

DEAD OF NIGHT MAGAZINE



Issue 17 February/March 1999

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Tales Of Ghosts And Midnight Terrors



Merseyside's Premier Publication Dealing
With All Paranormal Phenomena!!!

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DEAD OF NIGHT MAGAZINE

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The Shape Of Things That Never Came

'Secrets. Shared with her long ago...

Talking all night in a room.

All night, everything's slowing down.

I wish I was lost.

I wish I was lost...

Strangers. No one really knows we love,

I catch your eyes in the dark.

One look, relives the memory,

The memory, the way it used to be...

'SECRETS' THE CURE

Have you ever stood upon the shore of a warm sea of memories, and yet been unable to breathe in the comfort of them?

If you have, then this rambling excuse for an Editorial (what do yer mean, that makes for some *big* change?) will doubtless strike a chord with you. I guess if you haven't, you're either as indifferent to misery as the endlessly smiling air hostess in that 'WEETABIX' ad, or else you suffer from short term amnesia.

Never being blessed with such a carefree, happy-go-lucky attitude (no matter how many of those bran-filled biscuits I wolf down at breakfast) nor affected by memory loss, short term or otherwise, I was left strung out in a kind of emotional limbo after I'd spent a couple of hours, one rain-sodden Sunday afternoon, poring over my set of diaries.

Okay, I know the fact that I've kept a fairly detailed journal, (dating right back to the impossibly distant days of 1982, when I'd just turned eighteen, and all the world seemed filled with glorious potentialities), may sound a little sad in an anorak-ish sort of way, but I can't help it. I'm a compulsive writer. It's an addiction. A habit that carries no truck with the phrase; 'Just Say No!!!'

So you'll pardon me, I'm sure, if from time to time, when I'm short of inspiration, too tired or hungover to even switch on the word processor, all of the books and video's in my collection seem dull and unappealing, and there's nothing on the TV but inane soap operas, happy crappy quiz shows and endless debates between a bunch of faceless politicians, it's then that I reach into the darkest recesses of my wardrobe and fish out my diaries.

And there I sit at the foot of the bed, wallowing in nostalgia, as I recall the bygone years that seem less to map out the best (and the worst, oh boy, do they include the *worst*) times of my life than some sort of black, midnight journey of the soul. And if that sounds a trifle melodramatic to you, Dear Constant Reader, then in the immortal words of one Jonathan Rotten Esq; *'Tough titles, man.'*

All the personally historic landmarks are present and correct, of course. And most of these are uniformly good and make for pleasant reading; The annual trips to Wembley to see Liverpool win League and FA Cups almost at will. The holidays at home and abroad. Gigging with our band, 'Last Night At The Fair' at venues on both sides of the water, and having our demo's played on 'Radio Merseyside.' and 'City FM.' Getting engaged to the first

girl I've ever truly fallen in love with. Taking up DJ'ing. Starting a magazine.

A veritable kaledoscope of memories that may be long gone from the chart but not from my heart.

Strangely however, it's the not-so-good times, the personal disasters, the out and out trag-comedy's, that seem to carry the most poignancy, and make for the best stories. It's one of the sad facts of life that you can only waffle on for so long about those flawless halcyon days of wine and roses, before your audience starts to raise their hands to their mouths to stifle a yawn or else begin pointedly checking their watches as though they have an important matter to attend to, anywhere out of earshot of the rambling buffon and his endless recital from 'THE LEE WALKER BUMPERANNUAL OF GLAD TIDINGS AND JOY VOLUME 1'

Start launching into some of the things that have gone horribly wrong in your life however, and you can be sure you'll have their rapt, undivided attention.

Hell, they'll probably even pay for the privilege.

After all, isn't that exactly what you're doing right at this moment, (always assuming you haven't cadged a free copy from one of your friends, of course. And if so, you should be ashamed. I might have to forego that extra double Whisky at Last Orders, thanks to mingebags like you) .

Parting with your two quid just so you can laugh at the misfortune of others may seem a somewhat tasteless form of pleasure, but let's face facts, ladies and gents, it quite often proves cheap at the price....

ONE

Someone once said there's nothing quite so paranoid as a paranoid man accused of paranoia.

Okay dokey, that may very well be true, but seeing as how nobody is queuing up to accuse me of anything, save for being a bit of a hopeless romantic in my dealings with members of the opposite sex, I'll go right on peering in the rearview mirror to see whether or not we're being followed by anyone, dismantling the phone to prove it's not bugged, and checking under the bed before laying down to sleep at night, if it's all the same to you.

I don't think I'm crazy. At least not in the way the middle-aged loony who used to live three houses down from Stevie Gee's, was crazy. Back when we were kids, this cork-screw-haired, wild-eyed individual spent the best part of the golden Summer of '76, walking along the street shouting at passersby that the 'Bad Men' were coming to get him.

'But they won't catch me,' he used to scream, as he broke into a lolling run. 'I've got a plan that'll beat those buggers at their own game!!!'

For weeks on end, we'd bump into 'Mr Scary Shouter' as he scuttled along Ellens Lane or across the gardens outside Bebington Civic Centre, his shoulders hunched, his face contorted into a mask of sheer terror.

I can't speak on behalf of my friends, but I have to say, seeing an adult in such an obvious state of distress left quite a lasting impression upon me, and it got so I would lie awake nights thinking 'What if he's not a looney? What if he's got every reason to be scared witless? and, (here comes the one that gave me a whole month's worth of humdinger nightmares); 'What if the "Bad Men" really *are* after him?'

One thing's for sure, if he believed his tormentors to be essentially human in nature, then I guess in the end they got him, because one late August evening, just a week or so before school re-started, we saw him being dragged along St Andrews Road by a group of men, some of whom were dressed in white coats.

We'd been heading over to Stevie Gee's house to watch the kid's cartoons, have a game of 'MONOPOLY' or maybe

read through some of his *'INCREDIBLE HULK'* comics, but we immediately stopped, each of us staring open-mouthed, at the sight of 'Mr Scary Shouter,' fighting like a man possessed as he was bundled into the back of a waiting ambulance, All at once, his tortured yells hadn't seemed so frightening. They'd sounded lost and helpless. The aching despair that lurks at the very heart of darkness.

And I'd pitied him.

I later learned that he had taken to walking around with a pair of pillows tied to the soles of his feet, and that he'd gleefully announced to all and sundry that his masterplan was foolproof... 'The Bad Men' simply wouldn't be able to hear him on the occasions he had to leave the house, an idea that was so bug crazy it made you want to cackle till you were fit to burst.

Oh yeah, indeedly diggly doodely.

But that didn't lessen my pity for him any.

On the contrary, the knowledge that one of the true characters of Port Sunlight had been unceremoniously taken from our midst had hit us all harder than anyone could ever have predicted.

Mad as a Hatter he may have been, but 'Mr Scary Shouter' had been one of the defining landmarks of that seemingly endless summer. An abiding symbol every bit as poignant, every bit as memorable as *ABBA* and *The Bee Gees* blasting from the jukebox, massive swarms of ladybirds descending like some Biblical plague, and that satellite photograph taken from miles above the Earth adorning the front pages of the newspapers, revealing an entirely cloudless Britain.

Oh, I'm sure we crammed just as much as we could into what little remained of the holiday, but though we may have only have been twelve-years-old or so, I think it's fair to say that even then, we knew well enough that, for that year at least, the Summer was *already* over.

And in dreams in the nights that followed were filled with images of a pair of shoes lined with pillows, ominously waiting ambulances, and a bouquet of withered flowers..... A forlorn remembrance of late August wishes....

TWO

So no, I don't think I'm in quite as excessively neurotic as the tragic 'Mr Scary Shouter.'

I don't live in constant fear of being abducted by little Grey Aliens that can somehow float through the bedroom window and whisk you off to a waiting mothership where they perform medical experiments or bury implants deep beneath the skin.

I don't spend long sleepless nights worrying about some government conspiracy to establish a New World Order, using United Nations troops to subjugate the people and usher in an age where even our most basic democratic rights are blown to the four winds.

I don't believe 'Bad Men,' dressed all in black and driving black, unmarked cars, who issue threats like the villains of cheap, 1950's B-movies, are after me for some nefarious purpose.

Neither do I accept that the Moon is a base for Extraterrestrials, Nostradamus is smack on in his prophecy of Armageddon, Princess Diana was killed by a bunch of Satanists, Saddam Hussien is the living, breathing AntiChrist, heavy-metal records carry subliminal messages to kill your parents, or the Earth is as hollow as the inside of a ping pong ball (or the excuses proffered by Bill Clinton every time he decides to bomb 'those pesky Arabs' in a bid to bolster his flagging presidency, whichever you prefer) and populated by legions of Nazi's just itching for a chance to gain revenge for defeat in Two World Wars....

What I sometimes *DO* suspect however, usually in the wake of yet another failed attempt at establishing a

relationship with the latest girl of my dreams, is that there is a conspiracy afoot aimed at ensuring that, no matter what I try, I remain firmly stuck high up on the shelf, alongside the countless cartons of *Nilsson's Without U's* and the assembled boxes of *'Lennon's Lonely People.'*

Yeah. I know what you're thinking.

Oh, spare us the lonesome heart crap, will yer. We've all of us had more than our fair share of foundered hopes and sorry partings. You don't hear any of us crying into our beer. Why should you be any different?

And you'd be right to ask. I won't argue with you one iota. Maybe I am one of life's incurable romantics. Perhaps I do have an inordinate number of of vulnerable spots I practically wear on my sleeve. And yeah, what I am about to relate may well seem to you to be nothing more than a series of mundane, commonplace tragedies. None of that changes the fact that to me they represent a constant stream of Titanic-sized disasters.

So (and at the risk of coming on like a poor man's Nick Hornby), I guess I'll run just a few of them, (The Top Ten at least), right by you, regardless....

Ladies and Gentlemen, will you please put your hands together for the one and only;

'Alan 'Fluff' Freeman and his Gang Of Cheesy Disco Wobblers....'

'Alright, Pop-Pickers? Not arf!!!' I hope you're gonna sit right back and join us as we wind the soul clock ever backwards, along the length and breadth of Memory Lane and let me tell ya, things are certainly a-rockin and a-rollin in this part of town. Oh yes, indeedy. So whaddya say, without any further delay, let's get this show on the road...Alright? Not arf!!!

And kicking in at Number Ten, we've got 'Jackie Morely. Creepy Crawlie'

The girl who has the distinctly dubious honour of being awarded the title of First Girl I Ever Truly Fell For, was named Jackie. She was a classmate when I was just ten years old at Church Drive Junior School, and though the cold-hearted cynics would doubtless suggest that a mere child of that age could not possibly know the meaning of love, I'd beg to differ. If true love is measured by the amount of nights you spend lying awake, replaying snatches of conversation with the girl with the strawberry blonde hair and eyes the colour of June's soft blue, over and over in your head, searching for a semblance of a hint that she may regard you with some degree of affection. If it's determined by how many meals you skip because your stomach performs an endless series of acrobatic flip-flops every time you whisper aloud her name. And if it's gauged by the number of occasions you're moved to tears by the sound of a certain song playing on the radio...If any or all of that constitutes love, or something pretty damn near similar, then a ten-year-old can know (and suffer) every bit as well as an adult.

And I speak from bittersweet experience.

Jackie Morely (the '*Creepy Crawlie*' bit only came about because her surname happened to rhyme with that somewhat-less-than-flattering misnomer), sat in a row of desks directly opposite from me, and though she couldn't have been much more than twenty feet away it often felt like the distance between worlds.

I'd spend entire lessons just trying to catch her eye, and on the rare occasions that I was successful, (she was usually too busy passing secret notes under the desk, giggling behind her cupped hand at some private joke or staring

doe-eyed at posters of The Osmonds and The Bay City Rollers) I looked away so quickly I frequently cricked my neck and felt my cheeks burn crimson.

I was far too shy to ever actually go over and speak to her. The irony was that in other walks of school life, I was never slow in coming forward; I never backed down in an argument over the really important issues, such as who was the better striker, Keegan or Royle? Was a Cat's Eye really worth three Bolly's? Who was harder, King Kong or Godzilla? And did a headless spirit really stalk the long-deserted corridors of Old Nell's Mansion at the top of Trafalgar Drive...

But in the face of Jackie's prettiness, I felt tongue-tied and helpless.

I could no more have broken the ice with her than I could have jumped into the Tardis with Doctor Who to embark upon a mission to quell a Dalek invasion.

But neither could I just leave things as they were. I simply *had* to think of some way I could let her know the way I felt about her without incurring the crushing embarrassment that would come with outright, upfront rejection.

And the imminent approach of Valentine's Day, seemed at the time, to provide a god-given opportunity too good to miss.

I remember my stomach felt like it was being squeezed by a powerful hand the second I stepped into 'Liza Lollipop's *Newspaper's*' one freezing February morning, and spent the best part of an hour looking through the vast selection of cards that adorned the racks. I finally chose one that I'd thought Jackie couldn't help but appreciate. It had the lead characters of Walt Disney's 'LADY AND THE TRAMP,' standing at opposite ends of an enormous red heart, and the poem inside, (though I can't for the life of me recall a single word of it now), had summed up exactly the way I'd felt at the time. It was expensive. But I figured it was worth it.

I spent the next couple of days debating on what clues, if any, I should put in the card. At first, I toyed with the idea of leaving it unsigned.

But my subsequent dreams were haunted by the terrible prospect of Jackie presuming it was from some other lad she'd had her eye on, and after she'd showered him with grateful kisses, the pair of them walking off, hand in hand into the blood-red Winter sunset.

That was a vision far too dreadful to contemplate.

And so I went right ahead and signed it with love from LW. There was nobody else in our year (which only consisted of two classes, Five And Six) with those initials. She'd know who it was from alright, and that struck me as being both incredibly scary and intensely exciting at the same time.

I got into school extra early that morning, and hid the card amongst the pile of exercise books and pop music magazines in her desk, where she'd be sure to find it at some stage of the day.

Just before registration, I muttered hello to my classmates, told them I wasn't feeling too good, (which was at least partly true. I was sure I was gonna vomit at any moment) and took out a battered copy of 'FAMOUS MONSTERS OF FILMLAND' trying desperately to lose myself amidst its usually fascinating features on The Wolfman and Count Dracula. Gorgo and The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms. The Frankenstein Monster and The Mummy. But try as I might, I couldn't help but cast surreptitious glances at the desk across the way, where Jackie was now seated. My heart leapt into my mouth every time she lifted the lid of her desk, but somehow or other she failed to come across my card and as the morning wore on, the tension had become all but unbearable.

Right the way through History and Double English, past the mid-morning break, and on towards Dinner Time, still

she made no sign that she had found the roo'tin tootin' thing, and I began to despair that she ever would.

And then, just as the lunch bell sounded, wonder of wonders, Jackie reached into her desk, to take out her button box, one presumes, and I distinctly heard her yelp with delight as she held aloft the large, plain white envelope with the one word; Jackie, printed in the centre.

She tore open the envelope like an impatient child faced with some gaily wrapped package on Christmas morning, and squealed once more as *Lady and The Tramp* hove into view either side of that enormous red heart, and all of her friends gathered round, chattering excitedly, and just for a moment, the sickening fear left me. I'd been responsible for the undisguised joy Jackie was now experiencing.

Me.

The lad who'd secretly worshipped her from afar (well, from across the white wastes of the classroom, anyway).

I have to say it felt good.

But of course, my sense of triumph didn't last for long.

'Oooh, who's it from?' asked one of her friends, Julie Evans I think it was

'Hang on, hang on. Give me a chance to read it first,' Jackie replied as she tried to ward off an increasing number of curious classmates, and they backed off just a little, the better for her to see who had left their mark there.

'It's been signed,' she confirmed to all and sundry. 'It's been signed "Love From LW" Who do we know with those initials?'

Time seemed to stand still for me then. I was blushing furiously once more and I almost regretted placing my moniker on the card.

Almost.

But not quite.

Because as I'd stood there, seemingly frozen to the spot, another of Jackie's mates, Gaynor Davies, I'm virtually certain it was, suddenly announced in a voice that beggared no argument. 'I know who it is!!!!'

They all turned to face her, and I was still unable to move a muscle.

'I know who it is!!! I know who it is!!!!' Gaynor repeated unnecessarily. She couldn't have held a more captive audience if she'd have been a celebrity at some grand unveiling. The revealer of the culprit at the conclusion of 'SCOOBY DOO.' The MC about to announce the name of the number of the winning ticket in the big money prize draw...

'Well, tell us who it is then, smartypants.' someone shouted from the back of the assembled crowd, and Gaynor didn't need any further prompting.

'It's sooooo obvious. It's from Wayne Williams of Class Five, of course.'

'Er, it's signed LW, blockhead,' Julie reminded her. 'Not WW. How the flippin' heck do you work that one out?'

This drew a mixture of laughter and a few muffled shouts of 'That's right, blockhead. You should have paid more attention during Double English. Yer might have learned how to spell.'

Gaynor remained undaunted however. And much to my dismay, quietened their skepticism by reminding them of something they'd seemingly forgotten.

'Oh yeah, and just when was the last time anybody called him *Wayne*, exactly?'

This drew a thoughtful silence once more, as suddenly everyone remembered. Wayne Williams had once been forced to accept a challenge, a dare I guess you'd call it, thrown down by a couple of local hard knocks from the Big Kid's School on the New Chester Road. They'd approached him whilst he was on his way home for dinner the previous Halloween, and had promptly demanded a 'Trick Or Treat.' (I guess they must have been watching an

awful lot of American TV programmes, because back in the early '70's, when this account takes place, that particular custom was largely unheard of in England). Wayne, you need to understand, appeared at first glance, to be the archetypal school wimp. And certainly, the gawky, thin-as-a-beanpole kid with glasses three sizes too big, held together at the bridge by a thick layer of cello tape, couldn't fight his way out of the proverbial wet paper bag, but nevertheless, he'd earned the respect of just about every pupil at Church Drive, by refusing to back down to even the most fearsome of bullies.

I'd seen him stand up to Neil 'Yobbo' Clare, Peter 'Mauler' Major's, Jimmy 'Slammer' Swindles, even Nicky 'Cock Of The School' Ashton...And whilst it's true to say that in every case he never remained standing for very long, he'd come back for more the minute their back was turned and they'd assumed the (hopelessly one-sided) battle was won.

And so, it came as no real surprise to any of us to learn, courtesy of Michael Thomas, who happened to have been walking a hundred feet or so behind Wayne the day he was accosted by the dreaded 'Gang From The Big School,' that our fearless hero had refused to hand over any of his worldly goods, especially his most treasured possession: The black and white Casey football he carried around with him everywhere he went, like 'Linus' and his security blanket in 'CHARLIE BROWN.'

Wayne had, as per usual, been more than prepared to put up as much resistance as he possibly could, but almost before he was aware of it, the ball was punched from beneath the crook of his arm, and the very second it hit the pavement, it was whisked away and hurriedly passed from gang member to gang member, so that he'd been forced to play an involuntary game of 'Piggie In The Middle' as the ball constantly soared over his head.

They'd soon gotten bored of that however, and one of the group, a tall, moon-faced individual with eyes so lifeless-looking, they'd reminded Mikey of the dead fish lying on the slab at one of the stalls in New Ferry Market, had taken the ball in both hands and had launched it three quarters of the way up one of the poplar trees that lined the opposite side of the road.

Wayne had screamed 'NOOOooooo' at the top of his lungs, but the ball remained where it was, caught in the fork of a leafless limb.

'If you want it so much, why don't you go and get it?' one of the gang suggested. Other voices were raised in agreement; 'Yeah, go on yer little runt. Get on after it. We dare yer!!!'

Wayne hadn't needed further encouragement and with the sound of mocking laughter rising in answer, he'd scrambled up that tree like a regular powder monkey. He went up so fast he almost forgot to stop collect the ball, but he'd secured it safely in his hands before the crowd below had barely had time to draw breath.

Only one problem now remained.

'Hey, dickhead, 'Moonface' shouted in a voice that sounded like it was recorded on 33 and a third RPM. 'Yer can't stay up there forever. Come on down here. Giz a treat. And we might just let yer live.'

'I'm not scared of you, shit-for-brains,' Wayne had retorted. 'I just don't want yer getting yer filthy hands on me ball, again.'

This sent the gang into gales of uncontrollable laughter once more, even Mikey, scared as he was for Wayne, cracked a smile.

Only 'Moonface' failed to see the humour.

Double entendres, intentional or otherwise it seemed, passed him right on by.

'I'm staying put, until you's load have pissed off,' Wayne promised when the guffaws had at last subsided. And he'd doubtless meant it, too. Certainly, most of the 'Cheggar

Road Gang' believed so. A few minutes after this declaration had been uttered and he'd plainly showed no signs of moving, they began to gradually drift away back to school. After all, big hard lads they may be, but the lunchbreak was nearly over, and the bell would soon be calling them back to afternoon lessons. This stand-off was not worth a spell of detention.

Only 'Moonface' failed to see the logic.

Common sense and reasoning it seemed, passed him right on by.

Instead, he looked up at Wayne, grinned stupidly and withdrew a knife with a wicked-looking blade.

'I'm gonna wait here till yer come down,' he said in that oh-so-slow voice. 'And when yer *do* come down, I'm gonna burst yer balls!!!'

Mikey, who had decided to risk detention only in the interests of seeing his classmate safely out of this mess, later told me that he couldn't be one hundred per cent *sure* that's what 'Moonface' had actually said.

Balls.

In the plural. With all that that implied.

But whether he meant scrotum or leather Casey didn't make a whole pile of difference to Wayne. The sight of that knife and the thought of the damage it could wreak upon his prized asset had him scrambling still further up the tree, determined to put as much distance as possible between him and his inanely-grinning nemesis.

Or at least that had been his intention.

He hadn't negotiated three or four branches when the air had been rent with a terrible *CCCCRRRAAACCCCKKKK*-ing sound as one of the less-sturdy boughs snapped, and he'd begun plummeting backwards, thirty feet or so to the ground.

At that precise moment, the wail of a police siren caused 'Moonface' to look over his shoulder, and as he frantically sought the origin of the sound, Wayne Williams, still doggedly clutching his Casey, smashed into him with such force that 'Moonface' was knocked clean unconscious.

Wayne, his fall broken by his adversary's unwitting intervention, was merely winded, however, and had gotten to his feet and walked away with nought but a few bruises to show for his David and Goliath-type skirmish in the centre of Port Sunlight Village.

The upshot of all this was, Mikey was awarded a half hour's detention courtesy of the horrible Mr Harris. 'Moonface' got to spend a few days in hospital with a broken shoulder, concussion and several suspected fractures.

And Wayne....

Wayne got christened with a nickname that had seemed hugely appropriate at the time; Wayne was replaced with 'Lucky'

Lucky Williams

LW

L bloody W!!!

Would you believe it?

I was left utterly speechless as my darkest fears were played out before my eyes.

'No,' I wanted to shout. 'No, you've got it wrong. The card's from me. I'm LW, not that tosspot with the football fixation!!!' but all that emerged was a strangled sort of 'ug,' and Jackie and her entourage paid me no mind as they raced into the playground to seek out her not-so-secret admirer.

I couldn't face following in their tracks to witness the inevitable outcome. In my mind's eye, I saw Wayne wearing a dazed expression as he sought to deny the charges that it was he who'd sent the card. Jackie's mates would josh him, and reassure him there was no need to be embarrassed. And Wayne would continue to protest his innocence, until he realised that Jackie really didn't mind, was actually in raptures that he'd professed his love for

her,' and then he'd gaze upon her face, as if seeing it for the first time, see her as I did, and finally admit defeat....

Some 'Lucky' Williams, indeed

Maybe it didn't quite happen that way.

But the truth of the matter is, Jackie did eventually get off with him, whilst I was left with nought for consolation but the knowledge that I'd at least made her happy for a little while.

Even if, (unless in the unlikely event she someday gets to read this piece), she'll never know I was responsible...

Incidentally, the reason that this particular entry was excessively long, (aside from the fact that I am afflicted with that peculiar author's disease that compels one to 'write like fat ladies diet,') is quite simply due to the fact that this was the first time that God, Fate, Plain Bad Luck, or some Cosmic Joker with an extremely cynical sense of humour, had conspired to render my best efforts worthless...

All of the basic components are present and correct: Failing To Seize The Day, Chronic Shyness, Fear Of Rejection, Total Misjudgement...We'll be meeting up with these, and several of their closest chums and relatives as we continue with the Countdown.

So let's climb aboard for a ride on the Black Carousel, once more, shall we?

'Alright, Pop-Pickers? At Number Nine, it's doing fine, let's move forward in time to spread some more doom and gloom in the Apex Of Glum....Here's:'

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

Certain loud-mouthed individuals within the entertainment industry seem to regard the 1980's as being the Decade That Taste Forgot.

Funny that.

These very same people, be they music critics, film 'experts' or fashion designers, used to say very much the same thing about the now-hugely-revered '70's.

It seems to me that we always regard the decade immediately preceding the one in which we're currently living with outright contempt, dismissing even its undoubted highpoints with nary a second thought. So, for every classic record by *THE CURE*, *NEW ORDER* and *THE SMITHS*, they'll remind you of the godawful abominations that were *DOLLAR*, *TIGHT FIT*, and '*CURIOSITY KILLED THE CAT*.' For every must-see-film like '*THE SHINING*,' *GALLIPOLI*' and '*ALIENS*,' they'll shake their heads and say; 'What about '*NIGHT OF THE DEMONS*,' '*DEADLY FRIEND*' and '*FERRIS BUELLER'S DAY OFF*'?

It's my guess, however, that by the middle part of the next decade, we'll be looking back with fond nostalgia at the '80's, while we are told, in no uncertain terms, that the Nineties were honestly and truly, the Decade That Taste Forgot....

But I digress. I am well aware that memory can be selective, but the Summer days that spanned the 1980's, seem with hindsight, to have been impossibly long and sun-drenched. The evenings filled with a heat that hung, thick as a blanket in the still, breathless air.

There always seemed to be something happening back then.

There were endless 19-a-side football matches on a pitch we christened the San Siro for no other reason than it was surrounded by a circle of tall poplar's (the very same trees that 'Lucky' Williams's Casey had been unceremoniously

hoofed into several years earlier) that with a little imagination could be made to resemble the towering stands of that famous stadium, rehearsing and recording demos with our band, inspired by the songs of early *U2*, *THE CHAMELEONS* and *ECHO AND THE BUNNYMEN*. Day trips out to Parkgate, Chester, the beach at West Kirkby, or, when Stevie Gee became the first among us to get a car, further afield to Rhyl, Llangollen, and the Snowdonia National Park, in North Wales.

And of course, we discovered the myriad joys and delights of the local pubs and bars, and for varying amounts of time, stretched across the span of a decade, our regular haunts included 'The Three Stags,' 'The Rose And Crown,' 'The Welly' and 'The Bridge Inn.'

Probably our most-frequented watering hole however, was an almost ridiculously tiny bar situated on the corner that marked the unofficial boundary between New Ferry and Port Sunlight Village.

'The Railway,' (now rechristened, for some inexplicable reason; 'Le Railway,' and plastered with posters of Dutch football teams like Ajax, PSV Eindhoven, and er, Utrecht). despite its size, had a hell of a lot going for it. Friendly bar staff, a jukebox that contained virtually all of our personal favorite must-play tunes, a delicious selection of piping hot toasties and '*Castle Eden*' Ale, guaranteed to help you achieve a full on, all gun's blazing, Saturday night blowout! It was in the midst of one such drunken haze, that I first met Gaynor (I never did get her second name), and was subsequently accorded a sideways glance at one of those heart-rending 'Pictures From Life's Other Side.'

She was introduced to me by John Pritchard, ('Pilch' to his friends), a bespectacled, scrawny-looking individual who always seemed intent upon worming his way into the affections of anything in a skirt. With, predictably, very little success.

'See that girl over there,' he whispered in my ear-lugs whilst I was stood at the bar getting the ale in for me mates. He nodded, indicating the far corner of the lounge, and with a due sense of apprehension and dread I dared to peek over 'Pilch's' shoulder. At first, all I could make out was a vaguely feminine shape, shrouded in cigarette smoke, seated alone at a drink-laden table.

'What about her?' I asked without about as much enthusiasm one can muster when you're cornered at the bar with a raging thirst and a virtual allergic reaction to toady lads with greasy skin and even greasier smiles.

'Well, she asked me to give you this,' he said, and handed me a slightly soggy beermat.

I stared at the piece of card for a moment, not knowing quite what to say. And when I looked back at 'Pilch,' there was that grin, all liver-lipped and yellow-toothed, and I'm sure I took an involuntary step backwards, anxious to get back to my friends, as far away as possible from 'Pilch' and his less-than-Good-News-From Ghent.

He stopped me with another question. 'Well, aren't you even gonna' read what it says?'

Somewhat reluctantly I raised the beermat, the better to read it in the softly-lit bar room. 'Okay, let's see now,' I said, more to myself than anyone else. 'Ah, *Heiniken Refreshes The Parts Other Beer's Cannot Reach*' Nice advert, Pilch'

'Look on the other side, balloon head,' he sighed.

'Oh, sorry. Er...' I turned it over and struggled to make out the hastily scrawled writing. It looked like it had been etched in crayon at first. But then I caught a distinctive whiff and I knew it was lipsticker. I read aloud; "Gaynor 645 3245."

'Yeah, that's right. Gaynor. She's been asking about you all night. Why don't you go over and say hello?'

To tell you the truth, I was less than enamored with the idea of just sauntering across to that smoky corner of the room, to come face to face with a complete stranger who,

knowing my track record, might very well be a dead ringer for Elsa Lanchester in *'THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN'* or Kathy Bates in *'MISERY.'*

Most lads in that position may very well have assumed their ship had come in and though they'd be thinking with some other part of their anatomy than that of the brain, they would have raced over there slaving like a dog with a terminal case of rabies, no matter what she looked like.

But, as you've probably guessed already (and let's face facts, crime fans, you'd hardly have to be Inspector Morse or that smarty-pants old bat from *'MURDER SHE WROTE'* to work this out), I'm not most lads. I would just as soon have passed up the opportunity than run the risk of encountering the potential date from Hell.

I was in the process of issuing a half-arsed apology before taking my leave of Mr Matchmaker, however, when a girl, aged somewhere in her mid-20's, emerged from out of the bluish mist, favored me with a dazzling smile, and extended her hand in greeting.

'Hi, I'm Gaynor' she said, as though she were a contestant speaking to the MC at some beauty pageant, and, once more at a loss as to what else I should do, I shook her proffered hand and, trying to affect a coolness I really didn't feel, I said 'Alright, I'm Lee.'

'Pilch' meanwhile, tipped me a knowing wink, wished me luck, and left me to it.

I was expecting to have to indulge in a pretty stilted bout of conversation, but as it turned out, we hit it off straight away. She wasn't what you'd call a 'great looker' or anything. God, that sounds awful, but what I mean to say is, she wasn't blessed with the kind of knock 'em dead head-turning beauty that causes boggly-eyed men in long dirty macs, to walk into lampposts or get themselves flattened by a Number 42 bus.

Still, there was something undeniably attractive about her, though looking back now, I'm not sure whether it was her strawberry blonde hair, the fringe dangling over one eye in a Phil Oakey Stylee, the way her tight red dress emphasized the swell of her gazang...oops,sorry, I mean breasts, or the warmth of her bubbly personality, but what is certain is that come last orders, I was bidding a fond farewell to me mates, and walking out the door hand in hand with Gaynor, headed for a take-out from the local chippy.

While we were waiting in the queue for our portions of beef, curry and rice (this was well before I ever seriously considered turning vegetarian), she told me that she lived alone, that her house was nearby, and I was more than welcome to come back for a coffee or whatever, to help wash down the meal.

I wasn't sure about the coffee, but the 'whatever' part sounded like it could be mighty interesting, and so I readily agreed.

It was only a ten minute hike to Gaynor's two-up, two-down terraced home mid-way along Hassall Road. We tucked into our meals in the kitchen, before retiring to the living room to watch the late night film. *REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE'* with James Dean, I think it was. We were sat side by side on the sofa, almost, but not quite touching, and I kept casting sly glances at the clock on the mantlepiece, sure that at any moment she would hint that she had to be up early in the morning and that it was time for me to go. I kept telling myself that I'd definitely make a move the very second the clock struck midnight. But midnight came and went along with quarter past and half past the hour, and the film was running the final credits before I finally dared attempt the old faithful maneuver of stretching my arms out wide whilst releasing an exaggerated yawn. My right arm, of course, came to rest on her shoulder, and there was that horrible second or two of tense silence as I waited to see whether or not I'd be

shrugged off with callous indifference or else slapped in the face a good go-longer....

I needn't have worried, though.

We kissed, and wonder of wonders, my stomach didn't growl, I didn't succumb to a fit of the hiccups or hysterical giggles, and my nose didn't get stuck in her ear or anything. Her breath may have carried with it the faint aromas of stale cider, cigarette smoke, and the burning afterglow of a Chinese meal, but to me it tasted as sweet as fresh mountain dew (not that I've ever actually tasted that particular brand of dew, you understand. Allow me some poetic licence here, will yer eh, la?).

Anyway, without going into any kind of lurid detail, (you might be reading this during your lunch break and I don't want to put you off your Cheese pastie or your egg roll), we inevitably ended up in the bedroom. Once there, Gaynor asked, in time honoured fashion, to be excused for just a moment while she went and slipped into something a little more comfortable. Quite frankly, at that point, I was so far gone, I'd have gladly excused her while she put on a Nana Mouskori LP and turned the volume up to eleven!!!

I threw off my remaining clothes, aside from my boxies, and dived under the satin covers of the double bed, ready for a night of unrelenting passion. I think I whistled an impossibly happy tune as I pondered telling my friends of the glory of my sexual conquest the following day.

Nothing could stop me now.

This was surely meant to be.

And then I happened to look up at the white-painted ceiling and saw the series of huge dents that scarred its surface.

It looked like the landscape of some cold, distant planet, bombarded by asteroids to the point where all life had been wiped from its face, and the sight of it filled me with a dark sense of foreboding.

When Gaynor finally reappeared, dressed in a silken nightdress, she must have caught straight away the expression on my face, because she quickly turned out the light, climbed into bed beside me, and whispered softly in my ear 'Don't worry about Ronnie. He'll never find out about us. You're quite safe, honest to God.'

If these words were meant to comfort me, they fell about a million miles short of their goal.

