar managed to drown himself in a huge vat of spinach after he'd tunneled into a food factory in the middle of Warsaw. He had thought he was breaking into a nearby jewellery store.

30th March, 1997. Warsaw, Poland. *SUNDAY PEOPLE.*

*** Burglar Anton Schetz was arrested at a Johannesburg millionaire's home after sliding down banisters and impaling himself on a 12-inch splinter.

23rd March, 1997. Johannesburg. *SUNDAYMAIL.*

*** Car thief Carlos Rabbem definitely picked the wrong motor when he stole a Ferrari in Mexico. It belonged to the local police chief and within a paltry 12 minutes of joy-riding, he found himself cornered by a total of five patrol cars.

26th January, 1997. Tampico, Mexico. *SUNDAYMANC.*

*** After leaping from the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, Barry Mason broke his ankle when his parachute failed to open properly.

And to cap it all, he was then arrested, limping no doubt, for trespass.

16th January, 1997. San Francisco, USA. *SUNDAY PEOPLE.*

*** And finally, for this section, trucker Boris Kalush somehow drowned himself after trying to drink the beer direct from the tanker he was driving. Police later found him in Siberia with his legs sticking out from under the inspection cover.

THAT DREADFUL SINKING FEELING: A BOUT OF PLAIN OL' BAD FORTUNE

Clarence Jackson Jr., 23, showed up at Connecticut's lottery competition headquarters with a \$5.8 million lottery ticket....

Unluckily for him, (but doubtless providing a source of jealousy-inspired amusement for the rest of us) he did not manage to pick up his winnings. He unwittingly missed the deadline for the jackpot by a mere three days.

18th October, 1996. Connecticut, USA. *USA TODAY.*

*** And over in Greenville Mississippi, Richard Hill burned down an amazing combination of items, including his garage, 2 cars and much of his house whilst he was trying to destroy a peaky yellow jacket nest.

25th September, 1996. Greenville, Mississippi, USA. *USA TODAY.*

*** A pyramid made from 21 million toys exploded when fireworks, launched in celebration of the achievement, crashed straight into the model in Taiwan.

26th January, 1997. Taiwan. *SUNDAY PEOPLE.*

*** A party of less-than-successful clairvoyants from South-west France excitedly travelled 400 miles to their convention in Paris.

Pity for them they didn't have the foresight to see that it had in fact taken place a whole week earlier.

plane in Colombia spent two weeks looking in completely the wrong mountain range. When they finally discovered the right one, they had to be rescued themselves after they were severely injured by a pack of wild pigs.

16th February, 1997. Colombia, South America, 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** A jilted wife decided to end it all by offering herself as an impromptu meal for the tigers in a safari park in Springfield, Missouri.

Well, she must have been some kind of disgustingly ugly, because even the big cats ignored her. In her defence, they had just been fed.

18th March, 1997. Missouri, USA. 'DAILY SLUR.'

You'll Die Laughing...

A convicted murderer named Lawrence Baker, 47, was perhaps a victim of Divine Retribution after he was electrocuted when sitting on a metal toilet seat while listening to a TV with home-made headphones.

Officials at the prison in Pittsburgh blamed bad wiring in the headphones, but you can't help thinking that someone up there decided to administer an eye-for-an-eye style of justice...

3rd January, 1997. Pittsburgh, USA. 'USA TODAY.'

*** Fire killed at least 110 disciples who'd gathered to seek the blessing of a dead Hindu guru in eastern India on 25th February. Another 165 were injured when the blaze swept through the makeshift huts near Baripuda.

26th February, 1997. Baripuda, eastern India. 'DAILY MANC.'

*** Fernando Moura, bled to death after a fainting barber accidentally slit his throat. New York hairdresser Adriano Picarra, 55, collapsed while shaving the hapless Fernando, 42, with a straight razor and it cut right into his jugular vein.

12th March, 1997. New York, USA. 'DAILY SLUR.'

*** A Russian blacksmith was killed when an artillery shell he had unwittingly used as an anvil for over 10 years suddenly decided to blow up as he hammered it. He thought the shell was a dummy.

17th March, 1997. Moscow, Russia. 'DAILY MAIL.'

*** Farmer John Osbourne, 51, decided to rig up a booby trap for would-be burglars in Holtsville, New Mexico. He intended to use guns to blow away any trespasser who was foolish enough to enter his property.

Unfortunately, he stumbled home one night after a goodly session on the ale and clean forgot about the booby-trap trip-wires. The trap worked just fine...And he blasted himself to death. 'John got shot to pieces,' said the local police, somewhat unnecessarily, you may feel.

23rd, February, 1997. Holtsville, New Mexico. 'SUNDAY MANC.'

STRANGE DAYS IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM:

WHALES AND DOLPHINS IN MASS SUICIDE?

From the secluded, rock-strewn coves of Cornwall, to the sandbanks of Belgium and the fjords of New Zealand, the cruel sea seems to be transmitting a dreadful message to a passively indifferent mankind...

Mass stranding of dolphins and whales are becoming more prevalent and the all-too few environmentalists who care a fig are theorising that these tragic incidents are Nature's

way of ringing the alarm bells at the gross over-exploitation by man.

Some are even taking the theory to its most sinister extremes...They are saying that maybe, just maybe, what we are witnessing is the systematic death wish of an entire species.

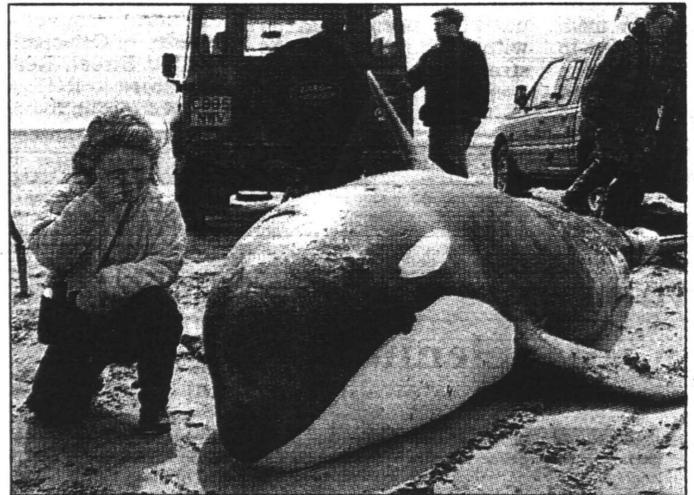
If you think that's a little on the scare-mongering, extreme side, well consider this. In January this year alone, 30 dolphins were found stranded in one area of Cornwall. Since then, over 400 others have been discovered washed ashore like so much discarded refuse, all along the coast of France.

In the past two years Sperm Whales have been stranded on the beaches of Belgium - the first to be washed up in any numbers there since 1762.

It gets worse.

You have to consider too the mass deaths of hundreds of Bottle-Nosed Dolphins on America's Eastern Seaboard and in the Gulf Of Mexico, Striped Dolphins in the Mediterranean and Common Dolphins in the Black Sea. In the Southern Hemisphere, whale stranding are becoming increasingly commonplace, and everywhere their plight has sparked frantic, though usually futile rescue bids. And certain scientists have now begun to wonder whether the animals are carrying out these acts deliberately.

Mark Simmonds, of the Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society, in Bath, was quoted as saying; 'Individual strandings are mainly the result of illness or injury. The animals either cannot navigate or swim properly and accidentally come ashore. It is even possible that they may choose to strand themselves as a response to their condition. Some scientists have talked about whales committing suicide to escape illness or stress - but there is no hard evidence.'



(Above): If only we all possessed the compassion of a child. A young girl weeps at the sight of a dead Killer Whale stranded on a beach in Kent

Mr Simmonds however, is of the belief that it is the very sea itself which is enduring a terrible, agonisingly slow death due to man's constant pollution of the waters, rather than cetaceans choosing to die ashore.

The mystery of the Belgian Sperm Whales at least, may be solved by looking at their normal habitat - the depths of the deepest oceans. The initial warnings were heralded in 1988 and then in 1990, when large numbers of these whales were spotted dead off Europe and Scandinavia.

But since then, the strandings appear to have accelerated - including 11 on Orkney in December, 1994, six near Aberdeen early in 1996 and 16 males ashore in Denmark three months later.

Mr Simmonds believes the whales may have got stuck in the North Sea, which is too shallow and where food is rather scarce. 'The North Sea is a whale trap. It is like

humans driving up a cul-de-sac. The dolphins dying off America and in the Mediterranean were nearly all affected by the morbillivirus. But they were also carrying a heavy pollution burden which had suppressed their immune systems.'

He believes the fishing industry is to blame for January's abnormally high death toll off Cornwall and France. Many dolphins were mutilated by nets and drowned in them - a slow death for an animal that can stay underwater for long periods without needing air. Others may swim ashore because of flawed navigational systems. Experts believe that in the deep ocean, the cetaceans follow the Earth's electro-magnetic field in the same way as homing pigeons. And Mr Simmonds feels that; 'On UK beaches, strandings occur on those unusual shores where lines of equal magnetic force meet the coastline at right angles. These animals are misled by these abnormalities and follow them ashore with potentially disastrous consequences.'

Further support for the theory comes from the discovery of crystals of magnetite - which can sense a magnetic field - in the brain and skull of some cetaceans.

If the animals are in a large group their leader gets disorientated, swims ashore, and they all tragically follow like lemmings, to their doom. As long as the leader is stranded, no amount of work by human rescuers will persuade the others to go back to the sea. That's some sense of loyalty.

Pollution, sea disturbance and overfishing are all thought to be behind the mass decline of Britain's two commonest cetaceans. A Whale And Dolphin Conservation Society report published in March of this year, claimed that harbour porpoises and Bottlenose Dolphins are in rapid decline at it called for British waters to be turned into a whale and dolphin sanctuary, with a law to ban anyone harming them. Cowboy "whale-watching trips", humans swimming with dolphins and driving jetaks at the animals, would become crimes.

Jeezly ol' crow, why aren't they already???

However, as an article in the 'DAILY EXPRESS' pointed out recently, 'it all adds up to a very bleak picture for the world's cetaceans as they continue their eternal fight for survival in the face of intensifying human threats.

The one piece of good news is that, when people succeed in refloating stranded whales, the success rate can be highly encouraging. In New Zealand, where most stranded whales are fit and merely lost, up to 90 per cent survive.

4th March, 1997. *General*. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

The Amorous Whale

And speaking of whales, a story in a far lighter vein comes courtesy of a Norwegian fisherman Sverre Flem. He was fishing in his 34ft boat when a 50ft whale suddenly approached him and began rubbing up against the hull. In what were quite obviously misplaced romantic overtures, it then began what can only be described as a courtship dance. Sverre, 76, claimed it became so passionate about the object of its desire, it threatened to capsize the boat at one stage, and the frightened sailor started up his motor and made off as fast as he possibly could.

3rd April, 1997. *Norway*. 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST.'

Missing Elephants In Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's president Chandrika Kumaratunga, has ordered his police force to track down a herd of elephants that have somehow gone missing from Buddhist temples. You might be forgiven for thinking it was damn near impossible to lose an entire herd of pachyderms, but reports have been circulating that they have been stolen from the faithful and were being kept as pets in the homes of powerful businessmen and politicians.

The Sri Lankan elephant is an officially endangered species and may only be kept in Buddhist temples or nature preserves.

A complaint filed with the president said businessmen and politicians who serve as trustees of Buddhist temples had taken elephants for themselves. Seven elephants were known to be missing, but apparently the number could well be higher. Every Summer, temples across the country send their elephants to a religious celebration in Kandy, 60 miles east of Colombo.

But this year, custodians of the Temple Of The Tooth, which is said to contain a tooth of the Lord Buddha Himself, complained that not enough elephants could be found to make up a parade to honour the said tooth.

4th August, 1996. *Colombo, Sri Lanka*. 'ST. LOUIS POST & DISPATCH'

MUTANT ANIMALS



THE CROAK OF MANY COLOURS

Reports of orange frogs have continued to come in from all over the world...Including Britain. Colours as diverse as yellow, pink, peach cream, and even white are not unheard of, but scientists at first thought the sightings of orange frogs in Truro, Cornwall, three years ago were mere freaks of nature. But now, a study of 124 ponds around the length and breadth of the country have shown examples of frogs throwing their usual high levels of caution to the proverbial winds as they take on a variety of shades.

Three multi-coloured frogs were recorded.

And although unusual, there is apparently a thoroughly scientific explanation. Cornwall Wildlife Trust researcher Mark Nicholson, who led the study, says the frogs are albinos with no true skin pigmentation. They assume different colours according to their genetic make-up.

The puzzle for naturalists however, is how so many albino frogs are able to survive. With no dark pigments to help them absorb the sun's warmth, their development is slow and stunted.

An inability to blend with surroundings is obviously out of the question when you're coloured bright orange, or shocking pink. Thus it follows, that it makes them extremely easy prey for would-be predators.

Mr Nicholson was suitably impressed by the frog's survival rate;

'It's a huge achievement for them, given the low survival rate of normal camouflaged common frogs.'

Of the ponds known to sustain brightly-coloured frogs, more than a third - 47 - are in Devon and Cornwall. There are 40 in the remainder of Southern England, 27 in the Midlands and Wales and only ten in the North of England and Scotland.

Mr Nicholson said; 'I believe the warmer south enhances the chances of the albino. Global warming may also be improving their survival rate.'

12th March, 1997. Great Britain. 'DAILY MAIL'

SOLVED - THE MYSTERY OF THE 'GOLD-DIGGING ANTS.'

A 2,500 year-old fable of 'gold-digging ants' is now believed to actually refer to marmots burrowing in gold-bearing sands high in the Himalayas, according to a French explorer.

Michael Peissel said he had spotted the mountain rodents on a rare expedition to the Karakoram Mountains of Balistan, a remote region disputed by India and Pakistan.

He said the Greek historian Herodotus first reported 25 centuries ago that natives of a mysterious region collected gold brought by 'ants bigger than foxes and smaller than dogs.'

Peissel, 59, said he was first tipped 13 years ago that the region concerned could be the 3,150-metre-high Balistan Plain of Dansar. But he obtained permission only last year to visit the restricted military area. He said he observed the rodents and the presence of strata of gold-bearing sand one metre underground. 'It the dark, gold-bearing sand that the 'Mountain Ants', as Marmots were called in ancient Persian, brought to the surface and that the local Minaro people collected 2,500 years ago and still quite recently,' Peissel said.

27th November, 1996. Karakoram Mountains, Himalayas. 'THE TORONTO STAR'

NEW THEORY OF HOW INSECTS STAY ALOFT

Scientists have never before been able to explain how it is moths, wasps and other flying insects manage to stay airborne.

You only have to look at the common, workman-like bumblebee, busily dashing from flower to flower in the long green light of a July afternoon, to wonder how it is these cumbersome-looking creatures can remain in the air.

A recent issue of 'NATURE' carried an article that may help explain the mechanics involved. Scientists who have harnessed moths with tiny leashes say that the insects create a whirling cylinder of air above their wings that provides lift.

'It's as close as we've come to explaining it,' says Charles Ellington, a Cambridge University zoologist.

To solve the enigma, Ellington and his redoubtable colleagues studied hawkmoths with a wingspan of about 4 inches. In an experiment, hawkmoths were snared in a loop of thread to keep them in the breeze from a wind tunnel.

The wind contained thin streams of smoke to show how the air flowed over the wings, and researchers took 1,000 pictures a second with a video camera. The telltale evidence appeared just above and behind the front edge of the wing where the moth flapped down. The layer of air curled up into a cylinder, which created low pressure that sucked the top of the wing upward.

The next step was to show how insects produce this air cylinder. To do that, Ellington built a mechanical moth

with a 3-foot wingspan. He found that if you tilt the wings so that the back edge is lower than the front edge, you get great lift....For a moment.

The problem is that a rolled-up cylinder of air quickly grows until it breaks free of the wing.

Ellington and his colleagues found that insects use the same strategy, but with a trick that prolongs the precious time of lift. The cylinder of air continuously slips toward the wingtip, which apparently keeps it from growing too big.

19th December, 1996. General. 'NATURE MAGAZINE'

ALFIE-THE REAL CAT BURGLAR...

The Cornish town of Mousehole was recently suffering a spate of bizarre burglaries, with the only clue being that all the victims' houses had catflaps. Small, inconsequential items were taken from a whole row of coastguard cottages in the quaint fishing village.

It didn't exactly take Sherlock Holmes to work out that the burglar here was obviously not human, and suspicion soon fell on a two-year-old tabby named Alfie. It seems the avaricious moggy is overly fond of other cat's toys as well as socks, scarves, baseball caps, beads and bin bags.

His embarrassed owner Mrs Pat Smith, was quoted as saying; 'He's a wicked boy. He started when he was just a few months old. He was a juvenile delinquent. I've never bought him any toys. There's no point really. Alfie is a lovely cat, it's just that he can't stop pinching things. (Working for a Merseyside firm of solicitor's, as I do, I know hundreds of mothers who say exactly the same about their human kids - Cynical Ed). 'The neighbours take it all in good heart, luckily. I will have to hold an Aladdin's Cave-style event so that people can see if Alfie has taken their stuff.'

Alfie's greatest triumph to date, was stealing a teddy bear bigger than himself - although ol' butter-claws dropped it in a garden because it was too big to drag over a garden wall.

Jill Prodder, the luckless bear's owner, said; 'Alfie operates just like a professional cat-burglar. He cases the joint, circumvents the security designed to keep him out and strikes when nobody is watching. We have fitted a magnetic cat-flap so our cats can push their way out but Alfie can't push in. Alfie has figured out how to open the flap enough to get one paw under. He has woken us up in the night, battering his way in.'

28th February, 1997. Mousehole, Cornwall. 'DAILY MAIL'

...AND A CAT WHO'S INTO CRIME-PREVENTION

Perhaps Mrs Podger should think about employing Georgie, the grey and white feline, who apparently has a penchant for felling thieves who enter houses in the dead of night...

Georgie ran pell mell up the stairs and jumped on his owner's bed, meowing loudly in Rosemary Povey's ear, after a burglar broke into their house in Dereham, Norfolk. When she failed to awaken, he even resorted to brushing her head with his paw. Shocked into wakefulness, Mrs Povey, 54, ran downstairs in time to see the burglar fleeing from her home, doubtless alerted by the sound of her feet descending the stairs.

Ironically, Aimee, the family guard-dog, slept soundly throughout the incident. Nothing was stolen and Rosemary, not surprisingly, hailed Georgie a complete hero.

'He deserves a medal,' she said.

6th February, 1997. Dereham, Norfolk. 'DAILYMANC.'

*** Meanwhile, over in Australia, a wallaby, who'd been rescued from a car crash, managed to return the favour when he saved a farmer from a raging inferno. The farmer's house had caught ablaze and the wallaby banged his bedroom door furiously with his tail until the farmer awoke and, together with the grateful wallaby, was able to make good his escape.

10th December, 1996. Perth, Australia. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

Low - Flying Pig Sighted Over Nottingham

Police were understandably baffled when a driver, apparently sober, dialled in a 999 report that a low-flying pig had shot through the air with the greatest of ease (or with as much ease as a snuffling porker can muster) before his very eyes.

The driver, who equally understandably, has chosen to remain anonymous, assumed it had fallen off the back of a farm vehicle. It was later found waddling and slightly bruised along a road near Newark, Notts. Despite an appeal by the police, no one had come forward to admit owning the pig, at the time of going to press.

3rd March, 1997. Newark, Nottinghamshire. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

THE BIRDS WHO HAVE NOTHING LEFT TO CROW ABOUT

For decades, scientists have puzzled over the mystery of why most male birds evolved without penises.

According to another of those new zoological studies, it is because female birds preferred their partners with nothing much in the way of (ahem) reproductive tackle.

Millions of years ago, the ancestors of the Sparrow and Budgie had sexual organs similar to other animals. But after generations of females choosing partners with smaller and smaller penises, they simply shrivelled up and disappeared.

Today, only a handful of the larger bird species still have external sexual organs. Most males have an internal chamber called a cloaca which secretes sperm.

Birds reproduce through a 'cloacal kiss' - where males and females brush together in an act which rarely lasts more than a second. Females then draw the sperm into their bodies where it is stored for weeks until needed.

The study, published in the magazine 'NEW SCIENTIST', says this gives a hen complete control over which sperm reaches her eggs. She can reject poor quality partners, and cannot of course, be sexually overpowered.

'There is a lot of conflict between males and females when it comes to breeding,' said Zoologist Dr. James Briskie. 'We believe that over evolutionary time, male birds have lost this battle.'

Dr Briskie also believes that the reason birds lost the penis, and mammals didn't, lies in the unique way eggs are produced.

A female produces one egg a day over the laying period. If she is unhappy with a father she can abandon the egg and within 24 hours produce a new one, fertilised by a better quality father.

But gestation in mammals takes so much time and effort it is not worth aborting a foetus, even if the father doesn't pass muster. This, thankfully, means that there is no danger of this happening to humans at some point in the distant future. Just as well. What would we men have to

write to the medical problem pages about, if that were to happen?

Dr. Briskie continues; 'Of course, individual birds are not making these decisions - we are talking about tendencies that emerge over millions of years of evolution.'

Most birds, which still retain a penis, tend to be large birds such as geese, ducks and swans. In these species, the female can be less choosy. Her eggs are small compared to her body size and so dumping fertilised eggs is less wasteful.

6th March, 1997. 'NEWSCIENTIST.'

*** The Warbler, on the other hand, has a lot to get excited about, it seems.

Scientists believe that the tiny bird has managed to develop its own method of genetic engineering, an ability that stems from the Warbler's somewhat unorthodox family set-up.

While young males can't wait to fly the nest, the female birds stay with their parents for a couple of years, helping to raise future generations. This extended family can be a blessing - but only if food is plentiful.

When supplies of insects are scarce, the female offspring becomes unwanted competition for food. Researchers have stated in 'NATURE' magazine that the adults can sometimes alter the gender of the young in the egg long before they hatch, to suit the prevailing conditions.

In territories where food is thin on the ground, 77 out of 100 eggs will hatch into males. But when the birds live in food-rich zones, there is an 87 per cent chance that they will have females.

If breeding pairs move from good territories to bad ones, the sex ratio of their future offspring switches to suit the conditions. The Seychelles Warbler is the only species where the sex ratio depends so strongly on the environment. Dr Patricia Gowaty, behavioural ecologist at the University of Georgia, said; 'It is the most dramatic sex ratio that has been found for birds. It is an amazing thing. But we still don't know how the birds do it.'

One theory, currently doing the rounds, is that the mother's ovulation is affected by diet. Another is that the selection takes place shortly after conception when the cells that determine sex are formed. The Warblers live exclusively on Cousin Island in the Seychelles where they were studied by Dutch researchers.

A breeding pair stays in the same territory for up to nine years before moving home. Because there are so few birds - only 320 were recorded in 1988 - the scientists were able to watch almost every one before arriving at their somewhat intriguing conclusion.

16th March, 1997. Cousin Island, Seychelles. 'NATURE'

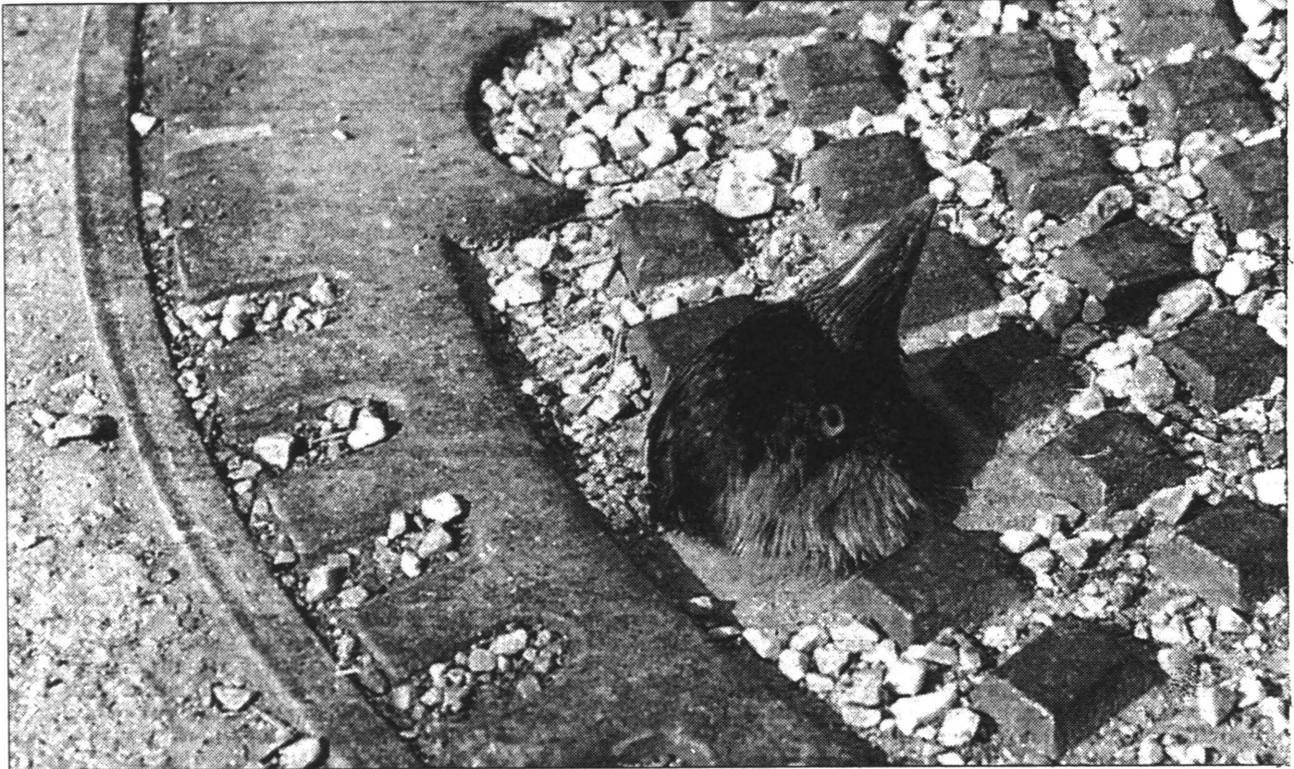
JEEZLY CROWS - A GOLF-BALL STEALER

Jonathan Marsden was delighted when he struck a bell of a 180-yard shot to within 10ft of the flag. He was standing there, admiring his shot in a moment of personal congratulation, when suddenly, and seemingly from out of nowhere, a large crow swooped down and took the ball away in his beak. Jon, who was in the company of three friends, stood there a while longer, in open-mouthed astonishment. 'You wouldn't have believed it without seeing it with your own eyes,' he said later. Officials at Waterton Park Golf Club, Wakefield, West Yorkshire, had to get out the dusty old rule book to decide whether or not a crow stealing the ball constituted a claim for the ball being lost.