'Who the hell's Ronnie?' I asked, my stomach lurching like a ship tossed on turbulent seas. But of course, I knew the answer even before she opened her mouth to tell me. The fact that I was lying in a double bed. *DOUBLE BED!!!* should have been enough to have raised my suspicions just a tad, at least. But no. I'd been too busy thinking with *'some other part of the anatomy than that of the brain'* to discern the obvious...

'Ronnie's my husband,' she sighed. 'Well, husband in name, anyway. I may as well be a widow for all the time he spends here with me. I mean, I don't know why I don't just divorce him and have done with it. Me mam told me he was no good and I wish to God I'd listened. But you know how it is. You think you meet the right person, yer swept away by their charm, their promises that they'll lead you by the hand to a better life, that they need only the love of a good woman to steer them clear of the Rocks of Adversity. That's exactly what Ronnie said to me the very first time we met. Oh, he has a winning way with words, alright. He always seems to say the right thing. He can make you believe that he means it all, too. And that's the really pathetic part. We both know he's lying when he says he'll pack in the ale, stop getting into fights, mend the error of his ways. We both *know*, the way we know the Earth's round and you can never trust a politician who goes around kissing babies, but he's such a good liar, such a natural-born charmer, he has no trouble convincing both of us that this time he'll stick to his promises.'

She paused for a moment, as if to catch her breath.

'Oh, Lee, I suppose I should have told you earlier. But I didn't want to spoil the night. I get so lonely here on my own. You're not mad at me, are yer?'

I turned to tell her that no, I wasn't mad at her. That I didn't care a jot that she was married to a drunkard who appeared to have a penchant for extreme violence. I was happy to be with her, just as long as she was happy to be with me, and that was all that mattered.

That's what I intended to tell her.

What came out instead were a couple of babbled questions, namely; 'Where is this Ronnie, now? And who made the dents in the ceiling?'

I've gotta say, the answers when they came, didn't exactly leave me feeling like I was hanging loose on hip street with the cool kids, daddio.

'I told you, you don't have to worry about Ronnie,' she said. 'He's barely half way through a five year stretch at Walton Prison, for robbery and GBH. And yeah, you've probably guessed already. Ronnie made the dents when he came home from the pub one night and accused me of flirting with one of his so-called mates. He's got such a temper. It's legendary around here. He tore the door off its hinges and rammed it into the ceiling over and over again, screaming how he'd kill any bastard who even *tried* screwing around with his wife. But like I say, you don't have to worry. He's locked away, and what he doesn't know won't hurt him.'

And with that, she snuggled up close to me and began caressing the back of my neck, something that normally has me soaring up to Wonderland, dancing the Watusi with the Goddess Of Luuurve. In the wake of her less-than-joyous-revelations however, her advances held all the sexual appeal of William Hague stuck on the toilet with a terminal case of bad bowel syndrome.

I felt like a class A lowlife, but I pushed her away from me and spun some line about how I was knackered and that I needed to get up early in the morning as I had to help me Dad out at the Tanyard.

She took the hint and left me alone after that although an awkward silence fell between us like a shroud.

It crossed my mind that I should just get up and leave, but that would have seemed like an insult too far. I just lay there staring at the far wall, lulled by the hypnotic beams of passing car headlights, trying desperately not to think about Ronnie and his 'legendary, door-throwing temper.'

I'd almost drifted off to sleep, when I heard the sound of fingernails rapping against the bedroom window, and I shot bolt upright like someone had shoved 10,000 volts through me.

I could just make out, half-obscured by the thin net curtain, a ghostly white face, peering in at us, and it was all I could do to stifle a scream.

'It's Ronnie' a terrified voice sprang up in my mind. *'It's Ronnie, come to kill the bastard who screwed around with his wife. Oh my God...'*

I moved to throw aside the covers, and I actually saw myself racing for the back door whilst I yelled at Gaynor to phone the police. But I was frozen stock still, though my heart was beating so fast I felt sure it would burst right out of my rib cage determined to make its own bid for freedom...

And the waxen face went right on gaping, the eyes bulged and spittle shone on its lower lip in the harsh sodium glare of a streetlight.

It grinned.

Fingernails ratta-tat-tatted on the surface of the glass.

It grinned again.

My paralysis broke in that instant, and I was able to scream, 'Jeeesssuusss Chrrriiisttt,' as I leapt from the bed and scrambled for the door.

I'd like to say I did the chivalrous thing and waited for Gaynor to join me before tearing headlong down the stairs.

I'd like to say I had absolutely no intention of leaving her alone to face her insanely jealous husband.

I'd like to...

But I'd be lying.

It's to my eternal shame that I was only concerned right then with self-preservation. The thought of what Ronnie might do to me if he caught me was too awful to contemplate, fear gave me wings, and I'd just reached the bottom of the stairs when the landing light came on and I heard Gaynor braying laughter. I spun round, and saw she was stood on the edge of the landing, hands on her hips, and making no attempt to run.

'Gaynor,' I shouted, 'Ronnie's trying to get in the house. We've gotta get out of here.'

Her only response was to laugh all the louder, although I couldn't for the life of me see what could be so funny.

And then someone was looming from out of the dark shadows of the bedroom to join her on the landing, and before I could even think to warn her, Gaynor called down between fits of the giggles, that everything was alright.

'It's okay, Lee. I let him in. I often do. No problem, he's harmless enough.'

My head swam with confusion, but I nearly fainted with relief when the figure stepped fully into the light and I saw it was only 'Pilch,' he of the liver lips and greasepaint-skin.

'But what's he doing here?' I asked as soon as I'd managed to gather my wits about me once more. I glanced at the hallway clock. 'I mean, it's half two in the morning. What the hell does he want at this ungodly hour?'

They both started that infernal laughing again, and it struck me that I'd inadvertently stepped onto the set of one of David Lynch's more surreal movies.

It was 'Pilch' who finally recovered his composure enough to provide me with an answer, although almost immediately, I sorely wished he hadn't.

'It's like Gaynor says. I often come round in the early hours. Whenever she brings someone back, in fact, which is pretty much every weekend. She doesn't mind a bit. She leaves the shed door unlocked so I can drag out the ladders, climb up and watch her shagging someone through the bedroom window. I was hoping to grab an eyefull of you and her going at it hammer and tongs. But you were just lying there staring at the wall, and Gaynor looked well pissed off. Why don't you come back up, Lee? It'll turn Gaynor on, and I only wanna watch. I'll stand in the corner and I'll be so quiet you won't even know I'm there, and I only wanna take out my todg...'

That's all I heard.

I felt a gorge rise in my throat, and I threw open the front door, vaulted over the garden gate, and stopped only to puke up my beef, curry and rice half-way across a patch of wasteland, where the kids build their bonfire every November 5th.

And then I ran the rest of the way home, a fine pre-dawn rain washing away the stench of ale, and vomit and cigarette smoke. But though it soaked me to the bone, the way a fine rain will, I still felt dirty, soiled, as if some malignant parasite had bored its way into the very core of my being. And made itself a home in the newly darkened depths of my soul....

'...And at Numero Eight, Let's sift down through the darkness of a troubled heart, and give a great big Freeman welcome to:

Attack Of The Crab Monsters

It took me a goodly while to get over the trauma inflicted upon me by Gaynor and 'Pilch,' and I made myself a firm

promise that I would never again go back to a girl's house or flat without first checking out their background, especially their marital status and their sexual preferences. I kept it, too.

For the best part of two years, I ensured that my relationships remained cool and casual, and on the rare occasions that I did allow myself to get serious about someone, I'd spend so much time carrying out my 'preliminary investigations,' they must have thought it was like having an affair with Phillip Marlowe. All I would have needed was a trenchcoat and a Fedora hat and people would have been stopping me in the street and asking if I knew the way to 'CASABLANCA.'

In the Summer of 1984, I met Karen Thelwell, at 28, a good eight years older than me, and I forsook my new-found wisdom for a pretty face and the chance to learn a thing or two from a girl, no strike that, a *woman*, vastly more experienced than yours truly.

Strangely enough, I met Karen in the very same pub; 'The Railway,' that had prompted 'The Making Of The Great And Sacred Promise' in the first place (incidentally, I hadn't once bumped into either Gaynor or 'Pilch' since that fateful night on the appropriately-named Hassall Road. I guessed they were keeping a low profile, or else had wandered further afield in search of fresh new 'prey'). Unusually for me, I hadn't required the intervention of some third party to help break the ice, and let her know I was interested. I actually had the bottle, whether due to the ever-reliable 'Castle Eden' ale, breaking down the walls of shyness, or because our band had just gotten back together following a split over ahem, 'musical differences,' it doesn't really matter, to initiate the conversation. And although I probably spouted the biggest pile of nonsense since Alex Ferguson's latest post-match TV interview, I must have done something right, because (and this might strike you with an eerie sense of *deja vu*) as the bell for Last Order's chimed drawing the usual chorus of moans and groans, I was bidding my mates a fond adieu and walking hand in hand with Karen on our way up to the chippy for a Chinese takeaway....

Whilst we were standing in the queue, she told me that she lived on her own in a flat nearby, and that I was more than welcome to come back for a coffee or whatever.

I wasn't sure about the coffee, but the 'whatever' part sounded like it could be promis.....

Hang on a minute. I surely don't need to go through all this preamble malarky again. You know the script by now. Let's press the Fast Forward button on the remote control until we get to the scene where Karen and I are in bed about to get down to some good, old-fashioned rumpy pumpy, real triple XXX-rated stuff, that would make the producers of 'DEBBIE DOES DALLAS' blush with embarrassment....

Except nothing's happening.

Nothing at all.

Well okay, that's not entirely true.

I'm sitting up in bed with my head in my hands. Karen is putting her arm around me trying desperately to reassure me that it really doesn't matter. There's no need to get upset. You're probably just tired. Or maybe you've had a little too much to drink. We can try again in a few minutes. And I want to tell her that yes, it bloody well does matter. There's every reason for me to be despondent. This has never happened to me before, but I know it's got bugger all to do with tiredness or one pint too many. It's that bloody window. The one with the thin net curtains. I can't help looking at it, even in the throes of passion. I keep expecting to hear fingernails tapping and see a face peering in. A round, cheese-white face with silver coins for eyes and a mouth stretched in an impossibly wide grin as it mouths the words; 'It's only me again. I often come around in the early hours. I wanna watch you go at it hammer and tongs.'

There's no one there, of course. And I don't tell her any of my fears. She'd doubtless think I was crazier than Mr Scary Shouter and his pillow-laden shoes. I just nod at the right places as she mumbles her platitudes, even though it's plain she knows she may as well reach for her own personal Fast Forward button.

We fall asleep soon after.

And I awake shivering at first light and wonder how it is I can be so bone-chillingly cold in the middle of August. I turn my head to that damned window and all I can see is a sky so dull and lifeless, it puts me in mind of seagulls huddled together on some Winter beach.

It's a strange image but one that seems curiously apt.

The beach.

The ocean.

Saltwater.

And then I realise why it is I'm afflicted with the shivers even though I'm tucked beneath a duvet and several thick blankets.

I'm soaking wet. Or at least, the right hand side of me is.

Karen is still fast asleep beside me, and my first thought is that one of us must have spilled a drink or something during the night. I can't honestly recall even having a drink, (I even back-heeled the obligatory coffee), however, and as I'm puzzling over this, I automatically reach down with my right hand, soak it in the mystery liquid, and then bring my fingers up to my nose to see if I can identify it by its smell.

There's the scent of salt in my nostrils. And I know immediately what that means: One of us has pissed the bed. I don't want to wake Karen, because I've got a horrible feeling that it's all down to me. What with last night's pathetic non-performance, the last thing I wanted was for her to find out I'd failed to control my bladder like some goo-gooing infant who hadn't yet been potty-trained.

I edged my way out of the bed, being very careful not to disturb Karen, and there's a very hairy moment when my stomach rumbles so loudly the foundations of the flat seem to rattle. She sleeps on oblivious, however, and after I retrieve my clothes, aside from my boxies which I'm still wearing, I tiptoe my way across to the bathroom. I need to pee badly. Though how that's possible after I'd apparently almost drowned the pair of us over on the do-it-yourself waterbed, was anyone's guess. It's only as I lift up the toilet seat and prepare to 'squirt me squiddy' (to coin a personal childhood phrase) that I realise that aside from a few patches on the right-hand side, my boxies are virtually bone dry.

That can mean only one thing.

Karen had peed the bed, not me.

I feel incredibly relieved (if you'll pardon the pun), that I am not, after all the guilty party, but this absolution doesn't lessen my disgust any.

It might sound amazingly hypocritical, but the fact is I don't want to be involved in a relationship with a girl, no strike that *again*, a *woman*, who wets the bed in the ahem, wee small hours. I mean, maybe she's not well. Maybe she did it deliberately to spite me for not being able to make whoopee with her the night before. Whatever. It doubtless serves me right for betraying the 'Making Of The Great And Sacred Promise.' I guess I'll just put it down to bitter experience and get the hell out of there.

This I promptly do, and like Gaynor before her, I never see Karen again. Perhaps that's really not so surprising when you consider that our days at 'The Railway Inn' were already numbered by this time. We'd recently re-discovered 'The Bridge Inn' in the middle of Port Sunlight Village.

It boasted one of the first video jukeboxes on either side of the Mersey and, hard as it is to believe now, (it's long since fallen from grace once more, and only attracts a handful of regulars at the time of writing), it got so packed, they had

to employ bouncers on the doors to turn people away after 9:30pm.

So, yeah, Karen disappeared from my life as suddenly as she'd stepped into it one late July evening, in the year George Orwell had predicted Big Brother would be watching our every move (though he never said anything specifically about people climbing up ladders and peeping through windows).

I never saw *her* again.

But not long after our one night stand (or should that read; one night *foad*?) I got to meet several of her closest, most intimate friends.

Several *hundred* of them, in fact.

I first made their acquaintance whilst I was lying in the bath with my head buried in a Dean R Koontz novel. I'd been afflicted with a maddening itching sensation in the region of my groin all day, despite the fact that I'd bathed myself to the point where my skin had been tingling. (I'd had to after being half-drowned by Karen's involuntary 'Golden Shower'.)

I'd begun scrubbing at the affected area with a nail brush, and when that failed to alleviate the problem, I bent my head for a closer look, half-expecting to be confronted with some sort of blotchy rash, and I actually yelped aloud in surprise when I saw the bunch of tiny, dirty brown-coloured objects splayed across the surface of my skin. From beneath the twin sacks of my scrotum (and Lordy, Billy Connolly was surely right when he referred to *that* word; scrotum, as being one of the most revolting in the entire English language!!!) to the top of my thighs, these unidentified things congregated, and no amount of frenzied scrubbing could remove them.

In the end I had to resort to picking them off individually with a pair of me mum's tweezers, and it was only when I inspected one of the objects up close and I distinctly saw it move, that I realised with horror that it was alive. And so, by implication, were all the others.

It dawned on me then, of course, that as a direct result of my sharing a bed with Karen, I had been infested with public lice.

I sincerely hope you've never had to experience a dose of crabs, but if you have, you'll be more than aware that getting rid of them is anything but easy.

I tried picking them off one by one with the tweezers, but the task proved to be on a par with any of the Twelve Labours Of Hercules. I toyed with the idea of buying some insecticide and liberally dousing my loins with the stuff be it powder or liquid, but I never, quite literally, managed to acquire the bottle, and eventually, in a fit of itch-induced desperation, I took a razor blade and shaved the public hairs clean off. For the best part of a month, I walked around with a pair of baldy bollocks, but it was heavenly bliss compared to playing host to a family of blood-sucking parasites.

Even such drastic action failed to eradicate them entirely, and I had to repeat the process on four or five further occasions before I was finally free of them for good.

And even now, whenever I get the slightest itch down below in the nether regions, I have to hastily give it toes to the nearest available bathroom in order to check whether or not the tiny little crab monsters are back, seeking to avenge the deaths of their brothers and sisters killed during The Great Razor Clearance Wars of 1984....

'Movin' on up to Number Seven, it's the final toon of this first part of the countdown, but we're gonna leave yer with a melody that will sting yer heart like a thimbleful of rosehip syrup and honk on a soggy Kleenex of self-pity....

'A Wrong Turn And Raindrops'

Have you ever caught another person's eye across a crowded room and been rocked back on your heels, faced with a beauty that could stir fossilised reptiles?

Of course you have.

It might be while you're seated on the rush hour train at the end of the nine to five litany of wishes, during lunchbreak in the college canteen, or more likely, down the youth club disco or the local alehouse. You catch sight of some pan-dimensional love god or goddess (depending on your sexual orientation), hold their gaze for the briefest second, and find that the cares of the day are suddenly blasted into seven shades of irrelevance.

For me, the most memorable example of just this type of scenario occurred in, of all places, the reference section of the Civic Centre Library, one rainy summer evening back in 1986.

I was looking for a book on the Lancashire Witches prior to a planned visit to Pendle, and though absorbed in checking the spines of the endless rows of books, for some reason, I happened to glance over at a table where several people were sat revising for some exam, and found myself staring as though hypnotised, at one of the most alluringly attractive girls I've ever seen in my life.

She stared right back, with a frankness that was a little disconcerting, and I felt myself blushing furiously. I don't know about you, but I've always found it difficult to decide quite what to do for the best in such situations. Should you try a warm, but generally non-committal smile? Should you be a little more brash and tip a wink? Should you pull a funny face or stick out your tongue and seek refuge in absurdity?

Or, as in this case, and countless others like it, should you do absolutely nothing, snag all, diddley squat?

And live with the regret for what might have been, for the rest of your life.

As luck would have it, however, I was to be afforded another opportunity to at least attempt to break the ice with this girl. I saw her again, a week or so later, during a night out at our latest regular watering hole; 'The Three Stags.' Once more, I spotted her in the midst of a crowd of people, this time standing at the bar. I even found out her name, Claire, thanks to a mutual friend, John Whitehead. She lived just a few streets away from him, and, as far as he knew, she wasn't going out with anyone. It was in my mind to ask him whether he could put a good word in for me, but for one reason or another, I never got round to it. I decided instead to write to her - I knew her address, and a love letter seemed to me to be a suitably romantic way of making her aware of my feelings for her. Pathetic, I know. But it felt like a good idea at the time, okay.

Anyway, I agonised about exactly what I should write. I didn't want to come across as being a hopelessly lovesick individual, with a crush the size of an American midwestern state, Nebraksa, say. But nor did I want her thinking that I really couldn't care one way or the other whether she agreed to go on a date with me. And so, I tried to strike a happy medium, and, whilst I could never claim that it was Pulitzer prize-winning material, I think I made a reasonably good job of it. At least it was free from the fetid embrace of cliché.

Now all I had to do, was post it.

I could have mailed it by person, but I have a horrible vision of me walking up her garden path, letter in hand, and she opens the door just as I'm about to push it through her letterbox, and she asks me what in the name of the barking hounds of oblivion I think I'm doing, and all I can

do is pray for a hole to open up into which I can disappear with a sigh of gratitude....

Not surprisingly then, I took the secondary option of posting it via Royal Mail.

I was fairly confident at the time that things were gonna work out just fine. I was buoyed by the fact that the World Cup in Mexico was fast approaching, Liverpool FC had just won the Double, our band were gigging on a regular basis, and we'd just recorded our fourth demo at Benson Street Studios (owned by Eternal Records, and the regular haunt of bands such as 'THE MIGHTY WAH!' and 'IT'S IMMATERIAL')

On top of all this, my friends and I were in the process of booking a holiday in North Wales, at the somewhat wishful-thinkingly-named 'SUNNY SANDS' caravan site, not far from Prestatyn.

This vacation had been at the 'planning stage' (in other words, we'd sat around in various pubs, and talked about it at every opportunity - and, as you know, talking's mighty thirsty work -the outcome of these holiday meetings then, would be that we'd get so bladdered we wouldn't be able to recall, in the cold hard light of day, any of the conclusions that we'd reached. And so of course, there was nothing for it but to organise another holiday meeting, with the same result, and on and on it went, round and round the same old mulberry bush, until, concerned at the risk of alcoholic poisoning, I'd finally taken it upon myself to do something definite about it.

I sent off a request for a caravan price list to 'SUNNY SANDS,' the very same day, a Monday, that I posted the letter to Claire. It seemed, somehow, to be propitious, well-omened, to dispatch them both together.

I enclosed a stamp addressed envelope in both letters, to ensure a speedy reply. All I could do now was wait.

For the remainder of that week, I was on tenterhooks. I was working on a landscape gardener's course in Oxton, at the time, so I was up sufficiently early to catch the morning post, though when it failed to arrive, I was filled with a dim impatience during work hours, not knowing whether the afternoon delivery had brought with it the hoped-for response.

And, as I'd included my telephone number in the letter to Claire, I forsook the pub and the 'San Siro' each evening, to remain within earshot of a potentially miraculous call.

The days loped away like gentle horses, but by the end of the week, I was getting more than a little despondent. I remember there'd still been no sign of any post, (save for a 'READER'S DIGEST' announcement that I'd been randomly selected to take part in their prize draw for £40,000 - Some *lucky* boy, huh?) as I'd left the house to catch the bus to work. We only worked half-day on a Friday, and at a little after noon, I clocked off, picked up my wages, and tried to adopt a positive attitude for the coming weekend.

It was glorious midsummer day. Chrissie Rule, the manager of our band, and one of my closest friends at the time, had arranged to pick me up from Oxton and, after dropping my wages at home and getting changed out of my grubby workclothes, we'd planned to drive out to Parkgate, for a kickaround, a stroll along the Dee Estuary, and of course, a quick snifty (or two) in one of the local pubs.

When we arrived at my house, however, I was stunned to find a letter addressed to yours truly placed upon the mantelpiece. I didn't allow myself time to ponder its contents. I tore open the envelope, and with my heart beating ten to the dozen, I read the short note that was contained therein. It said simply this:

'SENT BY MISTAKE?'

Regards, SUNNY SANDS HOLIDAY PARK

Bemused, I looked inside the remains of the envelope, and pulled out my hand-written love letter to Claire.

I honestly didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

All I could think of was the staff at 'SUNNY SANDS,' cackling fit to bust over the lovestruck scribblings of a prize plonker.

How embarrassing was that?

I consoled myself with the knowledge that at least I wouldn't ever have to face any of them. It was an inconvenience, sure, but it was an error that could easily be rectified. No problem.

It was Chris, waiting outside in the car, who pointed out the true horror my mistake had wrought.

'Hang on a minute, Lee,' he said as he held the reply from the holiday park in his hand. (He knew all about my plans to write to Claire) 'If you've sent this to 'SUNNY SANDS,' then that means Claire has received a letter requesting a price list for her caravans.' He paused, trying his damndest not to bray with laughter. 'And er, you've enclosed an SAE. So, er, she'll know it was *you* that sent it. God almighty, Lee, what the hell is she gonna think you're on?' Bloody *caravans*. Jeeeessssss!!!'

And he was unable to hold back any longer. He lost it completely, and notwithstanding the fact that I'd never felt less like seeing the funny side, I really couldn't blame him.

When Chrissie finally got control of himself, we took the ride out to Parkgate, and I strove manfully to have a good time despite the sick feeling in the pit of my stomach.

'Life is but a candle lit by an idiot,' some cold-hearted cynic once wrote. I'd assume that idiot was me, only I'm so dumb, I'd probably light a stick of dynamite instead, hold it aloft in child-like wonder and shout 'Ooooh, look at the pretty sparkler!!!'

On the way back from Parkgate, I told Chris there was no way on God's Earth that I was gonna go to 'The Stag's,' for a drink, later that night. We could go anywhere else, but the prospect of bumping into Claire in the aftermath of the Caravan Debacle, did not bear thinking about.

But, wouldn't you know it, Chris somehow managed to reassure me that the chances were good that she either wouldn't be there, or that if she was, she'd be too embarrassed herself to come over and wind me up about the letter. He could be very persuasive when he wanted to be could Chris. The truth is, he had a similar-sized crush on another girl who was always in 'The Stags,' and he was determined to make a move on her that very night.

'After all, Lee' he said as he dropped me off on the corner of our road, 'It's not as though it's gonna be headline news, or anything. You've got nowt to worry about.'

By the time he picked me up again at half past eight, Chris had had me more than half-convinced that he was right. The chances were good that no one other than Claire knew about the letter.

Yeah.

I was sure I'd hear no more about it.

It was a painfully sweet summer evening, just coming down dusk. 'NEW ORDER' were singing about those 'Love Vigilantes' on the tape deck, the air smelled of Hawthorn and honeysuckle and all seemed right with the world.

It was an impression that lasted right up until the moment that we drove into the pub car park, and saw Alan Ross standing in the doorway. He waved and shouted; 'Eh, Lee. Why did you send Claire Drews a caravan price list? She's been asking everyone in 'The Stag's' tonight, to point you out to her and....'

That's all I heard. I virtually begged Chris to put his foot down and get the hell out of there. Fair play to him, good friend that he was, he didn't need asking twice.

The Greeks probably have a phrase for events such as these,

But I guess I'll make do with one of my own.

It was a class A pisser!!!

To Be Continued...

Chasing The Unknown

The Exorcist IV: Poltergeist On The Loose in Eastern France



According to apparently reliable accounts humming down the wires from the tiny French village of Delain, the 18th-century church of St Hubert has been plagued with such a frequent outburst of *'inexplicable phenomena'* that the local populace became convinced that a Poltergeist was intent upon making its presence felt.

During mid -October this year, witnesses claimed to have seen candles within the church fly through the air as though hurled by some invisible agency, glass shattered with no apparent cause, light bulbs suddenly exploded, and object moved of their own accord.

Even more remarkable, were the reports that a statue of the Virgin Mary had been found with its saintly head unceremoniously removed after groups of worshippers had described hearing a sound *'like a gunshot'* echoing through the holy building.

The parishoners had only just got over that shock when, a few days later, the village priest opened up the church to find a statue of Saint Francis on the floor surrounded by candles *'in the shape of the sun.'*

This proved to be the final straw for both the clergy and the people of the non-descript hamlet, and the outcry forced the Bishop of Besancon to dispatch an Exorcist by the name of Mad de Wasseige to investigate the case.

The Franciscan priest duly inspected the beleaguered church at first hand, held a prayer-meeting and spoke to many of the local witnesses to the Poltergeist type phenomena. He was sufficiently impressed by the weight of the evidence that he obtained whilst visiting Delain, that he was moved to proclaim; *'In disbelief we have explored every corner of the church to try to explain these phenomena, but without success.'*

Local belief had it that the supernatural disturbances could be directly attributed to the removal of an altar in the church in order that a concert could be held there a few days earlier. They spoke in whispered conversations of an

unquiet spirit, annoyed and seeking revenge for what it regarded as a sacrilegious act.

The more cynical members of the populace were less willing to lend credence to the theory that a disembodied entity was to blame for the series of events. They put the whole thing down to the work of attention-seeking vandals and hoaxers, and even Brother Wasseige was slow to commit himself to carrying out a full-blown Exorcism, preferring instead to issue *'just a blessing and an invocation of the Saints.'*

Father Garet, the village priest, was equally quick to point out that he at least remained unconvinced that the removal of the altar had anything to do with the resultant outbreak of strange phenomena; *'If this had been a "techno" concert, then I would have understood completely, but this was entirely composed of classical music played by the Besancon symphony orchestra.'*

Not that any of this healthy scepticism did anything to prevent hordes of other, less discerning Exorcists, (as well as a whole crazy cavalcade of other 'occult-obsessed individuals') from offering their services, for a small fee, of course.

The last word, at least at the time of going to press, perhaps should go to Thierry Marceaux, the local Mayor; *'Believe me, I'm not someone who's really interested in the supernatural, but when you see it in front of you....'*

23rd October, 1998. Delain, Eastern France 'THE TIMES'

The Ghosts That Haunt You With Their Sorrows: 2

Interviews With A Dead Princess

Once more, the pages of the notoriously less-than-reliable women's (okay, *predominantly* women's - I don't want to be accused of sexism, here) 'Chat'-style magazines provided a rich source of apparent Fortean phenomena.

The June, 1998, edition of 'BELLA MAGAZINE' carried a fascinating piece on a series of seances during which contact was said to have been established with none other than Diana, the deceased Princess of Wales...

The alleged medium was a woman by the name of Dr Rosaleen O' Brien. She developed an interest in the world of spiritualism from a very early age. By the time she was in her teenage years, she was already giving seances for people who had lost loved ones and were just itching to re-establish contact with them.

When she's not conducting seances, Rosaleen, devotes a lot of her time to helping the disabled, which leads her to comment; *'Diana knows I'm not somebody to put herself first, just as she didn't.'*

She claims her subsequent 'conversations' with the Princess, following her death, were like having conversations with a friend. But I don't ask any questions. I just let her talk to me.

Every now and then she'll make her presence known, during the readings by appearing to me on the table or on an ornament. I love her *unmannerisms*. She's like a child in the way she changes the subject and smiles.'

She insists however, that Diana is far from resting in peace. *'She hasn't yet described where she is and what it is like. She's finding it hard to settle because all the people are still mourning her.'*

What's more, the trust fund has yet to be sorted out. To end up having her image placed on keyrings, tea towels and mugs, goes against everything she stood for.

'She shouldn't be a commodity and this commercialism must stop. Until then, her children cannot go on with their lives, so her spirit will be moving about and not at rest.'

The first seance was took place on the actual date of her death: August 31st, 1997, at Spinney Road, in Luton, Bedfordshire.

The alleged medium was a woman by the name of Dr Rosaleen had awoken from her sleep, an unaccountable feeling of loss weighing heavy on her heart.

She was unable to explain the acute sense of melancholy until she switched on the TV, and was immediately confronted with the terrible news humming down the wires from Paris.

As a practising Medium, she felt almost compelled to attempt to contact the spirit of the sadly departed Princess Diana. Without a second thought, she immediately drew the curtains, took out a pack of playing cards, and dealt them face up.

Then she simply waited.

According to her testimony, before too long, a voice began to speak through her. She remains convinced beyond doubting, to this day, that the voice belonged to the dead Princess.

Dr O' Brien was suitably amazed by this, but she had enough wits about her to pick up a pen and record a series of notes. The following dialogue is a verbatim account of what was said to have occurred that late Summer morning, last year.

'A voice echoes round the room. Gradually, it becomes louder;

'Now that this has happened, I need to make some things clear. First, I'd like to explain about Dodi. I loved Dodi, but I wasn't actually in love with him.'

She pauses....

'I found him very kind and caring, but at times, he was too much

'He was inclined to be self-opinionated and felt that I needed protecting from the awful media attention. I liked to make my own mind up about whether or not I should talk to the media.

'I was concerned Dodi would not be just a friend in my domestic life. He'd also be an authority. I shudder to think how I would have had to seek approval to visit friends and family.

'And when we considered marriage, he made it clear that I would be whisked off to a remote building far away from the media and cameras. This didn't please me at all.

'A total withdrawal from public life would have made me very unhappy. I was worried I would become more or less domesticated and be expected to always have Dodi by my side. I would have gone along with this change in lifestyle, but events changed all that.'

'The voice gives way to tears. The next words are said with much sadness.'

'That ring was not an engagement ring. It was...'

'Diana swallows hard'

'....It was a friendship ring.'

'There is a pause while Diana gathers her thoughts.'

'I was being brushed to one side. Friendship rings are nothing - even school friends give friendships rings.

'But Dodi did offer an official engagement ring to another lady. He never proposed to me.'

'Suddenly, the tears disappeared and Diana's voice becomes stern and strong.'

'I felt so angry because the fact he had given me a ring had been made so public. I love traditional things and saw it a symbol of commitment but engagement was far from Dodi's

mind 'In fact, just before the crash we had an argument. He intimated that after our holiday he would see me around.'

'An image of Diana appears on the table in front of me. I can see her smiling. She starts talking about her father but her voice is already fading.

'My father is still beside me and I know he'll lend spiritual guidance to Charles to help him through.'

'Now the voice becomes unsettled...'

'I'm happy that my children will be taken care of financially...'

At this point, the witness states that the spirit-communication' gradually faded so that it became indecipherable, before ending completely

*** The next case was said to have occurred on 24th April, this year, in the wake of the publication of a photograph of Althorp in *'TaB Magazine.'*

Readers were invited to write in with their impressions of the picture. Dr O' Brien attempted to 'contact' Diana once more, and was apparently successful, for she writes:

'A soft voice stutters. It is inaudible except for a few words, then eventually it becomes clear.'

'I want people to know I never achieved my life's ambition to marry someone I really loved and who loved me in return.'

'The softness fades and a stern voice takes over'

'I think Charles was a fool. If only he knew how much I loved him - I still do. I was prepared to go so far to be the wife he would want me to be. If only he wanted me.'

'A pause. Diana lowers her voice.'

'But I was in love with something else when death took me. My love was shared with the sick, the lonely and those who were terminally ill. My love for the sick is just as strong today as it was when I was alive.

'I will be in all sorts of places for the people who need me. But while some people may see me, most will not. I want my image to be something which isn't too accessible, like gold.'

'The word 'gold' echoes round the room and, as it fades, there is a glimmer of light.'

'A sick child may see me in the corridor of a hospital. A homeless person may see me in a cold bus shelter.

'I will be there to provide the strength they need. This is my gift of life...'

'The voice becomes fragmented and it is difficult to understand much of what follows:'

'My brother is lost in anger and when he comes to terms with his loss, I'll be there to comfort him to stop him feeling so alone.'

'At this point, it became impossible to hear any more and the second seance ended.'

*** On the third occasion, which took place on May 7th, this year, Diana was supposed to have said; *'I'm wondering what I would have looked like if I had lived to reach an old age. I know I would have been fit and don't think I'd have looked too bad.'*

She laughs and I see her teasing smile from an ornament. Then the smile disappears.'

'I'm remembering the accident. There was nothing sinister about it. It was just one of those things.

'I will not give in to feeling sorrowful. I'm just so pleased to have been a wife and mother before I died.

'But I want my children to know that I'm calling my fatal accident "death." Not "passing away" or anything else. If tears flow they should not be ashamed.

'It is better to have a good cry because that is what I do - it is the only way to come to terms with what has happened.'

She cries a little and then composes herself..

'I loved Charles and only Charles. But then it went wrong. I was like a child looking for affection and I guess that I too

made a few mistakes. You hit back and I was very good at getting my own back. Now I see it was silly.'

Her voices fades but soon becomes clear again.

'I'm worried about financial hardship affecting my good causes. I wish a special team would be responsible for good, honest PR and provide adequate monies to all the charities.'

'I would like to encourage Charles in his support for these causes. It is a wise decision and he will be able to continue my wishes. At the same time he can still perform his own very important tasks.'

She pauses, then raises her voice but in a gentle manner.

'For my sake, Charles, get on with a meaningful life in terms of what makes you happy. I send all of my love to the Royal Family and want you all to know I'm keeping a motherly eye on William and Harry.'

Her voice fades once more and thus the third seance is brought to a close.'

*** The fourth, and so far, final seance occurred on May 13th, and was described in the following terms;

'A brief glimmer of light appears at the window. Then the voice of 'Diana' enters the room.

'I am aware of the enormous efforts being made in relation to my fund. But it is better to help many than finance a few good causes and be wasteful. All good causes could die from lack of incentive no matter how much cash is collected.'

There is another glimmer. She sounds happy.

'It is helpful that Charles devotes so much time to William and Harry. It is tough being both parents. I feel my children will be well provided for. I hope they both go on to graduate with a certain amount of discipline in their lives.'

She laughs.

'For goodness sake don't follow me and Charles. We both got it wrong.'

There is a short pause as she composes herself.

'I sometimes sit for hours and wonder why different people do different things. I used to get a buzz from the fun and sheer excitement of holidays. But the nicest part of it all was coming home to my children.'

The voice fades away to silence bringing the fourth, and so far, final seance to a close.

To date, there have been no more contacts from beyond the grave with the former Princess of Wales, though Dr O' Brien remains confident that there will be further 'conversations' in due course.

June, 1998. Spinney Road, Luton 'BELLAMAGAZINE'

And Now, Yet More Halloween Horrors!!!

As per usual, whenever Samhain comes rolling round, each and every year, the popular press use the opportunity to regale us with tales of the supernatural...And this October 31st, proved to be no exception.

Here are just a small selection for your delectation...

*** Athelhampton Hall in Dorset is reputed to be haunted by up to five separate ghosts according to the present owners, Patrick Cooke and his wife Andrea. The impressive-looking building is open to the public for much of the year, but the comparatively vast influx of people who come to traipse through the house during the Summer months do not seem to deter the resident spooks any.

Patrick himself takes up the story:

'I've lived in the hall since I was born and ghosts have been lurking around here for as long as I can remember. The Great Hall in the house dates back to 1485, so it would be a bit odd if the house bore no traces of spiritual remains.'

When I was about six, I was known as the boy who lived in the haunted house, which made me popular.

'One time, when I was about 12 or 13, I was alone in the house watching the film 'SLEUTH' on television. The occasion was made particularly eerie because it was shot here, and when the film came to its end, I distinctly felt myself being watched by some unearthly being.'

'The most famous ghost story about the Hall concerns a young lady of the Martyn family, Catholics who lived here in the 19th century. She was jilted by a lover and decided to commit suicide. She fled through the secret door in the Great Chamber, closely followed by her pet, a tame monkey. She ran up the staircase, shut the door in her chamber, and killed herself. Unfortunately, the monkey was trapped on the staircase, and the poor creature starved to death. You can hear it scratching behind the panelling on a quiet night. There is also a ghostly copper who hammers away at non-existent barrels in the wine cellar and a Grey Lady who haunts the passage on the east side of the house. She was seen sitting in a chair by one of the housemaids, who took her to be one of the visitors. The maid asked her to leave as it was getting rather late and the Grey Lady got up and promptly disappeared through the panelling.'

'There are also two duellists who fight a ghostly - and quite noisy - battle in the hall, over the table. We sleep in the more modern part of the house, which was built in the 19th century with additions from the 1920's, and that has a very different feel to the old parts. When I walk through the more ancient rooms, especially the Great Hall, I do feel a chill run through me. I've certainly felt the spirits - and I still feel them today.'



*** We head on over next to the 17th century Glenarm Castle in County Antrim, a regular haven for all manner of un-earthly manifestations, and where the artist Hector McDonnell spent the halcyon days of his long-since vanished childhood.

He now lives in an equally haunted rectory, no great distance from the Castle where he was brought up, and could be forgiven for thinking that maybe, spirits have a habit of following him wherever he may roam...

'The rectory where I live is haunted by a strange half-formed figure, but it's nothing like the experiences I had when I lived with my parents, Lord and Lady Antrim, in Glenarm Castle.'

'I first became aware of a sinister presence in the house when I was six or seven. There was a wooden box outside my nursery which kept moving about and from which, strange, tortured noises emanated.

'When I was called down to dinner, I had to go down a great corridor to my bedroom. I would hear footsteps behind me, but when I turned around, there was never anything there. Every night I said prayers, asking for protection against the Evil Spirits, and in the end I was so scared that my mother arranged to call in an Exorcist. It had to be done when my father, who didn't believe in the supernatural at all, was away from the house. The priest duly arrived with his bell, book and candle, and went around spraying Holy Water everywhere and chanting Latin prayers. I was terrified. He went into every room except the attic because he didn't have time - my mother was so keen to get him out before my father came home and discovered what had been going on.

'But because the attic wasn't Exorcised, all the spirits moved there and they started to show their fury by trying to make as much noise as possible. My bedroom was directly beneath the attic and every day for the next twenty years, a terrific stamping noise could be heard.

'One night when I was 12, the banging got so loud that I could hardly hear myself speak and I was told to go investigate by my sister's rather frightening Spanish maid.

'Because I was more terrified of her than what was lurking upstairs, I set out to discover just what ghastly fiend inhabited the attic. I crept toward the bottom of the attic stairs, the sound of my heart beating in my ears, and switched on the light. As I climbed the stairs, I felt a strong, Evil presence, but steeling myself for what I would find, I carried on. Then, as I reached the top, the light behind me suddenly switched itself off and I was plunged into pitch blackness. I realised that whatever lived up there was now behind me. I was petrified and ran down the stairs until I found the Spanish maid, and ended up sobbing on her bosom.

'I never went up into the attic again. We tried to come up with logical explanations to explain the ghostly noises - the heating, the plumbing - but none was satisfactory. When I think about that strange, elemental noise, it still sends shivers down my spine today.

One of the oddest experiences I have had - and one which just cannot be explained - was when I was walking in a field in the middle of the day with another boy. Suddenly, out of nowhere, we heard the sound of horses galloping towards us. As we couldn't see anything, we ran towards the nearest gate, where we thought the noise was coming from. But when we got there, all we could hear was the ghostly galloping fading away into the distance - with no horses to be seen.

'Fifteen years later, a farmer and his son were working in the same field and heard exactly the same thing. The spirit horses thundered right past them - apparently the sound of the hooves hitting the turf was deafening - but again, nothing could be seen.

'We just don't know why this area is so haunted. The house, which has fifteen bedrooms and is surrounded by about 1,200 acres of land, was built in the 1630's, but we don't know of any murders or ghastly suicides. However, at the end of the last century, a skeleton was found in the grounds - maybe the disturbing of the body gave rise to the unquiet spirits. The house had been burned down in the Civil War and I suspect the skeleton dates back to that time.

'Whatever the case, the hauntings continue to this very day. In the early 1990's, a guest was staying in one of the bedrooms when she was awoken in the middle of the night by a strange-looking maid, dressed in old-fashioned clothes.

The maid looked terribly distressed and anxious, but when the guest described her the next day, she was told no such person worked there. Since then, the maid has appeared a couple of times, to different people, and on each occasion, she has had the same tortured look on her face.



**** And finally, for this mini-selection of personal ghost stories, we turn to the author Peter James, 50, who lives at Clayton Manor, near Lewes, East Sussex. Peter claims his house is haunted by anything up to four apparitions, and states that he became aware of their presence almost from the moment that he moved in, back in 1992...*

'Before I moved to Clayton Manor, the previous owner told me that the house was haunted but, I took the news with more than a pinch of salt. Now however, I know for sure that four ghosts haunt this place - a spectral Woman In Grey, a Roman centurion, a monk and a baby.

'The day we moved in I was standing with my mother-in-law, the most strait-laced, respectable you could ever wish to meet, when I saw her face transform. It was as if, to use the old cliché, she had seen a ghost. I knew something was wrong, and I asked her, but she said "Don't worry, it's nothing."

'I now know she kept quiet because she didn't want to spook us. It wasn't until years later, after we'd come across more sightings, that my mother-in-law, a former head of the local magistrates' bench, told us the truth. She had been standing in the hall when she saw a woman dressed in grey walk out of the wall and pass by her.

'My mother-in-law wasn't the only person to witness the Woman In Grey. A few years ago, we met this old man, a local, who told us that he too had seen the Lady In Grey when he once paid a visit to the house.

'He was sitting in the hall area when he saw something shimmering in the wooden panelling. A split second later, a woman in grey appeared out of the wall and glided towards him. She came so close to him that he even felt her eyebrow brush his face.

'There was once a Roman villa on this site and then, in the Middle Ages, a monastery was built here, so it's not surprising that the house is haunted.

'The grounds of this house used to be much more extensive. Unfortunately, the ghosts don't quite realise that. Ten years ago, the spirit of the Roman centurion was said to have chased away a group of men on the South Downs in a furious rage, presumably still trying to protect the villa that

once stood on this land, whilst the ghost of the monk has even had the gall to haunt our neighbours.

'One day, six years ago, when a christening party was under way in the house next to ours, our neighbour went to take his place at the dining table. When he came closer to the table, he thought he saw a monk-like figure sitting in his place. He initially thought it was a relative playing a joke on him, but soon realised it was something more sinister. "What are you doing in my space?" asked our neighbour, at which point the ghostly figure got up and walked into the kitchen, where it disappeared into the wall. "What the hell was that?" he asked his wife, who was preparing food. "What dear?" she asked. She had seen nothing, but the poor chap was so spooked he spent the rest of the night in a cold sweat, before reprimanding me for not keeping better control of my ghosts.

'One of the most disturbing ghosts in the house is that of a baby. Although no one has seen it, its tortured cries can be heard echoing throughout the house. A few years ago some friends were staying for the weekend with their daughter. At breakfast the next morning, their daughter asked who the new-born baby belonged to. When she was told there wasn't one in the house, she turned a ghastly shade of pale. She said she had been kept awake all night by the sound of a baby's cries. Since then, we have learned that in 1920, when the house was being treated for dry rot, the floors were dug up. In the process, the skeleton of a little baby, which was thought to have been there for a hundred years, was unearthed. In all likelihood, the body was that of a servant's baby that either died, or was murdered, a spirit so troubled that it still haunts the place to this day.

'The ghosts in the house repeatedly perform the same task or job over and over again as if they are stuck in a timewarp. There is a theory that suggests walls and soil act like a videotape - when humans emit tremendous amounts of energy, for instance during a violent death or a traumatic event - that energy is somehow stored and subsequently trapped in the physical surroundings. Certain people can tap into this energy, which then manifests itself in the form of what we know as a ghost.

'Funny enough, these spooky sightings don't scare me at all. I believe that ghosts often help to protect the occupants of the house, guarding them from the forces of Evil. I have a tremendous fondness for my four ghosts and when I finally move out of this house (January, 1999) I will miss them.

'A house isn't a home without its fair share of benign ghosts.'

31st October, 1998. Various sites. *THE DAILY MAIL*

GHOSTS AND DEVILS OVER MERSEYSIDE: THE HAUNTED HOSPITAL

The site of Birkenhead General Hospital, (where my dad spent the best part of six months recuperating from an horrific, life-threatening accident back in the early 1970's) demolished these last five years or so ago, is still said to act as a focal point for intrusions from some spiritual elsewhere, according to the residents of Livingstone Street. Rows of non-descript terraced houses have since been built upon what were once hospital wards and, more ominously, the penultimate resting place of the newly-dead; the morgue.

Local newspaper, *'THE WIRRAL NEWS'*, featured the site in the days leading up to Halloween, interviewing a member of 'The Wirral Play Council' which formerly used the old Victorian building as its centre. Steve Chan, was

quoted as saying that he was not in the least bit surprised that the area was rumoured to be haunted; "Nobody would go up to the library, it was spooky. One night there were just two of us there and I saw the double doors swinging. I went in expecting to see Jeanette, but there was no one there. She was at the other end of the building.'



Another witness, Ruth Sherlock, who has lived in Livingstone Road for five years, is more than convinced that the entire street is plagued by unquiet spirits. 'One day I was puffing up the pillows in the bedroom of my house when I heard the same thing happening in another room. When I went in the pillows were flattened as though someone had been hitting them violently.'

Objects mysteriously disappearing, 'deathly cold rooms' and other unexplained phenomena seem to have become accepted as being the norm for the residents of this latter-day *Hobb's End* (the fictional haunted road in Nigel Kneale's classic *'QUATERMASS AND THE PIT'*). 'We've even had tenants' meetings about it,' Ruth was further quoted as saying. 'It's all in the minutes of the meetings.' 28th October, 1998. Livingstone Road, Birkenhead, Merseyside *'WIRRAL NEWS'*

The Headless Man In Black

Amanda Harris-Deans claimed to have snapped photographic evidence (we were going to reproduce it here, but the quality was so poor you wouldn't have been able to make out diddly squat) what she believes to be the ghost of an eccentric millionaire that haunts the grounds of his ancestral home.

Amanda thought she had succeeded in grabbing a series of pictures of a fleeing intruder, as he sought to make good his escape from property, but when they were later developed they appeared to show something altogether more mysterious. Ms Harris-Deans professes not to believe in the existence of ghosts, but somewhat paradoxically, asserts that the pictures may well show the spectral form of Count Zabrowski, the man who inspired the classic children's movie; *'CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG.'*

Amanda, 47, was busily at work restoring Higham Court near Canterbury, Kent, along with one of her best friends Patricia Gibb, 57, when they spotted a 'man in black' in the midst of a neighbouring field. They raced outside, anxious to confront the trespasser, pausing only to snap the aforementioned photos.

They were amazed to discover however, that the couple of resultant pictures revealed something neither of the two women could explain. One showed a headless, running figure. The other revealed nothing but an empty field. A suitably bemused Amanda was later moved to comment;

'We just can't understand it. The field's too big for anyone to just disappear.'

'If it turned out to be Count Zabrowski, I would be delighted. Many people have told us that his spirit haunts this place.'

The Count was plainly obsessed with all things mechanical, especially cars, and attracted a wide circle of friends, including Lawrence Of Arabia. His all-consuming passion for automobiles inspired Ian Fleming (also the creator of JAMES BOND) to write 'CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG'. He apparently managed to blow his £11 million fortune before dying, suitably enough, in a car crash at Monza, Italy, in 1924. According to popular legend, there is a Mercedes racing car buried in the Higham garden.

August, 1998. Higham Court, Canterbury, Kent, 'DAILY EXPRESS'

A Real Neighbour From Hell

This is going to sound real familiar to you by now, Constant Reader, but not long after yet another happy couple had moved into a new house, blissfully unaware of its propensity for visits by apparitions from the other side, they were very quickly wishing that they'd never set foot in the place...

The house, situated in some undisclosed part of America, seemed ideal to Connie, Dan and their two-year-old daughter, Pammy, until they stumbled upon a smouldering teddy bear in the middle of the attic.

There was no explanation for how it had gotten there, but not long after Pammy began having nightmares that had her shaking, terrified at her parent's bedside as she told them *'Mummy, he's pushed me out of bed again. He won't let me sleep and he's trying to take my dolly.'*

They assumed at first that their daughter had imagined the whole thing, but as the sequence of events was repeated night after night, they took her to one side and questioned her as to the identity of the nocturnal intruder. Pammy was unable to provide any further details however, and they had no option but to offer up a silent prayer that the 'nightmares' would cease with the passing of time.

Not long after, in the dead hours before dawn, Connie was awakened by the sound of her daughter screaming. The heart-stopping cries were coming from the dining room, and having woken her husband, the pair of them raced down the stairs to Pammy's aid. They were horrified to discover that she was on fire, the flames shooting up from her skirt, and quickly engulfing her body. They managed to douse the fire, but Pammy unfortunately suffered 75 per cent burns.

Chillingly, there was no obvious cause for the fire.

During a subsequent hospital visit, Pammy's aunt Judith Dixon, met up with a hospital worker with whom she got into conversation about burns victims.

'I had a neighbour who had everyone beat,' the hospital worker told her. *'Mr Clayton, he hated everything. Kids most of all. In fact, he swore that by any child ever moved into his house the parents would be sorry. He died last year...He burned to death in his bed.'*

Filled with a sense of dark, portentous dread, the aunt later decided to do some checking, and found that Connie and Dan had bought Mr Clayton's old house...

In The Darkest Place

The following account appeared in 'THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH MAGAZINE' last Winter (the actual date had been snipped off by the person who handed me the clipping - shame on you, Lianne!!!), and in reading it one cold February evening, I couldn't help thinking that here was a tale fit for narration by 'THE MAN IN BLACK' the

former ghost-story teller during the halcyon days of radio, (the voice that so terrified and fascinated my Dad when he'd been a small boy).

Those grave, stentorian tones would certainly do this tale a degree of justice.

The story concerns a correspondent for the newspaper; Adam Nicholson, and the time he elected to visit one of the more remote, uninhabited islands off the coast of Scotland, for two weeks of peace and quiet. He'd travelled alone, with only a couple of boxes of supplies, a large selection of books, and his dog for company, and after cadging a lift from a local fisherman, he mentally prepared himself for a fortnight spent in isolation.

His imagination was fired by the knowledge that the island's were imbued with a sinister reputation. Their name translated from the Gaelic could mean either 'The Place Over Which The Sea Spray Is Brown,' or else more simply; 'Enchanted' or 'Haunted'

And of course, there just *had* to be a suitably eerie story associated with those forsaken, all-but deserted lumps of rock in the midst of the mighty Atlantic....Apparently, back in 1911, a man had chosen for reasons best known to himself, to live as a hermit on one of the islands, which had been abandoned only a few years earlier. He had his furniture delivered by boat along his full flock of sheep. The house, in reality little more than a stone hovel, was divided up into two rooms, one for living and cooking, the other for getting your head down for a good night's sleep. One cold dark Winter's evening, just as he had drifted into slumber, he was awoken by an old man standing at his bedside. *'Do you realise,'* the figure said in a conversational tone of voice, *'that you are sleeping on my grave?'*

You can be sure that the very moment the would-be hermit spotted a passing fishing boat, he very quickly set about alighting the heather at the island's highest peak, in an attempt to draw attention to himself and make good his escape.

He never set foot on the island again.

And, aside from several of the more courageous or foolhardy of the local shepherds, no one else did either. Although Adam was more than aware of this somewhat off-putting Ghost story, he refused to be intimidated by it. As he said; *'I was not alarmed at the prospect of being alone on this big, remote, empty place. I had been there before with others and loved its many uncompromised beauties. The idea that it was haunted lay somewhere in the background. More, it was a deep underwell of excitement and pleasure at being out there, exposed and unfettered, at the feeling of being dangled in a solution of such richness.'*

Despite this stubborn refusal to give in to superstitious dread however, Adam was nonetheless mindful enough to ensure that one of the first things he did upon entering the spartan building was to move the bed from the 'haunted' sector to the other, slightly more cheerful living room.

That first night he snuggled up in a thick, downy sleeping bag before a roaring log fire, with his faithful terrier dog at his side.

Adam makes mention of the intense, inky blackness of a Scottish night, a all-enveloping darkness that falls like a shroud after sunset, as if to compensate for the fact that in Midsummer, the days are excessively long. The island, not surprisingly, as no one chose to live there, was bereft of electricity, and the only source of light were the flickering flames of the fire and Adam's pocket torch.

Sometime in the dead hours, he woke up with a start. He was instantly alert, as was the normally boldhearted terrier, shaking like a leaf on the bed next to him. The dog was plainly staring at the far side of the room. Unable to

make out the source of its obvious fear, Adam shone his torch in that direction, and was confounded (though not a little relieved) to discover that there was nothing to see *'beyond my own pots and pans, the washing-up bowl, and my own coat hung upon the back of the door.'*

The dog refused to relax, however, and the tension seemed to emanate from it in near-palpable waves. Adam began, for the first time, to feel truly frightened; *'There was no sound beyond the swell on the shore, 50 yards away. I began to shake, dragged the dog down onto the sleeping bag and pulled its hood over us, the torch still in my hand, cocooned from the fear. I couldn't sleep. The dog and I shook together.'* (And I bet he was just as grateful as hell that he at least had the blessed companionship of his dog with him at that dreadful moment. I know from experience, when you're caught in the grip of extreme terror, on the wrong side of midnight, with no human company in sight, or likely to appear any time soon, even the presence of a pet cat can help banish those loathsome shadows that lurk, hidden against the darker threat of night...And come to that, seeking refuge from the Bogeyman by hiding under the covers armed only with a torch, seems like every bit as good an idea now, as it did back when I was a child - Ed).

'From time to time I would make a little eyehole of an opening at the top of the bag where I was holding its rim gripped in two fists, waiting for the light to come, for colour to drain back into the shapes and blackness of the room. The length of short nights!!! Again and again that eye, opened on to the world beyond the warmth of the dog and the sleeping bag, revealed only blackness. It became a matter of patience, of out-waiting the night. At three or four o' clock, the world started to grey. It felt as though the room and I had been through something deep and long together, that used up, post-trip sensation of exhaustion, and a world clarified because some of its deeper possibilities had been seen.'

He stated that he felt exhilarated, feeling that he had somehow met with, challenged, and eventually battled to a truce, the island's very soul.

Not that he was in in any real hurry to go through the experience again.

No thank you all the same.

He deliberately set about tiring both the dog and himself out, rowing around the islands, walking from one end to the other, tidying up around the stone cottage. By the time the sun dipped over the western horizon, he was asleep almost before his head hit the pillow.

And he awoke the next morning with golden bars of sunlight streaming in through the windows, and dust motes danced, and the water beyond glittered like sheeted glass.

Adam was moved to write; *'I have never been frightened of Ghosts again. Years after that haunting, I read a remark by Jung to the effect that if Ghosts are said to be nothing but "projections of your own unconscious thoughts and fears on to the outside world, no intellectual acrobatics are needed to turn that sentence around and describe your own fears as Ghosts that have taken up residence in you".'*

I like that.

And then years after the shuddering in the sleeping bag, dawdling one morning in the Map Room of the library in Cambridge, I decided to find the oldest map I could find of these islands. It had been made in the 1850's. The house I had stayed in was not marked. It had obviously not been built at that date. Instead, on the site, one unsuspected phrase burning out of the paper:

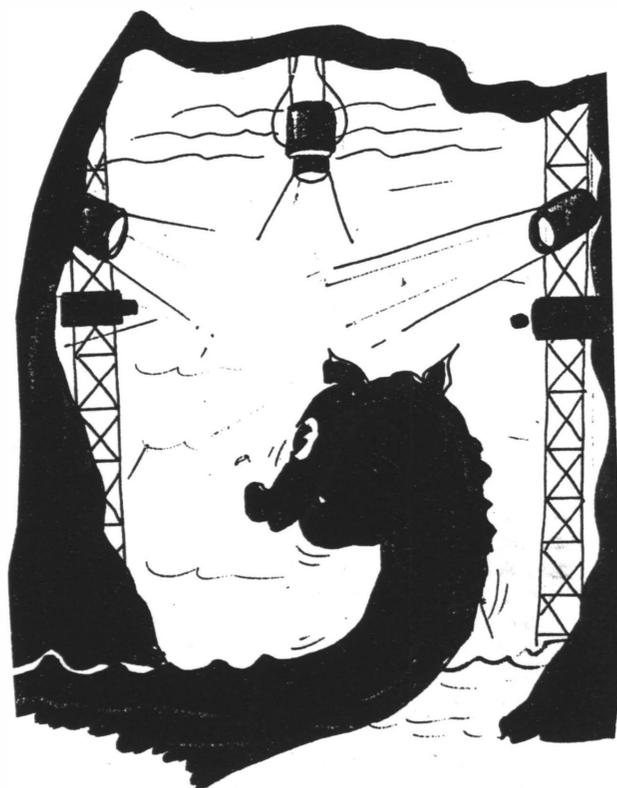
"BURIAL GROUND"

Winter, 1998. Unnamed set of Islands somewhere off the Scottish Coast. *THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH MAGAZINE'*

Alien Animals

Interview With A Monster Hunter

Betty MacDougall, the former curator of the Official Loch Ness Monster Exhibition Centre, deep in the heart of the sleepy village of Drumadrochit, has finally elected to call it a day after eleven years sterling service. During that time, Betty has had to deal with sceptical reporters, hordes of Summer tourists, and the Man With The Beard You Could Hide A Whole Colony Of Nesstie's In; Adrian Shine. On the very day that she retired however, she was still able to take time out to provide *'THE DAILY RECORD'* with the following question and answer session...



*** How did you become involved with the centre?

'I was living in London 29 years ago with my first husband and our two small children. He decided life in London was becoming impossible and we moved north - with me kicking and screaming in protest all the way.'

'We settled near Inverness and I was working for Help The Aged. Then my daughter Kit, who had a job at the Exhibition Centre, asked if I could help out. I got more and more involved and became curator in 1987, after my husband died.'

*** What's the daftest query you've dealt with?

'There's been so many it's difficult to pick one out. One man went to a lot of trouble to work out how we could drain the Loch to find out if Nesstie was really there. He was very cross when we explained that wasn't possible because there was so much water.'

'Then, there were the Germans who wanted to spread treated breadcrumbs on the surface to attract the Monster as if it was a giant sparrow!'

'Local opposition, led by the environmental lobby, ruled that one out.'

'Of course, I've lost count of the number of times I've been asked for feeding times for Nessie.'

*** Any visitors who stick in your mind?

The current Emperor Akihito of Japan, who's a noted marine biologist, visited us when he was a young man. There have been many celebrities, including Ian Botham who came in with his family, as did Tom Baker of DR WHO fame. Actor James Mason, who had a cottage on the other side of the Loch, popped in quite a bit.

'There was a pianist who reckoned he could raise the Monster with his music, and a vicar (the Reverend Donald Ormand, back in the 1970's, fact fans) who came to exorcise the Monster as he believed it was Evil, but nobody took a blind bit of notice of him'

***And which was the strangest?

A young man on a motorbike who arrived on a very cold day in February. He had left London and just headed north. He was dead keen on Nessie and, despite the bitter weather, camped in the area for about three weeks, patrolling the Loch.

'He reappeared the following year with his wife, and the pair of them camped out beside the Loch. He came up three years running, but I haven't seen him since.'

*** How much does the Nessie industry contribute to the local economy?

'The Exhibition Centre has become one of the major industries for Drumnastrach and Glenurquhart. Although we don't make a head count, we reckon to have 250,000 visitors a year at the site, with 180,000 coming to the Exhibition itself.

'Numbers were slightly down this year, but the Centre is still holding its own and has the benefit of being open all year round.

*** What was the question you were most asked?

'Is it a Plesiosaur?'

'The answer is that whatever Nessie is, she is most certainly not a Plesiosaur - a kind of giant lizard with a long neck, paddle-like limbs and a flat body.

'We get letters from all over the world, especially from children. I remember a boy from Guatemala who had a Scottish teacher. He knew a lot about the Loch and had me looking up books to answer his questions. I corresponded with him for years.'

*** Just how big is the Loch?

'It covers 260,000 million square metres, and the latest survey found a depth of 754.4 feet. It's 23 miles long and one and a half miles at its widest, making it the biggest body of fresh water in Western Europe.

'Loch Lomond has a bigger surface area but nothing like the volume of water. I always love speaking to the Irish who claim Lough Neagh is bigger - but in terms of volume, it's just a puddle.'

*** Any particular dates which cause extra enquiries?

'April Fool's Day used to be a nightmare - for example, there were these students with the carcass of a sea cow. There were lots of silly calls and people send in all sorts of bits and pieces.

'One man wrote to say the Monster would be flying above the Loch at a certain time. No-one took him seriously, but looking out at the given time there was a microlight aircraft above the Loch trailing a 'Monster' behind it.'

*** What's been your most memorable experience?

'One day, aerial pictures were being taken of Inverness and Loch Ness. The helicopter landed in the car park and there was a place for one passenger, so I jumped in.

'The pilot flew me over the whole area and it was truly amazing. Only problem was, he landed in Inverness and I had to find my own way back.'

*** Have you ever seen the Loch Ness Monster?

'No, but I have seen many things on the Loch. I remember driving from Fort Augustus early one April morning when the Loch was flat calm, which is unusual. I looked over my shoulder and slammed on the brakes. There in the Loch was a neck and head with a wake behind it, just like the famous "Surgeon's" photograph.

'I took out my field glasses and focussed in, but I saw that it was only a young deer. I don't know whether the car started it into the water but I watched it swim over to the far side and shake itself dry.'

*** Do you believe there actually is a Monster?

'Not a single Monster - I believe there's a colony of large creatures in the Loch. Operation Deepscan swept the Loch for a week back in 1987, with sonar. It didn't come up with a "media Monster" but there were three large moving targets, possibly 10 or 12 feet long. That gave cause for further investigation.

'I enjoy talking to people who can't believe the idea, (step forward, Adrian Shine) but their problem is that you can't prove there isn't a Monster.'

*** What do you intend to do now that you've retired?

'I re-married five years ago and want to spend more time with my husband Hugh, cruising on our narrowboat in Shropshire, and seeing more of my grandchildren.

'I'm 63 and not of the computer age. I hope my post will be taken by someone younger, who has the same drive and enthusiasm for the subject that I once had.'

22nd November, 1998. Drumnastrach, Loch Ness, Scotland 'DAILY RECORD'

In Search Of Swedish Lake Monsters

And speaking, as I believe we were earlier, of the ubiquitous Mr Shine, here he pops up yet again, on the distant banks of The Great Lake, Ostersed in Sweden. Apparently not content with whiling away his days rubbishing the legend of Nessie, he has instead chosen to don his Chief Spillsport Hat over in Scandanavia, for good measure.

And to cap it all, ol' beard face was actually invited over to Ostersed by members of the local council to assist in the hunt for a creature (or more likely, *creatures*) that have been rumoured to have lurked in the depths of the Great Lake for at least 700 years.

They doubtless invited him on the strength of his former open-minded enthusiasm and sterling work at the Scottish Lochs of Morar and Ness. They're probably not aware of his latter-day cynicism and propensity for slagging off eye-witnesses with an attitude that is every bit as sceptical as it is patronising.

Boy, were they in for a shock.

Not that the majority of the locals would be paying him that much attention. They are proud of their Monster that they have christened Storsjodjuret, or Storsie for short. The creature is said to figure in myths and legends dating back 700 years, and there have been somewhere in the region of 200 documented sightings, the most recent of which is said to have occurred in 1992.

As with Nessie, many of the eyewitnesses come from highly respectable backgrounds and include pilots, professional divers and even an Member of the Swedish parliament.

Also in common with her Scottish cousin, Storsie is held in something akin to reverence and a kind of superstitious awe by the local inhabitants of Ostersed. There is even an organisation dedicated to protect the Monster's interests. The Society Of Friends Of The Great Lake Monster launched a campaign in 1986, that rendered it illegal to 'kill, injure or capture' the creature or its offspring.

The Storsjoodjuret wing of Ostersund's local museum features a series of bound copies of every single reported sighting, along with a welter of illustrations. The assembled models of Storsie show the Monster to resemble either a traditional sea serpent, or else a mythological dragon, complete with a long, arrow-pointed tail.

And yet again, in common with accounts of the Scottish, Irish (and in at least one case) Welsh Water Monsters, the head is said to be similar to that of a horse.

The majority of the accounts seem to feature an animal that is at least nine feet long, and is capable of achieving a tremendous turn of speed.

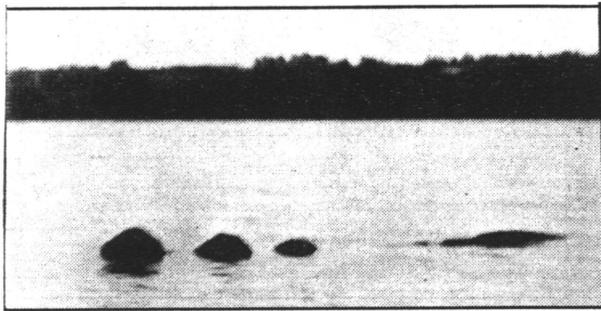
In 1894, a bunch of enterprising locals decided to set about trying to capture the beast and to this end, created an enormous iron trap the jaws of which were baited with whole pigs of calves in an attempt to lure the Monster with fresh food.

Typically, Storsie refused to rise to the bait.

Refusing to be downhearted by this distinct lack of success, a Norwegian whaler was hired by one of the town's richest women to set about drilling holes in the two-foot thick ice that routinely covers the surface of the Great Lake in the depths of mid-Winter. It was hoped that a lantern shone through the series of holes would tempt the Monster to the surface.

Quite how they expected *this* plan to work when they had plainly failed to entice the creature with food, is anybody's guess, but whatever the reasoning, it was doomed to failure.

After four long weeks of freezing his proverbial bollocks off, with not the slightest sign of anything unusual appearing, the whaler sensibly called it quits.



(Above): A photograph purporting to show the legendary Monster of the Great Lake of Ostersund. Unfortunately, the article containing the picture did not include any of the minor, trifling points of interest such as, who took the snap, when was it taken, and what were the circumstances surrounding its procurement. But there you go.

Unlike Loch Ness, the bed of the Great Lake (a massive girth that covers 280 square miles) has never been surveyed. Adrian Shine, not surprisingly, considers that the identity of the creature, assuming it actually exists, is most likely to lie within the boundaries of known marine life, as the water is too cold to be able to sustain any kind of reptile, and mammals would never be able to survive beneath the thick sheets of winter ice. One in the eye for our sceptical observer however, is that, also unlike Loch Ness, the Great Lake has a vast abundance of fish, a ready-made food supply for any large aquatic predator.

The article also featured what it refers to as 'one of the more detailed contemporary descriptions of a close encounter beneath the Great Lake' comes courtesy of a diver named Karl Arne Karlsson, who was working away merrily on a section of underwater pipeline when his diving lamp illuminated a huge gaping mouth equipped with a hideous darting tongue.

Adrian however, has expressed the belief that the culprit may in fact be some sort of mutated giant European

Catfish, known, as its name suggests, for reaching a formidable size.

Tellingly perhaps, Ostersund's public information officer, Kennet Christiansson, has visited the Loch Ness Exhibition Centre (see previous article) and despite his observation that he had never been so cold, not even in the depths of the Swedish winter, has seen at firsthand the commercial spin-offs that an enduring legend can generate. He was quoted as saying; 'I think it's important to retain a healthy balance between legend and scientific knowledge.'