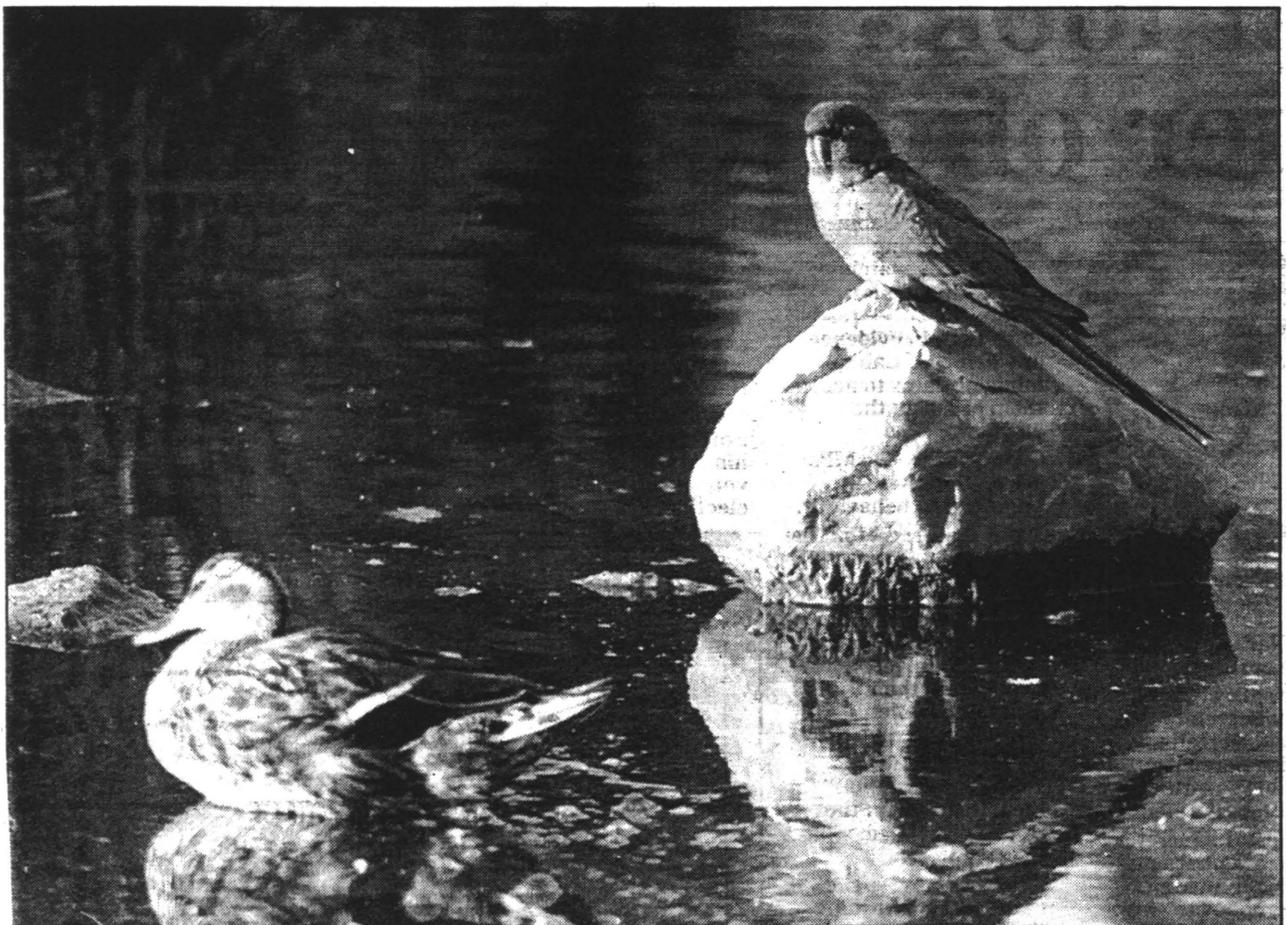
The eventually ruled, that the ball could be replaced, but Jon, doubtless still stunned at the actions of the (ahem) birdie, failed to win his monthly medal contest.

5th March, 1997 Wakefield, West Yorkshire. 'DAILY SLUR'

A Right Pair Of Bird Brains



(Above): A Jackdaw attempts to free itself through a manhole cover in Klagenfurt, Austria, after somehow getting itself trapped, head-first in the city's sewerage system. Luckily for the bird, it was eventually rescued by firemen. 8th March, 1997. Klagenfurt, Austria. 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST.'



For two years, Billy, the duck-loving parrot, has chosen to live with the wildfowl at a quarry in Cullercoats on Tyneside. No one knew where he originally came from, but the ducks seemed to accept him as one of their own. The orphaned bird delighted in hopping from rock to rock making loud quacking noises. Now, sadly, the parrot who thought he was a duck seems to have disappeared without trace. Some local wag quipped; 'Perhaps he tried to go for a swim and realised he wasn't a duck after all' 23rd March, 1997. Cullercoats, Tyneside. SCOTTISH SUNDAY POST.'

THE ANIMALS STRIKE

BACK: PART NINE



RAGING BULL

A crazed bull went on the rampage through Darlington's busy town centre on 3rd March, this year, eventually being shot dead by police marksmen after it had attacked three people.

The white, half-ton beast had managed to jump out of its pen at a local cattle market and then, enraged, ran amok, scattering hordes of terrified, not-so-happy-shoppers. It knocked over and trampled a 75-year-old pensioner, tossed a motorist over the bonnet of his car and injured another man. Then it charged through a park, uprooted a garden fence and rammed the side of a van.

Further mayhem was averted by a livestock driver who followed the bull on its two-mile trail of destruction and succeeded in trapping it in a dead end with his lorry until the police arrived and killed it with a single shot to the head.

The bull had made good its escape after vaulting a 4ft fence as farmers were taking livestock to a weekly market at Darlington, Co Durham. It ran through a park, causing chaos as it charged amongst groups of joggers and mothers with their prams. It then headed for nearby houses and sent Alfred Thornton, 75, spinning to the ground. He was later treated for head and back injuries and cuts to his arms.

The next victim was engineer Albert Cuthbertson, 60, who was leaning into the boot of his car outside his house when he turned to see the animal careering towards him.

He was hurled unceremoniously over the car and suffered cracked ribs, cuts and bruises. 'I tried to move out of the way but it came straight at me and hit me full on,' said Albert, as he was being released from the hospital.

'The next thing I knew, I was five feet into the air and went sailing over the car and landed on the pavement.'

The bull then rammed the side of a van and charged towards a young mother who had come out of a nearby house carrying a baby to see what all the noise was about. She immediately fled indoors as the bull uprooted a chicken wire fence around her front garden before running off.

The wire was still tangled around the bull's horns when it was later shot dead. The third victim, Geoffrey Swinbank, 46, injured his hand as the bull escaped from its pen. Police were quick to praise lorry-driver Tony Monkhouse, 54, for trapping the bull with his wagon.

'He also released three cows into the area to try and calm the bull but it became enraged whenever anyone tried to

approach it,' police said. 'But for Tony, all hell could have broken loose.'

4th March, 1997. Darlington, Co Durham. 'THE EXPRESS'

DAYS AND NIGHT'S OF THE LEPUS

Train commuters are facing a new threat to their already excuse-filled, frequently delayed journeys...An explosion in the rabbit population.

The warrens have apparently caused major problems to lines, embankments and cuttings throughout Railtrack's 10,000-mile system. There have been reports of problems with burrows on the main West Coast Line at Rugby, on the Perth to Inverness Line, and on the East Coast Line in Yorkshire.

ombination of warm summers and resistance to myxomatosis has led to a vast increase in the numbers of rabbits inhabiting the British countryside.

Railway cuttings, where the soil is unusually soft, make a perfect spot for warrens.

'There was an incident on the West Coast Line where land slipped after a flash flood and a rabbit warren was a contributor,' a spokesman was quoted as saying.

Railtrack keeps no figures for the number of rabbits killed each year, the same source said. 'As far as I know though, we have never used rabbit damage as an excuse for delayed trains...'

Not yet, anyway.

And it's not only the railways that are suffering from this spate of rabbit sabotage.

The A9 main road from Edinburgh to Inverness is also being undermined by the rabbits, according to the Scottish Office.

12th March, 1997. General. 'DAILY MAIL'

Insects On The March:

The relentless march of the dreaded fire ant across the USA, may finally be halted sometime in the Spring, as researchers are forced to add two new weapons to their, so far, inadequate armoury.

One is a parasitoid fly that preys on the fire ant but leaves the harmless native ants, well alone. The other is a growth regulator which stops the larvae of fire ants from developing the exoskeleton they need to turn into adults.

David Williams, a researcher with the US Department of Agriculture in Gainesville, Florida, says; 'We will never eradicate the fire ants. What we hope to do is shift things back so that our native ants will be able to compete with them.'

The fire ant, *Solenopsis invicta*, is native to South America and was accidentally imported to the US about 40 years ago. Freed from the natural controls it faced at home, it quickly spread throughout the Southeastern US, and is still conquering new territory in the north and west.

Not only do fire ants drive out native species, but their bite can also be deadly to people with allergies, the very young and the very old. They also somehow manage to chew through buried power lines.

Now, the scientists have resorted to introducing the fire ants natural enemy, the Scuttle Fly.

They hover above the ants, waiting for a chance to dart down and lay an egg within the ants head. Once the larva hatches, it kills the ant and uses its head as a cocoon.

February, 1997. USA. 'NEWS SCIENTIST'

*** Mosquitoes carrying the Eastern equine encephalitis virus, potentially lethal to humans, have been reportedly found at a second site near Wyassup Lake in Connecticut, USA.

Officials were quick to point out that no level of ground-spraying need be carried out because the cold weather should kill them off even more effectively. For the sake of the local residents, we hope their confidence is not misplaced.

Wyassup Lake, Connecticut, USA. 'USA TODAY.'

*** And meanwhile, Scientists at the University of East Anglia, were issuing warnings to ramblers that due to global warming, a cocktail of ticks and their attendant tropical-style diseases could soon be rife in the beauty spots of Britain.

19th March, 1997. General. 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST.'

Even The Cutest Creatures Can Be Deadly: Killer Moose, Peacocks, Cats And Giraffes.

In Lancaster, Vermont, USA, Ellen Moody, 75, died of injuries after the car she was driving collided with an 800-pound moose on U.S. 2.

It will be no consolation to her family that the moose was also killed

'21st January, 1997. Lancaster, Vermont, USA. 'USA TODAY.'

*** And marauding moose have also been acting as saboteurs in Alaska.... They've managed to tear up a total of seven light aircraft in less than a week at Anchorage Airport.

23rd February, 1997. Anchorage, Alaska. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'

*** A Bangkok man aged 30, died after being attacked by one of his pet peacocks. The irate bird administered a deadly blow with the point of its beak causing him to lose consciousness.

Doctors operated on a blood clot on Vichal Thongto's brain, but they failed to save him and he died a day later.

4th April, 1997. Bangkok. 'DAILYMAIL.'

Salvatore Colavito, 16, was charged with killing his father, Leonard, with a crossbow...

His defence is that he was tripped over by the family cat as he and his father were engaged in an argument about the weapon.

1st November, 1996. Connecticut, USA. 'USA TODAY.'

*** And in Memphis, Tennessee, USA, zookeeper Debbie Blackwell, 27, was kicked unconscious by a giraffe way back in 1976. She slipped into a coma from which she sadly, never recovered. She was finally allowed to rest in peace in February last year.

2nd December, 1996, Memphis, Tennessee, USA. 'USA TODAY.'

THE ATTACK OF THE (AHEM) RAMPAGING BADGERS

It's hard to believe, but a family of badgers have combined to make life a misery for their human neighbours in Yeovil, Somerset. The tunnelling activities of the 15 animals have turned once-peaceful gardens into virtual death-traps.

One pensioner suffered a broken neck and another a fractured foot when their lawns collapsed into the badgers' sett. Children are unable to play outside and pets have to

be kept under lock and key after several guinea pigs were devoured.

Complaints of falling property values and fears of more accidents prompted the officials at South Somerset District Council to make plans to relocate the animals to a site at Dulverton.

But the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food fears the move would spread disease and refused to grant a licence to relocate the badgers.

11th March, 1997. Yeovil, Somerset 'DAILYMAIL.'

*** And finally, for this issue at least, a swarm of deadly caterpillars, whose sting is almost as strong as a cobra's bite have reportedly killed one man and injured 16 others in Southern Brazil.

Officials like Roseli Simone, a spokeswoman at Santa Terezinha Hospital in Cruz Machado, claimed that 'during the past week (the first week in March, 1997) one farmer has died and there have been 16 hospitalised, two in a very serious condition.'

The dark green insects grow to about two inches and are covered with tiny hair-like spines that act like hypodermic needles to secrete lethal venom. The killer pests have accounted for the deaths of 10 people over the last few years.

14th March, 1997. Parana, Southern Brazil 'LIVERPOOL ECHO.'

BEE ATTACKS

Bees have been busy making life hell for certain people these past few months.

A wedding in Nigeria was called off when a swarm of bees swooped down and attacked the assembled guests.

In Freetown, Sierra Leone, thousands of the critters disrupted a female genital cutting ritual, an attack that caused over half of the 100 girls taking part in the local hospital. Sources at the infirmary said that the girls had been stung by the bees during the ceremony in the northern region capital of Makeni. Most of the victims were allowed home after receiving treatment.

And in Pachuca, Mexico, bank robber Miguel Sanchez was actually stung to death by a swarm of killer bees just as he was in the process of burying his ill-gotten gains.

He had the misfortune to try hiding the £5,000 cash too near to a bees nest in the middle of a wood.

23rd February, 1997. Nigeria. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE.' / 26th January, 1997, 'BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE.' / 27th FEBRUARY, Pachuca, Mexico. 'DAILY SLUR.'

MOTHER GRIZZLY FIGHTS BACK

In Kallispell, Montana, a mother Grizzly Bear has taken to charging freight trains, forcing rail traffic to a halt right across Northern Montana. The creature has acted in what can only be described as maternal rage.

Two of her cubs had been earlier struck by a passing train as they scrounged for a few scraps of grain that invariably trickles out of the cars as they speed along the tracks.

One of her cubs was killed instantly, the other was so badly injured that, acting out of kindness, a wildlife official put it out of its misery.

The sow continued to vent her wrath at passing trains right into the wee small hours, and the railway officials at Burlington Northern were forced to halt through traffic.

Tim Manley, a bear expert and the kind soul who put the fatally injured bear to sleep, later reported that the heartbroken animal had eventually moved off the tracks.

29th September, 1996. Kallispell, Montana, USA. 'BOSTON SUNDAY HERALD.'

Killer Alligators And Crocodile Dundee Wannabe's

Tiny, three-year-old Adam Binford was killed by huge alligator as he stepped onto a lily pad to pick a flower for his mother.

A passing trapper shot dead the beast, and managed to prise open its cruel jaws, sickeningly, a few precious moments too late. And most tragically of all, Adam was still clutching the fateful bunch of daisies.

A visibly shocked game warden was later quoted as saying; 'The beast exploded from the depths like a bolt of lightning. The child didn't stand an earthly chance. He was tossed around and dragged away.'

The boy was attacked just a few yards from where his family were picnicking at Lake Ashby in Florida.

Adam had strayed unnoticed from an appointed swimming area as he searched for the flowers. The 11ft bull alligator dragged his pathetic body for over a mile.

24th March, 1997. Lake Ashby, Florida, USA. 'DAILY MANC.'

*** More fortunate was the girl who was trapped in a 15ft crocodile's deadly jaws, but who was happily rescued by her father.

In desperation, Joe Bredl first beat the animal called Solomon with a rake. Seeing that it had no real effect, and shouting 'bugger this', he leapt on to its back and dug his thumb into its eyes. He finally managed to force it to let go of his daughter Karia, aged 20.

Karia, who works as a keeper at a wildlife park near Mackay in Queensland, Australia, had been joking earlier with tourists; 'If one ever gets me, I hope it's Solomon. He hardly has any teeth.'

Despite suffering a broken pelvis and a fractured leg, she was successful in her efforts to persuade her bosses to spare the life of gummy ol' Solomon.

Talk about not bearing grudges!

24th February, 1997. Mackay, Queensland, Australia. 'DAILY MANC.'

Big Bird Drops In To Flummox Driver

Dale Ford, a trucker from Apple Valley, California, found himself being locked in a stand-off with a wild turkey for over 3-and-a-half-hours after the bird crashed through his windshield on Interstate 79.

'It scared the hell out of me,' Ford said later. 'He was still alive. He must have had a rush of adrenaline. He was looking all around, and he stared at me for a goodly while.' When Ford climbed into the back of his cab, the wounded turkey began kicking and hissing. So Ford wisely sat in the driver's seat for those 3-and-a-half-hours, patiently waiting for a tow-truck. The turkey remained silent but vigilant in the back.

At the garage, Ford again tried to dislodge the stubborn bird and finally, it fled through the badly broken windshield.

'He's on the loose somewhere in Pittsburgh,' Ford warned ominously.

19th December, 1997. Pittsburgh, USA. 'ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH.'

Gorilla Goes Ape At The City Zoo.

The Mayor of Boston, USA and various other assorted dignitaries holding an impromptu news conference at the city's Franklin Park Zoo got more than they bargained for when a young gorilla suddenly began hurling bombs made of straw and droppings



Embarrassed zoo officials later dismissed a theory that the enraged ape was showing its displeasure for local politics, and merely felt threatened by the presence of so many people.

Being the capricious tykes that we are, we prefer to think the former...

24th February, 1997. Boston, USA. 'LIVERPOOLECHO.'

Sharks And Snakes Give People The Shakes

Four people were forced to swim for their lives when a Great White Shark attacked and sank their inflatable dinghy.

The two men and two women made a frantic 50-metre dash to the safety of the rocks when the incident happened off the Australian coast near Phillip Island, Victoria.

The area is a well-known shark-hunting ground and local police said the 16ft-long shark would have been waiting to feed on seal pups.

3rd January, 1997. Phillip Island, Victoria, Australia. 'LIVERPOOL ECHO.'

*** A 2-ft long python crawled up through a Lancaster, Philadelphia family's toilet and decided to settle itself down in a cupboard.

Luis and Virgin Quirindongo quickly called the police, who later managed to nab the errant snake without too much

fuss. There was no indication however, as to where the snake had come from, originally.

31st December, 1997. Lancaster, Philadelphia, USA. 'USA TODAY.'

*** And mother-of-two Elizabeth Finnigan was sent running wildly into the street after spotting a 12-inch Rat-Snake in her home in East Stanley, Co Durham. Police later removed the creature and Elizabeth was left to ponder 'where the hell it had come from.'

24th February, 1997. East Stanley, Co Durham. 'DAILY MANC.'

Alien Animals

The Philippine Gill-People

The populace of Manila in the Philippines, appear to be unusually gullible when it comes to (ahem) decidedly fishy stories. First there was the urban myth doing the rounds that a woman had given birth to a fish and that thousands of people have queued up to see this wondrous offspring, being carefully fed in an aquarium. Later, the fish died and the hoax (for, not surprisingly, that's exactly what it was) was revealed.

Not long after that particular tale had begun to fade from public consciousness, there erupted a similar furore over the story of a man who claimed he was pregnant (See 'DON' #5 for more on this preposterous claim), proudly displaying his protruding stomach following a doctor's positive pregnancy test.



(Above): A family of real-life Tritons? According to legend, these humanoid creatures once lived solitary lives in remote sea caves, were amphibious and were notorious for being storm-rats and wrecker's of ships.

Now though, comes an account that's even more bizarre (if that's possible) Health officials in the Philippines are apparently seriously investigating a family that says it has gills and can breathe quite freely underwater.

Segundina Jimena claims her three children - like her late husband - can stay underwater for a staggering six minutes without having to draw breath. The 'gills' that enable them to perform this quite impossible feat are said to consist of a small hole on the sides of the neck behind each ear.

Dr. Antonio Yapha, Chairman of the Cebu Provincial Health Committee, was, at the time of going to press, making plans to visit the Jimena family in Dumanjung, approximately 350 miles south of Manila., to examine the claim at first-hand.

'Instead of being happy that they have a gill, that they can breathe in the water, it might be a dangerous condition. It

might cost their life,' Yapha said. 'If it is a congenital anomaly, I will try and convince them to see a pulmonary specialist.' Jimena says she doesn't know how to swim and her children are just starting to learn. Her family lives in a remote mountain village far from the sea.

The local press quoted Simplicio Guinocor, an eye, ear, nose and throat specialist, as saying the neck perforations may be branchial clefts, a remnant of primitive gills possessed by foetuses. The holes have no function but can be dangerous if they become infected, the good doctor said. We'll keep you posted on any further developments,

28th July, 1996. 'Dumanjung, Philippines. 'ATLANTA JOURNAL'

'EXTINCT LION' RE-DISCOVERED IN SOUTH AFRICAN CIRCUS

A black-maned lion rescued from a circus by animal rights activists may well be a Barbary Lion, a subspecies thought to be extinct since 1920.

Scientists at Pretoria University in South Africa are currently carrying out extensive tests on the lion's hair and blood. Results were not expected until April, at the earliest, but the experts have gone on record as saying that there is a better than average chance that Akef, as the lion is called, is a Barbary.

The subspecies was deleted from the World Encyclopaedia Of Animals after what was thought to be the last one was killed by a heartless hunter in Morocco 76 years ago.

'This is extremely exciting,' said Jan Creamer, director of the London-based Animal Defenders. 'We were thrilled that we were able to rescue the animals in very difficult circumstances, but to discover that one of the lions could be a Barbary is extraordinary.'

Animal Defenders officials said there may well be other Barbary Lions in captivity, and they are checking circuses all over the world and following leads in the animal's native North Africa.

A successful search could lead to the setting-up of a breeding programme, and ultimately, the release of the Barbary into the wild. One intriguing possibility is that somewhere there may be descendants of the Barbary Lions believed to have been kept by Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie.

Creamer and her team rescued Akef and five other lions, three tigers, a python, horses and dogs from a circus on the outskirts of Maputo, capital of Mozambique. It was the first time an entire circus had been confiscated.

The animals were being kept in cages barely large enough for them to lie down, and had been in the cages for six months before being abandoned by El Sayeed Akef, who had fled from his creditors in his native Egypt.

Wildlife groups believe the circus may have been part of a network used as a front for smuggling endangered species across frontiers.

5th January, 1997. Maputo, Mozambique. 'THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH.'

Tales From The Loch-Side

As reported in our last issue, Drumnadrochit boatman and auxiliary Coastguard George Evans, 45, has apparently discovered a huge underwater cavern deep beneath the murky, peat-stained waters of Loch Ness.

Inevitably, amidst all the talk of finding 'Nessie's Hidden Lair', George has found himself being catapulted (whether he likes it or not) smack into the middle of the media headlines.

Said a somewhat flustered and bemused George, 'I have been up all night doing live interviews on air in New Zealand, Australia, France, Germany, Poland, and at least 20 stations in America. Everyone wants to know about the monster.'

But George readily admits that despite the all the media attention, the story is hardly a new one and the original discovery of the 'cave' - in actuality a hole or crater on the floor of the Loch, was reported in *'THE INVERNESS COURIER'*, five years earlier.

George is also quick to point out though that; 'the actual hole itself is quite genuine.' He goes on to explain that the story of the 'cave' had been related to him by a friend to a local freelance journalist, and not released by himself.

'My reasons for not saying much about it in the past has been fear of the reaction. I did a radio show with a London station where there were two disc jockeys and at the end, one of them said to the other, 'Well, the guy's got a passenger boat on Loch Ness, and he's obviously out for some publicity.' That was my very reason for not wanting to say anything.'

He remains convinced though, that there is considerably more to the Loch Ness mystery than some dreamed up tourism gimmick.

'I have often seen strange shapes and water movements that cannot be explained by any small animal or fish. I am not the only one to have seen this. Many of the locals are equally convinced that a whole family of monsters are living here with us.'

The hole itself is said to drop 30ft lower than the surrounding Loch bed, to a total depth of 826 feet.

Specialist underwater survey company, Offshore Survey and Engineering UK Ltd, has apparently offered to spend £10,000 exploring the crater. Andrew Mallinson, managing director of the Aberdeen-based firm was quoted as saying; 'We have the technology to screen live pictures of the inside of the cave. Who knows what we might see in there. Maybe even Nessie and her family at home.'

When asked if he thought the hole could really be home to a previously undiscovered species, George answered; 'That would be pure speculation, of course. But it would certainly be worth investigating. It's not something I could afford, but I would gladly offer my services if a suitable offer came along.'

Typically however, veteran Loch Ness researcher turned avowed sceptic, Adrian Shine, has a more mundane explanation for the hole, and simply believes it was caused by movement in the silt following a tremor on the Great Glen faultline sometime last century.

Doubtless, Mr Shine is still sticking to the deeply offensive 'They are all seeing *their* Nessie' theory...

Pretty rich, when you consider this was the same man who, in 1987, during Operation Deepscan, announced through a loud-hailer; 'This is the chance to vindicate all the eyewitnesses!!!'

21st February, 1997. Loch Ness, Scotland. *'INVERNESS COURIER/LIVERPOOL ECHO.'*

'EEL-LIKE MONSTER' WASHED UP OFF THE PHILIPPINES

In late March, this year, one of those maddeningly inconclusive reports came in over the wires about a mysterious carcass washed up on the beach of Masbate Island in the Philippines.

The unidentified creature was described as being 26ft-long, eel-like in body shape, and had a head resembling that of a turtle.



Teams of 'experts' had been descending on the island, but had been unsuccessful in their endeavours to classify it as any known species.

In a typically tantalising statement to the press, zoologist Dr. Perry Ong said; 'It must be an ancestral or primitive fish, where are the ribs? It is not a mammal.'

26th March, 1997. Masbate Island, Philippines. *'THE EXPRESS'*

GHOSTLY TALES

Campfire Ghost Stories From The Pages Of The Sunday Magazines

Part One: From The Mouths Of The Rich And Famous

Bill Maynard: 'HEARTBEAT' Actor.

'I used to be a stand-up comedian and I was driving to a concert in Bradford at 11 o' clock one night through a country road which had no street lights.

Suddenly, right in front of my headlights, an old man wearing a cap and jacket appeared out of nowhere. I slammed on the brakes, but there was nothing I could do. I went right into him, but there was no bump. I was convinced I'd killed him but, but when I leaped into the road to see how he was, there was nobody there. I walked back down the road a little way but there wasn't a soul in sight.

The people at the club where I was performing weren't at all surprised. They told me the old man was known as "Old Sid" and that he was a ghost who frequently appeared on that stretch of road.'

Ricky Tomlinson: Actor.

'When I had a club in Liverpool we often saw spooky things - like little guys wearing old-fashioned suits. No one dared go up the back stairs where the fire escape was because of the little page boy who used to block them. People were also upset by a ghostly lady with two babies. I knew I really needed someone to come in and get rid of them after one friend, who was frightened of nothing, began desperately smashing the windows of the flat above to get on to the ledge.

She kept saying "This guy won't let me out of the room." It was a tall, slightly bald, Irish ghost dressed in modern clothes.

Even a local radio man - who came along to take the mickey out of our hauntings - left the place terrified after seeing it.

Another guy told us the Irish ghost was waiting for Nellie. She was coming to see him soon and he had to be there for her. I know you could say it was coincidental, but the lad who worked there had a wife called Nellie - who died the next day. We never saw that ghost again.

Michael Aspel: 'STRANGE BUT TRUE' Presenter.

'While filming the maiden voyage of an ocean liner I asked a young female passenger to join me for some of the sequences - leaning over a rail, sharing a joke with the crew, that sort of thing. After a week at sea we went our separate ways.

The next night I dreamed that the girl, dressed in a bright blue robe, was floating away into total darkness - looking back over her shoulder with an expression of intense sadness and regret.

Some days later, I got a letter from her mother, saying that her daughter had tragically died of a brain tumour on the exact same night as my dream. She had been wearing her favourite blue nightdress.'

Julia Sawalha: 'ABSOLUTELY FABULOUS' Actress.

'When I was 15, a clairvoyant told me that my late nan Edith is my Spirit Guide. Her presence helps me when I feel desperate or alone. She said she'd been watching me practise the splits before a show and found it hilarious.

I'd hardly known Nan, who died when I was small, but Mum told me later that Nan had always laughed at her practising the splits. Since then, I've often felt her close to me.

Some said I only had a 60 per cent chance of dancing within a month after I injured myself. I decided I would dance four days later. Without her help, how else could I have done it with my leg still black and blue from bruising?'

Jonathan Kerigan: 'CASUALTY' Actor.

'Me and my best friend Neil were watching TV late one afternoon when there was a scratching outside the door. We thought it was the cat. A very comforting old woman's voice was saying; "Go on pussy, go in. Open the door and go in."

I didn't know who the heck it was. I opened the door and nothing was there. Neil heard it as well. I wasn't frightened at all, but we were both freaked out by it and really wanted to find out where this voice had emanated from.

The really spooky thing was that after we moved away some time later a dying old lady and her family moved in. I always felt we'd come across a ghost from the future - or future echo - rather than a ghost of the past.

Jilly Cooper: Author.

'My son Felix was transforming my gazebo into an office and, because my two dogs sleep at my feet when I work, I

moved two baskets into the gazebo. But the dogs refused to go near the place. Even if I shut them in there for a few minutes, they'd whine to get out.

One year on, they still prefer to be in the house. I spoke to a friend who used to live in my house, and she said her dogs were terrified of the gazebo as well. Apparently, it was used by monks to spot customers wanting buy their wine. There's also a suggestion that it has been used for cockfighting. But, whatever, it is, there is something there that really frightens the animals.'



Edward Woodward: 'THE WICKER MAN.' Actor.

'I was a drama student in 1948, living with the other students in the Castle Theatre, Farnham, Surrey, which was reputed to be haunted. One summer evening that year I was on my way to the main dormitory and as soon as I opened the door I saw an astonishing sight. The curtains were all standing straight out into the room, the trees were moving as though in a hurricane and all the windows were wide open.

Although it had been a warm evening, the dormitory was amazingly cold. There was a roaring wind, except there was no noise. I rushed out to get some friends to see what I'd seen and, even though I'd rushed through three doors on my way to fetch them, by the time I'd returned, all three doors had been locked again.