Yeah right.

But clearly not as important as the cheery sound of cash registers ringing and wads of paper money being slapped into the hands of the great exploiters...

23rd August, 1998. Great Lake, Ostersund, Sweden. 'THE MAIL ON SUNDAY'

ALIEN BIG CATS ON THE PROWL ONCE MORE

Well, it's certainly been a busy time for Big Cat hunters here in deepest, darkest Britain, since our last issue hit the erm, newsstands...

I've never known such a plethora of reports in such a comparatively short space of time. The fun and frolics started at the height of that pitiful excuse for a Summer, and continued right through to the middle of November. Indeed, accounts were still coming in as this magazine was being put together, and we'll include those reports in our next issue due out early in 1999. (God, that date is gonna get some getting used to. I find I can't think about it without images of Nostradamus and Gerry Anderson's space stations on the surface of the Moon careering through my mind on an endless tape loop).

On July 21st, the media were having something of a field day at the less-than-glamorous unveiling of a video clip said to contain the best evidence yet got the existence of the Beast Of Bodmin.



(Above): Still picture from the amateur video shot by a man known only as 'John.' Opinion is divided as to whether it depicts an Alien Big Cat or an everyday housecat...

The 20-second clip of footage was screened at Newquay Zoo, and sadly, the assembled audience of reporters, zoologists and other so-called 'experts,' were reduced to howls of uncontrollable laughter at the sight of a jet black and pointy-eared, but disappointingly small creature crossing a verdant green field. The clip had been filmed

neat to Bodmin Moor's historic Jamaica Inn, and it was claimed by those who shot it to feature two separate puma-like animals. I wanted so hard to believe that the 'experts' had got it hopelessly wrong. That their scepticism was entirely misplaced.

But let's face facts, friends and neighbours, which ever way you slice it, it looks like a common house cat.

Not everyone was in agreement as to the animal's identity however. And here's a thing; One of those who raised his voice loudly in dissent was, unusually enough, an acknowledged 'expert'. Mike Thomas, managing director of Newquay Zoo, was forthright in his opinion that 'these cats are breeding out in the wild, so if they are breeding you are going to have different sizes of animals. My opinion of that animal is that it's an interesting species of wild cat.

'I am of the opinion that Pumas, Panthers, Lynx and other wild cats are out there. But apart from catching it, you can't be any more definite than that.'

And, here's another thing; Plymouth biologist and college lecturer Chris Mosler, an avowed sceptic, was alleged to have discovered photographs and paw-prints of Alien Big Cats. He has discovered, had this to say; *'I am as sure as one can be that it belongs to a cat, probably the size of a Lynx. Yet the animal on the video is definitely not a Lynx.'*

Cornwall councillor Joan Vincent was equally convinced that the creature in the clip, whatever it may be, is most certainly not a rather large domestic house cat; *'I have seen one of the black cats near my home. It is larger than any domestic cat I have ever seen.'*

On the other hand, information concerning the man who actually shot the film, was somewhat sketchy, and this obviously helped fuel the cynicism of the rest of the invited audience. Known only as 'John,' the film-maker claimed he had stumbled upon the Beast whilst enjoying a leisurely stroll. As luck would have it, when he later returned with his camera, the creature was obligingly still hanging around, anxious to have its picture taken.

22nd July, 1998. Bodmin Moor, Cornwall. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** The next Big Cat story to hit the news also occurred in July, and concerned the formation of the self-styled 'Beast Watch Club,' a group of teenagers who believed they could succeed where everyone else had failed....Namely, capture concrete evidence of The Beast Of Bodmin.

At the time of the featured article in the tabloid press, the club had already managed to stumble upon 'a gruesome discovery that has led them to think that they have found the spot where the Beast goes to eat its prey.'

Daniel Bell, 16, was quoted as saying; *'We are trying not to jump to conclusions, but there were buried animal skulls and a tree with dead rabbits hanging from it.'*

*** During August, investigators were reportedly excited by the discovery of two giant paw prints at a farm in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire.

Photographs and a series of plaster casts were obtained by the RSPCA after the owner of the farm, stated that she had spotted a large, black cat-like animal amongst the trees that line the bottom of her garden.

The unnamed witness told reporters; *'In recent weeks I have had two glimpses of what appeared to be a large, wild black cat.'*

Steve Foster, an RSPCA inspector who personally investigated the case, was moved to comment that the prints certainly appeared to be from a Puma or Lynx and Lincolnshire police were quick to claim that the discovery added weight to the numerous sightings of a black, Puma-like animal over the previous two years.

15th August, 1998 Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** The following month, September, saw the focus switch to Althorp Park in Northamptonshire, where the so-called Beast Of Althorp was said to be prowling the estate once more.

The creature was being blamed for a series of attacks on sheep, dogs and rabbits in the area.

Ann Wynyard of Chapel Brampton told reporters that her five-year-old German Shepherd, Khan, had been very nearly blinded and suffered wounds that required 30 stitches after getting involved in a struggle with an Alien Big Cat. Ann recounted the following story;

'Khan went into a field after seeing some rabbits. The next thing I saw was this huge black blur. It was probably the size of a Labrador. It jumped over a four-foot wall with Khan.'

'I heard the most blood-curdling scream. About five minutes later Khan came back covered in blood. He had three awful cuts on his face.'

'The vet said his injuries were consistent with being caused by a big cat. I had never heard of this panther until a friend mentioned it a little while afterwards.'

A further witness, a milkman by the name of Chris Haynes, claims he saw the creature on at least two occasions whilst he was out walking with his son Tom, 15.

'Although it was dark, I was close enough to see it wasn't a dog, although it looked a bit like a Labrador. As we got closer, it suddenly leapt over a seven-foot fence.'

'Three weeks later we saw it again on the same road.'

And finally, farmer Clive Lawrence, 54, states that he too saw 'the Beast' near his home in West Haddon a full eighteen months prior to the current crop of sightings; *'The best description I can give is it looked just like a panther. There have been numerous other sightings. It has jumped out at horses and run out in front of cars.'*

Even Northamptonshire police were keen to add fuel to the fire by confirming that there had been rumours of a black panther prowling around the area for several months.

16th September, 1998. Althorp Park, Northamptonshire. 'DAILY MAIL'

*** And later that very same month, it was the turn of 'The Beast Of Barnet' to hit the headlines.

The local police took the stories of sightings of a large, Puma-type animal so seriously that they set about warning the residents of the area with loud-hallers that they had best keep their doors and windows closed for the foreseeable future.

Two civilians and a couple of police officers had apparently witnessed an animal that was first described as being 'larger than a Labrador' only to gradually grow in size, until it reached the girth of a Shetland Pony.

The two members of the public had reported entirely unrelated sightings of a sandy-coloured cat-like animal, with a tail longer than its body and a black ring at its tip. It was said to have roamed around near a row of houses in the South Mimms area of Hertfordshire, near the junction of the M25 and the A1.

Typical of such cases, a thorough search of the locality failed to uncover any evidence of a big cat, but late the following day, two police officers claimed to have spotted the same, or a similar animal in a nearby field. Another search was initiated, this time incorporating the use of a helicopter equipped with heat-seeking devices and a team of armed officers.

Once again, their efforts proved fruitless.

Not to be discouraged however, the police set up an operations headquarters at Barent, Police Station, where a dozen officers took advice from both the RSPCA and London Zoo.

Following much debate and constructive argument, they were able to reach the conclusion that the animal in

question was not only bigger than a Labrador, it might even dwarf an Alsatian. They concluded too that the creature may have been on the prowl in the area for at least the past eight years.

'What is of particular concern to us is the fact that such an animal was spotted close to a well-populated residential area,' a police spokesman was quoted as saying.

Yvonne Arnold, a 45-year-old dental nurse from South Mimms, claimed that she had sighted the creature as it was actually in the process of being tracked by the police across a field; *'I don't normally believe in things like this,'* she later told reporters. *'We were driving past on the way back from the supermarket. It was a huge animal, the size of a Shetland Pony, but cat-like with a long tail. It was prowling along the field'*

Another witness, Sharon Kennett, was struck dumb with astonishment as she watched armed police officers searching her garden with a tracker dog. They later explained to her that the Beast had been seen entering her garden, where the family keep a brood of chickens in a shed. Yvonne never saw the animal herself but one of her chickens was found to have been killed and mutilated horribly.

'I suppose it could have just been eaten by a fox' Yvonne conceded. *'But the police were convinced that there was an altogether different sort of animal around.'*

Metropolitan police Chief Superintendent Huw Thornton added to the furor by stating; *'The two police officers described it as a large brown cat with a very large, rope-like tail which had a black ring on the end of it. It was walking very slowly and then sat down. The officers got within fifty yards. The animal then got up, stretched, and turned to walk away.'*

'It was a very large brown cat, bigger than an Alsatian. But this is not something which should panic residents (Lordy, that's mighty reassuring) People should live normally, but if anyone should spot the Beast, they should not approach it.'

RSPCA officers have proffered the theory that the creature could well be the same one that had previously been sighted over a period of at least eight years.

Inspector John Storey had this to say; *'It is going to be feeding on rabbits, small game, and possibly deer. There is an abundance of food for it. It is unlikely to attack humans or pets, but if is hungry enough it will eat just about everything.'*

23rd September, 1998 Barnet, London 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** And from Barnet, we head on off the equally unlikely setting of Chesterfield Canal, where it is alleged David and Christine Dewdney succeeded in capturing photographic evidence of their encounter with a large, black, cat-like animal.

The couple were cruising on the canal when they saw the creature prowling through a field near Woksop.

They claim to have heard an eerie, animal cry before they actually set eyes upon the Beast which they later described as being as big as an Alsatian with a long tail.

They managed to take two photographs of the animal before it disappeared into a hedge.

Naturalist Derek Whiteley from Weaton Park Museum, Sheffield, stated that the pictures were conclusive proof of a wild feral cat.

1st October, 1998. Worksop, Chesterfield DAILY MAIL'

*** Police in and around Dartmoor were forced to call off their search for what was described as a 'bloody Lion' that had reportedly been roaming the area.

Tracker dogs accompanied by trained marksmen were called in after three sightings of the animal. It was first

seen by Paul Gourley, 42, as he was driving to his home near Wrangton.

The Lion, said to be a 'bedraggled male,' lumbered towards him up the road moved him to comment; *'It had a bit of a bloody mane. Then it seemed to panic and jumped through the hedge.'*

'I had heard about the Beast Of Bodmin, not knowing whether it was real - then I am faced with a Lion.'

Two other people later spotted the same animal crossing fields at Marley Head, three or four miles distant. In the weeks leading up to the sightings, large, unidentified paw prints had been reported in the bunkers at Wrangton Golf Club.

Chief Inspector Phil Swarbrick, led an 18-strong police team, and was convinced that a big cat had indeed been sighted, although he wouldn't go so far as to say it was definitely a Lion.

A 6 inch paw print was also discovered by PC David Eldridge in a muddy gateway not far from where the Lion was actually seen.

Wildlife 'expert' Robin Godbeer from the nearby Dartmoor Wildlife Park, said the plaster cast taken from it resembled that of a big cat but he was unable to identify the species.

Typically, local zoos and wildlife parks did not report that they were missing any of their big cats.

20th November, 1998 Dartmoor 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

*** And finally, for this issue at least, a couple of 17-year-olds were camping on Dartmoor, when they were rudely awoken by the sound of their tent canvas being slashed by some animal.

Quite understandably, none of the teenagers had the nerve to poke their head out for a peek at what exactly was causing the damage, and the next morning they emerged to discover the bloody remains of a sheep close to their tent.

Tom Hayman-Joyce and David Dennehy, who were with a camping party from Bloxham School in Oxfordshire, were said to have been scared out of their wits by the sounds of the tent being slashed by what could only have been the claws of some animal.

Tom told reporters; *'We were woken by a ripping and a pulling noise at the porch of the tent. The bottom was badly torn with claw marks. We reported the incident to the police and everyone believed us, especially when they saw the state of the tent.'*

Tom's mate David added; *'I thought it was a Lynx - it did not seem big enough to be a Lion.'*

The incident occurred in the same area where the aforementioned 'bloody Lion' had reportedly been sighted.

'Experts' who examined the plaster moulded paw prints that were recovered from the site could well have been from a young lion or a smaller species of big cat.

23rd November, 1998 Dartmoor. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

YETI SIGHTED ON MOUNT EVEREST

Craig Calonica, 45, was the latest in a long line of witnesses to come forward and openly admit to sighting an-honest-to-God Yeti whilst skinning on the slopes of Mount Everest.

In fact, he actually claims to have seen two of critters, walking erect, as he made his way down to base camp at 17,000 ft from 21,300 ft. He described them as having thick shiny black fur and they walked in the manner of humans 'except they were a little hunched over at the shoulder' Craig was quoted as saying; *'My point is that I*

saw something that was not human, not a gorilla and not a bear. The creature's arms were very long and and their hands were very big.'

4th October, 1998. Mount Everest, Himalayas 'DAILY MAIL'

OUT OF PLACE AND NEWLY DISCOVERED SPECIES

Talk about Urban Mythology imitating life...For years beyond counting, stories have circulated, most of them little more than FOAF tales, concerning Crocodiles living down in the storm drains of the world's major cities.

Well now, here comes an apparently true-life report of a six-foot long Crocodile swimming in the sewers below the town of Cairns in Australia. Interestingly enough, a teenage girl had been mauled by an unseed something, the previous February.

20th April, 1998. Cairns, Australia. 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

*** A five-inch lizard that was found in a workshop on an industrial estate at Ferndown, Dorset, was identified as a Warty Newt from the mountain streams of Northwest China. The only explanation offered for its being discovered so far from its natural habitat is that it arrived in a packing case of components.

25th September, 1998. Ferndown, Dorset 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

*** A species of snail that was thought to have died out completely has been found to be alive and well and living in Lake Bala in Wales. The lake, also known by the name Llan Tegid, is rumoured to be the home of a Monster, christened 'Teggie' (see issue 5 of 'DON'), so this re-discovery is especially intriguing.

The 6mm glutinous snail, so-called because of the jelly-like gills covering its shell, was last sighted in Lake Bala, back in 1953.

It was thought that the creature had fallen victim to the pollution of the lake or the lowering of its water levels caused by the building of sluices. (God, we're a thoughtful, environmentally aware race, dontcha think?) But studies by the Countryside Council for Wales and the Snowdonia National Park Authority have found a healthy population around the edges of the lake during last September.

John Steel of the Environment Agency, stated that the snails were still very vulnerable to pollution (oh, so no change there then), and the discovery would spur on the search for other populations (doubtless so that we can make a thorough job of finishing them off, this time).

The glutinous snail is just one of the many creatures in decline across Europe. It is one of more than 170 species in the Government's Biodiversity Action Plan aimed at attempting to save endangered plants and animals.

23rd October, 1998. Lake Bala/Llan Tegid, Wales 'THE TIMES'

*** A Great Bustard, which has been officially extinct in Britain since pre-Victorian times, has recently been spotted in deepest, darkest Dorset.

Otis tarda, the world's heaviest flying bird was sighted by two men at Broadstone Golf Course near Poole, and then by a farmer nearby.

The presence of the imposing bird, which is the size of a turkey, has excited great interest amongst ornithologists. Chris Mead, an 'expert' on all things feathered, told

reporters *'This bird became extinct several decades before the Great Auk died and one normally has to travel across Europe to see them.'*

'Great Bustards were once a common sight in parts of Britain, but their sheer size and conspicuousness made them an easy target for the sporting guns directed against them, and they died out sometime around 1832.'

There has only been a handful of sightings of Great Bustards this century. One was spotted at Felixstowe in February 1987, and before that on Fair Isle in January, 1970.

Recent efforts to reintroduce them have been put on hold after years of unsuccessful attempts at breeding them in captivity.

In Western Europe the huge and colourful Great Bustard breed in the dry inland areas of Spain and Portugal. But these birds do not migrate and the Dorset specimen was thought to have flown in from central Europe.

9th November, 1998. Poole, Dorset. 'THE TIMES'

*** Meanwhile, yet more of those ubiquitous 'experts' were busy queuing up to proclaim that Britain may well face the prospect of an invasion of exotic insects in the very near future.

Some of these species will include such heartwarmingly wondrous possibilities as bugs that are impervious to all forms of insecticide.

Around 20,000 different species of insect already plague the average British home at one time or another. Cockroaches, Click Beetles, Crane Flies, Earwigs, Fleas, Gnats, Centipedes, Mosquitoes, Houseflies and Woodworm are among the most virulently common.

However, the assembled 'expert's are warning that global warming and the predicted resistance to insecticide will result in a massive bug population explosion.

Dr Peter Ewen, who hails from the University of Wales in Cardiff, and the self-styled Insect Investigations Limited, which carried out the aforementioned study, was quoted as saying; *'Bugs have already colonised more areas of the planet than humans. We share our homes with more uninvited creatures than ever before and this number looks set to increase.'*

'Insects transmit diseases and have caused more deaths than all of man's wars put together.'

23rd November, 1998. General 'DAILY MANC'

*** The highest living known fishing mouse has been discovered existing far from the prying eyes of man, high in the Andes of Ecuador. The animal is described as being streamlined with thick, water-repellent fur and is said to behave not a whole pile unlike a miniature otter.

Chibchawomys orcesi is named after Ecuadorian biologist Gustavo Orcesi.

It ekes out a living at 4,000m in the minutest of freezing cold streams on the Andean moorlands of the Cajas Plateau in Southern Ecuador.

According to the Natural History Museum's Paula Jenkins and Adrian Barnett from the Roehampton Institute, *C. Orcesi* is almost blind and finds its prey - fish and freshwater invertebrates - by touch, using a forest of sensitive whiskers.

Amazingly, it does this at night when fish are busy, erm, resting.

'With all that swirling water, locating such food by touch must be a bit like trying to home in a piccolo playing in a heavy metal concert,' Barnett was later moved to comment.

C. Orcesi is known only from the Cajas Plateau, where it seems to be both rare and somewhat finicky about its choice of stream.

September, 1998. Andes, Ecuador 'BBC WILDLIFE MAGAZINE'

Dark Visions: Highlights Of The X-Creatures

Screened From August 26th To
September 30th, 1998. BBC 1



As the Summer-that-never-was, wound its way into the Golden Days Of The Fall (one of the very few Americanisms that I can honestly admit to using in preference to its British equivalent), along came a series that seemed, initially at least, to perfectly complement the season; Wild and invigorating.

Colourful and free-minded.

Emotionally-charged and fleetingly beautiful...

In common with Bilbo and Frodo Baggins, the heroes of Tolkien's 'LORD OF THE RINGS,' the time of year has always inspired in me a feeling of restlessness.

The need to embark upon a journey from out of the humdrum mundanity of day-to-day life.

To seek an escape from the nine-tive ritual of wishes.

To board the last freedom Montego out of Nowhere City...

And maybe, just maybe this programme, with former children's TV-presenter Chris Packham as our (admittedly unlikely) guide, could provide that route to dreamland.

I sat back and waited to be transported to the fabulous realms we dreamt of as children....

On The Trail Of Big Hairy Monsters:1 The Yeti And The Orang-Pendek

The opening programme takes us first to the snow-encusted peaks of a remote mountain range. A group of climbers are playing cards in a tent lit by the flickering glow of a single oil lamp.

A bearded man, wearing a balaclava, and with a voice strongly reminiscent of Sean Bean, takes up the narration; 'I was with Mike Thompson and two sherpas. These are men who really understand the mountains. They take life very seriously.' The prevailing good humour is suddenly disrupted by the laying down of 'the Yeti Card' by Mr Balaclava. Like some cheap, sideshow fortune-teller predicting dire consequences at the end of a Tarot reading, one of the Sherpa's is moved to exclaim; 'No good. Very bad for you' No good. Yeti!!!'

The following day, the four men are shown attempting to negotiate the ridge at the roof of the world. That evening, as they set up base recalls; 'we were just putting packs down to set up camp, when there was a commotion at the back of me. I turned around just in time to see something drop out of sight behind the ridge. But night was coming. So I put it to the back of my mind.'

After dark, the group are tucked up in their sleeping bags, gathering their energy for the next stage of the climb. 'Balaclava's slumber is disturbed however by a series of bad dreams and the appearance of a sinister-looking shadow on the wall of the tent. He awakes with a start and, convinced that something is out there, watching and waiting, he decides to grab a pair of binoculars to try and identify the creature. 'It was daylight, practically. The moon was so bright. And I saw a dark patch in the shadows. I definitely saw it move, and I got the impression that it was an ape-like creature. I watched it for almost ten minutes. Then, as if it knew it was being watched, it dropped out of sight.'

Having thus set the scene, and helped create a fair degree of atmospheric suspense, we switch to the sun-lit villages of modern-day Tibet. Incense is burning. A monkey startles the pigeons in a dead-end street. The air is filled with the soft tinkling of hand bells. Multi-coloured flags bedeck the holy shrines.

Our presenter appears in the midst of this tranquillity, the archetypal Westerner in a strange land. In brash cockney tones he reminds us that we humans share 98 per cent of our genes with chimpanzees (though the SKY SPORTS presenter, Richard Keys, may well be living proof that there exists amongst us at least one who shares a per cent or two more).

He also asks the most crucial of questions, the answer to which has continued to elude scientists and zoologists alike; 'At the end of the 20th century, could there really be a close living relative of ours, out there in the wild, as yet, unknown to science?'

So saying, he boards a plane to take him high into the mist-shrouded country of the Sherpa's, the breathtaking scenery of the Himalayas stretched out below like some artist's conception of Heaven.

Upon landing, Chris is moved to comment; 'The culture here is so different. There's a real sense of spiritual harmony with nature and the landscape. The head porter

told me that the Yeti represents a very potent force in the mountains. A destructive force.'

Mr Packham, despite his insistence that he has never smoked and is not overweight, is quite out of breath by the time he reaches his destination; a village with an unpronounceable name (well, unspell-able, anyway), 13,000 ft above sea level. Taking a well-earned breather, he speaks to one of the village elders to find out whether the locals truly do believe in the existence of the Yeti.

Seated before a roaring log fire, the elder tells him that he at least is certain that they are dealing with a real animal that is extremely rare. He further proposes that there may actually be two types of creature. One which is essentially man-like. The other, more animalistic both in nature, and in appearance.

We get to feast our eyes upon a series of pictograms, highly-colourful Sherpa paintings, most, if not all, of which feature Yeti's peering down from the mountains.

Chris then goes to visit an alleged victim of a Yeti assault back in 1974; Lakpa Sherponi. She relates the following story;

'When I was fourteen years old, we grazed our yak at Pheriche, and that's where it happened. I turned, (as she was washing pots and pans in a swift-flowing stream) and there was a black figure just behind me. It threw me into the river. When I came out of the river, I realised my hair had been pulled out.'

She was later found, in a highly distressed state, by her brother; *'The yaks had been killed. When wolves or snow leopards attack cattle, they make a lot of wounds. But these had only teeth marks. Yet all the flesh had been eaten from inside. I found a Yeti footprint in the sand. It was narrow at the heel, and the toes were long and spread out.'*

Chris is the first to accept that eyewitness testimony alone, no matter how compelling, could never be enough to convince the more skeptical amongst us. That said, he refers to a conversation he had before embarking on this one-man expedition, with George Schaller, a field naturalist who knows the Himalayas better than most Westerners.

'There is no question that during the Pliocene era, based on fossils found in China and Vietnam, and so forth, a gigantic ape lived in the region. Nobody is sure exactly what it lived on, but most likely it lived on a combination of meat and vegetable matter.'

So, the 'creature,' if it exists today, at least has an historical basis for reality.

A skull of *Gigantopithecus* is flashed up on the screen, and the supposition is put forward that as this Prehistoric ape may have lived alongside early man, the legends that have since sprung up about the Yeti, may well have their root in a sort of inherited race memory.

But as for descendants of this giant ape surviving to this day?

A parallel is drawn between the seldom-seen snow leopard and the Yeti. The former creature is known to science, but even local naturalists admit that there are so few sightings, the animal could very easily have taken on the mantle of legend.

Mr Schaller however, remains doubtful that a great ape could exist, even in such a secluded location. But even he doesn't rule out the possibility entirely; *'On the other hand, it's very difficult to prove something doesn't exist. I think, there is still a faint chance that something might exist. Something unexplained that is still there.'*

The old chestnut concerning the creature's potential food supply (a standard criticism levelled at any report of an alien animal, by the skeptics - Witness Adrian Shine's withering comments concerning the food supply - or lack of it - in Loch Ness) is once more brought to the fore, as Chris casts doubt upon the Yeti's ability to survive the harsh

winter months. In the summer months, food may well be plentiful, if a little rudimentary, but when winter turns the forest into an icy, frozen wilderness, how could a large hominid, herbivorous or otherwise, eke out an existence?

And even supposing that a primate *could* somehow evolve in this harsh climate, what evidence so we have, aside from the obvious eyewitness testimony, for the Yeti or Adominable Snowman?

Well, there are, of course, the footprints.

One explanation for the sets of two-footed prints that explorers have reportedly stumbled across during various expeditions, is that four-legged animals such as bears, save energy when walking through the snow plant their hind feet in the prints of their fore feet. This leaves a track not too dissimilar from an upright ape's.

And then there's the problem of the lack of oxygen at such heights. Hallucinations and ill-fated attempts at reasoned conclusions come with the territory.

The Shipton photographs of 1951 are given an airing (see *'DON' #1 Carnival Of Monsters Supplement P:6*), and as Chris readily acknowledges, they remain pretty convincing. The tracks were said to have led for over a mile. Packham points out though, that whilst Shipton never admitted that it was a hoax, it was widely believed to be just that. Precisely what the evidence is for this assumption is not made clear by the programme-makers, but there you go.

'The Freeze-Thaw Phenomenon' is also used to explain away the anomalous footprints. The sun can melt the original print of a human, say, and transform it into a variety of weird and wonderful shapes.

The search for solid, physical evidence leads Chris, inevitably, to the local monastery's. At a one of them, the skeletal hand of a Yeti was said to have been housed as a holy relic. Unfortunately, someone decided to steal the artifact before zoologists could get a good look at it. Just to add to the fun, a fire at the monastery of Pangboche resulted in the destruction of a similar piece of evidence.

The only remaining artifact is to be found at another monastery at Kumjung. Highly revered amongst the Sherpa's, a supposed Yeti scalp is entrusted to our intrepid investigator by a Buddhist priest. The priest claims that it is totally different from a human skull, but Chris has his own opinions; *'To me, it looked like a very poor fake. It's got an obvious seam, and more importantly, the hair is growing out towards the crown, and that just isn't natural. And back in the 1960's, the most famous of all Himalayan mountaineers; Sir Edmund Hillary, took another similar scalp back to the West for testing. The verdict; a Himalayan good-will-lope.'*

Chris, to be fair to him, notwithstanding his grave doubts concerning the origins of the Kumjung scalp, attempts to obtain a hair sample to take back to the West for DNA tests. This latest technology would surely establish once and for all, the authenticity or otherwise of the Yeti scalp.

Sherpa Tensing, the head of the village committee, however, refused to hand over even a single strand of hair. He is moved to comment; *'I do not care whether the Western people are saying "buffalo skin," or whatever skin. But we do believe that this a Yeti skull...So let them say whatever it is.'*

Chris shakes his hand and claims that he respects Tensing's passion.

A trifle disappointed though, he attends a village festival where the Yeti is used a symbol of the evil forces that threaten the well-being of the community.

'During the ceremony, the Yeti scalp is worn by a man. Once he has placed it on his head he represents the spirit of the Yeti. That's a bad spirit, sent by the Gods to punish humans for their misdeeds.'

So, I suppose, in a way, the Yeti is a bogey-man in Sherpa culture. And long may it live.'

We travel next to the forest of Sumatra, 8,000 km to the south of the Himalayas...

The plaster cast of the Orang-Pendek (translated quite literally as 'the short man'), is shown revolving on the screen.

David Chivers, a leading primate scientist is duly asked for his opinion. He is surprisingly enthusiastic;

'The footprints are amazing in respect of the mixture of ape and human features blended together. It retains some of the grasping abilities of the apes, but also has a sort of flat-footed version of a human foot. And this enables it to walk upright.'

Belief in the existence of an unknown primate is so strong that a team sponsored by Fauna and Flora International, have recently been sent to the area to investigate, and if possible, obtain evidence of the creature.

The forests we're dealing with here, have very little in common with the comparatively barren wooded slopes of the Himalayas...

David Chivers again; *'The forests of south-east Asia, especially Sumatra, are so complex and diverse, and still extensive, that it's quite feasible there's a species of ape that's eluded discovery.'*

In 1993, a member of the team claimed to have encountered the creature. Debbie Martin describes how it walked straight across a valley in front of her, not 30 metres away. *'I didn't expect to see it,'* she maintains, a look of scarcely concealed wonder lighting up her features. *'And certainly not that clearly and so close up. It appeared between a couple of trees, vegetation about hip-level, this gorgeous, graceful, very strongly-built primate, walking out of legend and into broad daylight. Lit up by the sun. And the disbelief of seeing this thing... If I'd seen it concealed in undergrowth, I would have said "well, I saw something" But I didn't see something. I saw an Orang-Pendek walk across a valley, 30 metres away from me.'*

Chris and Debbie head to a nearby village situated right at the edge of the forest, to gather further eye-witness statements. Many of the inhabitants claim to have had clear, unobstructed views of the creature. A local artist has even been able to construct a composite portrait based on their accounts. Even more compelling, are the accounts proffered by members of a secretive tribe who still inhabit the forest. One of their members (they number just thirty) describes a recent encounter with the Orang-Pendek; *'It was the same colour all over. It's face was covered in hair, like a bear's. But it wasn't a bear. We all know bear's. It was a Man Of The Forest.'*

Hard, physical evidence has been typically difficult to obtain, however, not least because the terrain is alternately deluged with rain or baked dry by the intense heat. The team have managed to obtain photographs and plaster-casts of multiple footprints. The extraction of DNA though, has proven to be well-nigh impossible given the decidedly un-sterile surroundings.

The retrieval of a dead body is also highly unlikely, The moment an animal dies in the jungle, the insects and other larger scavengers like porcupines and vultures descend like erms...vultures. A carcass can disappear quite literally overnight.

Despite this, David Chivers believes the project to find Orang-Pendek is more than worthwhile; *'When I read Debbie's report, it sent shivers down my spine. It was uncanny. And given the frequency of these sightings, there has got to be something out there.'*

Chris however, maintains that there may well be the possibility that a known species, the Orang-Utan say, may have evolved into some sort of bipedal ape. Film is shown of a chimp walking around on two legs, and as Mr Packham points out, the image is an undeniably scary one.

'It's as if the Bogey-Man is real after all. And maybe, that's the root of our fascination with these legends.'

Attempts to grab a photograph of the beast have so far met with abject failure, not least because of the thick, jungle undergrowth. However, using state-of-the-art camera technology, the team hope to obtain a positive result some time in the near future.

Chris concludes the programme with some stunning aerial shots of the the almost impenetrable jungle and suggests that; *'surely, here is our best chance of an X-Creature. Thousands of square miles of the world's richest and most productive forest. An unexplored wilderness, and a place where it's incredibly easy for an animal to hide.'*

Programme Two featured the search for the Giant Squid - the real-life Kraken.

Unfortunately, although I set the tape to record it for review purposes, for some reason it didn't come out, so I never got to see it.

Apologies to our readers, but seeing as though this is intended to be a highlights review of the series, we'll move on to something infinitely more interesting, anyway....

THE LOCH NESS MONSTER

The programme opens with a cleverly-shot, black and white re-enactment of the Spicer's 1993 press conference at BBC Radio Studios, in the wake of their infamous sighting of Neale on the road to Foyers...

'The day in question that my wife and I witnessed this extraordinary sight, was Saturday, 22nd July, 1933. We'd been touring Scotland, (we see a colour backdrop of trees, green-leaved, with snatches of the sun-flecked water glimmering in between) and were returning from Inverness' (The camera pans back to reveal a quantity old-fashioned car, a Bentley maybe, driving along the winding, dipping B852 road.

And then we see the Loch itself, revealed in all its summer glory, looking towards Fort Augustus). *'It was about 4pm in the afternoon, and we were mid-way between the village of Dores and the hotel at Foyers (coincidentally or not, given what was to follow, not too far from Bokakine House, former home of the notorious Aleister Crowley, and the godforsaken burial ground directly below it See 'DON' # 8 P:35) 'Suddenly, my wife exclaimed "What on earth is that?"'*

(Mr Spicer slams his foot on the brakes and the car screeches to a halt. At first we see nothing but an empty road from the perspective of the driver, but soon...) *'and as she spoke, I saw the most extraordinary form of an animal crossing the road. It was horrible. An abomination.'* (...there's an amorphous mass, like something out of a Lovecraftian nightmare, making its way clumsily towards the Loch, and...) *'About 50 yards ahead, we saw an undulating sort of neck, quickly followed by a large, ponderous body. I estimated the length to be 25 to 30 feet. (...the thought that this whatever-it-is bears little resemblance to the soon-to-be-popular theory of a Plesiosaur, and has more in common with some bloated denizen of Demonology crosses the mind, and...)' its colour was dark, elephant-grey. Because of the slope, we could not see its limbs. Although I accelerated quickly towards it, it had disappeared into the Loch by the time I reached the spot'* (...it's kind of hard to shake the notion that we are dealing here with something not merely prehistoric, as fantastic as that would undoubtedly be, but something truly otherworldly...) *'There was no sign of it in the water.'* (...Something impossibly ancient...) *'I'm a temperate man. But I'm willing to take any oath that we saw this Loch Ness'*

Beast' (—Something older than time itself...Something EVIL).

We switch to the present day. Chris is standing at the Loch-side, armed with a set of binoculars, scanning the water's surface, whilst waxing lyrical about the unique romance attached to the place. He pays homage to its mystique. Its ever-changing moods. The tricks this body of dark, peat-stained water can play on the eyes of even the most frequent of visitors.

Following the by now familiar montage of eye-witness testimony, (familiar that is, to viewers of the many documentaries featuring Nessie, that have rolled off the production line down the years - See 'DON' #16 P:29 for a prime example of this), and the compulsory references to St Columba and his famous encounter with 'a certain water monster,' back in AD 565, we come across mention in an 1868 edition of 'THE INVERNESS COURIER' of a strange fish being washed up on the shores of the Loch. The species was never identified.