When we finally got to the dormitory, I discovered that the curtains were fine, the windows were shut again and it was hot without any sign of a wind. I felt a complete, rather frightened - and although nothing ever happened again I was always a bit scared going back into that room.

Will Carling: Ex-England Rugby Player.

When I was 14, I was at school in Sedburgh, Cumbria. I had gone to the top of my form's house to collect something and was just standing in the corridor outside, which was about 40 yards long, when I was faced by a very dark figure at the other end, wearing a long cloak. I stood frozen to the spot, looking at the figure - and I was convinced it was looking at me.

My first instinct was to turn and run, but I didn't want to turn my back on the figure even though it was about 35

yards away and so we stood there facing each other for about 30 seconds and I can honestly say I was pretty scared. Eventually, I couldn't face it anymore and I just turned and ran down the stairs.

I never went to the top of the house on my own for the next few weeks and I never encountered the figure again. I've never experienced anything else like it, I'm pleased to say. That figure wasn't particularly friendly.

PART TWO:

Tales From The General Public

24 years ago, Barry Atkinson was hiking with his brother David in North Cornwall, sleeping rough.

One night they decided to sleep in the derelict waiting room at Gunnislake railway station, sprawled out on benches that were once used by travellers.

Barry, of Billingshurst, West Sussex, says; 'At around 3am, David shook me awake and the first thing that I noticed was that it was freezing cold - too cold for what should have been a warm summer's night.

"Look over there," whispered David, pointing to the open doorway. And there, framed in the gloom, was the figure of a small boy, aged about five or six.

He was dressed all in grey - long grey coat, grey socks and shoes and grey cap.

He just stood there looking at us...then suddenly he was gone.

We went outside, both a bit shaken. The station was deserted. Nobody in the village could explain what we'd seen.

*** A mysterious vision of two Chinese children gave Doreen Pope nightmares for years afterwards.

When she was a youngster, she was playing with her dolls on her bedroom table. Later, on the other side of midnight, she awoke to see what appeared to be the ghosts of two children nonchalantly playing with the dolls as though they had every right to be there.

'I am now 47, and I can still see it in my mind's eye,' says Doreen, of Ashford in Kent. 'But was it truly ghostly or were these children my guardian angels?'

*** Edward Hewitt was staying at a hotel in Berwick-upon-Tweed when he awoke to find two figures in his room - a man and a boy - wearing oilskins.

'Next morning I made enquiries but nobody seemed to know who they might have been,' he said.

'But an elderly waiter asked which room I was in. When I told him the number he said; "Oh yes, you've seen the ghosts". It appears that a father and his son had drowned in the nearby river some years ago. They had been staying in that very bedroom.'

*** Carole Sprenger was overjoyed with her new house...Until she was woken up in the wee small hours by the choking smell of incense.

'There was no other living accommodation next door or above or below my part of the house,' said Carole, of Borehamwood, Herts. But a few days later, an elderly resident told her that the house had been built on the site of an old priory - and a nun's graveyard.

'As you might imagine, my flesh crawled,' said Carole. 'I never again felt completely at ease living there afterwards.'

*** A picnic on a summer's day turned into an encounter with something decidedly unusual for Angela Charlton.

Angela, of Carlisle, Cumbria, walked with a friend to a hilltop near Penrith, used as the site of an ancient beacon to warn of Scottish invaders.

'It was a late summer's day and we were almost at the top of the hill when the weather suddenly changed for the worse. As we were rounding a bend we stopped dead in our tracks. There stood a little old cottage with smoke coming out of the chimney and shutters on the windows.

It was like a dwelling from the Middle Ages. We stared at each other and then fled in terror. We went back many times after that but we never saw the cottage again.'

*** Proof that not all ghostly encounters occur on some bleak, windswept moor, within the confines of some dark, forbidding mansion or that eerie, desecrated churchyard, is provided by the case of Nanny Angela Hall. She was taking a leisurely stroll through the leafy green suburbs of Kensington in London when the following occurred;

'I was approaching an ancient tree called the Elfin Oak, when suddenly, from the inside of the tree, I heard a bizarre, high-pitched chanting of several voices in unison. I stood rooted to the spot. Ever since I've wondered whether the tree is perhaps haunted by some woodland spirit.'

*** And finally, former merchant sailor Terence Springthorpe believes he encountered something undeniably evil when en route to Cape Town, South Africa, some years back.

'We were on the midnight to 4am watch,' remembers Terence, of Enfield, Middlesex. They called it the ghost watch. One of the greasers confided in me that he was frightened by an apparition appearing in the tunnel at the back of the ship. The tunnel housed the huge shaft that drives the propeller.'

Terence, at first, was sceptical about the man's story but nonetheless he led an investigating party down into the murky bowels of the ship.

'In fact I felt rather foolish for taking notice of such a story. Then a mist began to rise like a stream of smoke. It got very cold and that mist was definitely forming into a shape. Then my nerves gave way and we bolted from the scene.

Later, we found out that a worker had been crushed to death doing work on the tunnel in a previous voyage.'

All accounts from 'YES!' MAGAZINE, March, 1997.

Ghostly Goings-On In Washington, USA

Washington, is apparently, one of the most ghost-infested capital cities in the world. There is a whole welter of supernatural phenomena associated with the place...Just consider the following; Woodrow Wilson's wife Edith regularly held seances to contact the spirits of the departed. Richard 'The Big Dick' Nixon himself, used to wander the hallowed halls of the White House 'talking' to presidents of the past and Harry Truman (when he wasn't high-tailing it over to Roswell to preside over the recovery of crashed flying saucers and their occupants) never tired of telling anyone who would listen that he always felt he was surrounded by the ghosts of the dead.

'I'm sure they're here, and I'm not so alarmed at meeting up with any of them as I am at having to meet all the live nuts I have to see every day,' Truman once said.

And of course, Ronald Reagan professed a belief in ghosts. This was, after all, a man who passionately believed in the Biblical Rapture at the end of time, during which, the faithful would be saved from annihilation by bands of archangels...He once said that he sincerely hoped one day to run into the ghost of Abe Lincoln, said to haunt the White House Lincoln bedroom. 'There are a few questions I'd like to ask him,' Reagan said.

He added that his dog refused to go into the Lincoln bedroom, but just stood at the door's threshold and barked at the windows outside.

However, contrary to all this talk of ghostly phenomena, writer John Alexander, author of *'Washington's Most Famous Ghost Stories'*, (a best-seller since its publication in 1976) says ghost stories seem to be a dying art form today.

Alexander, whose book had its origins in a 1970 Halloween radio programme he produced about Washington's haunted sites, said his favourite local ghost story involves the Capitol's 'Demon Cat,' which is one of Washington's few non-human ghosts and is reputed to haunt the building's dark catafalque, erected to hold the remains of George Washington in the basement under the Rotunda.

He vividly recalls the stories of Capitol policemen patrolling the building at night seeing a 'cat swelled to the size of a tiger with glowing piercing eyes,' which appears when there's a change in administration.

Alexander believes he has succeeded in tracing the origins of that particular tale to those very same Capitol policemen, who entertained themselves on long, lonely night patrols trying to scare their colleagues by tying walnut shells to the claws of cats brought to the Capitol to try and keep the rat population down.

'You have to close your eyes and imagine the days when the Capitol was lighted with flickering gas lights and imagine how the cats cast huge shadows on the walls, and of course, the noise,' he said.

In Statuary Hall upstairs, Capitol police also reported that they have periodically heard the dying screams of John Adams reverberating through the domed room, where mere whispers can be overheard. On the Senate side, Daniel Webster's cry; 'How stands the Union' has also been clearly heard.

Washington's other buildings have even, in some extreme cases, been altered to avoid the presence of ghosts. The shutters on the H Street side of Lafayette Park's Decatur House remain permanently closed to this day because the periodic appearances of the ghost of Commodore Stephen Decatur in his bedroom window startled so many passers-by.

The most heavily documented of Washington's ghosts however, is Lincoln, whose tall, bearded figure has been spotted by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, Winston Churchill and Margaret Truman. A startled Churchill ran stark naked into the hallways of the White House after encountering the spirit.

Maybe old Abe was just getting his own back, because according to legend, he himself was haunted by a premonition of his own death. He was awakened by noises one night and followed a strange light creeping along the layers of curtains and illuminating a bier that bore his coffin. A few weeks later, after he was assassinated at Ford's Theatre, his coffin was installed in the very same room.

Another White House legend concerns the ghost of a young girl beating on the front door, said to be the daughter of Mart Surratt pleading at the White House on July 17th, 1865, to save her mother, who was later hanged that day.

Across the river, in the middle of Arlington Cemetery, at Arlington House - the ante-bellum home of the families of George Washington, Parke Custis and Robert E. Lee - Park Service employees have heard children playing in the rooms after all visitors have left.

One Washington story of the occult, of course, managed to grab Hollywood's attention in the shape of the classic horror movie; *'THE EXORCIST'*. William Peter Blatty's novel and later screenplay placed the story in the midst of

historic Georgetown, although the actual exorcism that inspired the plotline allegedly took place at a house in Bunker Hill Road in Mount Rainier; across the District line in the Maryland suburbs. The site is now an empty lot owned by the Catholic Church, but locals say the neighbourhood is still plagued by an unusually high (even for America) spate of senseless violence and death.

Alexander said one mystery he hasn't yet been able to resolve is whether or not the Clinton's have encountered the White House spirits.

He said he tried to find out for an update of his book, but was dismissed by a White House aide who told him; 'We've got enough ghosts back in Arkansas.'

3rd November, 1996. Washington, USA. *'BOSTON SUNDAY HERALD.'*

And Not To Be Outdone... The House Of Commons Too Is Haunted

A cleaner in the House Of Commons claimed that as she was tidying MP's offices on the first floor of St Stephen's Tower, she felt an unseen presence that reached out and touched her arm.

She later added that one section of the building was appreciably colder than the rest of the sprawling edifice.

St Stephen's Tower is right next to Westminster Hall, the oldest part of Parliament, built between 1097 and 1099. It quite predictably has something of a chequered history. Spencer Percival, the only British Premier to be assassinated, was shot in the entrance to St Stephen's back in 1812, and Braveheart himself, William Wallace, Gunpowder plotter Guy Fawkes, and Charles I were all condemned to death in nearby Westminster Hall. Both George V and VI, Gladstone and Winston Churchill lay in state there after their deaths.

19th January, 1997. House Of Commons, Westminster, London. *'SUNDAY PEOPLE.'*

The Ghost Of Sigglesthorne Hall

Staying in the world of politics, Tory MP John Townend and his wife have had to reportedly share their home with a 150-year-old ghost.

They live (in no doubt opulent splendour) at Sigglesthorne Hall, an 18th century house near Hull. They first became aware of 'some otherworldly presence' when objects began to move of their own accord around the house. Their two dogs would suddenly grow agitated and curtains billowed out for no apparent reason (curious echoes of the Castle Theatre phenomena - 'the curtains that were all standing straight out into the room' reported by Edward Woodward - See elsewhere in this issue).

The poltergeist (if that's what it indeed was) opened up cans of Coca Cola and for some reason delighted in leaving toffee wrappers in various wardrobes.

The 62-year-old Bridlington MP at first put the strange occurrences down to 'our four children. But when they went away to boarding school and the strange events kept right on occurring, I realised there had to be another explanation.'

The couple's gardener later informed them that he believed they were being haunted by the spirit of a maid who killed herself around 1850 after being jilted by her former lover. She is reputed to roam the corridors of the house in a long black dress.

And the John reported that he had actually seen the ghost for himself.

'One night I saw her walking around the end of my bed. I thought at first it must be Jennifer, my wife, but then I remembered she was in hospital at the time. I used to be sceptical about such things, but no longer.'

Jennifer added; 'She doesn't appear to like change. When our bedroom was re-decorated she threw our pillows all over the room.'

'26th January, 1997. *Stigglesthorpe Hall, Near Hull, 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'*

DEAD SETTLERS' REFUSE TO FIND ETERNAL REST IN SAN DIEGO

A 140-year-old two-story red brick house in California, which opened as a museum in 1960, is said to be haunted by the decidedly restless spirits of Thomas Whaley and his long-dead wife.

The sweetly, rich aroma of Cuban cigars and the flowery fragrance of perfume drift through the upstairs rooms of the 19th-century home. The ghostly couple can apparently be heard (ahem) banging around in the dead of night when the rest of the house is quiet and still.

'It's not like there are poltergeists or furniture that flies around by itself or anything that people need to be afraid of,' says Wayne Cook reassuringly. He would, wouldn't he. Wayne is after all, the museum curator.

The building was erected on land where a set of gallows once stood, and the house is next to Old Town State Park, one of California's earliest settlements and its most popular state park.

Inside, several hundred visitors each month admire early Californian artifacts but are intrigued still further by the mysterious smells and noises emanating from the rooms upstairs.

'What's the deal with all the cigar smoke upstairs? and Who's got the lavender perfume?' are questions that are frequently asked by the puzzled visitors upon leaving the premises.

In the early 1960's, the U.S. Commerce Department designated the Whaley House as being officially haunted. The Government gives the designation to houses that have a history of strange occurrences.

In 1964, then-local American TV celebrity Regis Philbin and a companion attempted to spend the night in the house. At about 2:30am; they saw someone - or something - walk from the study into the music room. 'They put a flashlight beam on it, and whatever it was vanished into thin air,' Cook said. The two didn't hang around any longer and beat a hasty retreat.

'I'm sure haunted structures abound, but before you make the Government List you've got to have a history, Cook added. 'This house certainly qualifies on that count.'

Whaley, the son of a New York merchant family that owned the land now known as Central Park, constructed his San Diego home in 1856, seven years after he sailed to California in search of the gold in them thar hills.

Four years after finishing his house and knocking down the gallows that had been on his property, Whaley heard footsteps upstairs. He wrote in letters that they belonged to James 'Yankee Jim' Robinson, who was hanged for trying to steal a schooner.

Whaley died in 1890, and his wife, Anna, followed him in 1913.

In addition to the Whaley's and 'Yankee Jim,' some visitors have heard the sound of children crying where the Whaley's 17-month-old baby died of scarlet fever and a neighbour's daughter was killed after slicing her neck on Mrs Whaley's clothesline.

31st October, 1996. *San Diego, California, USA. 'CIRCLEVILLE HERALD'*

Ghost Planes Of The Desolate Moors.

A massive search for survivors of an apparent plane crash had to be abandoned after would-be rescuers could find absolutely no trace of any wreckage.

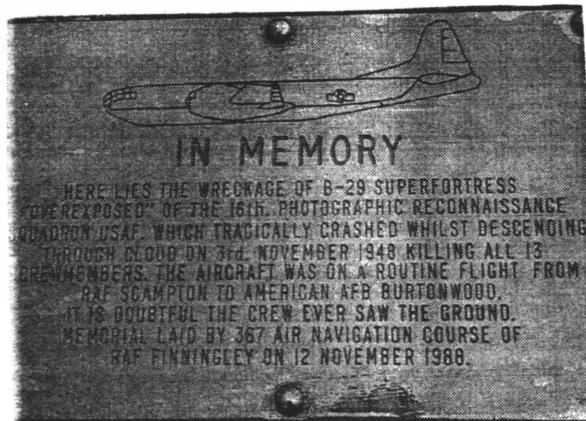
The hunt, sparked by local villagers reported sighting of a stricken plane swooping silently overhead, had involved 100 police officers, seven mountain rescue teams and a helicopter.

One of the witnesses claimed to have seen a blinding flash and billowing smoke, of the aircraft - and the mystery of the so-called 'Howden Triangle' was allowed to deepen still further.

The 40-square mile area in the Peak District, on the edge of Sheffield, has long been notorious for sightings of ghostly aircraft, as we shall see later in this section.

The round-the-clock hunt began late on Monday, 24th March. People inundated the police with phone calls from all over the area, saying that a large aircraft showing navigation lights was clearly in serious trouble.

The callers included a farmer and his wife at Bolsterstone in the Hope Valley and a former special constable. But the search drew a complete blank - and there were no reports of missing aircraft, either.



One of the plaques erected by the locals in honour of the airmen who lost their lives on the moors, 50-odd-years ago.

Mariafrance Tattersfield, 39, of Wharnciffe Side, near Sheffield, along with her husband Stephen, 45, were out driving on the moor, hoping to catch a glimpse of Hale-Bopp. They both saw something that they could never in a million years have bargained for. Mrs Tattersfield, a former special in the South Yorkshire force, said; 'I could quite clearly see an aircraft. It seemed very low and was descending at less than 1,000ft. I lost sight of it when it disappeared behind some high trees and have no idea what happened to it after that.'

The sighting - one of a series dating back 20 years on Howden Moor - came almost two years to the day when shocked postman Tony Ingle reported seeing a World War Two Dakota crash on the same bleak stretch of moorland. Mr Ingle, now retired, was walking his Golden Retriever near a camp site at Hope when he spotted the USAF plane

struggling for height 60ft above the moor. 'There was no sound - although I could see the propellers going around. It was bizarre. I could see it was banking, as if trying to turn, and then it seemed to go down just over a hedge.'

Mr Ingle was convinced that it had crashed into a field on the other side of a hill.

He ran there - and was astounded to find nothing but an undisturbed field of grazing sheep.

'There was just no sign of the plane. Everything was totally silent - you could have heard a pin drop. I couldn't believe what had happened. I don't believe in ghosts. I have always been the sort of person who laughed loudest at any suggestion of supernatural manifestations. But I can't explain this. I saw that plane alright - and it disappeared before my eyes.'

Mr Ingle was quoted as saying in the wake of this latest account of what would appear to be the same phenomena, 'to this day my dog Ben refuses to go up that lane where I saw the plane.'



(Above): Tony Ingle and his Golden Retriever; Ben, who both witnessed the Ghost Plane in March, 1995.

The sighting was near to the site of two aircraft tragedies that occurred in May, 1945, and November, 1948, respectively, and, coincidentally or not, Tony's experience came exactly a week after a plaque commemorating the lives of the airmen who died was unveiled on the moors.

The locals maintain that this latest sighting is simply a part of an ongoing mystery that should be added to a list of similar occurrences that has its origins more than 50 years in the past.

During this time they claim to have seen or heard dozens of unmarked Second World War Dakotas and Lancaster Bombers, which either crash into the hillside or disappear in full flight..

Local spiritualists claim to have picked up messages from the lost souls of airmen and farmers who have come across hulks of real wartime aircraft have returned the booty to the soil after talking of strange tremors striking the buildings where they were hoarded. One man, who says he found the ring of a dead Lancaster pilot, insists that he was later visited by its owners vengeful spirit.

Gerard Greaves of *'THE EXPRESS'* claims to have unearthed evidence that the area bound by Glossop to the west, Buxton to the south and Sheffield to the east has become the grave to more than 300 people who have lost their lives in more than 50 separate air crashes since the Second World War.

Ron Collier, an Air Force historian who has written two books on the subject, says; 'There has to be a logical explanation. But in my research I have repeatedly come up against the paranormal. There is a force that governs the moors. You can feel it. And the scores of sightings of ghost planes only backs that up. Many of the people who have seen these planes are plain-speaking farmers who know better than to believe in ghost stories. Something is going on, and it is very hard to explain what.'

The phenomenon has now become so commonplace that it has gradually woven its way into the fabric of local folklore. It is also accepted by the villagers that it was the aforementioned aerial disasters at the end of the last war, that acted as some sort of catalyst for the enigma. On May 18th, 1945, a Royal Canadian Air Force Lancaster Bomber from 408 Squadron was flying back to its Manchester air-base from a raid in Europe when it exploded on impact with Bleaklow Mountain in the Peak District killing all six of its crew.

Two months later, and a mere 50 yards away from the original crash site, the seven-man crew of a USAF Dakota were killed when their plane ploughed into the boggy western side of the mountain, 1,800ft up.

At the time the area was heavy with air traffic. And indeed, Bleaklow Mountain stands at the northern end of the Ladybower Dam and reservoir, where the Dambuster's Bouncing Bombs were developed. Rather than being just two coincidental accidents however, Mr Greaves believes there is something more sinister than mere chance at work here. He cites as evidence the fact that shortly after the aforementioned crash, a Superfortress plane also speared into the moors and then, a few years later, so too did another Dakota.

Planes have continued to crash in the area. In 1993, a privately-owned Hawker Hunter went down into Broomhead Moor. The body of its experienced pilot, Walter Cubitt, was never recovered and is presumed to be entombed within the quagmires that are prevalent in the vicinity. As fast as the planes went down, so the inexplicable sightings have seemed to increase in number.

Ron Collier, a former airman himself, has since set up a group to investigate the apparently strange sequence of events. He admits to being disturbed by the ghosts associated with the disasters. 'If you ask me for a scientific explanation. I would say there is a prevailing south-westerly wind which pushes the planes off their flightpaths to Manchester and Liverpool and into the mountains. Certainly, 90 per cent of the wartime crashes there were put down to pilot error. But I am regularly contacted by people who say they have seen ghost planes. A nurse once called me after some friends had messed about with a Ouija Board during a night shift. She was terrified. The Board had spelled out a message saying; 'Where we are now, we are not at rest.' It then gave the names of all the crewmen aboard the 1948 Fortress plane. I told her to go and see a priest, which she later did.

Another time, a farmer told me how he had picked up debris from some of the wrecks for his farming equipment. He stowed them away in an outhouse, but then one day he and his son saw the barn almost shake itself to pieces. They immediately took all the stuff back to where they found it and it never happened again.'

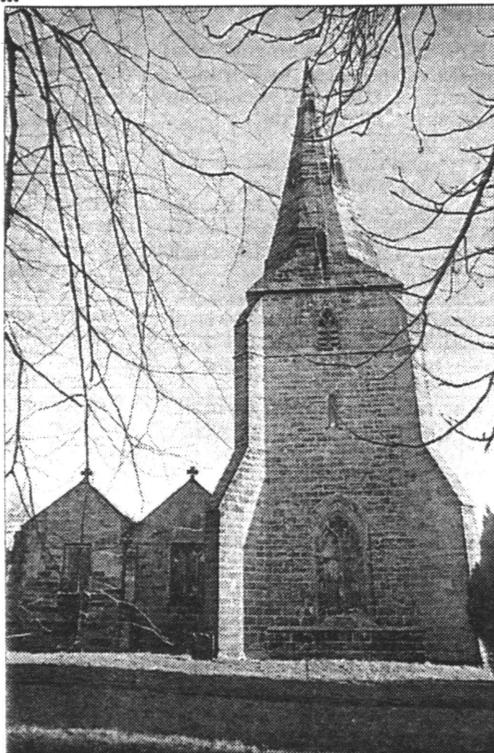
26th-29th March, 1997. Peak District, Glossop. 'THE EXPRESS'

Ghosts And Devils Over

Merseyside Part 2

THE PHANTOM MONK OF ST. ANDREWS CHURCH

'THE LIVERPOOL DAILY POST' carried a brief article concerning ghostly phenomena at St. Andrew's Church, early this year, that was of especial interest to your humble Editor, as the site is within 15 minutes walking distance of my home. There's an old war memorial at the entrance where, as a teenager, I used to meet up with my circle of less-than-reputable friends and while away the hours guzzling a bottle of cider cadged from our parent's fridge whilst we listened to John Peel sessions of 'STIFF LITTLE FINGERS' or 'JOY DIVISION' taped from the night before...



(Above): St Andrew's Church in Bebington on Merseyside. The site of a whole host of ghostly monk's???

I'd long been aware there were stories about the church being haunted by the spirit of a nun, who stands in the centre of the graveyard on clear Winter nights, her pale face bathed in moonlight as she glares balefully at the unwary... But I'd never heard tell of any phantom monk. Until now. I was fascinated to discover that the ancient church was built on the site of an early Saxon church and that novices for the priesthood were trained there at that time. According to the account, in more recent times, many people have reported seeing the ghosts of monks both inside and around the church. Documented evidence shows that the descriptions of what these people have reported

seeing bear a remarkable consistency i.e.; a grey hooded figure, gliding along about 15 inches off the ground.

A member of the congregation at the church, who, not surprisingly, wishes to remain anonymous, related to the 'POST'S' reporter that one day while she was kneeling in the chapel, she looked through into the choir stalls and saw two whole rows of these grey-hooded figures sitting on both sides of the stalls.

This is exactly what the monks would have done whilst in training all those hundreds of years ago.

There have also been sightings of a ghostly monk walking down the lane leading up to St. Andrew's Church before disappearing into a tunnel.

The current Curate, the Reverend Peter Froggatt, has understandably sought to play down the reports. He told the same reporter that he had never once seen or heard anything unusual during his tenure at the church.

We hope to speak to him personally, in time for the next issue.

5th January, 1997. St. Andrew's Church, Bebington, Merseyside. 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST.'

One Early Morning In May

The following is a personal account sent to the Editor by way of a letter. Once again, the author would prefer to remain anonymous.

'Early in May, 1995, I was out delivering 'THE WIRRAL NEWS' around the Thornton Hough, Bromborough and Eastham area of Merseyside.

It had been a very long day as I had been delivering in North Wales since 11am. I had only about three more drops left on my run, all of which were in the area of Eastham Village. The route which I was to take would be from Carlett Boulevard, onto the A41, and then turn left at the set of traffic lights, which would eventually take me into Eastham Village itself. I had travelled this route for the previous six months, so I was not expecting anything out of the ordinary to occur.

It was approximately 3:30am, and already the dawn was beginning to break in the western sky. I was approaching the churchyard, which is situated in the middle of two roads, the junction of which I had started to anticipate. About 60 yards in front of me, I suddenly noticed, next to an angelic statue, what appeared to be a grey mist wisping out into the middle of the road. To the right hand side of this 'mist' on the opposite pavement, I could see a more condensed, concentrated patch of 'mist'.

As I got nearer, I could see that this patch of 'mist' was forming into something resembling a cloaked, humanoid figure, no more than five feet tall.

This figure began moving slowly towards the middle of the road, apparently unaware that I was driving a large van towards it. As soon as I was almost on top of the figure, it simply vanished along with the mysterious 'mist' that had cocooned it.

Once I had passed the place where the figure had been, I immediately checked my mirrors, but could see nothing out of the ordinary. I decided there and then to stop the van. I'm not entirely sure why, but I felt strangely relaxed and at peace with myself. I mulled over in my mind what I had just witnessed, and although not given to flights of fantasy, I was unable to reach any conclusion other than that I had seen a ghost of some description. I have been past the same spot since on several occasions, hoping for a further sighting, but to date, I have had no such luck.

I should add that at no time during the 20-30 second or so incident did I feel the slightest bit afraid.

Keep Watching The Skies!!!

UFO UPDATE

ARE WE DESCENDED FROM ALIENS?

1997 has so far certainly been a year for the return of old 1970's and 80's favourites. *'THE PROFESSIONALS,'* *'DAD'S ARMY,'* and *'THE ROCK AND GOAL YEARS'* are back on our TV screens. Wes Craven has directed his first decent horror film since the original *'NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET.'* The brilliant Liverpool F.C. side of 1977 got together to commemorate their first European Cup win in Rome (on a glorious night in May) Hell, even *DURAN DURAN* reformed and cut a half-decent single.

And, just in case you failed to notice it, (or if you did, were more interested in the feeding and breeding habits of the lesser spotted Shrike) that past master of the Ancient Astronaut Theory, Erich Von Daniken, has also decided hit the comeback trail. The revolutionary visionary or infamous hack, depending on how seriously you take his often, wildly controversial views, has once more elected to present as the literal truth, yet another entirely unsubstantiated claim to an all-too trusting public. He now claims he has evidence that Alien races have abducted human beings so that they can prepare mankind for the *Return Of The Old Gods.* He's even managed to gain the support of that champion of the Alien Abduction As Everyday Reality Theory, Dr. John Mack.



In a quite literally throw-away article in *'THE SUNDAY PEOPLE'*, Erich cited several cases that he maintains back up his latest hypothesis...

As *'THE PEOPLE'* stated at the outset of the article, read on if you dare...

The first case he relates concerns Maria Struwe, who apparently suffered a terrifying nightmare when she was just three months' pregnant.

The 'dream' centred upon a recollection of her being placed upon her recollection of being placed upon an operating table as the archetypal small Aliens with large heads and almond-shaped eyes stood either side and removed her unborn child.

Maria is described as an intelligent housewife (therefore implying that she couldn't *possibly* have allowed her imagination to run away with her to the extent that she'd begin to confuse her dreams with reality...) and when she awoke in her bed she was bathed in beads of sweat.