Chris, once more to be fair to him, is the first TV presenter (although he is by no means the first *researcher*. Mike Dash of 'THE FORTEAN TIMES' made a similar point in a recent letter to yours truly) I have so far encountered, to make the assertion that the plesiosaur theory enjoyed such popularity mainly because, the time was just ripe for stories of prehistoric monsters surviving into the present-day. Just as strange things seen in the sky have been associated with extraterrestrial spaceships since 1947, (though prior to then such phenomena were variously explained as being religious visions, giant airships, phantom planes and ghost rockets), so weird things seen in Loch Ness (and there are stories related by reliable, sober witnesses to testify to the fact that strange things *are* perceived from time to time) became universally accepted as being sightings of a surviving dinosaur.

The release of novels, such as Conan Doyle's classic 'THE LOST WORLD,' and the subsequent 1925, Willis O' Brien animated movie version of the story, fuelled the imagination of people eager to escape the constant struggle of daily life between the wars. And of course, in 1933, the year the Loch Ness story really grabbed the headlines, two other monsters were stalking the world stage. One was the entirely mythical (though nonetheless wonderful) 'KING KONG.' The other was evil incarnate; Adolf Hitler.

The now thoroughly discredited (well, *sort of*) Surgeon's photo is given its inevitable airing, and Packham maintains, quite rightly in my opinion, that genuine or not, the picture only added fuel to the plesiosaur-proponents.

A brief natural history of the extinct reptile follows, courtesy of Dr David Martill. He believes it is possible that plesiosaurs, whilst essentially marine animals, might have strayed into fresh water to give birth to their young. They may have given birth to live young, or like turtles, made an annual pilgrimage to various lakes in order to lay their eggs. Chris insists that in order to establish the likelihood (or otherwise) that a prehistoric animal could have somehow survived the mass extinctions of 65 million years ago, we have to travel half-way across the world to Australia, and what he calls, a modern-day Jurassic Park.

In the vast wilderness of this great southern land, all kinds of lizards have continued to exist in a form, largely unchanged from that of their remote ancestors.

After various clips of monitor lizards making a meal of children's picnic's, we hear whispered rumours of stories of other, far larger reptiles originating from the outback. One such tale is narrated by Steve Oxoborough, who together with his wife Tanya, encountered just such a creature: 'We were walking along, when I heard what I thought was a cow moving towards me. It came from behind me, and I didn't take much notice at first. But as it got closer, I turned to look at it, and it was a big lizard.'

Tanya agrees, adding; 'It was scary. It was as big as me (about five and a half feet), and its legs were as thick as mine'

Steve maintains that it was about three feet in height and that it was not afraid in the slightest by their presence.

Chris proposes that what the Oxoborough's might have seen was a surviving *Megalania*, a fearsome-looking animal that was living in Australia up to between 18-20,000 years ago. We get to see a skeleton of the monster, and you can well understand the couple's very real sense of terror at setting eyes upon something, even remotely similar. In the flesh.

However, most local 'experts' agree that it is highly unlikely that the *Megalania* could have evolved to eke out an existence in modern-day Australia, without a carcass being discovered, or without it being sighted on far more occasions.

We move on to take a brief look at a species that has certainly managed to survive the age of the Dinosaurs...The crocodile. And this leads Chris to ask to all-important question (although you strongly suspect he already knows the answer, and it most certainly isn't going to be in direct opposition to anything ol' beard-face Adrian Shine has to say about the mystery); 'So if we have an aquatic, prehistoric reptile living here, (in Australia) then why not in Loch Ness???'

A necessarily abridged version of the history and geology of the Loch is given, before we take in the classic Rine's/Edgerton Flipper Photos of 1972, the cosmic-joke inspired naming of the monster '*nessiterus rhombopteryx*' courtesy of Sir Peter Scott, the Surgeon's photo, and numerous eye-witness accounts.

Chris makes much play of the fact that all of these witnesses seem to be reporting different things, and oh, wouldn't ya just know it, here comes Mr *Beardus Facetus Shibus* ready to regale us with how it is everybody, even the locals, are seeing nothing other than their own personal Nessie's.

The food supply, or apparent distinct lack of one, is cited by Shine as being the prime reason why he cannot accept the premise of a family of large predators existing in the loch. This argument is more than familiar to anyone who has taken even the slightest interest in the mystery, and it may well be a valid one, but only if you assume we are dealing with a real, flesh and blood animal here. As opposed to something a tad more incorporeal. But I digress. The programme ends with Chris adopting a highly sceptical stance, and all but dismissing the entire phenomenon as being explainable in entirely mundane terms; mass illusion, (the Spicer's sighting of an 'abomination' crossing the road, is ahem, 'explained away' as being a couple of otters, their appearance distorted by the heat-haze) wishful-thinking, and the appearance from time to time, of various exotic creatures such as Baltic Sturgeons in the loch having travelled from the sea to spawn. He concludes by saying, in somewhat condescending tones; 'I know exactly, whatever I say, won't ever stop any visitor to the loch from slowing down, taking a look over the water, and hoping to see something, a little bit too strange to be true.'

ON THE TRAIL OF BIG HAIRY MONSTERS II: BIGFOOT

This programme centered upon the authenticity or otherwise, of the Patterson/Gimlin film of October, 1967.

Mr Packham, whilst predictably sceptical about the footage itself (and let's be honest ladies and gentlemen, it *does* look a little less than convincing, no matter how open-minded

a little less than convincing, no matter how open-minded you try to be), he rightly laments the fact that nary a professional zoologist took the time and trouble to actively investigate either the film, the site where it was taken, or the footprint casts that were obtained from the same vicinity.

The fact that most of the sightings appear to be of single creatures also strikes a false chord with Chris, because he asserts that if Bigfoot (and that is, once again, only an if) were any kind of an ape, it would almost certainly live in a group, 'or, at the very least, pairs.'

He also remains convinced that, even allowing for the sheer vastness of the north-western forests, there would be a much larger volume of reported sightings;

'I was staggered at the extent of those coastal forests and at their remarkable productivity - but it is trodden all over by hikers, hunters, foresters and fishermen.'

'By now, there should be more than unsubstantiated sightings: There should be photos, film and body.'

The Gimlin/Patterson film is all-too easily reconstructed courtesy of Packham and his special effects crew. 'We reshot it using the same type of camera, and two things made an impact. First, Roger and Bob were on top of the creature.

'They were so close to it that any wild, startled animal would never have just walked away with only a backwards glance'

'Second, we found that it was practically impossible to make a film as "jiggly" as the original. The camera was actually rather good, and even when he tried to be terribly clumsy, we got much better footage than Roger had done.'

Chris hints strongly at a botched hoax, that had started out as a good laugh, but had all too soon gotten out of hand. The hordes of would-be believers had descended in less time than it had taken for someone to shout 'Cryptozoological Scoop Sensation!!!' and suddenly, it would have been hugely embarrassing for all concerned to admit that they'd hoodwinked so many people.

Roger Patterson passed away in 1972. Several other of the suspected key players implicated in the 'plot' have also died as the years have rolled by.

Frustratingly, Bob Gimlin, Patterson's assistant back in 1967, is still alive but has long since given up talking about the subject. Fourteen years ago, he decided he could no longer put up with the constant ridicule, and the less-than-kind remarks hurled in his direction.

Chris states that he believes Gimlin; *'He's not a hoaxer, he's got nothing out of that 1967 film other than a lifetime of endless hassle. And, I regret to say, we hassled him too. We rang him repeatedly and wrote to him, but understandably, we got no reply. That was until we sent him a rough cut of our programme, complete with a few ideas as to how the 1967 film could have been made.'*

'Then he spoke to us.'

'He broke his silence to voice his doubts. Bob Gimlin admitted that he could well have been had. He was used to substantiate the story, because he was well-known for his honesty.'

'Yes, there were indeed motives other than mere mischief, and money was undoubtedly made. Big money.'

'So there. A stake protrudes from the bleeding heart of Bigfoot, from Cryptozoology itself. There's a whole pile we can't say, publish or broadcast yet, but the truth will out eventually, and the legend will eventually go down. It's not a shame - showing up a sham couldn't be - but maybe it is a little sad.'

'Thirty one years ago a bunch of the good ol' boys got together with a plan to make a few quick bucks. They pulled in a few desperadoes and a couple of jokers, got an honest Joe on board, and they turned out a winner.'

'The problem was, they did it far too well.'

'It stood for too long untested, and grew too big, so big that they couldn't get off without losing a lot of face. Somewhere out there, and I lie awake wondering exactly where, perhaps in a dusty Californian loft, is a cardboard box with a musty suit in it.'

'The skin that strict science so definitely needs to close the debate has probably got a bad case of moths.'

Just to add to the well of controversy however, the programme then turns to feature news of another 'Bigfoot' film, shot in 1995 by a Californian film crew....

Chris, having it seems, successfully dismantled the Gimlin/Patterson footage, is content to pass the mantle over to Jeff Muldrum, associate professor of Anatomy and Anthropology, and Richard Greenwell, of the International Society of Cryptozoology.

The film was apparently shot in the Jedediah State Park on 28th August, 1995. A TV crew from Waterland Productions were filming in the area, when suddenly, one of the party spotted a dark shadow moving at the edge of the base camp they had set up as dusk fell. At first they assumed it was a bear, but eager to capture the image on film, an intrepid cameraman grabbed his video and succeeded in zooming in on the rapidly retreating figure. In the pouring rain, the crew are just about able to discern a massive shaggy animal.

They were astonished to see that it was walking upright, arms swinging at its sides,

Determined to take a closer look, they pile into the RV and follow the 'bear' around a bend in the road. The driver accelerated forward as the hirsute figure cast wary glances back at its pursuers. But instead of the familiar protruding snout of a bear, they were confronted with a flat, human-like face.

The driver broke to an abrupt halt as, without warning, the creature stepped in front of the oncoming vehicle and crossed the road in the direction of the nearby Smith river. The glare from the headlights revealed a hair-covered giant, towering nearly eight-foot tall.

When they switched to full beam, the creature rose to its full height and raised its arms in self-defence, doubtless assuming it was about to be attacked. The occupants of the RV were equally shocked by the sight that greeted them. The whatever-it-was then turned with slow, unhurried strides, and, after pausing momentarily, it glared back with an expression of defiance clouding its features.

And what of those features?

The film crew were afforded a clear view of its sloping brow, broad flat nose, high, flaring cheekbones, and broad well-muscled neck and shoulders.

And then the 'Bigfoot,' for what else could it realistically be, vanished from sight behind a giant redwood tree. Attempts to follow it, were rendered futile in the rain-shrouded darkness.

Instead, the still shaken witnesses gathered around the video monitor to see whether they've been able to capture any trace of the entity on tape.

And it seems that they have indeed.

Driving back to Los Angeles, they debate the merits of going public with their footage - the humiliating experience suffered by Bob Gimlin, was imprinted firmly on their collective minds.

But so too was the sure and certain knowledge that they had encountered something from beyond the borders of accepted science.

And in the end, the desire to share their experience proved to be a tad too strong.

Both Muldrum and Greenwell, agreed before viewing the controversial footage to approach it with a spirit of open-mindedness. They described their findings thus;

'The video depicts a fleeting, dimly lit image of a bulky, striding, bipedal figure, initially seen at a distance'

(approximately 32 metres), in the periphery of the RV headlights, then later, at close proximity, (about 4.5 metres).

'One of our first objectives was to attempt to establish some scale by which we could determine the size of the subject. Starting from the factory specifications of the RV, we were quickly able to corroborate the witnesses impression that the subject stood nearly 2.5 metres tall. After a site visit - and some careful measurement of trees visible in the video - we arrived at a height of about 3.2 metres.

'The subject in the video clearly wasn't just an ordinary man.

'The next step was to compare the new video with the Patterson/Gimlin film shot in 1967. Several similarities were apparent - not only in facial features, but also in body form and proportion. On the other hand, we were also impressed by some fairly obvious differences.

'The Redwoods' video subject is apparently a male and has particularly long and shaggy hair, especially on the extremities, whereas Patterson and Gimlin filmed what appears to be a smaller female, with a sleeker coat and obvious breasts.

'Sex differences in hairiness are found in other primates, such as the orang-utan.

'After careful study of the Redwoods' video, we were also able to discern numerous additional details. One series of frames, for instance, shows the action of the gluteal muscle of the buttock during walking. The insertion of the gluteal muscle is marked by a shadowed furrow. Above and forward of this region, there is a reflective spot that could be skin with the hair rubbed off.

'This spot corresponds to a bony protuberance on the thigh bone just below the skin surface known as the greater trochanter. This subtle detail appears in precisely the appropriate anatomical position, suggesting a worn spot acquired from sleeping side down or from rubbing a hip against a tree.

'The Redwoods' film may also reveal an anatomical detail not reported previously in Sasquatch encounters - the male genitalia.

'As the subject passes in front of the RV, a reflective object can be seen at the front of the body, just below waist level. The object in question has a thick hair-covered base and a reflective, tapering portion that curves upwards in a sickle shape.

'One interpretation is that the subject is displaying an erect penis, perhaps as a form of threat - as has been observed in some other apes.

'As the subject vanishes into the darkness behind the redwood tree, we are afforded a last informative glimpse of the leg and foot. The heel is very broad, the ankle thick, and the calf lacks the characteristic taper and straight line of the human Achilles' tendon.

'Significantly, the heel of the visible trailing foot comes off the ground while the midfoot appears to remain in contact with the ground until it pushes off, and the entire foot swings forward. This is quite different from the action of the human foot, in which heel and mid-foot lift together, but characteristic of an ape's foot with its more flexible joints.

'All the signs are that the bipedal Sasquatch walks with a gait distinct from that of humans.

'These are just the highlights of our analysis.

'And this analysis has encompassed on-site inspection, interviews with witnesses, consultation with video enhancement specialists, and careful scrutiny of the subject in the film.

'In all this, we have detected nothing to falsify the testimony of the witnesses. In fact, we have noted numerous

anatomical features on the video that are highly suggestive of and consistent with the image of a large, bipedal, non-human primate.

'Nevertheless, we always keep one overriding thought in mind when evaluating Cryptozoological evidence; the witnesses were there, and we weren't.

'It is certainly possible that the witnesses in this case - given their obvious Hollywood connections - could have pulled off a spectacular hoax.

'It is even possible that all of the thousands of Sasquatch reports - including the hundreds of cases where tracks have been found - have been due entirely to hoaxing (and perhaps some misidentifications).

'In our view, there are only two hypotheses that seem possible about the Sasquatch, both of which seem improbable;

'One is that the Sasquatch doesn't exist and that the thousands of reports are spurious. The other is that a giant, non-human, bipedal primate inhabits the forests of the US-Pacific North-west and Western Canada, and has so far somehow, eluded conventional scientific observation.

'One must decide for oneself which is the least improbable of the two.

'Meanwhile, the search for that elusive proof continues. We are just about set to embark on our second month-long Bigfoot expedition, when we will be using infra-red light, invisible to primates' eyes, combined with special night-vision cameras.

'Perhaps, this time, we may bring back conclusive evidence that will settle the Bigfoot debate once and for all.'

'Reports of a giant primate stalking the forests of North America, first came to prominence during the late 1950's. Large, human-like footprints were found at road-construction sites as the wilderness of Northern California was opened up to logging. The reports, documented by photographs, and plaster casts, resulted in the name 'Bigfoot,' but the creature was also known by the Indian name; 'Sasquatch,' (meaning 'Wild People.')

'Eyewitnesses related startling encounters with giant, upright apes, but their stories were ignored by both the authorities and the scientific community.

'The study of these and many subsequent track casts, as well as the two films, has revealed quite about the possible anatomy of this supposed giant ape, but much less about its possible behaviour and ecology.

'Eyewitness reports - now numbering more than 2,000, and involving more than 3,000 witnesses - suggest that the Sasquatch could be a largely nocturnal, solitary, shy omnivore.

'The fossil record affords a tantalising clue to the possible biological identity of the Sasquatch. There once existed an ape that stood 2.5 - 2.75 metres tall and was quite likely bipedal.

'This giant ape, known as *Gigantopithecus*, lived in Indochina, where three of its enormous fossilised jawbones and more than 1,000 isolated teeth have been found.

'*Gigantopithecus* is thought to have become extinct as recently as 500,000 years ago (or 300,000, according to some 'experts').

'Conceivably, it may somehow have survived right up to the present day, and the Sasquatch could be descended from forms that crossed from Asia to North America via the Bering Land Bridge that long ago connected the continents during the last Ice Age.'

The remaining three programmes in the series will be reviewed in the next issue of 'DEAD OF NIGHT'

Past A Deadly Spell

Curses, Jinxes And Plain Ill Fortune

Unlucky For Some

According to the lore of popular superstition, the horseshoe is regarded as an extremely *lucky* talisman (the origins of this belief can be traced back to its crescent shape and its associations with the Moon Goddesses, Diana and Hecate, coupled with the fact that such items are forged in the sacred fire, and are of course, made from the sacred metal; iron).

Strange then, considering its reputation, that the horseshoe obtained by Charles and Lillian Mooney, a few years back, brought anything but a spell of good fortune....

The couple had hung a six pound shoe, the right way up (that is, with the two 'horns' pointing upwards, so that the luck will not run out) on a pipe near the gas meter. Quite clearly, this was not the best of ideas, but even so...The weight of the horseshoe eventually caused a fracture in the pipe, and one afternoon, as their lunch was cooking, escaping gas lit the flames in the oven.

The resultant blast was so great that it blew out the walls and windows, as well as ripping up the floorboards of their home. Not only that, but various pieces of flying debris went hurtling through the air causing fairly serious damage to a passing car and narrowly missing a next-door neighbour.

Maybe they should stick to four-leafed clovers or lucky heather?

1st February, 1991. Huddersfield. 'DAILYMANC.'

***- A man who went to visit a clairvoyant wound up in hospital after the so-called soothsayer's crystal ball fell from her first floor window smack onto his head.

Maria Fortunata had carelessly left the ball on a ledge after she'd washed it. Maria claimed, with the wonderful benefit of hindsight, that she had *warned* him to be careful, during previous fortune-telling sessions.

The last word was left to her injured client, Salvatore Lugaresi, however; 'She doesn't know it yet, but I'm suing for damages!!!'

September, 1991. Syracuse, Sicily. 'THE DAILY SLUR'

The Curse Of The Pele Stones

People who holiday in far-away, exotic countries, and then heedlessly take 'holy relics' back home with them as souvenirs, frequently come to believe that they are the victims of a curse.

Typical of this scenario is the following account of former airline vice president Ralph Loffert and his family, who visited Mauna Loa Volcano in Hawaii during the summer of 1977.

Whilst they were there, (and in the typically ignorant style of a latter-day Lord Carnarvon, thoughtlessly giving the go-ahead for the desecration of the Tomb Of Tutankhamun), they ignored the dark warnings of the locals, and collected handfuls of stones from the side of the volcano. The stones were said to be the sacred property of

the Volcano Goddess, Pele, and not long after the Loffert family had returned to their home in the United States, locals claimed to have seen manifestations of Pele, confirming that the deity had been angered at the American's lack of respect (something which the majority of us, here in the West, have long since learned to take for granted). This burning anger was said to have been characterised by the sudden eruption of Mauna Lua, and the subsequent series of ill-fortune suffered by the Loffert family.

It began with Todd, one of Ralph's sons, being struck by acute appendicitis. He was then forced to undergo surgery on his knee, and then broke his wrist, all within the matter of a few short months. Another son, Mark, suffered a badly sprained ankle and broke his arm. The third son, Dan, then caught an eye infection and was forced to wear glasses for the first time in his life. Their only daughter did not escape the litany of ailments, either. Rebecca lost two of her front teeth in a fall.

Exasperated, and now fully-convinced that they should have heeded the warnings of the Hawaiian locals and left well alone, Ralph tried desperately to set about sending the Pele Stones back to the island. In July, 1978, he finally succeeded in persuading a friend of his to return them to the volcano, and the sense of relief within the family was palpable....

For a little while, at least.

As it turned out, not even sending them back to their rightful owner it seemed, was enough to appease this truly jealous Goddess.

Mark badly hurt his knee. Rebecca lost another three teeth. Dan fractured a bone in his hand. Todd dislocated an elbow, and fractured his wrist again.

It was only following this latest spate of calamities that Mark owned up to the fact that he had (for some unknown reason) retained three of the accursed stones.

You can be sure they were returned to Hawaii, lickety-split, and the seemingly endless run of accidents immediately ceased.

Now, if this were an isolated case, you could be forgiven for thinking that what we are dealing with here is coincidence, pure and simple (assuming such a random, trick-of-fate creature truly exists, of course).

But what then are we to make of the following, startlingly similar accounts that hummed their way down the wires in the aftermath of the Loffert's experiences???

Mrs Allison Raymond, of Ontario, Canada, and her family, also holidayed in the Mauna Lua region of Hawaii, and they too, elected to ignore the pleas of the natives and take a selection of stones with them when they left for home.

Allison's husband was tragically killed in a head-on car crash, her mother passed away after she was suddenly diagnosed as having cancer, her youngest son was rushed to hospital with a pancreas condition, and not long after that, he broke his leg. Oh, and her daughter's seemingly perfect marriage very nearly broke up.

And yes, you've guessed it. It was only after the stones were posted back to Hawaii, that the run of terrible fortune came to an end.

And finally, consider the story of Nixon Morris, who hails from the 'West Texas town of El Paso...'

In 1979, Nixon took home several of those damned 'Pele Stones,' and just a day or so following his return, he was working on the roof of his house when he lost his balance, and fell off. Luckily (if luck had anything to do with it), he was not seriously injured. Not long after that accident, several of his family's home appliances were knocked out of action when lightning struck one of the aerials. Then, Nixon's wife fell ill with a mysterious infection that resulted in her left knee being unaccountably swollen, and Nixon himself broke a hip and a thigh after he disturbed a burglar in the middle of the night.

And the run of misfortune didn't end there.

The family cat was sleeping under the bonnet of his wife's car, unbeknownst to Morris's wife, and when she unwittingly started the engine, the poor creature was stripped of its fur down one side, and Nixon's granddaughter fell and broke her arm in two places.

Even stranger, was the fact that Nixon had broken one of the rocks in two and had then given half of it to a friend (I bet he was just overcome with joy). Morris was later quoted as saying; 'He brought the wretched thing back to me after he'd wrecked a total of four cars in less than two years, and he'd never before been involved in a single wreck in his life.'

Faced with no alternative, Nixon sent the rocks back in 1981.

1977-1981 Mauna Loa Volcano, Hawaii Source: 'WHEN THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPENS' P:37-38

The Real Horror Of Dracula

Back in the Summer of 1991, a series of supposedly supernatural events were rumoured to have surrounded the making of a TV programme in Transylvania, and a repertory theatre production based on Bram Stoker's horror classic; *DRACULA*.



In July of that year, the then-popular, now fallen from favour, TV presenter Sarah Kennedy, had journeyed to Romania to film travel agents taking part in the godawful, brain-numbing bore that was 'BUSMAN'S HOLIDAY.' When they arrived in darkest Transylvania, the programme's director, Jenny Dodd, was bitten by a dog and had to be immediately flown home suffering from a badly gashed leg.

Hot on the heels of that mishap, a cameraman named Andy MacDonald was very nearly killed when huge boulder, direct from 'Castle Dracula,' no less, fell down the mountainside, missing him by mere inches.

A breathless Sarah was later quoted as saying; 'It was very odd. Strange things kept happening.'

*** And just two days earlier, back here in England, the tabloid's had been talking darkly of 'Dracula's Curse' causing a bizarre series of accidents during Birmingham Repertory Theatre's production of the musical 'DRACULA SPECTACULAR'

After several members of the cast had broken their legs in on-stage falls, another member was said to have cut his wrists as he did a spot of washing-up, whilst another accidentally slit his throat after falling on broken glass.

10th July-12th July, 1991. Transylvania, Romania, Birmingham, England. 'DAILY SLUR/DAILY MAIL'

*** Any talk of 'cursed' theatre productions, always brings to mind the oft-quoted story of the so-called 'Jinxed Aria' in Havely's opera; 'CHARLES VI'

It made its premiere in 1852, at the Opera Comique, in Paris. During the aria, the much-admired tenor, Maffiani, sang 'Oh God, smash him!!!' referring to the villain of the piece. As he sang, he lifted his eyes to the ceiling, and one of the stagehands lost his footing and fell to his death.

Maffiani, convinced that by calling on God, whilst staring at the theatre ceiling, he had somehow caused the man's death, was said to have been inconsolable.

The following night, he decided he would take no chances. As he sang the aria, he focused his eyes upon a clearly empty box.

At the very moment however, the curtains parted and a man entered to take his seat.

He never got the chance. Without warning, he suddenly swayed and toppled to his death.

Maffiani's reaction is not recorded, but it can well be imagined.

On the third night, he simply refused to look up when the time came to sing that accursed aria. Instead he stared intently at the floor, concentrating on nothing but the stage boards...

In the midst of the dreaded line; 'Oh God, smash him!!!' however, one of the musicians in the orchestra pit chose that precise moment to play a slightly off-key note. The result was that Maffiani's concentration was broken, and almost without being aware of it, he glanced toward the offending musician, who promptly dropped dead of a heart attack.

Not surprisingly, further planned performances were cancelled forthwith, though in 1858, Napoleon III requested that Havely stage the opera especially for him. The night before the show hit the road once more, Napoleon and Eugenie narrowly escaped a cluster of bombs hurled at them by fanatical Italian revolutionaries....

And this time, the opera was cancelled for good. It has never been staged since.

*** And just to add to the fun and frolics, the previous June, had seen a so-called 'Devil worshipper' apparently obsessed with Vampires in general, and with Dracula in particular, stab his lover through the heart with a series of wooden stakes after he'd butchered her body.

An office worker by the name of Darryl Stephens, aged 31, plunged knives, pool cues, and specially sharpened chair legs into the body of Jin Song Joss, a wealthy widow, before setting fire to her North London flat.

He was remanded to a top security hospital after admitting the manslaughter of Mrs Jones, almost 30 years his senior.

There is no truth in the rumour that, like the Renfield character in the classic Stoker novel, he took to feasting on captured flies and other flying insects to supplement his diet, thereafter....

27th June, 1991. North London Source: 'TODAY'

*** Christopher Etherington, 50, was perhaps labouring under the illusion that he was cursed with being a real-life Vampire, because the method of suicide he chose sure seems to belong within the final reels of one of HAMMER's early 1970's batch of DRACULA movies (by then, the series had grown somewhat tired and formulaic, the halcyon days of the 50's and 60's long since passed, the directors seemed more concerned with inventing ever more bizarre ways of killing off their anti-heroes than with such trivial matters as a coherent plot)....

He elected to wedge an aluminium stake between the dashboard of his car and his chest, and then drove straight into a motorway road sign so that the stake pierced his heart.

Not surprisingly, he died instantly on the M4 near Slough, Berkshire.

Oh, and hey now, just what 'drives' (I think yeeeeewwwww) a man to that, ladies and gentlemen of the jury.

Christ, we've all of us felt like there's nothing worth living for at some point in our lives. It may be in the wake of yet another pointless night out in the rock and roll soul slum that is your hometown, it may be at the arse end of a Derby Match, the result of which didn't go your way, it may be the conclusion of that job interview you had your heart set on, but which has ended only in rejection, not because you're unqualified or that you didn't have the relevant experience, but simply because your face didn't fit..

As Matt Damon says, mid-way through the already classic 'GOOD WILL HUNTING'; 'How d'ya like them apples???'

God knows, during the 34-years that have mapped out the often rocky contours of my life, there have been occasions that I've been down so low I've been whispering sweet nothings to the mud-encrusted soles of my 'Nikes.'

You want examples?

Hell, this is a 'DEAD OF NIGHT' Halloween supplement, not a glorified agony aunt column.

But since I'm assumning you asked, and I'm writing this in the midst of the dead hours on the wrong side of midnight, after a less than gratifying encounter with the blessed waters of oblivion, I guess I'll run a couple right by you....

The night my ex-flancee dumped me, but agreed to go for one last drink, for old times sake, y'know, and I desperately tried to grab hold of her hand at Last Orders, even though we both knew it was over, and she drifted away from me like an errant balloon blown upon a hurricanewind...

The rain-sodden afternoon of my much-loved Nan's funeral at Landican Cemetary...

The Christmas Eve, a few years back, when I staggered home from the pub, alone and (seemingly) friendless, whilst all around me, revellers and party-goers celebrated the joy of the season, regardless.

And, overriding all, experlencing at first hand, the horrors of the Leppings Lane in 1989. Feeling guilty as hell that I'd survived when so many had needlessly died.

At a football match.

In Sheffield.

On a sunbright afternoon in mid-April

(And incidentally, for all of you out there who have doubtless been wondering why it is I constantly refer to the obscenities masquerading as newspapers by the (deservedly) less than flattering nicknames of 'THE SCUM' and 'THE DAILY SLUR,' it's because they both saw fit to print a series of vile, malodorous lies concerning the cause of the tragedy and the actions of certain sections of the Liverpool support)

But I digress.... Let's move on....

15th January, 1992. Slough, Berkshire. 'DAILY MANC'

The Plumber Of The Beast



In the spring of 1991, Swansea Driving Licensing Centre took to officially banning the number 666 from future licence plates after a 'stream of drivers afflicted with the dreaded number reported (ahem) a series of Devilish accidents involving their cars.'

These cases were said to include a boss who claimed that various species of birds took to crashing headlong into his windscreen on a total of 22 (significantly? another number imbued with supposed magical powers) occasions. He also complained that a crazed fox attacked his Montego, as well as very nearly colliding with another 666-registered car.

And then there was the unnamed woman who asserted that her car had somehow taken control as she was pulling into her front drive. Against her will, the vehicle suddenly mounted the back doorstep, and squashed her son's (poor, defenceless) scooter.

She apparently just managed to regain control before it went crashing through the front window.

The clipping also made a somewhat vague reference to a convicted killer who claimed that the evil force existing within his '666' - plated van had taken possession of his very soul and had compelled him to carry out the murder... Adding further 'credence' to the DVLA's decision to ban the number 666, was the case of Peter Cavanagh, which was said to have occurred late that same year.

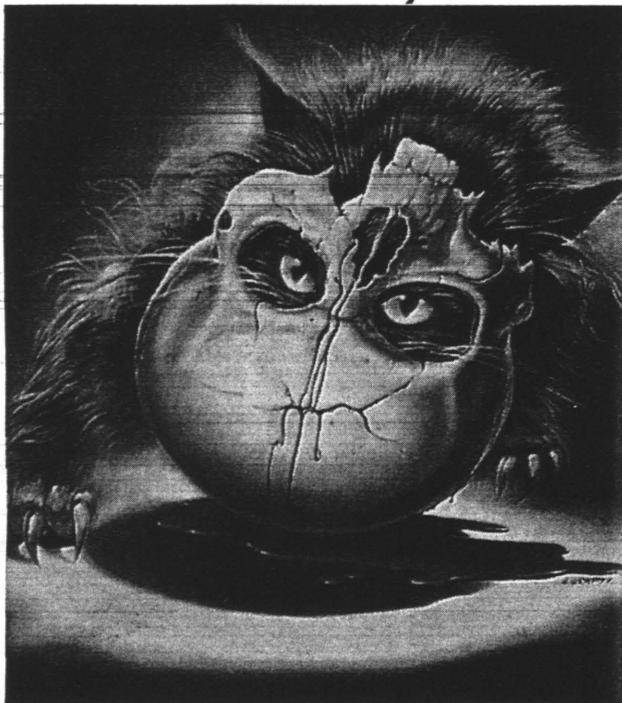
The registration plate of his Rover P6 was none other than 666-CRY, and so perhaps there's little wonder that the 29-year-old claimed that petrol seemed to evaporate overnight, and the car moves mysteriously six feet from where ever he originally parks it.

The company boss was quoted at the time as saying that he was offering as little as £5,000 for the vehicle, although if he didn't receive any offers, he was happy to let it go for nothing.

*** And just to wrap up this Devilish numerology section, the street number of a rectory in Central Falls, Rhode Island, USA, had to be changed from 666 to 568 due to the fact that church parishioners feared that the old number was the sign of the Evil One.

April, 1991. 'THE DAILYMANC'/July, 1991. Carlton, near Barnsey THE SCUM/1991, Rhode Island, USA. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

Possessed By Evil?



A woman in South Carolina, USA, took it upon herself to rip out her sister's tongue with her fingernails whilst they were both sharing a prison cell.

When asked to explain her actions, she replied that she had no choice because her sibling was possessed by the Devil, and she had been left with little option but to tear out the unfortunate girls' tongue.

10th October, 1991. South Carolina, USA. 'DAILYSLUR'

*** The Mexican town of Matamoros, just over the Texan border, grabbed its fair share of headlines in the winter of 1989, for all the wrong reasons....

According to some of the more sensational reports coming out of the area, 'a Devil-worshipping gang' were busily engaged in kidnapping unwitting students for their human sacrifices. They then set about feasting upon their still-warm corpses.

It was alleged that up to 12 young men were murdered, their killers utilising various tools, including machetes, sabres, and sledgehammers.

Police discovered the mutilated remains of the bodies buried in a series of shallow graves after they had carried out a raid on the gang's ranch hideout on the outskirts of the town.

The scene that assailed their eyes was later described as a *human slaughterhouse.* Five of the 'Satanists' were arrested on the spot, and were said to have been laughing in an unconcerned manner as they were led to the waiting patrol cars.

The tabloid press made much of the litany of horrors that confronted the officers upon arriving at the ranch. There was said to have been *'a huge cauldron in which carved up bodies were boiled into a stew.*

Kettles and pans containing human hearts, brains and blood. Bones scattered around, plates with flesh on them And a bizarre assortment of Satanic and Voodoo-worshipping items, including pentangles, sheep's heads, and black candles.'

Texas Attorney General James Mattox, was quoted as saying; *'I have been an investigator for over 15 years and it is one of the worst things that I have ever seen.*

'There were still warm remains of human beings cooking in a big pot there.'

One of the 12 victims was named as 21-year-old Texas University student Mark Kilroy.

A member of the gang confessed to the murder of Kilroy, butchering him with a machete.

Newspaper photographer Anthony Padilla, who was a witness to Kilroy's body, had this to say; *'I have never seen anything so horrible in my life. His legs were cut off at mid-calf and his spine was severed and twisted. And there was nothing inside his skull.'*

Police were said to be of the opinion that the unfortunate man's brain had been mixed with herbs and chicken feed, then thrown onto a fire.

Kilroy had last been seen walking back over the border to Brownsville, Texas. Friends had seen him talking to a young man with a cut on his face.

Some of his fellow victims had been lured to a the ranch with bogus offers of big money to become drug runners.

Others were simply captured at gunpoint. Kilroy was apparently taken at random after members of the cult were ordered to *'pick one Anglo male'* for sacrifice.

Sherrif's Lieutenant George Gavito claimed that the ritual slaughter had gone on for at least nine months.

He also alleged that the 'Satanists' had *'prayed to the Devil so that the police would not arrest them, so buiieis would not kill them, and so they could make more money.'*

I guess somebody should have told them, the Devil rarely keeps his promises.

Winter, 1989. Matamoros, Mexico. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** A priest with the unlikely name of Ablodum George, subjected a female student to a less-than-holy ordeal in an attempt to rid her of the 'Evil spirits that he alleged were possessing her.

He persuaded Janet Egesimba to strip naked and pray while clutching the Bible. The perverted priest then elected to roll a large red candle up and down her body whilst he fondled her breasts.

Mrs Egesimba, 27, claimed that she called upon George of the Seraphim and Cherubim Church, Plumstead, because she was worried about her accountancy exams. Seizing his chance, he chose instead to set about offering to exorcise the Devils that were taking gradual control of her body, utilising the aforementioned methods.

March, 1992. Plumstead, London. 'DAILYMANC'

THE CURSED LOCO

Loco D326 was built by English Electric in 1960, in a bid to replace the then popular express steam traction.

One bone-chilling, fog-shrouded evening, just two years later, she was hauling the London-bound 'Mid-Day Scot' which crashed into the rear of a stationary Liverpool-Birmingham train just north of Crewe, killing 18 people and injuring 33.

The Loco was duly repaired and put back to work on the West Coast Main Line. And a few months later, her image was once more splashed across the TV screens and newspaper front pages, after she was bushwhacked by the infamous Great Train Robbers in August, 1963.

Her driver was coshed by one of the gang, and received severe head injuries as a result.

In 1964, a railman on the roof was electrocuted by overhead wires, and just a year later, her brakes failed outside Birmingham, and she sped out of control towards New Street Station at over 40mph. Fortunately, an alert signalman diverted the 100-ton engine onto a goods line, where it hit a freight train and injured the guard.

Later, British Rail issued computerised numbers to its rolling stock, and in her new incarnation, No. 40126 has been no problem whatsoever.

3rd January, 1984 *General* 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

When Life Imitates Art

The belief that seemingly random events and bizarre coincidences are in fact the province of some sort of capricious Cosmic Joker is, we like to think, given further weight by the following examples from our files....

Back in 1974, Noel MacCabe was at home listening to 'THE CRY OF THE WILD' by Frankie Laine, when suddenly a Canadian Goose crashed through his bedroom window, whilst another couple fell to earth outside.

19th November, 1974. *Derby, England* 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Even stranger than the aforementioned was the story of the Melkis family who hail from Dunstable, Bedfordshire.

In July, 1975, they were at home watching a movie about the 'Titanic' called 'A NIGHT TO REMEMBER (1958)', on their TV, when just at the point where the great ship was due to collide with the iceberg, their house was shaken by the impact of a large block of ice that had chosen that precise moment to fall from the sky and smash through their roof.

8th July, 1975. *Dunstable, Bedfordshire.* 'THE TIMES'

*** And later same year, villagers in Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire, were watching 'AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS' when there was a sudden power failure. It turned out that just beyond the village, a hot air balloon had been attempting to land when a gust of wind blew it into the power lines, just as the hero was about to set off in his hot air balloon in the movie.

12th April, 1975. *Ruthwell, Dumfriesshire, Scotland.* 'DAILY MANC'

*** A Republic Airlines plane was in the process of landing in South Dakota, USA, when a large goose smashed through the cockpit window.

The pilot was injured, but the co-pilot managed to land the plane safely.

The Cosmic Joke here was the fact that the airline's company symbol is none other than a flying goose.

8th November, 1983. *South Dakota, USA.* 'THE NEW YORK POST'

*** The Automobile Association were called to assist a driver stranded near Sledge Green, Worcestershire. He was carrying a load of 300 toy polar bears and travelling North.

And his name was Mr I. Sleigh!!!

December, 1984. *Sledge Green, Worcestershire.* 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Another tale of horseshoe misery (see elsewhere this issue) concerns a motorist who took to driving around with such a lucky(?) charm when he was driving past a pub called 'The Three Horseshoes.'

Suddenly, and without warning, three runaway horses came crashing into his car. Peter Jones, from Bournemouth, suffered facial cuts when the horses tried to jump over his car and only succeeded in smashing into the windscreen and onto the roof.

And of course, his car just had to be a Colt.

1986. *Bournemouth.* 'DAILY SLUR'

*** A bunch of firemen wearing Santa Claus outfits while collecting for charity, were forced to race to a fire at Leasingham, Lincolnshire, in a chimney.

December, 1988. *Leasingham, Lincolnshire.* 'THE SCUM'

*** Three pupils at Lee Brooks School, in Derbyshire, slipped and fell off a stage...They were performing in the hit musical 'GREASE'

1989 *Derby.* 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** Peter Silvers thought he'd discovered a real bargain when he picked up a lumberjack shirt for just £3 at a branch of Oxfam. Unfortunately, it proved to be one of his own. His wife had given it to the charity shop a mere two days earlier.

May 1990 *Nottingham.* 'DAILY SLUR'

*** An escaped prisoner by the name of Alan Williams, hurled himself 40 feet from a block of flats in a bid to flee the police....But wound up landing right on top of a cop car in Plymouth.

7th July, 1991 *Plymouth, Devon.* 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** Mustafa, the farmer, accidentally swallowed a fly and, seeing as how he knew that the insects would breed fast, he immediately gulped down insecticide to kill it. He was left breathless with agonising chest pains and was rushed to hospital near Istanbul, Turkey.

Mustafa, who later made a full recovery, was quoted as saying; 'I wanted to kill the fly before it started breeding inside of me.'

11th September, 1991. *Istanbul, Turkey.* 'DAILY MANC'

*** In October, 1991, Wendy Robinson of Moreton, here on Merseyside, was reading a book called 'THE BURNING WOMAN' whilst lying in bed, when her electric blanket suddenly caught fire.

Wendy managed to escape from the blaze unharmed, and the firemen even managed to salvage her slightly charred novel.

4th October, 1991. *Moreton, Merseyside* 'THE WIRRAL GLOBE'

*** In June, 1991, the inhabitants of the German city of Hameln were crying out for a new Pied Piper after a sudden plague of rats erupted onto the winding streets.

Mild winters had been blamed for the population explosion, despite the use of over four tons of poison.

June, 1991. *Hameln, Germany.* 'THE SCUM'

*** Meanwhile, over in Queensland, Australia, Jennifer Roberts was enjoying a camping holiday reading Stephen

King's excellent novel *'THE DEAD ZONE.'* Suddenly, a storm blew up, and she was struck by lightning, leaving her paralysed for over an hour. Curiously, the front cover of the book features bolts of lightning sheeting down from a darkened sky.

A total of 291 pages were burned up as a result of the electrical storm, and Jennifer was only saved from death by the fact that she was lying on a rubber mattress.

1st November, 1991 Queensland, Australia 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** A freak gust of wind blew a woman 30ft down an outdoor shopping escalator in Yeovil as she opened her umbrella....Just like Mary Poppins. She escaped with mild bruising.

21st November, 1991. Yeovil 'DAILYMANC'

*** And yet another horseshoe disaster occurred when an unnamed man bought a charm in St Kew, Cornwall, and wound up suffering severe headaches after it fell on him as he nalled it over his door.

23rd August, 1992. St Kew, Cornwall 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Back in 1993, an eye infection left film star Al Pacino temporarily blind, a mere two weeks after having won an Oscar for the lead role of a blind soldier in *'SCENT OF A WOMAN.'*

16th April, 1993. USA. 'DAILYMANC'

'Dem's Da Breaks!!!'

In 1989, worried post office staff spotted wires sticking out of a briefcase on the back seat of Irishman Dick Shanahan's car, recognised his Irish number plates, and called in the police.

The cops elected to call in the Army, and Sheffield City Centre was sealed off while bomb experts blasted the car open.

But the wires turned out to be part of a do-it-yourself blood pressure tester.

A shocked Mr Shanahan had been visiting relatives nearby.

1989. Sheffield City Centre 'DAILYMAIL'

*** A schoolboy who fell over and broke his arm triggered an amazing chain reaction that put two other people in the same hospital.

Six-year-old Darren Sparrow tripped over a kerb and broke his arm. When his father Alan heard he had been taken to hospital, he immediately left work, jumped on his motorbike and dashed right on over.

But once outside the hospital, Darren, 28, had na accident with another motorbike.

Pensioner Freda Warton went to help him and promptly slipped and broke her hip and shoulder.

Darren's mother Julie, was quoted as saying: *'It was like an old film where everyone gets injured. It was a right carry-on.'*

2nd June, 1989 Weoley Castle, Birminghams. 'DAILY SLUR'

*** Hapless Paul King, 25, changed his mind while trying to gas himself, lit a cigarette, and wound up blowing up his caravan.

And just to add to the fun and frolics, an Australian court fined him a total of £220 for the crime of misusing gas.

June, 1989. Australia. 'DAILY SLUR'

*** Divine retribution seems to have been the order of the day after a convicted killer avoided execution in the electric chair...Only to later electrocute himself by accident in his cell.

Michael Godwin, 28, was sitting naked on a metal commode trying to mend the headphones on his TV set when he bit through the wire.

'It was a strange accident,' a spokesman for the prison was later quoted as saying.

Godwin had originally been sentenced to death for murder, but had had his sentence reduced on appeal to life imprisonment....

But some Higher Force it seems, had other ideas...

1989. South Carolina, USA. 'THE SCUM'

*** A governor's car was stolen from outside Coundon Court School in Coventry as the city's police chief told Prize Day guests that crime rates were well and truly falling.

17th June, 1989. Coventry. 'DAILYMANC'

*** Two climbers engaged on a course aimed at identifying avalanches, died when they were hit full on by a wall of snow, whilst they were climbing Mount Ruapehu, New Zealand.

July, 1991. Mount Ruapehu, New Zealand. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

At Gatwick Airport in London, TV presenter Hilary Bell, managed to break a foot after tripping over a pair of skis. At the time she was just about to set off to report on ski hazards for the BBC's *'WATCHDOG'* programme.

June, 1992 Gatwick Airport, London 'DAILY SLUR'

*** A would-be thief was knocked unconscious after he threw a brick at a jeweller's window in Croydon, Surrey, and it bounced right back and hit him smack in the face.

20th December, 1992. Croydon, Surrey. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** In Wantage, Oxfordshire, PC John Penrith had just finished launching an anti-bicycle theft campaign when her arrived home to find *his* bike had been pinched.

7th February, 1993. Wantage, Oxfordshire 'THE TIMES'

The Cosmic Joker's Classic Pranks

A woman managed to kill herself while showing her neighbours how her sister had died. Yooket Pean, 57, was killed when she slipped in the mud at her farm in Thailand, grabbing a live wire as she fell.

Showing how it had happened, Pean's sister, Yooket Pan, 52, also slipped, touched the wire and electrocuted herself in front of the horrified onlookers.

May, 1991. Thailand. 'DAILY SLUR'

*** In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, nine people were killed and thirteen were injured when a bridge collapsed under the sheer weight of of a crowd who'd gathered to watch a girl commit suicide.

Ironically enough, the girl in question was later rescued.

July, 1991. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam 'DAILY SLUR'

*** Tragic Kirk Godson, thought he had lost a winning lottery ticket worth £2 million...And so he killed himself.

But his suicide was rendered even more pointless by the revelation that he was wrong.

No one had a winning ticket in the draw in Portland, Oregon, USA.

1992. Portland, Oregon, USA. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** A would-be burglar panicked when a warehouse alarm went off and he leapt straight into an unmarked police car in his stocking mask yelling 'Go, go, go!!!'

He thought it was the getaway car.

12th May, 1992. Wraybury, Berkshire. 'SUNDAY MANC'

*** And finally, for this selection at least, a Witches Coven in New York, disbanded after 157 years after their only virgin, vital for most of the rituals, became pregnant.

17th April, 1994. New York, USA. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

HALLOWEEN HORRORS:

Tales Of Ghosts And Midnight Terrors

Introduction



A cold evening in late October....

The moon is full and streaked with grey shadows. The sky is lit with a smattering of stars, their brightness diffused by the sodden glare of the streetlights below.

The chilled breath of a faint wind snaps at hands and faces, and ushers you nearer the blazing wood fire. Beyond the flickering glare of the flames, there is only a black, impenetrable darkness.

A timeless shadowland.

A void.

And within its endless boundaries, walk all manner of Night Creatures.

You shudder involuntarily, and move closer still to the fire, seeking both its warmth and the reflected glow of familiar faces; your friends, smiling or whistling tonelessly, reducing you to wishing you felt half as brave as they they're pretending to be.

An owlhoots from some invisible tree.

The eerie cry of a fox, so like the sound of a woman screaming in abject terror, rises in answer.

You're about to suggest that perhaps this all-night Halloween camping expedition to the very edge of Storeton Woods, may not be such a great idea after all, (the promise of a comfortable bed never seemed so enticing). when one of

the group, the usually quiet lad seated at the outermost limits of the circle - the one who no one really knows, and whom most can't even remember inviting, suddenly pipes up;

'Okay, who wants to hear a true-life, Halloween Horror Story?'

You hiss a sharp intake of breath. There are a few audible groans and one of the girls present squeals with ghoulish delight. But mostly, there is a deathly silence that the would-be storyteller presumes to be unspoken consent...

And with the bright orange firelight dancing in his eyes, he grins wolfishly, and launches into the sort of tales you'd rather not hear. But which have you listening, fascinated anyway....

Seekers In Darkness

For an untold number of years, certain of the rooms at London's Lincoln Inn, were widely-rumoured to be haunted by an entity straight out of a Lovecraftian nightmare.

According to various witnesses, the mere sight of the horror that appeared before them had caused them to flee from the premises, vowing never to return.

Such accounts were given scant credence by those of a sceptical bent, however, and for Ralph D Blumenfeld, former editor of 'THE NEW YORK EVENING TELEGRAPH,' and Max Pemberton, a Cambridge graduate and popular author, belief in the supernatural lay strictly within the domain of the eternally gullible. To prove that there was no substance whatsoever to the stories of the Lincoln Inn, they elected to spend the night there.

On May 11th, 1901, these two highly-respected men checked in, chose a fairly standard, if somewhat spartan room, and set about powdering the floors of the rest of the building with chalk so that, should any 'manifestations,' occur, any human agency would inevitably leave a clearly discernible trace.

They searched the empty building from top to bottom and then set about barring the windows to prevent anyone else from gaining entry.

Blumenfeld was so confident that they had the entire building secured that he was moved to proclaim; 'Not even a black beetle could escape unobserved.'

All was quiet until 12:43 am, when a door opened of its own accord. This door led into a room that contained no other means of exit, and Blumenfeld was moved to write later; 'The latch clicked, the brass handle turned, and slowly the door swung back to its full width.'

Normality reigned once more, but only for a mere thirteen minutes.

That was when another door, leading to a similarly, inconspicuous room, behaved in an identical manner.

Puzzled, but not at this stage, particularly frightened, the two men simply closed the two doors over, remarked that the rooms were both empty, and stated that they felt not the slightest hint of a draught.

Thirty minutes later, those bothersome doors slowly opened again, with no apparent agency, and then suddenly shut themselves with a resounding slam.

The same process was repeated on two other, separate occasions during the next half an hour, and now, well and

shaken from their former scepticism, the two investigators elected to seek out the source of these disturbances. They stood at the threshold of the two rooms, fear slithering into their skin, as though they were about to take a peek through Hell's back door....

They raised their flickering gas-lights, and saw something that simply couldn't be.

Yet was plainly there, anyway....

Etched in the chalk-dust were the unmistakable footprints of a giant bird. There were three in the left-hand room, and five in the right-hand room. Each of these prints had three toes, and what appeared to be the mark of a short spur behind the foot, and the tracks seemed to cross the floor in a diagonal fashion, directly towards the centre room where the two investigators had been based.

Blumenfeld and Pemberton bravely made a systematic search of the premises, but were unable to find anything that could conceivably be responsible for the mysterious prints. All that was left for them to do was to measure and make sketches of the damn things and hightall it out of there.

Blumenfeld was later quoted as saying: 'We both heard what we heard, felt what we felt and saw what we saw, but don't ask me for an explanation. I don't believe in ghosts one way or the other. But I do know that this thing happened.'

Source: 'MAIL ON SUNDAY' November, 1996. *Lincoln Inn, London.*

Carnival Of Souls

In 1971, an ordinary house on Philip Avenue, Audenshaw, Greater Manchester, became the location of a frightening series of hauntings that resulted in an equally terrifying sequence of nightmares for yours truly, when first I read of it....

Prior to that year, the family who lived there had never reported anything remotely unusual occurring, but one night, sometime between half past twelve and one o' clock, a six-year-old boy by the name of Trevor Hulley, had suddenly awoken with a start, and shivering with fear, had screamed wildly for his mother.

Understandably, Mrs Hulley, who had ran to her son's room with her heart in her mouth (and when a loved one screams like that, on the wrong side of midnight, in the preternatural stillness of the dead hours....Well, there is perhaps, only one other sound that can so fill a person with that peculiar brand of deep, dark, formless dread, and that is, the shrill ringing of the telephone. No one calls at that time of night simply to pass on their favourite recipe for chocolate-chipped cookies or to indulge in the latest gossip concerning that awful Mrs Gabriel's daughter, Annie.

Like the scream in the night, it can surely mean only one of two things; there's bad news on the doorstep - the wolves are at the gilded gate, or else it's a wrong number - a bad dream with no basis whatsoever in reality).

Mrs Hulley was almost overcome with relief when she saw that there was nothing to visibly account for her son's terror, and she, not unsurprisingly, assumed that he had been having a nightmare. Feeling sorry for him, just the same, she allowed him to sleep beside her in her bed for the remainder of the that night.

Trevor's four-year-old brother, Graham, had also awoken, but had turned over to go back to sleep, and so had remained alone in the bedroom.

Approximately ten minutes later, the silence was once more shattered by the sound of screaming, and the boys' mother once more raced to the bedroom to find Graham 'shaking with fear and as cold as ice.'

In garbled, scarcely coherent tones, he told her that Trevor had complained to him that he kept seeing things moving in the darkness beside his bed, and that his constant crying had served to keep him awake.

That had been bad.

What was undeniably worse, was that the very moment his mother had taken Trevor to her own bed, the room had grown progressively colder and colder, until at one point, he felt compelled to raise his head and look towards the bottom of his bed.

Standing there, was his recently deceased Gran, and she seemed to be waving and beckoning to him to go with her. He couldn't say where it was she wanted to take him. He only knew that she was insistent in her invitation.

He described her (as best a four-year-old could) as wearing a long white gown, and he voiced his surprise that she had neglected to wear her regulation spectacles. He could never recall a time before when she hadn't been wearing them. He could clearly see the wedding ring on her finger and a big scar that ran down one side of her face. Even at such a tender age, he was well aware that there was something not quite right about the figure, and that was when he had screamed.

As he did so, his Grandfather suddenly appeared along with his maternal Grandmother, and they both conspired to lead Nana away, holding tightly to her hand.

As Graham watched, all three apparitions simply disappeared through the bedroom wall, his Grandfather waving to him just before they vanished from sight.

It later emerged that Graham and Trevor's Grandfather had passed away two years earlier, yet even though Graham had only been a mere two-year-old at the time, he was still able to instantly recognise him with no trouble whatsoever. He was able to describe him as looking a lot like his own father, as well as his uncle, and it seems the rest of the family maintain that yes, there is a strong resemblance between the three of them.

The boys Grandmother on the other hand, had died only six months before they saw her 'ghost.'

It transpired that there had been an accident not long before she'd eventually passed away, and her face had been bandaged up. Therefore, it followed that Graham had never seen the scar that he'd described, etching her well-loved features. There was no way he could even have known of it.

To add further credence to Graham's account, he was able to describe accurately, the long white gown in which she was later buried, and the fact that she wasn't wearing glasses when she had appeared in his room.

Source: 'GHOSTS OF NORTH WEST ENGLAND.' Peter Underwood. Fontana. 1978

*** The rest room at West Derby Fire Station in Liverpool was said to have been haunted by at least one spirit during the Winter of 1990.

The crew of the nightshift were apparently plagued by sightings of a Dickensian-type entity, a man local spiritualists claimed was Edward Wilson, who used to live on the site of the fire station.

However, there were also reports of another very tall man, as well as accounts of a group of ghostly children.

The firemen described to reporters how they had seen figures walking up and down the rest room, standing over their bunks, and even feeling as though their blankets were being pulled from off their beds as they struggled to catch a well-earned nap.

In common with so many of these type of hauntings, (and in true, 'QUATERMASS AND THE PIT' style) the trouble seemed to coincide once work had begun on building an extension to the station which had unearthed an old water well.

One of the resident firemen, Keith Taylor was quoted by the local press as saying;

'I'm very sceptical about these things and in our job you see some disturbing sights, but I tell you, this has really got to me.

'It sounds far-fetched, and if it had not happened to me, I would never have believed it. But the other night I woke up and there was this bloke, staring at me.

'It's only now that we have all started talking about it that we realise we have all experienced the same thing. Up until recently, we would all have been too embarrassed to admit to such a thing.'

Another fireman, by the name of Tony Jordan went on record as saying that *'there has been something weird about the station for at least the last six years.'*

The local Spiritualist Church was called in to assist, and Church treasurer Coral Matthews, who subsequently put the crew in touch with a medium, was quoted as saying; *'Without doubt there is some kind of spirit activity down there. It often happens when people like firemen, or ambulancemen or policemen, who, as we say, work for the good of mankind, have a compassion and sensitivity which makes them susceptible to sensing spirits.*

'From what we know about this case, they have nothing to fear.

'The spirit is simply very interested in the work the firemen do and the technology that is there. He (the spirit) says he also learning a whole new language!!!'

3rd January, 1991. West Derby, Liverpool 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

The Woman In Black

* ** Also perhaps, similarly disturbed by renovations, were the unquiet spirits at Birkenhead Priory, including that of a mysterious *'Woman In Black'*

In 1990, the old church tower, dedicated to St Mary, (the top of which affords a wonderful, panoramic view of the Mersey on one side, and the distant Welsh mountains on the other), was given a £350,000 revamp and was soon re-opened to the public.

One of the unforeseen consequences though, were the persistent reports, from various witnesses of an old woman dressed entirely in black walking (if that's the right word) alongside the tower.

One of those willing to come forward with their accounts was the Priory's custodian, Geoff Halewood. He claimed that he saw an old woman's face peering in through the window of his office.

'I went outside to call her in,' he later told local reporters, but she ran off. I followed her into a passage with a dead end, but she simply vanished.'

In the wake of that sighting, site foremen also stated that they had seen a shady figure which disappeared into thin air the moment that they attempted to give chase.

Williamson Art Gallery Curator, the appropriately named David Hillhouse, who was overseeing the restoration work at the time, was quoted as saying; *'There have been lots of stories about the site which aren't very credible, but the people who reported these two sightings are not ones to fantasize.*

'We don't know who the ghost is, but during the restoration work, a driveway collapsed and revealed a Victorian family vault containing a total of five coffins encribed with the name Balles...

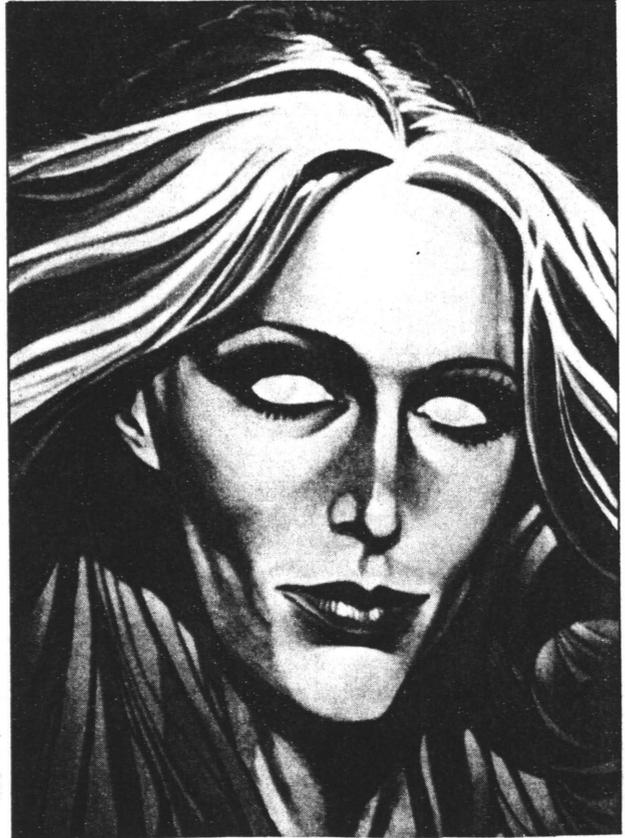
'Perhaps we released a spirit at the same time.'

The area is certainly well-renowned for its ghosts and Devils...As we shall see in future issues.

Summer 1990. St Mary's Tower, Birkenhead 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

Just The Ghost Of A Smile....

*** Staying within the Editor's home county for just a tad longer, indulge me if you will, while we consider a case that occurred a few years back, but was only recounted in the pages of the local press fairly recently....



A projectionist at a cinema in Wallasey, claimed that whilst he was working there, he frequently encountered a 'friendly ghost' that stalked the cinema corridors.

Kenneth Dodgston, who worked in the Gaumont Cinema, now re-christened the Apollo Six, stated that on one occasion he *'was working late and had to take some equipment to the top of the building.'*

'As I walked along the passageway, I saw a lady wearing a long grey dress which I thought was very old fashioned.

'I told her the public were not allowed in that particular area and gave her directions for the public gallery.

'The woman simply smiled at me and turned around, vanishing through a door. My colleagues later told me that they often saw the smiling lady walking along the corridor which, was always unusually cold.'

14th July, 1996 Apollo Six Cinema, Wallasey, Merseyside. 'THE WIRRAL NEWS'

Footsteps In The Dark

*** Penny Lane, the street in Liverpool made famous by 'THE BEATLES,' has host to a series of hauntings since at least 1930.

It began when a family were forced to up sticks and leave their home after they were constantly being terrified by the sound of unexplained footsteps coming from the adjoining printing shop.

Then, in 1945, another family in the same house reportedly heard strange voices and weird bumping noises emanating

from the shop premises next door which had, by then, been severely damaged by German bombing raids.

Several years ago, the then owners of the printing business, intrigued by the continuing stories of strange phenomena, decided to hold an all-night vigil to attempt to record anything unusual on their audio tape. Ken Shackman and John Hampton's efforts proved unsuccessful, but their researchers elicited a host of letters and phone calls from former Penny Lane residents, all of whom claimed to have experienced 'paranormal phenomena' in the area.

One woman, who had long since moved to Rotherham, and who wished to remain anonymous, stated that she had heard the loud tread of feet on stony steps while living in an old manor house which used to be in the Penny Lane area.

2nd September, 1994. Penny Lane, Liverpool. 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

Also in Merseyside, well okay, if you want to be pedantic, it's actually right on the border with Cheshire, is the Ellesmere Port Boat Museum....

The site is reputedly haunted by a teenage worker killed by a falling load of coal very nearly a century ago. Samuel Hill had just turned 18, when tragically died at the locks in 1899, but, according to the accounts of witnesses in the area, his ghostly footsteps have often been heard running along the upper levels of what were once warehouses, on wild and stormy evenings.

One of these witnesses, was the Museum Education Officer Annette Cavelle. Back in 1995, she described how she had encountered a quite terrifying apparition as she was locking up one night; *'There had been a dance night and I was just letting the musicians out of the back door. For some reason I glanced towards the stage and saw a black figure, crouched down on one knee, looking at me.*

'It was on the platform above the stage, and peering under the wooden beams which come down from the ceiling.

'It was a solid silhouette, with no face, and wearing a cap. I got out of there as soon as I could!'

And Annette is apparently just one of the many people who have heard the mysterious footsteps late at night in another part of the museum.

The invisible entity seems to run across the main exhibition centre - itself a former warehouse - and down a flight of steps which lead to nowhere.

Annette was further quoted as saying; *'I first heard the footsteps about 11 years ago. I used to have an office in the centre, which backed on to the lecture theatre.*

'I was in there with my dog one night when I heard someone running in the main hall. It sounded like whoever it was had clogs or hob-nailed boots on.

I thought someone had come out of the lecture and was messing around, so I went to look.

'I checked everywhere and saw nobody, and all the doors were locked. The dog wouldn't leave my office. In the end I had to drag her out.'

7th July, 1993. Ellesmere Port Boat Museum, Cheshire 'SOUTH WIRRAL HERALD & POST'

*** The case of Trevor and Graham Hulley, and the ghostly Nan that beckoned them to join her over in some otherworldly Carnival Of Souls, (featured on the previous page), brings to mind, albeit a trifle belatedly, the following story from the early part of this century....

In the spring of 1906, Walter Landry from Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA, tragically lost his mother when he was barely three years old.

To spare him the pain of his loss, and in deference to his tender years, he was told by his family and relatives that he had simply gone away for a little while, and would return some day in the distant future. The boy seemed to have

little difficulty in accepting this well-intentioned lie, and when the time of the funeral came round, Walter was kept at home to be looked after by a nurse.

At some point in the afternoon, just as the sombre ceremony had been taking place, the nurse heard him screaming in the downstairs room where he'd been left quietly playing, and dashing headlong to his assistance, he was gibbering and pointing at the centre of the room.

'Look at the lady!' he cried over and over.

The nurse, totally bemused by his ranting, was unable to see anyone else in the room, and asked Walter who he was referring to.

'There's Mamma!!!' he replied with chilling certainty, as he continued to point out her movements across the room.

When questioned by his family later that evening, Walter told them that his *'Mamma'* had beckoned him to join her, and at one point, had tried to take him up in her arms.

What is strange about this case, aside from its similarities to the Hulley incident, is that the young Walter should be so obviously terrified of his *'Mamma'*, if, as it was believed, the boy had accepted the fact that his mother, far from being dead, had merely gone away for a little while???

15th May, 1906. Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. 'NEW YORK HERALD'

*** Another story from the early part of this century, also happens to be one of the saddest ghost stories we've come across in a long while...It concerns the experiences of Jeanette Griswold, a descendant of the people who built the Griswold Inn, in Worthington, USA.

During 1910, Jeanette, who was described at the time as being *'a very down-to-earth young lady,'* visited her birthplace (she'd left the Inn when she was still little more than a child) and was startled by the sound of a sweet singing echoing throughout the building.

'It seemed to come from the upstairs, where travellers used to spend the night. I followed the sound, which led to one of the bedrooms. The door was ajar, and I peeked in and saw a lady rocking and singing to a baby cradled in her arms.'

Jeanette, thinking that the lady and her child were paying guests, traipsed quickly back down the stairs lest she disturb them. Curious, she enquired of her two aunts who owned the place, the identity of the woman with the baby upstairs. The aunts reportedly exchanged knowing glances, but told Jeanette only that it must have been her imagination.

She realised, of course, that they were concealing the truth from her, for reasons best known to themselves.

Years later, when Jeanette had blossomed into a teenager, she once more thought to bring up the subject, its enigmatic nature having haunted her since childhood. Now that they considered her old enough not to be frightened by the truth, they told her the real story about the lady upstairs....

They said that a couple had stopped at the Inn in the days when it had been a stagecoach stop. The woman was pregnant, and sadly, delivered a stillborn baby during the night. The loss of the unborn child had a devastating effect upon the lady; *'She was distraught, so much so that she refused to give up the baby because she felt she could still, somehow revive it.'*

The couple eventually left the Inn, but not long after, word filtered through that the childless woman had passed away suddenly, the rumour being that she'd died of a broken heart.

'And through the years, according to the Griswold ladies, they began hearing the sound of singing, and the lady could sometimes be seen, dark against the shadows, rocking and singing to the baby.'

The Griswold's apparently, were not in the least bit disturbed by it, nor felt any degree of fear. They simply accepted it as part of the eternal mystery of life and death.'
Source: 29th October, 1995. *Griswold Inn, Worthington, USA. 'THE COLMBUS DISPATCH'*

'Shadows On The Wall...'

One of the walls of the curiously-named 'Same Yet Inn' at Prestwich, near Bury, deep in the heart of Lancashire, was suddenly etched with the image of an old man during the early Spring of 1994.

The simulacra is, of course, open to the individual's interpretation, and remains very much in the eye of the beholder. However, it may well be more than mere coincidence that the inn has acquired a less than savoury reputation for a series of apparently inexplicable events including such classic Poltergeist phenomena as anomalous noises and bottles moving with no obvious cause.

Local superstition has it that the 'mysterious shadow on the wall' is an earthly representation of the spirit of a farmer, killed at the site during a robbery gone wrong 150 years earlier.

To add credence to these stories, there is the indisputable fact that not long after the discovery of the ghostly image, a virtually all-consuming fire decimated the building in the dead of night.

The damage was extensive, but the fire brigade remained perplexed as to the precise cause of the blaze, and how it came to be that very little heat seemed to have been generated by it.

Only one of the building's walls managed to escape the ravages of the fire. And you can have one guess with no prizes for surmising that it was the very same wall that contained the 'ghostly image of the old man.'

24th October, 1994. *Prestwich, near Bury, Lancashire. 'MAIL ON SUNDAY'*

Faces At The Window...

Stories of spectral faces leering in through the windows at unsuspecting inhabitants of ordinary houses are legion. I only have to think, from a local point of view, of the tales of the *'Tramway Terror'* a gibbering, capering horror that was said to have delighted in appearing (and just as quickly *disappearing*) outside the homes of the good people of that particular area of Merseyside, earlier this century.

Consider too, if you will, the following account from Stockton, Newcastle, New South Wales....

The Cooke family, a young couple and their baby daughter, had not long moved into their new home, were forced to abandon the property fairly sharpish after their bedclothes were unaccountably rumped, the baby's toys were moved by some invisible agency, and the doorknobs took to rattling furiously when there was quite plainly nobody there.