Worried by the lingering power of the 'dream' she decided to pay a visit to her doctor in Berlin, and was confronted with the heartbreaking news that she was no longer pregnant.

Two weeks later, in the long hot Summer of 1986, Maria expelled what she referred to as 'two lumps of flesh.' She assumed at first that it must be placenta and simply flushed it away.

Maria and her husband gradually recovered from the bitter experience and decided to try and have another child. They failed in their efforts, although Maria had become pregnant very quickly the first time around. Finally, at their wits end, they elected to try artificial insemination. The attempt apparently caused Maria excruciating pain and the doctor was forced to stop the procedure.

Two weeks later, Maria expelled a transparent skin-like tissue.

Even more mysterious was the fact that she suddenly became pregnant once more, and happily, nine months down the line she gave birth to a healthy son, Sebastian.

She later felt compelled to relate her story to a scientist, Dr. Johannes Flebag, who has it seems, investigated several other unexplained abduction cases in Europe. He has been taken with the belief that aliens have extracted Maria's foetus and then implanted the skins to prevent her becoming pregnant again.

Now, you might be forgiven for thinking that perhaps all we are dealing with here is an unusual, though perfectly natural pregnancy coupled with a some admittedly vivid dreams of those pesky abducting aliens...

Erich and his new-found friends would ask you to hold onto your sceptic's hat for a second longer, however. They maintain that as he grew up, Sebastian began telling his parents about strange dreams of 'monsters with big heads and strange eyes.'

He also related of how he'd 'seen little children in boxes.' When Dr. Flebag showed the doubtless impressionable child drawings of different types of aliens, he 'instantly identified the small ones with large heads and strange eyes.' Yet Maria swears she has never told her son about her original 'dreams.'

Although Dr. John Mack, the Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard University, and well-known advocate of the Alien Abduction Hypothesis, is not actually working with Von Daniken, he propounds the theory put forward by Erich that the abduction scenario is real and part of a wider plan aimed at genetic engineering human beings for some undisclosed, though doubtless, nefarious purpose.

His 'researches' have, he alleges, provided proof positive that 78 people whose cases he'd been involved in had indeed been taken away by aliens. Some even claimed that they had spawned 'Cosmic Children.'

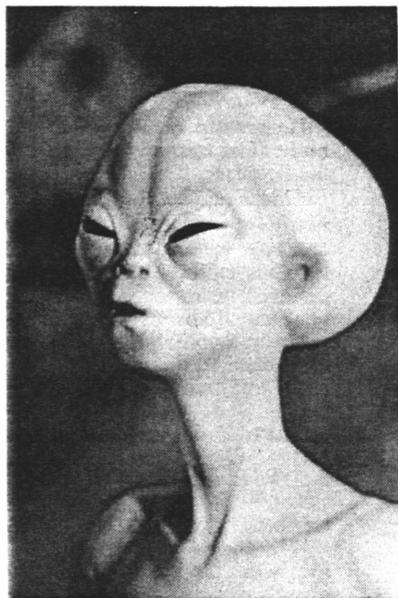
These victims further claimed that they were somehow calmed and paralysed before they were taken aboard a spaceship...

Whilst on an operating table hair and skin samples would be removed, and needles and other objects inserted into various body orifices. Some are then shown shelves filled with small embryos floating in a clear, gel-like fluid.

This has of course, now become the classic abduction scenario, and a few examples of this were contained within the article:

Jerry, a 35-year-old clerical worker, honestly believes that aliens took to removing eggs from her womb and then implanted embryos. They then abducted her in a spaceship and showed her two little girls.

'They were angelic with pale skin, wispy hair and blue eyes. They said to me; "You are our mother." After embracing them, I felt all the usual motherly instincts.'



Dave, a health worker, claimed that he was levitated into a spaceship where aliens inserted a long probe into his penis. He was then forced to donate a sperm sample.

Another case involved a 43-year-old technician who was 'seduced by a female being' with silvery hair. She 'extracted this sperm through a tube to create special babies.'

And Catherine, a pregnant 25-year-old music student, told the (ahem) good Dr Mack, that she was abducted near Boston. 'A being with huge almond eyes' took her aboard a spacecraft and an operation was performed to remove her foetus.

She said that the creature had 'alien-type eyes and I was told to be proud of it. When I asked how many other humans have you done this to? I was told; "A large number."

And as if all this wasn't enough to have you rolling your eyes in exasperated disbelief, Erich takes the whole thing one crazily logical step further...

He proposes the theory that aliens could have been conducting breeding experiments here on the Earth, creating mutants - a hypothesis he backs up by pointing at the writers and artists who throughout history have described hideous gods and demons.

The Egyptian scribe Manetho, who lived in the third century B.C, wrote a history of the 3,000 reign of the Pharaohs, he described "double-winged humans" and men with the "thighs of a goat and horns upon the head.

He also talks of humans with horses' hind quarters. Jewish chronicles tell of beasts with only one eye and others with the body of a horse and the head of a ram.

He also asks us to accept that aliens left us a message in the dim and distant past proving that we are their remote ancestors.

Such a message may well be contained within our DNA. Erich believes that sometime in the future, mystery strands of DNA will spark to life when triggered by the all

knowing, all-seeing aliens. And then, and only then will the human race be ready to face up to the return of their Cosmic Parents.

Von Daniken says that we only use about half of our brains capacity - and when alien messages are finally released, triggering the unexplained DNA, the other half will come into use. This is why the oldest Pharaohs had very large skulls and large brains. It also explains rather neatly, why they constantly referred to themselves as "Sons Of The Gods."

Not that this theory is anything new of course. Keeping up his penchant for shamelessly nicking other people's ideas and presenting it as his own, Erich now rips off Nigel Kneales' Professor Quatermass, who voices his opinion that we are the genetic product of a Martian colony in the classic film and TV series '*QUATERMASS AND THE PIT*.'

Never mind, Erich.

Now what was that bit about only using one half of the brains mental capacity, again???

30th March, 1997. *SUNDAY PEOPLE*.'

FORMER DEFENCE MINISTER 'ADMITS TO EXISTENCE OF UFO'S'



And yet another '*SUNDAY PEOPLE*' *World Exclusive* was quick to brighten up our Sunday lunches with the 'astonishing revelation' that former British Defence Minister Earl Frederick Howe seems to readily accept the reality of UFO's as 'Allen Spacecraft'. An admission that lends credence to the ETH and vindication for all the conspiracy theorists who believe we are deliberately being kept in the dark about the existence of the abduction-happy aliens by shady government agencies...Break open that bottle of Chateau de Roswell. Don those '*THE GREY'S ARE COMING!*' baseball caps and unfurl those banners

saying '*I DON'T WANNA SOUND SMUG, BUT I TOLD YOU SO!*' We're gonna have ourselves a pro-alien celebration...

What's that? You want proof of the claims?

Lord, you surely are a bunch of hard-boiled sceptics. Try this on for size: According to the article, Mr Howe has apparently written a supposedly confidential letter (which fortunately, in the interests of free speech fell into the hands of the sensation-seeking Sunday press) in which it is revealed that all RAF station commanders are under orders to report UFO sightings.

Not impressed? Then how about the earth-shattering admission that '*so far as the existence of extraterrestrial lifeforms is concerned we remain open-minded?*'

The letter was originally sent to former Don Valley MP Martin Redmond who is it seems trying desperately to break the MoD's wall of silence when it comes to UFO's.

Redmond was concerned about a strange object with a red and green rotating light that appeared in the skies above East Anglia in January of this year. The UFO was reportedly tracked by radar at RAF Neatishead and RAF Northwood for several hours as it hovered for several hours before flying 50 miles down the coast.

The sighting was corroborated by the crew of a tanker and a civilian plane, whilst a video, now in the hands of the MoD - was taken by police officers.

'It's incredible no aircraft were scrambled when a target was picked up so close the coast,' Redmond was quoted as saying to former Defence Secretary Michael Portillo. 'This raises questions on the way we police the UK Air Defence Region.'

Earl Howe replied that the RAF does not respond unless there is evidence that UK air space has been compromised. He added; 'We do not investigate further or provide an explanation for what might have been observed.'

Mr Redmond, along with the majority of the UFO's As Extraterrestrial Spacecraft Lobby, believes the Government is guilty of a massive ongoing cover-up, and maintains, quite reasonably, that if there is no defence significance in these apparent 'invasions' then there is no excuse for continued secrecy either. Always assuming that the MoD have any more of a clue as to their identity than the rest of us, of course.

'The answers I've been given lead me to think there is something more to this, Redmond contends. 'The only thing I know for sure is that the whole issue is shrouded in secrecy.'

The article concluded with a statement from (yet another) former Defence Minister, Nicholas Soames, (he of the Deputy Dawg cheek jowls). He refused point-blank to reveal how many UFO's RAF pilots have reported encountering since 1966. He claimed the information would be too costly to obtain. But he added; 'Unidentified contacts penetrating UK airspace are identified by all available means, including interception.'

Alright. So there's no *real* revelation here. Just a patent reminder of that which we know already...Put the champagne on ice. We're no nearer an answer yet. And perhaps it's to be our fate that we never will be...

11th February, 1997. *East Anglia*. '*SUNDAY PEOPLE*.'

*** Nor will we be holding our breath any awaiting the result of an ultimatum issued by America's fairly well respected SETI (Search For Extraterrestrial Intelligence) team upon President Clinton.

They've apparently urged him to reveal the truth about documented encounters with UFO's, or else they themselves would.

The Committee boss Dr. Steven Greer was quoted as saying; 'It's not our intention to cause instability.'

UFOLOGY PROVES ITS POINT!

A SPECIAL REPORT BY MALCOLM
ROBINSON-FOUNDER OF STRANGE
PHENOMENA INVESTIGATIONS (SPI)

Will the study of UFOlogy ever be afforded the respect it deserves?

We all know from bitter experience, that the topic has often found itself right at the forefront of many a media joke, and regardless of how impressive the weight of the evidence may be, UFOlogy has never been afforded the opportunity to successfully prove its point.

Well, not so!!!

The Case For UFOlogy was recently proven in court, albeit a mock one. On Friday 21st March, 1997, Grampian Television, based in Aberdeen, Scotland, completed its series of programmes entitled; 'WE ARE THE JURY.' The programme is based on a studio courtroom format, the members of whom are asked to deal with topical issues and subjects that the general public would like to see debated.

The final programme in the series dealt with the issue of UFO's in Scotland, and the witnesses who have claimed to see them.

Was there a case to be answered? Do UFO's exist as extraterrestrial spacecraft? Or Earthlights? Or Multi-dimensional manifestations? Or whatever other theory you choose to proffer, or are the simply misperceptions of the perfectly ordinary?

Well, for the first time in the somewhat chequered history of UFOlogy, the subject was to be given a serious gearing in open court, with a professional jury made up of individuals from all walks of life. I was fortunate enough to be amongst those presenting the case for the 'Reality Of UFO's, (I am the former Editor of 'ENIGMAS' and in my capacity as founder of the Scottish Research Group: SPI, I personally studied the wave of UFO sightings over Bonnybridge in Central Scotland).

Opposing the belief in the reality of UFO's was arch-sceptic and major debunker, Mr Steuart Campbell from Edinburgh, whose books seeking to discredit the subject as well as the Loch Ness Monster, are well-known. Supporting Steuart in the court audience were many professional and amateur astronomers, including Professor Archie Roy of Glasgow University. Clearly, the opposition were of high standing and their views on the non-reality of UFO's would no doubt be presented with academic vigour. My own counsel were primarily made up of UFO witnesses, including Scotland's most famous 'UFO Abductees,' Gary Wood and Colin Wright. There were also other SPI members present, the most notable of whom was Billy Devlin.

The stage then was set. It looked like being a heated debate, and so it certainly proved!

As this was going out live over various parts of Northern Scotland, it was a major opportunity for us to present UFOlogy fairly and accurately to the nation, without any scissor-happy editors cutting out the juicy bits.

I took to the floor and spoke to the jury about close proximity UFO sightings, and the fact that the sheer volume and weight of impressive, well-documented UFO cases were growing by the year. I asked the jury to honestly consider this, and also to remember the fact that this was truly a global phenomenon of potentially immense importance. The hushed court listened attentively as I

delivered my speech...And they remained so for the turn of my opponent, Mr Campbell to present the case against.

Reading from notes (I am glad to say that I didn't have to resort to this stimulus to get my points over) Steuart asked the jury to consider the 'fact' that there was no hard, concrete evidence for the existence of UFO's or that aliens were visiting this planet. He maintained that all UFO sightings could be explained away in entirely conventional terms. As examples, he cited everything from temperature inversion layers to misidentifications of planets and stars and out and out optical mirages.

His submissions having thus been entered, it was then the turn of the court audience to voice their opinion on the subject. The lively arguments swung to and fro, from pro to con, as both sets of 'believers' and 'sceptics' aired their vies.

Brian McMullan, lead guitarist with Glasgow rock group CE IV, refused to be swayed by a host of astronomical explanations being proffered from the hard-headed realist side of the courtroom. He spoke with something approaching contempt for these views and issued a scathing attack on Campbell for supporting them.

Soon the TV courtroom was filled with sometimes over-enthusiastic debate and one began to fear the whole thing would get out of hand. Fortunately, there was a cut for commercials at around about the point where tempers became somewhat frayed, and break gave time for emotions to be calmed a little.

But not for long.

Upon resumption, one astronomer declared angrily that no other astronomer had ever reported witnessing a UFO. At which point, somebody thought it wise to remind him of the name Clyde Tombaugh - the man who discovered the planet Pluto...

During the course of the debate, the viewers were asked to phone in expressing their own views on the matter at hand. Did *they* believe in UFO's? Had they ever themselves, witnessed one?

Pretty soon the phones were ringing off their hooks!

The presenter then asked Garry Wood to inform the jury and the watching TV audience about his own UFO abduction. Garry duly delivered an emotional and frankly honest account of his experience which was fully backed up by his friend, and fellow-abductee, Colin Wright. At the conclusion of this very moving, not to say convincing account, the sceptics, undeterred, continued to express their doubts, and that even this case could be explained away in natural terms. I was moved to rise to my feet at one point and personally put it to one particularly loudmouthed sceptic; 'Have you ever actually sat down and studied the available UFO data?' to which he replied, predictably enough, 'no.'