Friends who came to visit and were invited to stay overnight, complained that they were rudely awoken by *'someone shaking their shoulder'* and when they opened their eyes they were confronted by a vague figure leaning over their bed.

The final straw came when the husband, Michael Cooke, spotted a *'horrible white face looking in through one of the windows as I walked past. The eyes were white and coloured green in the middle. I was so scared, the tears just*

ran out of my eyes. That was the end. I was thinking of actually buying the house, but I'll never live there again.'
February, 1970. *Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia 'SYDNEY MORNING HERALD.'*

And Nightmares From Over The Hill...



One of the accounts that has haunted me ever since I first read it as a child, concerns an unnamed woman who was sitting idly chatting with her husband and a group of neighbours when, completely out of the blue, she suddenly went into a trance-like state and said; *'It will come over the hill when it comes!!!'*

When her astonished family and friends asked her what the hell she was on about, the woman had no recollection of having said anything. In the days that followed this bizarre comment, she began to brood and worry and become afraid to step outside the house at night, although she couldn't say precisely why.

Three months later, she awoke bolt upright in the middle of the night, sweating and trembling uncontrollably. She knew with a sickening certainty that whatever was coming over the hill was almost upon them.

She woke her husband, and in hushed tones, told him of that which she feared, and then they both heard the either the back or side door of the house creak open below, and heavy footsteps entering the house.

The footsteps sounded like something wet and slimy was slowly, but surely approaching. Whatever it was, it crossed the living-room and then came squelching up the stairs. The woman clung to her husband, as scared for their children as she was for themselves, whilst a creature out of an EC Comics nightmare (*'TALES FROM THE CRYPT'* perhaps, or *'VAULT OF HORROR'*), came into their bedroom and went across to the window. It was bloated and naked. Its skin looked to be coloured green and purple with yellow blotches, and had a massive bull-neck with a head coming to a point, and ear-lobes nearly to its shoulders.

It also seemed to have webbed feet, and gave the impression of gliding across the room.

It then went out of the window and disappeared from sight. It was described as being imbued with the absolute *'essence of Evil'*

Whatever it was, the thing was never seen again....

Source: *'THE POWERS OF EVIL'* Richard Cavendish

Sometimes They Come Back

A house in Paterson Street, Birkenhead, deep in the Editor's home county of Merseyside, was said to have been haunted by a particularly sinister entity, according to reports in the local press.

In the dying days of 1976, (the year of the hottest, driest Summer in living memory, when the Bee Gees, ABBA and The Real Thing shared the airwaves with The Damned, David Bowie and The New York Dolls, Liverpool FC were defending Champions and UEFA Cup Winners, the Labour Government under Harold Wilson was (sadly) in terminal decline, and I experienced my first, painfully bitter-sweet romance with some impossibly gorgeous girl whilst I was on holiday with my parents at Prestatyn), a family living in an ordinary terraced house were left reeling with terror by a series of apparently inexplicable phenomena...



As is quite usual with such 'hauntings,' things began relatively quietly. There were reports of odd coughing and choking noises that seemed to follow various members of the family about the house, but these were explained away as being attributable to the sounds of the building settling at night, or else faulty plumbing, the immersion heater or whatever.

It wasn't until the children, aged 16, 12, and a pair of twins aged five, described being confronted by the figure of 'a tall hanging man' suspended from the banister that the supernatural began to be seriously considered.

It was then recalled by the parents that the twins, both of whom were girls, had frequently glanced fearfully up the staircase when they'd been very young, and had shouted 'Man, man!!!!'

The shouts would then invariably turn to screams as they yelled 'Man gone!!! Man gone!!!!'

Things got so bad that eventually, the family felt they were left with little option but to call in the local priest to carry out an exorcism. The ritual appeared to have had very little success however, although he was able to dig up some potentially useful information regarding the history of the house. It transpired that an exceptionally tall man had indeed been found hanging from the very same banister where the children had reported seeing his spectre.

The man's dead, gently spinning body hadn't been discovered for four whole days.

December, 1976. Birkenhead, Merseyside. *'THE BIRKENHEAD NEWS'*

*** And staying on Merseyside, a case with very definite echoes of the Vanishing Hitchhiker tradition, was said to

have occurred six years earlier, in 1970, around the Poulton Road area of Higher Bebington.

A motorist claimed that he was driving home one night after having visited a friend, when he spotted someone standing at the side of the road, just ahead of him. Realising that the figure was a female who seemed to be in some distress, he slowed down to see if he could be of any assistance. He later described her as having long hair, and an all-enveloping coat, that was really more like an old-fashioned cloak.

As his car came to a halt, he lowered the window, intending to ask her if she maybe wanted a lift, only to see her slowly disappear before his very eyes.

And this was no immediate vanishing,

Rather it was a gradual fading. A paling away of solidity. As ethereal as a morning mist burned off by the power of a blazing July sun.

I distinctly remember being at primary school and hearing similar stories of a disappearing Hitchhiker, courtesy of a friend who lived in the locality.

And the area is still reputed to be haunted to this day....

1970. Higher Bebington, Merseyside. *'LIVERPOOL ECHO'*

*** Meanwhile, in Faldouet, on the Isle of Jersey, an army colonel's daughter by the name of Mary Stevenson, stated that she woke one night in 1989, to come face to face with the spirit of a dead Nazi soldier.

The ghost, dressed in an officer's Second World War uniform, didn't speak, but glared menacingly at her, and was filled with a dreaded certainty that he wanted her dead, too.

And sure enough, not long after her encounter, Mary found herself spreadeagled on the bathroom floor with blood pouring from her slashed wrists.

She didn't have the slightest idea how she had gotten there, and had no recollection either of how she had come to mutilate her wrists, though the blood-soaked razor blade was lying accusingly at her feet.

This attempt at taking her own life was said to have been the culmination of a six-year 'possession' during which Mary claimed she had been invaded by the spirit of a suicidal Nazi soldier, hell-bent upon her destruction.

Mary elected to research the history of the house, and was startled to discover that a German soldier had hanged himself in one of the rooms in the dying days of the War. She maintained that she'd first encountered the restless spirit when she still been little more than a child. She had been given an attic bedroom and despite frequent encounters with the Ghost, she was not in the least bit frightened by his presence. Not at first, anyway.

During the course of the years that saw her blossom into adulthood, Mary gradually grew more and more convinced that the German was Evil incarnate, and that he wished to first possess her, and then ultimately, to destroy her.

Mary, who has since moved away to Shoebury in Essex, along with her two children, was quoted at that time as saying: *'I saw a medium when my mother passed away. She described a man in uniform, who she said was "with" me. I became disturbed and was hooked on valium. My personality changed completely. I got angry easily, and felt contempt for everyone.'*

'I would wake up in a cold sweat, feeling this man's presence. Then one night, I saw him at the end of my bed.'

Following the 'suicide' attempt, in something approaching desperation, she sought out an exorcist to rid her of the evil spirit.

'Friends had to stop me from attacking the vicar as he was saying prayers,' Mary recounted.

'Apparently I was shouting in a man's voice, in German, a language that I have never ever learned.'

Then I slumped unconscious. When I came to, the soldier had gone.

'And I was free.'

1989 *Faldouet, Jersey. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'*

The Haunted House Of Horror

The following account appeared in the pages of *'THE SUNDAY MANC'*, back in May, 1989, and we include it here as much an example of how the tabloid press deal with such phenomena, as how it is that certain witnesses look to sensationalise the events in a bid to make a financial killing in the wake of Jay Anson's hugely successful *'AMITYVILLE HORROR'* novellisation, (the book that launched a thousand increasingly ludicrous, cesspit-dredging sequels, official and otherwise).

The account begins with the father of the Smurl family awaking in the middle of the night as a decidedly strange woman climbs into bed and crawls over his body, whilst his wife sleeps on oblivious beside him.

The language used by the author reads like a trailer for one of those so-bad-they're-really-rather-good-in-a-trashy-way Science Fiction B-movies of the 1950's: (*'ATTACK OF THE FIFTY FOOT WOMAN,' 'THE BRAIN FROM PLANET AROUS,'* or *'IT CONQUERED THE WORLD'*)...

'He was paralysed with fear as he realised that the voluptuous figure raping him was NOT HUMAN!!!'

This supposedly terrifying ordeal proved to be the final straw for the Smurl family. Jack, his wife Janet and their four children, had long since been convinced that their 100-year-old 'dream house' was in fact a regular 'Gateway To Hell.'

Newspaper reporter Robert Curran, the er, completely impartial 'investigative journalist' sent to cover the story, was quoted as saying; *'The Demon was riding Jack in the position of sexual domination. Next to him, Janet slept in a deep psychicsleep*

'Jack was unable to move or speak as she plundered him sexually - her neon green eyes growing larger as her mouth ran with the drool of satisfaction.

'The curious thing was, that for all the movement - and she put on a dazzling display of tricks - Jack felt no sexual sensation. He lay there and simply watched the Demon perform.'

Janet Smurl was apparently the first to actually encounter the Evil presence that was said to haunt the premises. The air in the kitchen where she was busily ironing, suddenly froze and a black, human-shaped form with no face began to move threateningly towards her.

The entity appeared to be made of a thick, dark smoke that she could see through. It glided by her from the kitchen into the living room.

The supernatural phenomena then spiralled out of all control....

A neighbour walking past the house heard the sound of giant birds flapping their wings (interestingly, this reference to 'giant birds' bears a striking similarity to the creatures in the case of the *Hamting Of The Lincoln Inn* - See elsewhere in this section), followed by a terrible screaming.

Then one night, just after Jack and Jane had made love, Janet was pulled from the bed by some *'invisible fury'* and dragged across the floor as her frightened husband tried to hold on to her in a bizarre tug-of-war.

Janet was moved to comment; *'One minute I was lying in Jack's arms, then something I couldn't see grabbed my right leg.*

'While it was happening, there was a tremendous banging on the walls (a la' the psychic manifestations in Shirley Jackson's classic ghost story; 'THE HAUNTING OF HILL HOUSE'), as if an army of Demons was at work, and a foul smell was overpowering.'

Not long after this incident, the family dog, a German Shepherd, was lifted from the floor by an invisible agency and smashed against the kitchen door, leaving it to writhe and howl in pain.



Some of the children heard *'the hissing of unseen snakes and footsteps thudding in the attic.'*

Now at their wits end, the Smurls decided to call in a pair of psychic investigators; Ed and Lorraine Warren. They had been involved in the aforementioned *'AMITYVILLE'* hauntings, so it'll come as no surprise to the more cynical amongst us that it really wasn't very long before they too began encountering otherworldly phenomena....

Ed Warren was reportedly alone in the Smurl's bedroom when it quite suddenly went freezing cold and he felt fingers around his throat, choking him.

Then a message formed in the frost on the mirror. It read; *'YOU FILTHY BASTARD. GET OUT OF THIS HOUSE.'*

Another time, Janet was relaxing in the bath when she felt something staring at her. *'I'd never felt quite so naked or vulnerable*

'Then a whistling began.

'It was the kind of lascivious whistling women have to endure around groups of drunken men, filled with innuendo and threat.'

Needless to say, there was nobody there who could have accounted for the whistling.

On yet another occasion, Janet was lying on a couch when she felt fingers moving lightly up her thighs and stomach. The unseen hands were around her throat choking her.

The Demon continued to infest the bathroom, sometimes moaning as if in sexual ecstasy.

Meanwhile, one of the children, Dawn, was taking a shower when she felt something seize her arms - squeezing them until she screamed.

One of the twins, Carin, was dragged violently from her bed and hurled to the floor.

The other twin, Shannon, told her mother a man had come into her room and had taken things from her toy box. But even greater horrors lay in wait for the already terrified family....One of the entities that was said to have appeared was described as being *'a creature roughly eight feet tall that stood on two legs. Above its wide shoulders was a furry head with blinding red eyes and a pig-like snout.'*

Standing at the end of the bed, the creature slavered and slobbered, then clawed at the air with rake-like fingers.

'Even more repugnant than the creature's face was the slapping noise of its lips which resembled pieces of liver.'

Meanwhile, Janet Smurl encountered another, Demonic-type entity which materialised in the couple's bedroom. She described it in the following terms...

'A man appeared with very bright, almost neon eyes that were a mixture of yellow and green.

'He also had two animal horns that protruded from his head.

'As I said the first words of the Hail Mary, I could see the creature's eyes glowing with an even deeper hatred.

'Then suddenly, my voice became very loud, out of desperation and saw the creature start to dematerialise.'

And finally, Jack had to get up one time in the middle of the night, and whilst in the bathroom glanced briefly in the mirror. What he saw reflected there caused him to jerk backwards as though he'd been shot.

'The face in the mirror belonged not to me, but to a decomposed man whose flesh hung in tatters and whose eyes burned with the sorrow of the newly dead.'

A series of exorcisms were carried out at the house, located in West Pittston, Pennsylvania, but they each proved to be totally ineffective. After the final ceremony, things did become a little easier for a while, but all too soon the black, caped form returned to haunt the family once more. On one occasion, it approached Jack menacingly, only to back away, straight through a wall.

Violent bangings and Demonic laughter continued to echo through the house, and in the end, the Smurl's took the only option they believed was left open to them...They upped sticks and left.

April, 1989. West Pittston, Pennsylvania, USA *'THE SUNDAYMANC.'*

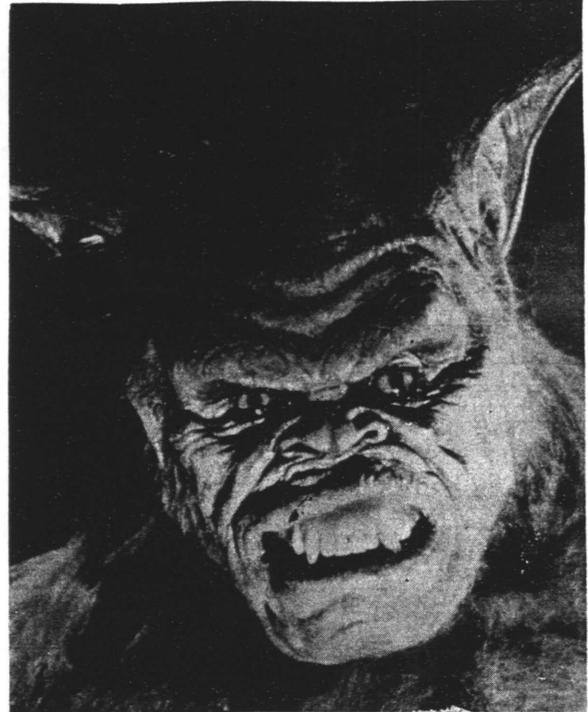
The Hackney Horror

Deep in the midst of the harsh, snow-laden Winter of 1981, the newspapers of the time were featuring stories concerning the flat, featureless scrubland of London's Hackney Marshes. The area was rumoured to be haunted by a nightmarish entity that was described by those who witnessed it as being *'a giant, great growling hairy thing.'*

The initial account of something decidedly strange roaming the locale was forwarded by four boys aged between nine and thirteen. They had been out walking their dogs when they stumbled across three separate sets of unusual-looking footprints crisscrossing the two-inch deep snow. One of the boys, Tommy, aged 13, who was said to have been very interested in wildlife, claimed that he recognised the tracks as having been made by a bear. As they were busy discussing the seemingly absurd possibility that there was a bear loose on the marshes, they were approached by a middle-aged couple who'd overheard their conversation. The couple, who were unknown to the

kids, told them that they were well aware that there was indeed a bear about, as they had seen it themselves.

'Go away, it's dangerous,' they warned, whilst, rather bizarrely, they threw snowballs at the boys to urge them on their way. (Is it just me, or is there something profoundly unsettling about this couple's behaviour? Warning the kids off is one thing. But throwing snowballs at them to make their point?—Ed).



The boys remained undeterred by the snowball bombardment however, and they continued on their way. Just a few seconds later, they all heard a strange growling noise, and as dark was coming down fast, Tommy pulled out his pocket torch and raised its beam in the direction of the sound. The light revealed something that shouldn't exist this side of a Stephen King novel. It looked like a bear, and yet somehow, it wasn't. Not exactly.

The boys later related to reporters how the *'hairy thing'* had stood upon its hind legs and reared up before them. Tommy's dog Lassie, refused to go anywhere near the creature, and not surprisingly, the kids ran like hell.

The local police were duly informed of the boys encounter, and the very next morning, they undertook an extensive search of the area. Despite the thoroughness of the operation however, all that were found were a number of unusual tracks.

Sets were discovered on either side of the river that runs through the marshes, whilst another were found on an island located smack in the middle of the river. They were, somewhat tentatively identified as being those of some kind of bear by both 'experts' from London Zoo and RSPCA officials, regardless of the fact that the vast majority of them had deteriorated due to a slight thaw in the snow.

On 28th December, that same year, an allotment shed was found badly damaged, and people were quick to speculate that some large animal had sought shelter from the increasingly bitter weather within its confines.

Not long after this, the manager of a local sports complex found another set of strange prints, and Tommy, the teenage wildlife enthusiast, showed police officers a tree whose bark appeared to have been scored with large clawmarks.

After several hours had passed, with no further sightings of anything remotely unusual however, the police were forced to call off their search, and all was quiet for a little while...

Then came reports that another group of kids, considerably larger in number than Tommy's gang of four, had encountered 'the bear,' but the fact that the police immediately called off their secondary search a mere thirty minutes after they'd re-newed it, would seem to indicate that there was very little substance in this particular account.

The very next day, December 29th, the search was once more re-instigated, but a light drizzle soon turned the crisp snow into slush and the tracks had eroded to the point of obscurity.

The hunt was finally abandoned for good.

This course of action seemed to have been proved to be eminently sensible when on December 30th, a man giving his name only as 'Ron,' telephoned 'THE SCUM' to inform them (in the time-honoured fashion of Doug'n' Dave - Crop Circles, Mr A. Wetherall, the Loch Ness Monster, and Stephen Darbyshire - UFO's) that the whole thing had been a hoax perpetrated by him and a bunch of his friends with the help of a bear suit.

'Ron' claimed to have made at least two appearances in the suit, once in front of Tommy and his mates, and on another, up until then, unreported occasion when people walking the marsh had seen him clamber into the back of a van.

The police decided to see if they could discover any record of hirings of bear suits from local theatrical costumiers, but were unsuccessful in their efforts. One proprietor was keen to point out that it would be well-nigh impossible for a man to make such convincing bear-prints as the ones found in the snow-covered marsh whilst dressed in such a suit because, as he explained; 'the feet of bear suits are always made to fit over a person's shoes. Therefore, a hoaxer would make footprints, not pawprints!!'

The police never did manage to trace the snowball-throwing couple who allegedly also saw 'the bear,' nor did the people who 'Ron' maintained had seen him climb hurriedly into the van ever come forward to confirm his story.

And 'Ron' himself, the hoaxer supreme, never revealed his true identity, either.

Even more interesting is the fact that the Chief Inspector who coordinated the search for 'the bear,' was quoted in the press as saying; 'I saw three sets of prints that to me were very strange. One line of prints was on an island which had a perimeter fence and a locked gate.

'The other two lots were near marshalling yards. All three were on virgin snow and couldn't have been made by a hoaxer as no other prints were near them, or led to or from them. A man from London Zoo secured a footprint of a bear on a piece of cardboard. When this was placed next to a mystery print there was little similarity. The real bear print was bigger and a slightly different shape.'

Perhaps however, the strangest detail of all came from the lips of young Tommy; 'The bear I saw had thin legs and I don't think brown bears have legs like that.'

December, 1981. Hackney Marshes, London. 'THE SCUM'

Stranglers In The Night

A young woman named Christine Brown, fell victim to 'a Night Strangler,' an entity oft-reported, throughout the ages, in 'Ghostly Lore,' during the Spring of 1990.

Christine, a single parent who hails from Lochgilphead, Argyll, Scotland, told local journalists and investigators that she would often feel unseen hands clamp her throat until she could barely breathe.

In another echo of traditional belief; that of the 'Nightmare' that sits on your chest in the dark hours, a crushing weight that renders movement impossible, (this scenario has of course, since been seized upon by the Abductionist Brigade who believe such instances provide evidence of 'Alien Experimentation'), Christine also recounted that a 'mysterious weight would often conspire to crush her ribs.'

Even when she sought sanctuary in another bedroom, along with her 14-year-old daughter Helen, there was to be no escape. She was quoted as saying that the attacks began not long after she moved in. 'It was early in the morning when I suddenly felt hands around my throat. I could see nothing, but the hands squeezed until I could hardly breathe. I could also feel a weight on my chest.

'I was so terrified I started praying, Suddenly, the hands left my throat and the weight disappeared.'

One night however, she was attacked on three separate occasions.

Perhaps even more frightening than any of the above, Christine once found that her own hands were involuntarily clamping her throat, as though she sought to strangle herself.

'No matter what I did I couldn't take my hands away,' she said later. 'But I prayed hard, and whatever it was let my hands go.'

The incidents seemed to come to an abrupt end in the wake of a visit by a local priest; the Reverend John Callen. He blessed the house, and the disturbances ceased as suddenly and as mysteriously as they had started.

20th May, 1990. Lochgilphead, Argyll, Scotland
'SCOTTISH SUNDAY MAIL'



*** Another example of this type of entity was said to have occurred during November, 1973, at a reputedly haunted cinema in Accrington, Lancashire....

Throughout that year, The Classic, on Broadway, had been the site of a spate of paranormal activity, which seemed to culminate with an Irish workman named John Murphy being subjected to an attack by an invisible assailant late one night. He was quoted as saying; 'a pair of ghostly, cold and clammy hands went up the nape of my neck and pulled my head back. I raced out of the ballroom bar that was then in the process of being renovated, and I will never go back there.'

November, 1973. Accrington, Lancashire.

In A Lonely Place:

In Search Of The 'Goatman' Of Maryland

Sometimes, when I'm trawling the murky, oceanic depths of possibility and wonder, I stumble upon a story so patently ridiculous, even I, old 'Spooky' Walker, may well think twice about referring to it within these pages...

I like to think that I'm a pretty open-minded individual, neither overly gullible (despite the sneers of some of my so-called friends. Stop that sniggering back there! I know who you are and where you live, and if you don't stop this instant, I'll come around there and shove this magazine right up your collective judge tunnels!!!), nor excessively sceptical.

I like to think too, that the publication that you hold in your hands (or inbetween your butt cheeks, depending on whether or not you've been afflicted by an attack of the Giggle-Pixles), maintains a fairly balanced view in its reporting of things half-glimpsed, half-observed in that indistinguishable grey area between myth and reality.

If I fall far short of this lofty ambition, then I've failed in my task, and I guess it's high time I took to writing something that truly does lie within my capabilities. A 'TELETUBBIES MEET THE LOCH NESS MONSTER' novel, perhaps. Or maybe a screenplay for a re-make of 'THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE CREATURES WHO STOPPED LIVING AND BECAME MIXED UP ZOMBIES,' (to be filmed in 'Bloody Vision').

*The truth of the matter is though, I can no more seek to omit that which I personally find difficult to swallow, anymore than I can pen the lyrics for the next single from 'BILLIE,' or 'B**Witched,' or whatever other skew-wiff pop group are currently (ahem) gracing The Hip And Wunnerful Top Forty (actually, thinking about it...hang on a minute. I'm just gonna make a quick phone call to my agent...).*

Seriously, sometimes, you have to cast your prejudices aside...

Sometimes, you have to wander from the well-worn path, and leap blindly into the rain-slashed twilight of an unknown night.

Because sometimes, to paraphrase Jim Carrey in 'THE TRUMAN SHOW' "We merely accept the reality with which we are presented"

And we all know what happened to him...

There is nothing outwardly remarkable about Prince George's County, Maryland, USA. It's picturesque enough, sure, with a mixture of gently rolling hillsides and dark, primeval forests surrounding the typically American homesteads and the urban sprawl of its towns.

It is most certainly the very last place you'd expect to become widely renowned as being the haunt of 'Goatman,' a creature that appears to have stepped straight from the pages of some ancient tome dealing with Witchcraft and Demonology.

But nevertheless, a significant proportion of the counties inhabitants, give at least some degree of credence to the existence of this fearsome entity, though in truth,

descriptions of what 'Goatman' is supposed to look like vary every bit as much as say, that of 'The Jersey Devil' (see DON #16) or The Beast Of Bodmin.

The stories about him, that have since become moulded into fully-fledged Modern Urban Legends, include the assertion that he may well have entirely prosaic origins; A harmless old hermit who had grown increasingly disenchanted with the ways of modern-man, decided to seek refuge deep in the woods, where he didn't take kindly to strangers trespassing on his domain.

Other, more fantastic, tales contend that the Goatman is just that; half-goat, half man, a manifestation of pure Evil, whilst still others have proffered the theory that he may be some sort of Bigfoot, whose shaggy, unkempt appearance may have been misconstrued as being goat-like.

Most of the contemporary accounts seem to stem from the late 1960's and early 70's, but there are still occasional reports of sightings and encounters from in and around the vicinity of Fletchertown Road in the delightfully-named Old Bowle, as well as the equally lonely, seldom trodden roads in Mitchellville and Clinton.

The lure of the mystery proved compelling enough for Paranormal Researcher Mark Opsasnick, to recently visit the County on a self-funded, fact-finding mission.

And what he found, at the very least, adds credence to the local witness accounts of an entity that would, quite literally, scare the halo off an Angel...



Mark first of all called in at Prince George's County Historical Society in Glenn Dale, to pore through the stacks of old newspapers, where he hoped to find mention of the creature within the dusty, all-but faded pages.

He was in luck.

Society president Fred DeMarr had only just received an original collection of the now-defunct 'PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY NEWS,' and, satisfyingly enough, the journals did indeed make reference to local folklore...

The first mention of 'Goatman' in the newspaper occurs in the October 27th issue of the aforementioned publication. Karen Hoesler, is the author of the following article;

UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES REVEAL: BOAMAN, GOATMAN, AND GHOSTS STILL HAUNT THE AREA'

'The woods around Fletchertown Road have other strange inhabitants, folklore records indicate. One is the Goat-man, half-man, half-goat, who supposedly was once a researcher at the Beltsville Agricultural Farm. The story goes that the man experimented on Goats. One day he went insane and ran into the woods. He grew all his hair until it covered his body.'

She kind of waffles on here for awhile about the areas myths and legends, before stating later on in the article;

'Another story does not mention the Goatman by name but said that the woods along Fletchertown Road are frequented by an animal that walks on its hind legs. The animal once picked up a dog and carried it off into the woods. Only half the dog was found.'

Additional stories were provided by the November 10th, 1971, edition of the very same paper, which on this occasion elected to feature a banner headline that quite literally screamed from the front page;

'RESIDENTS FEAR GOATMAN LIVES: DOG FOUND DECAPITATED IN OLD BOWIE'

The piece is accompanied by a photograph that serves to illustrate the remains of the hideously mutilated animal. The unfortunate dog belonged to April Edwards of 8510, Zug Road in Old Bowie, and had been reportedly disappeared after Miss Edwards and several of her friends had heard strange noises out in their yard on the night of November 3rd, 1971. Peering out through the windows she saw what she described as a large creature moving slowly in the darkness. The article also made further reference to the assertion that the area is well-known for being the focal point for a series of sightings of 'an animal-like creature that walks on its hind legs.'

In the wake of this account, Goatman fever descended upon the locale in pretty much the same way as people reacted following the 'INVERNESS COURIER' account of the McKay's Nessie sighting, back in 1933.

Fletchertown Road became something of a mecca for both the nearby town's inhabitants and tourists visiting the area. High School students in particular embarked upon a nightly ritual of Goatman-spotting, and as the craze reached epidemic proportions, and crowds of sightseers grew so large the authorities grew increasingly concerned for their safety, the newspaper that had started it all, featured one more front page exclusive....

The November 24th, 1971, edition contained the story of Mrs Evelyn Johnson, who at the time lived on Fletchertown Road itself. The article makes mention of the

trouble and harassment she and other neighbours were forced to endure at the hands of the Goatman enthusiasts. She refers to one incident in particular where the whole road was blocked off by two cars and one truckload of people who claimed that they had the creature trapped. Mrs Johnson, apparently unimpressed by their boasts, was forced to call the police in order to successfully reach her own property.

With the legend of the Goatman growing with the passing of each and every day, it was little surprise that eventually, the nine-day wonder drew the attention of the national media, and 'THE WASHINGTON POST' was the first major newspaper to feature an article on the mystery.

The November 30th, 1971, edition carried the story of April Edwards' unfortunate dog, Ginger, and included several more details including the fact that the remains of the dog were discovered by Willie Gheen and Ray Hayden. The piece also referred to an encounter with the Goatman on the night of November 17th. Apparently, April's sister, Kathy, and a group of girls claimed to have seen a form of some indistinct type alight from a pickup truck and walk calmly into the woods near to the Hayden's home.

There was mention too of a statement made by Captain Lawrence Wheeler, Bowie District Commander for the County Police Force. In it he admits that he personally received numerous phone calls about the creature from in and around rural Bowie, many of which he believed to be genuine.

Wheeler claims that he once heard of an old man who live din a shack in the affected area several years previously, and that many of the locals were of the opinion that this self-styled hermit may be at the root of at least some of the reports.

In order to attempt to establish a clearer picture of what exactly was going on during the height of the 1971 Goatman fever, Mark Opsasnick managed to track down John Hayden, and was granted an interview with him.

Mark found John working in his family's towing service deep in the heart of Old Bowie. He was surprisingly loose-tongued about his involvement in the mystery, and described in some detail his own personal encounters...

'Everybody around here was complaining about it, strange things going on around here. It was seen on Fletchertown Road, mainly in the area of High Bridge Road. We had sightings of it here, me and Wille Gheen, my brother-in-law. We seen in back in the field located across the railroad tracks from 8510 Zug Road, just before it got dark. It was six foot, hairy, like an animal. As far as I know, it was an animal on two feet. I remember it made a high-pitched squeal.'

Hayden went on to tell the researcher that the very next morning he and Gheen had found Ginger's decapitated head. They assumed that the actual body had been eaten, as there was no sign of it whatsoever.

He also confirmed that a number of neighbours had seen the creature, including the aforementioned Edwards family, but 'after a year things got quiet and nothing more was said about it.'

Mark, slightly disappointed with the fact that these accounts seemed to have more in common with stories of encounters with Bigfoot (intriguing as they undoubtedly are), than Goatman, decided at this point in his investigations to consult the files of the University of Maryland's Folklore Archives, the repository named in the initial newspaper articles as being the original source of the Goatman mythology.

This is what Mark had to say about those voluminous files; 'The Folklore Archives are housed in several filing cabinets in the Tallafero Hall office of English professor Dr. Barry Pearson. Items on the Goatman were collected from the years 1970 to 1972, as part of a folklore class project which

focused on local legends of all types from Prince George's County.

The material in this collection is vast and the Goatman tales varies greatly in nature and content. In the Bowie versions, some detailed the familiar story of the Goatman as a Beltsville Agricultural Research Centre employee who experimented on goats and retreated to the woods where he would attack unsuspecting motorists and high school couples with an axe (a la 'MADMAN MARZ, the film and camp-fire horror story that used to scare me shitless as a kid. Christ, it still does).

'Other examples described the Goatman as half-man, half-beast. Other reports confusingly mixed the Goatman with the more popular of Urban Legends. The following account, collected by class member Clay Schofield in Bowie on November 5th, 1972, illustrates how the Goatman story has blended with these other legends, thus producing an eclectic mixed tale of terror....

Rumour has it that a few years ago, a boy and a girl were out on Fletchertown Road in Bowie, parking, when they saw what looked like a half-man, half-goat. The boyfriend got out of the car to investigate what was happening and told the girl to stay in the car. About two hours later, the boyfriend didn't return, but the girl began to hear the steady tap on the car's roof. And so, being understandably scared, she locked all the doors. She stayed in the car until daylight, as the tapping on the roof had continued all night long. When she finally got out of the car in the morning, she found that the tapping was caused by the blood dripping from her boyfriend's head, which had been severed from his body and hung on a tree limb over the top of the car....

(Ed's note: This is actually a very well-known example of a Modern Urban FOAF Tale, and the Goatman motif may only have been introduced merely to add a touch of local 'authenticity' to the recounting of the tale)

'Also in the collection are numerous accounts of Goatman activity from Tucker Road in Clinton, Maryland. These reports helped emphasize that the Goatman was actually human. Like the Bowie reports, almost every account was different in some way, though their premise can give us an entirely different perspective on the possible origins and transformations of the legendary figure. A typical Tucker Road story, collected in 1971, by a student named George Lizama, from an informant named Josiah Proctor of Clinton, is presented here....

'There really is a Goatman of Tucker Road. He is an old man with a real long white beard - like a goat.

'He's a hermit who lives by the bridge in a little shanty. He grows all his own food and hunts for his meat, and in order to do so, he must cross the narrow bridge from time to time. This is probably when everyone sees him and as they pass, he smiles and then everyone in the car gets bent out of shape and goes screaming; "Goatman."

'I've gone down that road and never met up with him, but relatives have and they're all still alive.'

'Leaving the folklore archive files behind, I tracked down several publications of recent date which made brief reference of Goatman. One publication in particular gave special attention to this figure, and is therefore worthy of mention. In 1986, a group of students from Prince George's

Community College, published a book entitled 'PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE: AN ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION'

In a section on the Goatman, student Les Illinski, focusing on Goatman reports from Lottsford Road in Mitchellville, offers a "mutated" creature profile, describing the entity as a "man or goat dressed in goatskin. From the torso up he's human and from there down he either had goat legs or he's wearing a goatskin."



'Illinski also writes; "Again, I talked with people who claimed to have seen Goatman in the woods around Prince George's County. Sometimes, he's seen off to the side of a road or even in the middle of one. Some insist that Goatman is not dangerous, that he only likes to scare people. Others associate him with "dumped bodies" found along country roads, especially where there has been violence.

"Another source attributes numerous automobile accidents to Goatman. It's been claimed that many accidents are caused when people swerve when they see him in the middle of the road. They say, "Oh my God, I saw the Goatman, and I swerved and hit a tree!" Or they might say, "Did you know

that my mother-in-law died in a car accident because she swerved to avoid Goatman?"

'When I contacted Illinski, I discovered that in fact, his writings weren't exactly what one would call accurate. He had in fact, only talked with one person, an anonymous source who had passed on Lottsford Road, tales from second and third-hand parties. Illinski had never interviewed any actual eyewitnesses and he seemed to have limited knowledge of the origin of the Goatman tales. And he only repeated what his one source had told him. However, his section on the Goatman, as well as the entire book, is valuable for the viewpoints that they offer.