The debate raged on unabated, and once more tempers became extremely frayed. All too soon, however, the programme began to draw to an end, and Mr Campbell and I were asked to give a 45 second summing up of their case to the assembled jury members. Campbell continued to stress the point (once more with the ubiquitous notes in his hand) that UFO's were without exception, misidentifications of ordinary, mundane objects, whereas I stressed the need to 'examine the evidence for ourselves. To sift and study the hard UFO data, of which there was plenty in abundance.

With that, it was time for the jury to deliver their verdict. What would it be?

The courtroom was hushed as the Jury Foreman was asked to give its verdict: 'We the jury find the Case For The Reality Of The UFO Phenomenon, proven by nine votes to three.'

This verdict was greeted with loud, ecstatic applause by the supporters of Ufology, whilst the amateur and professional astronomers and the sceptical Archie Roy, sat in silence with facial expressions that spoke louder than any amount of words.

This victory for Ufology, was made all the more sweeter knowing that we had been up against undeniably strong opposition, who were not ordinary members of the public as such, but who had attended in their professional and semi-professional capacities.

So, for the first time in British Television history, the case for the existence of UFO's was officially *proven*.

But wait.

There's more.

Grampian Television were reportedly snowed under with telephone calls from the audience at home who also believed there was a real case to be answered. A staggering 86% of the public felt strongly that UFO's were a reality.

So Ufology scored a small, but significant victory which was celebrated back at the hotel in which we were staying until the wee small hours by members of SPI as well as English Ufologist Eric Morris, who was flown up by Grampian to participate in the programme.

The argument for the reality of UFO's was well and truly taken on and won that night.

The fight now goes on to show the World that they must now look at this subject with eyes no longer blinded by a refusal to accept anything that lies outside the borders of what passes for 'everyday reality.'

New cases are emerging every day, and we can only hope that the ridicule that this subject has been forced to endure for the past 50 years, will finally cease....

It did that March night in Aberdeen.

And boy, was the taste of victory sweet.

NASA REPORT SUSPECT, SAY UFOLOGISTS

The dedicated enthusiasts who have spent whole decades investigating reports of UFO's are said to be (perhaps understandably) extremely sceptical about the report concerning what the tabloid press rather disparagingly referred to as a UMO (Unidentified Microscopic Object) NASA'S study of the famous meteorite from Mars, is according to Don Jernigan, founder of the Phenomenon Investigation Committee, nothing but a raising of public awareness to the possibility of ET life and the potential risk of alien invasion.

William Jones, a Dublin attorney, and state chairman for MUFON, says, not surprisingly, that this is something of an extreme view, although many Ufologists believe the government does use the media to manipulate public attitudes on extraterrestrial life.

NASA created something of a sensation when last in the dog days of last August, they reported that their study of a 4.5 billion-year-old Martian meteorite revealed fossils resembling those left behind by ancient bacteria on Earth.

The well of controversy that has arisen in the wake of this announcement has not prevented NASA looking for ways to launch Martian rock-recovery missions early in the next century. But all this isn't really about Martian microbes, according to Jernigan.

'Some UFO event is on the verge of happening that they will not be able to control,' he was quoted as saying. The microbe report is apparently the governments way of beginning to back off its contention that UFO's don't exist.

'This could be the first step towards an explanation of what's been going on for years,' said James Donohoe, of London, Ohio.

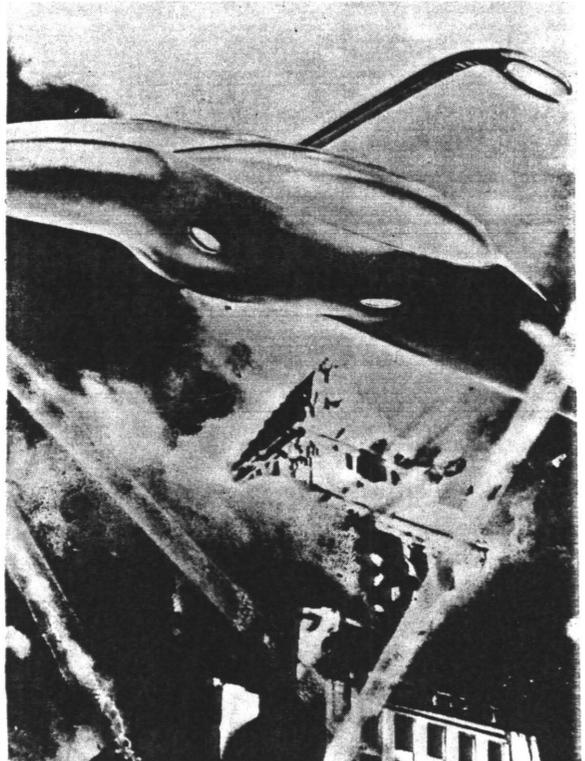
Jernigan and Donohoe say their sources tell them astronomers have already spotted a cluster of city-sized asteroids heading this way. The objects seem to be under intelligent control and may, in fact, be alien spaceships.

'They said four years ago they'd be here in six years,' said Jernigan. 'Lots of strange stuff has been happening in the last four years. What, for example, was Star Wars all about?' He was referring, not to the recently re-released George Lucas epic, but to the Reagan-era missile defence program.

In any case, Jernigan says its galling that the government gets so excited about microscopic fossils while ignoring more than 100,000 reported sightings of UFO's.

William Jones, however, would beg to differ.

'This meteorite is more direct proof than is the UFO record. You can take the UFO record and come up with a strong hypothesis. But while the extraterrestrial hypothesis is reasonable, it's not proven yet. Nobody really knows where UFO's come from, and we don't know for sure, that the government knows. Maybe the fact that government officials don't know enough is the reason they don't talk. But there certainly is evidence that they know a great deal more than we do.'



(Above): Poster art for the 1953 film version of H.G. Well's classic story of Martian invasion; 'THE WAR OF THE WORLDS.'

In the wake of the 'discovery' of what may be Martian microbes, and movies such as 'INDEPENDENCE DAY' and 'MARS ATTACKS' there seems to be a growing feeling that UFO's may well be hostile. A sinister throwback to the paranoid '50'? Or a government inspired plot to raise public awareness to a very real threat?

Walter Andrus, director of MUFON, in Seguin, Texas, has stated that he, along with his 5,000 member group support Mars exploration missions.

'We don't know where these strange objects originate from, but these things have been here for hundreds, if not thousands of years.'

15th November, 1996. General 'ST. LOUIS POST & DISPATCH.

EXCHANGE MAGS

REVIEWS

Northern UFO News #176.

The June issue of my favourite UFO publication, including the current stack of glossies weighing down the magazine shelves at just about every newsagent's, is as excellent as ever. There are features on a new 'alien body' controversy, the MoD cover-up, Men In Black, Michael Knighton's UFO encounter, the low down on all the big Summer events, and the latest news of Flying Triangles over Britain.

An essential read for anyone remotely interested in the subject of UFO's written, as it is, by one of the foremost figures in the field.

Available from; 11, Hallsteads Close, Dove Holes, Buxton, Derbyshire. SK17 8BS.

Subs Details: £6 for six issues.

Animals And Men # 13

As regular readers will doubtless know by now, I have a great interest in all things Cryptozoological. It may come as no real surprise then that this publication is my favourite Fortean 'zine on the market. Written with an engaging mixture of factual reporting and a wealth of good humour, the latest issue includes articles on Singing Oysters, The Barking Beast Of Bath, Mystery Cats In Yorkshire, A Plethora Of Pangolins, the latest sea serpent and lake monster reports and tons more besides...

An absolute must-read!!!

Available from: The Centre For Fortean Zoology, 15, Hoine Court, Exwick, Exeter, Devon, EX4 2NA.

Subs Details: £8 for four issues.

Cover Up # 6.

My first encounter with this magazine, and I sincerely hope it won't be my last.

The publication of the Scottish Unexplained Phenomena Research group, the latest issue includes articles on UFO's Over Livingston (the site of Bob Taylor's infamous close encounter, of course), Weird Events In Knock Forest, a rather damning cartoon slagging off two well-known Scottish Ufologists and an in-depth overview of The Falkland Hill Landing.

Very well written and put together.

Available from 49, Limefield Crescent, Bathgate, West Lothian, Scotland EH48 IEF.

£1:25 Sample Issue.

Magonia # 59

The magazine that Interprets Contemporary Vision And Belief is also a compulsive read.

Edited by fellow Merseysider's John Rimmer and John Harney, the latest issue features an thought-provoking piece entitled; Dangerous Abduction Fantasies. It pours some much-needed scorn upon the current abduction mythos and the real harm it may be doing to gullible people who believe they may have experienced something 'out of this world.' The Budd Hopkin's Brigade are given a thorough and well-deserved kick up the proverbials. There's also an equally highly literate article on the equally

worrying trend of Satanic Child Abuse Hunters being on the rise again.

Add to this, a selection of excellent book reviews, and a consistently lively letters page, and you've got one hell of a good read on your hands. So enjoy.

Available from: John Rimmer, John Dee Cottage, 5, James Terrace, Mortlake Churchyard, London, SW14 8HB.

Subs Details: £5 for four issues.

The Demeter May Issue.

For lovers of all things Vampiric, this magazine is for you. The latest issue includes articles on Bosnian Creatures Of The Night On The Prowl, Vampire Fiction, True Tales Of Terror, The Bloody Guide To The Best Vampire Films Ever Made, the Undead influence in rock music, and there's even a Vampiric Crossword courtesy of Dr Blood, minus his coffin!!! A pretty comprehensive overview of the subject, and a fine read.

Available From; Unit 63, St Hilda's Business Centre, The Ropery, Whitby, North Yorkshire. YO22 4ET.

Sample Copy; £2:50.

At The Edge #6

One of the best publications dealing with Earth Mysteries, Folklore and Mythology available today.

The current issue is a sex and gender special and has well-written articles on Women On The Rampage, Spinning In Myths And Folktales, and my personal favourite, an excellent piece on cats as both witches familiars and their transformations into the same.

Even if you're not normally taken with this sphere of interest, you could do worse than purchase a copy of this very well presented magazine. You never know, you might just like it.

Available From; 2, Cross Hill Close, Wymeswold, Loughborough, LE12 6UJ

Subs Details: £9 for Four Issues.

The Fortean Times

The first and still the foremost in the world of paranormal phenomena reporting, the FT continues to maintain the same impossibly high standards...

At the time of going to press, they'd reached their 99th issue, and were just about to celebrate a ton up. We wish them all the best for the next hundred.

Issue 99 included the usual impressive array of features including a fascinating report from the Amazon Jungle of an encounter with a lake monster. There's a remarkable photograph of what is said to be the mysterious beasts set of saw-teeth breaking the surface. 'Nothing like it exists in nature,' is just one of the quotes made in the wake of the sighting.

There's also a look at the new mysteries thrown up by the increased level of technology that enables us to see further and further into outer space, and the rise of Apocalyptic Cults in Japan being possibly connected with the appearance of strange lights in Australia and suppressed technology in the less than good-ol'- USA.

Add to this, the consistently excellent STRANGE DAYS section, thought-provoking Forum debates from leading Fortean's, and you can see why this mag has stayed at the top for so long.

Available From: John Brown Publishing, The Boathouse, Crabtree Lane, London, SW6 6LU. Subs: £30 for 12 issues

Next Issue:

CELEBRATING 50
YEARS' OF THE UFO
PHENOMENON.

A REVIEW OF THE TOP 50 UFO REPORTS SINCE
KENNETH ARNOLD'S INFAMOUS ENCOUNTER ON
24TH JUNE, 1947.



A Round-Up Of All The Very Latest News From The World Of Ufology!

On The Trail Of The Silver

Man; David Coleman reports on the mysterious entity of Knock Forest in Scotland.

PLUS All The Regular Features Including News On Crying Icons, Glowing Mice, Wolf Women, A Visit From The Grim Reaper, Killer Poltergeists, The Bible Code, Modern Day Miracles, U.N. Conspiracies, Icebergs From Space, And The Monster Of Lake Champlain...And Lots More Besides!!!

Due Out Mid-August, 1997. Price: £2

AND FINALLY!!! 'The Chances Of Anything Coming From Mars....'

In the wake of the NASA's revelation concerning the Martian meteorite and its potential for containing traces of microscopic alien life, comes news that British scientists had encountered new evidence to suggest that life did once exist on Mars...

And maybe still does.

A second Martian meteorite was found to contain significant amounts of organic material. The comparative young age of the rock means there could have been life on Mars as recently as 600,000 years ago. Geologically speaking, this is recent enough to for there to be a good chance that life in some form, may still exist in certain protected areas of that remote, forbidding planet.

The scientists from the Open University and the Natural History Museum, have also discovered new clues pointing to life from the first meteorite, which hit the world headlines in August, 1996.

Not long after this was announced, news broke that scientists for the planned Mars Global Surveyor mission were saying they would try to photograph the region of Mars said to contain the mile-long, human-like visage, first captured on film by the Viking space probe in 1976.

From orbit, 234 miles above the planet's surface, Surveyor's cameras can apparently see objects as small as 6 and a half feet across. But the scientists can't guarantee that craft will have its high resolution camera on when it finally hovers over that precise area.

For one thing, there are said to be 4,000 high priority science targets to shoot elsewhere on Mars during the 687-day mission. And Surveyor must alternate its sharpness settings to achieve the goal of mapping the entire planet.

But if the spacecraft is in a position to see the face on a given day then; 'rest assured, I'm gonna try and take a picture,' says camera designer Michael Malin.

When he can, Malin hopes to announce in advance on the Internet when the spacecraft will pass over 'the face', and he'll post the images.

Richard Hoagland, a believer in the ancient monuments on Mars theory, is predictably less confident that NASA are going to allow this to happen. He believes they are doing everything they can to leave themselves a 'legal loophole' to withhold the images if they show any signs of alien handiwork.

Malin, who doesn't accept 'the face' is anything but a natural formation, retorted that he had no reason to hide anything;

'Either way, I win. If it turns out to be artificial, I'm the guy who took the picture. If it turns out to be natural, then the images will go a long way to providing the confirming evidence on something I've done the research on.'

Whatever the outcome, don't hold your breath for any news or television pictures of anything remotely controversial to be released to the general public.

I'm not at all sure if I can afford any level of credence to the conspiracy theorists who propound that all this talk about life on Mars is merely a public information exercise, aimed at raising their awareness to prepare them for some major revelation in the near future...

Perhaps even an imminent alien invasion

But you never know!

3rd November, 1996. LIVERPOOL DAILY POST.