'They also helped keep the legend alive and offered pertinent material to a new generation of high school Goatman hunters.

'Despite the material that I had at my disposal it wasn't until I interviewed an unusually reliable informant that I felt I was getting to the possible origin of the Goatman's exploits. My source was extremely knowledgeable on Prince George's County, history and folklore, and every story that he related to me on unrelated matters checked out thoroughly.

'This individual claimed that the Goatman stories originated with farm families in early 1958, around the Upper Marlboro area of what today is Rt. 202 or Landover Road. Later that Summer, the reports spread throughout the County, switching with special emphasis to the Lottsford Road area of Mitchellville, dramatically escalating in popularity with high school students.

'At this time the Goatman was definitely said to half-man and half-animal, a type of rural Bogeyman.

'My source said he believes the initial reports going round the area called the creature a "Goatman" because at the time, goats were an extremely popular type of livestock in the County and also because the entity in question was grotesque in appearance, tall, bipedal, and covered with grizzled hair. Word of mouth soon carried the Goatman reports over to the Fletcherown Road area of Bowie, where it was said the creature was repeatedly seen. My source was adamant that some specific factual event in Prince George's County, probably in the Upper Marlboro area, triggered the entire Goatman wave.

'Inspired by this lead, I began a lengthy search through area newspapers hoping for any type of clue or offbeat article that might shed some light on the birth of Goatman. While on the verge of old newspaper overdose, an incredible headline flashed across the cranky University of Maryland microfilm reader;

"STRANGE ANIMAL IN PRINCE GEORGE'S SOUGHT BY POSSE"

'The August 5th, 1957, edition of 'THE WASHINGTON EVENING STAR' detailed a bizarre story of how searchers tried to flush out an animal that looked like a gorilla from the woods along Brown Station Road in Upper Marlboro. The creature was allegedly seen the previous Thursday and Friday nights on the farm owned by C.S. Fuller. Articles on the creature also appeared in the August 7th, 1957 issue of 'THE WASHINGTON POST' and 'WASHINGTON DAILY NEWS,' as well as the August 8th, 1957, 'WASHINGTON EVENING STAR.'

The creature flap began on Thursday, August 1st, 1957, when Mr and Mrs Revery Garner ran into a large, hairy, man-like animal as they pulled into their driveway on Brown Station Road. Mr Brown turned the car around and pointed it at the creature, which kept coming at him with red, beady eyes. "I thought it was a gorilla or something," he said.

The next night, a neighbour, Mrs Francis Brady, claims she saw the animal looking into her bedroom window. Mr Brady ran outside and shot at the creature as it ran off. The next day, the Brady's fled their home in fear, taking their four children and seeking refuge with relatives.

'During the week-long siege, Prince George's County Police received more than 200 reports of the prowling monster, causing Lt. Boyd Hamilton to organize ten-man armed search parties which ultimately failed to uncover any additional evidence.

'The August 7th, 1957 'WASHINGTON DAILY NEWS' account featured the headline;

"REPORTS OF STRANGE BEAST PERSIST, POLICE AREN'T SURE WHAT THEY ARE HUNTING"

'The article began; "Jokes and jitters are hand-in-hand in the Forestville-Ritchie area as the hunt for P.G. County's Abominable Phantom moves into its seventh day."

The article detailed reports of the "burly, hairy creature" with "blazing red eyes" and reported that the creature had been seen twice the previous night, once in the Sansbury Road area and later on in the Walker Mill Road area where District Heights Police searched for two hours. It was suggested that a grizzled Chow Dog was responsible for the reports, and they very soon died out in the media.

'These "Abominable Phantom" reports were certainly the birth of the "Monster" reports in Prince George's County and coupled with John Hayden's eyewitness Goatman sighting in 1971, suggest that the creature may not be a myth after all, but an actual, physical Bigfoot-type entity unknown to science.

While to this day there has not been one shred of indisputable hard evidence to support Bigfoot's existence, there have been literally tens of thousands of sightings of the creature throughout the United States and Canada. In gathering material on this subject, I uncovered almost 500 sightings of Bigfoot-type creatures in the state of Maryland alone, most of which were recorded in Harford, Baltimore, and Carroll Counties. There is evidence that in the years following the 1971 Goatman media blitz, encounters with Prince George's County Bigfoot-type Monsters continued.

'An excellent source for Maryland Monster information was Rockville resident Mark Chorvinsky, Editor of the excellent 'STRANGE MAGAZINE.'

Mark had recently been contacted by an elderly Silver Spring woman named Audrey Havice, who claimed that one night in December 1968, while driving down Rt. 198 to I-95 south in Laurel, when a large gorilla-like creature walked across the roadway in front of her car. The creature was described as being six feet tall, round-shouldered, covered with a greyish-brownish fur, and having eyes that reflected red in her headlights. Mrs Abell called the State Police, who thought she was crazy and refused to investigate.

I was also contacted by a Riverside man named Ronny Williams, building superintendent of the Hyattsville Commerce Centre, who claimed a sighting in September, 1976. While poaching deer just before dusk in a heavily wooded area near the Patuxent Wildlife Research Centre off Rt. 197 in Laurel, he observed from his deer-stand a huge, hair-covered creature which emerged from a patch of brush twenty yards in front of him and walked off deeper into the woods. Williams swears he had no knowledge of anything like Bigfoot or Goatman ever being reported anywhere in Maryland. This occurred just up the road from Ms. Havice's encounter.

More information was uncovered by an organisation called MARCEN (Maryland Centre for the Investigation of

Unconventional Phenomena), founded in August, 1978, in Silver Spring.

Under the direction of Dr. Willard McIntyre, the group investigated Monster reports throughout the state, including several from Prince George's County. In an article titled; 'IS BIGFOOT IN MARYLAND?' which appeared within the pages of the October 1st edition of the local publication; 'THE BURTONSVILLE/TRI-COUNTY FREE PRESS,' McIntyre writes;

"The nearest and most recent report of Bigfoot in this area came in March of 1977, when a NASA engineer on his way to work at Goddard Space Flight Centre told police that as he approached the Interstate 95 overpass on Powder Mill Road, he saw a huge brown of black hairy creature lumbering along in the early morning fog with a dog chasing it and snapping at its legs.

As he related his encounter to the police, he said that after a short while the creature reached down with one arm and hand and scooped up the dog and threw it over onto I-95. As his car approached, the astonished engineer told police, the creature ran off into the wooded area, east of I-95 at a high rate of speed."

'I read about further local work of this organisation in an obscure publication called the 'UFO OHIO NEWSLETTER' (published by Page Research, Rome, Ohio). In Issue 27, Editor Dennis Pilchits (then president of AREC (the Anthropoid Research and Evaluation Centre) writes;

"Three toed prints were found by the MARCEN Bigfoot Research Team on November 14th, 1978, on the bank of the Patuxent River, near a landfall off Route 198 in Prince George's County, Maryland. The creature was sighted at 6:30am, as it was scrounging through garbage at the dump. The landfill workers who witnessed this creature said it was definitely a female."

'McIntyre and the MARCEN organization also conducted extensive research into Monster reports in Montgomery County before going out of business in 1982. No hard evidence was ever obtained which substantiated any of these Bigfoot-type creature reports.

'The growing mountain of monstrous Goatman data, reports and oral accounts suggests that something very unique has travelled through the County in years past. It is almost incomprehensible to suggest that in this day and age, a major suburban area could play host to a faerie-tale creature lost in a legendary time warp.

'Somehow, the Goatman danced astray from the shadows of civilisation and sought new companions to join his lonely sojourn in a lonely place...

'His social swirl encompassed many different settings and scenarios. Born with the Abominable Phantasm, nurtured through local folklore collections, and ultimately, stalking the County's dark forests, the Goatman existed and continues to exist, both as a mythical hero and as a living nightmare. A willing participant in the ultimate game of hide and seek, the Goatman gallops across the collective

psyche of the people of Prince George, all the while roaming his vast home terrain.

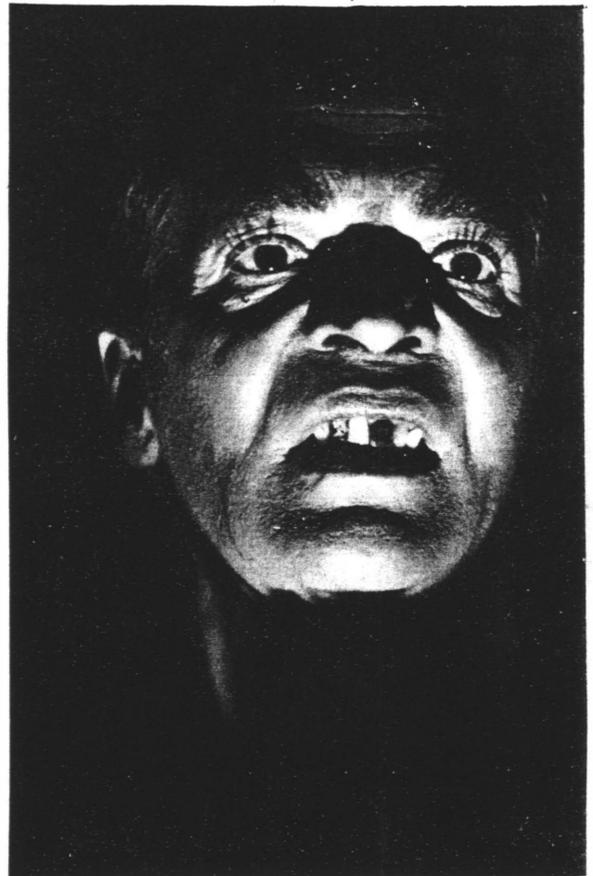
Running in the dark, the Goatman lives in to evade the High School eyes of those who continue to seek his nighttime back road reign of terror....

DARK EYES OVER LONDON

As someone who has suffered similarly (see last issue of 'DON' # 16), the real-life horror stories humming down the wires from London, concerning the senseless mutilation of family pets sickens me no end....

However, the fact that the twisted, sadistic culprit(s) has yet to be apprehended, not to mention the apparent lack of motive for the attacks, means that I feel duty bound to make reference to the mystery here.

However much it may pain me to do so.



The attacks and their grisly results are, disturbingly enough, not entirely without pattern, and the majority appear to have occurred in North London. Over a period of several months, the local residents have been forced to call both the police and RSPCA officers, after stumbling upon the mutilated carcass of yet another much-loved pet, usually a cat or a rabbit.

Their heads and tails have, more often than not, been neatly removed with a sharp instrument, most likely a meat cleaver. These body parts are then usually found in the garden of the pet's owner, almost as though the attacker, rapidly (and predictably) becoming widely known as 'The London Cat Ripper,' has taken the time and trouble to ensure that the results of their handiwork would be left ingrained upon the memory of those who are already deeply distressed.

To rub it in, so to speak.

As if they needed reminding

That's bad.

What's even worse, are the instances where the amputated body parts, more often than not, the head, has been found to have been placed carefully alongside the unfortunate creature's body.

Like The grotesque display of some bizarre ritual. That's *real* bad.

Worst of all though was the incident where a cat had had its brain removed and all of the blood drained from its body.



The killings seemed to have begun in February this year, on a somewhat sporadic basis at first, but gradually, they increased both in frequency and range, reaching a peak over the course of the last three months. Most of the earlier mutilations were confined to a relatively small area of Barnet (where, of course, an Alien Big Cat, resembling a lion, was recently sighted - see elsewhere this issue - Mere coincidence, or are we talking about the opening of a potential 'Window Area' here?), but now they have spread far and wide right across the south and east of London. As far south as Surrey (another county plagued by accounts of an Alien Big Cat) in fact. The number of cats that have been reported as being missing has also radically increased. Nigel Shelton, an RSPCA Inspector, leading the team of investigators currently engaged in the hunt for the Cat Ripper, was quoted in the press as saying; *'At first I thought it must be a Fox, or even an unusual kind of road traffic accident, but the injuries are just not consistent with that*

'I've gathered enough information to say there is something very weird going on.'

Shelton has also gone on record as stating that he believes that the killings have been carried out by more than just the one sick individual, and that whatever the true numbers involved, there is a high risk that they may eventually tire of slaughtering animals, and move on to humans...

Dr Richard Ryder, a clinical psychologist, and a trustee of the RSPCA, was quick to issue words of warning when he said; *'This is not just casual violence. These highly calculated attacks suggest a seriously disturbed individual(s).'*

There has, so far, been no indication that any of the animals were subjected to sexual assaults, as in the spate of horse mutilations a few years back. Forensic clinical psychologist Susan Hope-Borland hasn't ruled out the possibility that the attacks may be sexually motivated, however.

'It could just be extreme sadism, and sado-masochism is part of the sexual spectrum. I have had patients for whom blood is an extreme turn-on.'

Another theory put forward to account for the attacks was tendered by Professor Linzey, an Anglican priest currently researching the theological and ethical aspects of animal welfare at Manfield College. He stated that *'Cats are*

creatures of the night. And somewhere, deep within us, they still represent the forces of Darkness - the cat is the Demonic, the Witch's familiar, Satan's favourite form. All the Medieval beliefs still deeply ingrained in us.

'It could be simply a neurotic hatred arising out of some negative experience in relation to cats. But the ritual aspect of it - the severing of heads and tails, the removal of trophies - seems particularly perverted. That's what makes it much more morally significant than acts of random cruelty.

'This killer puts in a lot of time and forethought. It's a formidable thing to spend one's time doing.'

27th November, 1998. London 'THE TIMES'

Strange Days In The Animal Kingdom Revolt Of The Creatures

MARCH OF THE INSECTS:

During the not-so-lazy days of last Summer, the tabloid press were warning the good people of Britain to prepare for the invasion of the 'Euro Superwasps.'

Mini swarms of these aggressive critters, that are twice the size of our normal (though still pretty deadly - see below) garden wasp, were said to be crossing the Channel from mainland Europe, much to the chagrin of pest control officers.

The homegrown variety of wasp normally conceal their nests in roofs and sheds, but the new, decidedly unwelcome arrivals prefer to build football-shaped nests in trees and gardens, which they protect with a jealous ferocity.

Reports of these 'Eurowasps' have risen dramatically, particularly in East Anglia. They are believed to have crossed the North Sea from France and Belgium, either by stowing away aboard the daily ferries, or else concealing themselves within a holidaymakers camping equipment.

The recent excessively mild Winters have assisted in the insect's breeding capabilities.

The curiously-named Mark Grimwood, a pest control manager for Ipswich council, was quoted as saying; *Our three experts are currently dealing with 25 nests a day.*

These wasps are a stronger, bigger breed, so when they sting you it's a bigger wound. They are more aggressive because their nests are outside, so they protect them more.'

And Ian Burgess of the Medical Entomology Centre in Cambridge, added; *'These wasps are not like the ones we are used to, which make a nuisance of themselves by buzzing around sugary drinks or jams sandwiches.*

'They will divebomb people who go to near their nests and if that does not work, they will attack. It would be wrong to say that they attack en masse, but like bees they do admit an odour which encourages others to attack as well

'People should use their common sense and not be stupid enough to approach their nests or antagonise them.'

23rd July, 1998. Britain. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Just one month later, and 'Eurowasp's' were being officially blamed for causing the death of 63-year-old farm worker Frederick Parker, and seriously injuring his employer Arthur Pocock.

The attack occurred as the two men walked through a field gate to reach an injured calf. Mr Pocock barely had time to shout out a warning, before the huge cloud of angry wasps descended upon them. They both slumped to the ground. Mr Parker was subsequently rushed to Devizes Community Hospital in allergic shock, but sadly, he died a few hours later.

Mr Parker's distraught widow, Edith, told reporters that; *'you couldn't count the number of stings on my husband's body. By the time I got to the hospital it was too late.'*
August 23rd, 1998. Erlestoke, near Devizes, Wiltshire. 'DAILY MAIL'

*** Meanwhile, in October, a couple belonging to an anti-establishment religious sect waited for over seven hours before deigning to call an ambulance for their two-year-old son after he was stung more than 200 times by a swarm of bees.

He was declared dead on arrival at the local hospital in Tampa, Florida, USA.

Kelly and Wylie Johnson, the less-than-loving, caring parents, had already been acquitted of failing to report the death of a baby born to fellow sect members, refused to talk to sheriff's deputies concerning the incident.

1st October, 1998. Tampa, Florida, USA. 'THE GUARDIAN'

*** Also during October, the forests of south-central Alaska were being decimated by a plague of Spruce Bark Beetles...

Over the past twenty years, this voracious pest has effectively killed Sitka/white Spruce hybrids over an area of 1.3 million hectares. Another species, the Black-Headed Budworm can hardly be accused of being any kind of a slouch either, having killed about 40,000 hectares of trees since 1973.

According to Dr Glenn Juday of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the damage has been so extreme in some areas that the only question that remains unanswered, is what kind of forest system will replace the one that is rapidly dying out?

Doctor Juday's forecast is hardly encouraging:

'The current forest is dying, and for conifer-dependent species, such as Martens, Flying Squirrels and Woodpeckers, that means trouble.'

October, 1998. South-central Alaska. 'BBC WILDLIFE MAGAZINE'

*** Rather closer to home, beetles of an unidentified species were also making life hell for garden centre boss Ron Thorne.

Ron, 62, of Hoo, Kent, has all but surrendered his home to an infestation of nocturnal creepy-crawlers; *'They come out at night and scurry around. It's a nightmare for my wife Maureen.'*

Curiously, according to the clipping we have on file, scientists had failed in their efforts to identify the inch-long beetles.

16th August, 1998. Hoo, Kent. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** Meanwhile, the Cumbrian Fells were swarming with up to 80 million caterpillars last June. Almost 1,000 acres were reduced to barren wilderness, and the local farmers were helpless to prevent the relentless tide.

Pretty much the same thing last happened 12 years earlier, and the shepherds blamed the freak weather conditions. Wildlife 'experts' however disagreed, and claimed instead that the insect invasion was down to a little understood natural occurrence.

One of the worst affected farmers was John Jackson, 56, who moved 600 sheep to lowland pasture normally reserved for Winter feeding.

'It's like something out of the Bible,' he told reporters. *'There are no sheep left over hundreds and hundreds of acres. The ground is dead, and the caterpillars are advancing at the rate of about two feet a day. At a distance you can see what appear to be areas of grass in different shades of green. The darker green is where the grass is left - the lighter green is where the caterpillars are covering the ground.'*

The enormous trail of destruction was caused by the tiny inch-long larvae of the Antler Moth, which feed constantly night and day. Insecticide proved to be too costly, and would doubtless have rendered the grass decidedly un-sheep friendly.

The plague simply continued until the creatures - *Cerapteryx Graminis* became docile and entered the chrysalis stage before turning into fully-fledged moths sometime in July and August.

Mike Lole of the Agriculture Development and Advisory Service was quoted as saying: *'When you get a plague like this, it is like a moving army. Each caterpillar can manage a gram or two of leaf tissue every day.'*

24th June, 1998. Cumbrian Fells. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

KILLER COWS, TIPSY MOOSE, NUTTY SQUIRRELS, POLO-LOVING MICE AND GOLF-HATING ELEPHANTS

A £45,000 Mercedes car, renowned for its high performance qualities, was transformed into a plodding 30mph top-speed clunker that eventually ground to a halt at the top of a steep hill, in Ringwood, Hampshire.

The owner, Mrs Pola Brown, was furious and took the car back to the garage from where she'd purchased it just four months earlier, only to be told that the reason the Merc had failed to live up to expectations was not down to any mechanical problems, but was, quite simply, the work of a sabotaging squirrel.

Over 5lb of peanuts had been crammed into the air filter intake by a nesting squirrel. It had also gnawed its way through the alarm system and had successfully built a drey beneath the bonnet.

The animal had whisked the peanuts from Mrs Brown's back garden bird table, and had somehow gotten into the garage of her home, the Cosmic Jokingly christened - 'Nuthatches' - and had secreted the supply of nuts in the air intake.

Because squirrel interference was not covered by the car's warranty, she had to pay £250 for the repairs. Chris Lonnen, general manager of a car company in Poole, Dorset, (and who obviously fancies himself as a pupil of the Jim Davidson school of comedy) told the press; *'There were so many peanuts in the airway the car could barely run. That's it, in a nutshell! (I think yeeecwwwww!!!)'*

July, 22nd, 1998. Ringwood, Hampshire. 'DAILY MAIL'

*** Also in Poole, Dorset, squirrels managed to consume 400 cones and a box of chocolate flakes when they somehow forced open a window and set about raiding Barry Whittaker's ice cream van which was parked in his drive.

19th November, 1998. Poole, Dorset. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** The rural town of Lindesberg in Sweden, was terrorised by a Moose with a taste for a drop of the hard stuff last October.

The animal apparently discovered that feasting on apples that aer just about to turn rotten makes him more than a tad tipsy as they ferment in his stomach.

Apple growers in the area were forced to call the police due to the extensive havoc the Moose was causing throughout the orchards and greenhouses. His drunken antics made the entertainment slot - the light relief at the end of the news - across the country and a local police officer was quoted as saying; *'He flees when he hears my car siren but as soon as my back is turned, he returns. He*

gets so drunk he doesn't so much walk as stagger along. Sometimes he can hardly stand.'

Funny that, those symptoms somehow seem strangely familiar....

22nd October, 1998. Lindsberg, Sweden. 'THE TIMES'

*** A 67-year-old woman was trampled to death by a herd of cows as she was in the process of walking her dogs along a public footpath.

Grace Aldridge was discovered by a couple out walking, her bruised and battered body lying alongside the corpses of two of her four Shelties. One of the surviving dogs was howling mournfully at her feet.

The Health and Safety Executive immediately opened an official inquiry into the tragedy, and they're resident 'experts' were convinced that Grace had been crushed under the hooves more than fifty cows and a bull which were grazing in a field across which she was walking.

It was not known, at the time of going to press, (hell, maybe it never will be) what had caused the animals to stampede, but those selfsame 'experts' proffered the theory that perhaps the cattle reacted aggressively because they felt that either they, or their calves were threatened.

Mrs Aldridge was well-known in the village of Lyminster, near Arundel, West Sussex, for her love of dogs. She had lived alone for the best part of thirty years and had no children.

Neighbours were quick to point out that she had walked in the fields many times prior to the attack, without even the slightest hint of any trouble.

Detective Inspector Dick Shelton, of Sussex Police, was quoted as saying; *'Early indications are that this was a very tragic accident. For some reason, the cows acted unpredictably.'*

The tabloid press were quick to point out that there have been six deaths attributed to cattle attacks on humans since 1990, and the HSE says it has investigated 16 major incidents.

For the record, the cattle involved were a Charolais-Limousin cross breed, bred solely for their beef. I don't know, ladies and gents, maybe they just decided enough was enough.

2nd June, 1998. Lyminster, Near Arundel, West Sussex. 'DAILY MAIL'

*** Meanwhile, an unbroken stallion ridden by, of all people, Monty Roberts, the world famous *'Horse Whisperer'*, suddenly kicked out and killed a young stable girl by the name of Allison Carter, 19, after she'd hit the animal with a brush.

Allison had been working with Ski, a three-year-old Colt, at the Middleton Equestrian Centre, Near Darlington, Co, Durham, when the incident occurred.

Witnesses say she was walking the horse which had only ever been ridden by Mr Roberts, the man whose Horse Whispering antics inspired the Robert Redford movie of the same name, back to its stable when she removed its bridle.

This apparently, is not normal practice, and it made the animal difficult to control. She picked up a broken yard brush and struck the horse on the rear with the bristle end. Perhaps not surprisingly, it retaliated by kicking out with both feet, and hit her on the left side of her face. She was immediately knocked unconscious. She died in hospital two days later.

27th October, 1998 Darlington, Co Durham 'THE TIMES'

*** And just to add to the sense of animal rebellion out there in the British countryside, a farmer named Matthew O' Shea, 72, was gored to death by a stag.

He is believed to have antagonised the animal by entering the paddock during mating season.

Most deer farmers feed the animals over the fence or from a well-protected tractor, but Mr O' Shea had been feeding the herd for his son, who found him dead in the paddock near Kilrush, Co. Clare.

Michael O' Dowd, a deer 'expert' with the Irish Farm Advisory Service was asked for his opinion on the tragedy, and he stated that stags were particularly aggressive during the mating season that begins in October and finishes at the end of the following month;

'The Stag is very possessive and territorial around this time. He likes to be on his own with females and does not like any interference.'

6th November, 1998. Kilrush, Co. Clare, Ireland. 'THE TIMES'

*** And a startled deer elected to leap directly into the front passenger seat of Mike Speak's soft-top Mercedes as he was driving near Morecombe in Lancashire.

The hitch-hiking creature didn't stay for long however. Before he'd had time to really register the fact that he was sharing his car with a deer, the animal had leapt back out again without so much as a by-your-leave!!!

12th June, 1998 Morecombe, Lancashire. 'DAILY SLUR.'

*** A 5-year-old boy who claims a Kangaroo tried to maul him to death, decided to sue the Sydney Golf Club where he was attacked for a staggering £270,000

Steven Shorten apparently still suffers from nightmares and nervousness around the animals, and has been taunted at school where he has been christened with the nickname; Skippy.

30th October, 1998. Sydney, Australia. 'LIVERPOOL ECHO.'

*** And speaking of Golf, in Johannesburg, South Africa, a German woman tourist was killed by an Elephant whilst she was playing a round at a local holiday resort.

The rampaging animal, which is belted to have made good its escape by knocking down a fence at the nearby Kruger National Park, attacked and killed the woman at the Hans Merensky Country Club And Lodge, in front of her horrified husband and son.

27th October, 1998. Johannesburg, South Africa. 'THE TIMES.'

*** A bear kept in a Tehran zoo, had to be destroyed after it dragged a four-year-old girl into its cage and proceeded to eat her right in front of her parents.

The pitiful remains of the little girl's body were only recovered after the bear was tranquillised with a dart.

13th July, 1998. Tehran, Iran. 'DAILY SLUR.'

*** Undertstandably annoyed at being poked by an eight-year-old child, a Box Turtle called Boxer clamped its shell together on the little boys finger and simply refused to let go. The animal stubbornly held its grip until firemen in University Place, Washington, USA, gave it a dose of laughing gas.

'We just blew a little in his face, he relaxed and the kid pulled his finger out,' a paramedic stated later. The cruel kid suffered a blood blister, while the Box Turtle - so called because it can close like an, er, box - was said to be *'totally stoned and sleeping it off.'*

5th October, 1998. University Place, Washington, USA. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** Here's a decidedly unusual spot of trouble for a couple of entirely unconnected fishermen....

Angler Ed Stuardi was quietly waiting for a bite on lazy afternoon, when he was suddenly forced to ward off an amorous Emu which was especially determined in making its advances.

He eventually succeeded in scaring it off by using one of his oars.

25th October, 1998. Alabama, USA. 'SUNDAYPEOPLE'

*** Meanwhile, another angler, Nick Baggot, had his finger bitten clean off by a huge Pike as he unhooked his line.

RAF Corporal Baggot had taken over thirty minutes to bank the 15lb 8oz fish during a match at Farringdon Lake, Oxfordshire.

3rd November, 1998. Farringdon Lake, Oxfordshire 'DAILY SLUR'

*** Hundreds of Monkeys have literally invaded the town of Villa Serrana, in Brazil, as they search for food and water in the wake of an eight-month drought.

23rd July, 1998. Villa Serrana, Brazil. 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

***Whilst over in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia, patients were forced to flee in sheer terror when a group of wild Monkeys broke into the local health clinic.

The animals stormed the building, before ransacking the place and running off with various items of medical equipment.

The staff tried their damndest to repel the attack, but were quite simply overwhelmed. The Monkey population has apparently exploded in the area and packs regularly run amok in the streets.

6th August, 1998. Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia. 'DAILY SLUR'

*** Somewhat worryingly, unprovoked Shark attacks increased dramatically by up to two thirds in 1997, an increase of 56 from 36.

Sharks, in common with a good deal of humanity, seem to dislike Americans intensely....Of last year's total, 34 took place in US waters.

August, 1998. General 'FOCUSMAGAZINE'

*** A pair of Swans managed to bring the traffic to a halt on the M1 after they decided to use it as a landing strip.

The pair caused three-mile tailbacks near Sheffield before being rescued by passing police officers.

The incident started when the pen (female) clipped an electricity pylon and collided with the top of a lorry before landing in the northbound carriageway.

As the traffic swerved to avoid the injured swan, her mate circled the motorway and landed on the slow lane of the southbound carriageway.

A police officer then stopped the traffic and with the help of other drivers, managed to throw a blanket over the cob.

He then picked it up and took it to a nearby field.

Another officer put his jacket over the pen and kept it pacified until swan 'experts' arrived.

The birds were soon recovering at a sanctuary near Doncaster.

1st October, 1998. Sheffield. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** Curiously, on the same day, a wild boar inadvertently created a hold-up for the early morning express from Weymouth to Westbury....

The busy commuter train hit the animal near Sparkford, Somerset, causing delays of up to an hour as engineers struggled to clear the tracks.

A spokesman for Wales and West trains told reporters: 'Sadly, the boar didn't live to tell the tale.'

1st October, 1998. Sparkford, Somerset. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** A bunch of sweet-toothed mice managed to put the brakes on nine-year-old Daniel Webster's fun after hoarding a total of 400 Polo Mints, and their wrappers, in the engine of his quad bike, while he recovered from a broken leg.

27th October, 1998. Broadwas, near Worcester. 'THE TIMES'

WEIRD HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

The Crazies Are Out There...Waiting



Election Madness: The Phantom Pig Thrower And A Not-so Dead Loss

We kick off this issue with the strange tale of Hsu-I-Sheng, a candidate of Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party... He was forced to publicly apologise at the height of his country's election campaign for flinging live piglets at at aides to James Soong, the current Governor of Taiwan. 'I apologise for this incident to all the world's pigs,' a repentant Sheng stated, and so he damn well should.

Taiwanese sometimes insultingly refer to immigrants from mainland China, such as Mr Soong, as 'pigs.'

Sadly, the fate of the unfortunate pigs was unknown at the time of going to press.

20th September, 1998. Taipei, Taiwan 'THE TIMES'

*** Even more bizarre was the following item from Oklahoma City, where a *dead* woman managed to win a highly respectable 20 per cent of the vote in an election for US Senate candidates.

Housewife Jacquelyn Ledgerwood took a quite amazing 56,000 votes, securing her a second place amongst the four candidates in the Democratic Primary Election, despite being at the somewhat (you would think) major disadvantage of being ever so slightly dead. She'd suffered a massive stroke six weeks earlier.

The late Mrs Ledgerwood, 69, had the temerity to die before anyone could withdraw her candidacy, and her relatives were delighted at her strong showing. Her son, Thomas, was quoted as saying;

'I am very excited about the opportunity to have Mum's name on the ballot again. She had a lot to offer Oklahoma.'
27th October, 1998. Oklahoma, USA. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Also of the opinion that sometimes dead is better, was an 80-year-old South African woman who elected to marry a man who passed away back in 1973.

In the ceremony at Vaalbank, east of Pretoria, South Africa, Zibi Masanabo married the father of her seven children, Issac Masanabo, after laying a wreath on his grave.

'Issac may be dead, but he is still the best man for me,' she told reporters.

Masanabo was so committed to loving Zibi that he had paid her family ten cows for the privilege of winning her hand.

27th October, 1998. Pretoria, South Africa. 'THE INDEPENDENT'

WEIRD CRIME:

The Latest Batch Of Hopeless Burglars, Thieves And Robber's

After robbing a paraplegic man in Palm Beach, Florida, two men sought to make good their escape in a golf cart. Their victim however, successfully gave chase in his wheelchair.

August, 1998. Palm Beach, Florida. 'FOCUS MAGAZINE'

*** A would-be thief who stole knock out gas from the inside of a police car, in the mistaken belief that it was some kind of expensive perfume, was found unconscious in a Romanin street.

12th September, 1998. Bacau, Romania 'DAILYMANC'

*** Police were pretty damn near speechless after they arrested a drunken burglar who was dressed as a bumble bee.

The man, who had been to a fancy dress party, waved at a security camera before breaking into a Brighton bookshop.
29th September, 1998. Brighton, England. 'DAILYSLUR'

An Iranian judge ordered a burglar by the name of Nikun Thakur to walk on his knees for a total of 16 months. If he stands up too soon, he will face a lengthy jail sentence.
25th October, 1998. Yazd, Iran 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** A pretty clueless robber was easily caught after he managed to grab £30,000 from a bank, and then promptly ran straight into a bar next door to celebrate.

Joe Bullock, 29, wolfed down a couple of pints of ale with several whisky chasers and even went so far as to buy a round for a selection of assembled strangers.

He was arrested after strolling to a bus stop because he did not even have the foresight to organise a getaway car.

Police in Hartford, Connecticut, USA, were quoted as saying; *'He has to be one of the world's dumbest robbers.'*

'He told us he had planned to use his bicycle for the getaway but it got stolen. He's facing a spell in jail.'

3rd November, 1998. Connecticut, USA. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** An equally careless robber marched straight into a bank and thrust his written demand for money at a cashier...

On the reverse of the note was a CV that he'd previously penned to boost his employment chances.

He was soon arrested by police...

5th November, 1998. Carmel, California, USA. 'DAILY SLUR'

*** David Ash, was another would-be robber who made a complete hash of things when he held up a store in Northport, Alabama.

At the time, his mum and dad were shopping in the store, and the stunned parents had little hesitation turning their knife-wielding son in to the boys in blue...

19th November, 1998. Northport, Alabama, USA. 'DAILY SLUR'

***And, it seems to me that they just get more incompetent with each passing caper...

A fraudster who opened a US bank account using a dead man's name was grassed up by the clerk, the deceased's widow.

22nd November, 1998. USA. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

Time To Enter The Realms Of The Entirely Pointless...

Psychic Janet Geel, 44, who claimed that she lost her special powers after a plank struck her head in an Orlando, DIY store, has had a \$1.6 million damages case thrown out of court.

Surely, if she'd been any good, she would have seen it coming.

September, 1998. Orlando, Florida. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** Snorkeller Sergio Manti, 19, thought it might be a jolly good wheeze to swim in between gondolas in Venice with a rubbers shark's fin strapped to his back.

He was later jailed for a total of three months after a tourist fainted when confronted with the sight.

September, 1998. Venice, Italy 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** A 54-year-old man bit off another man's nose at the height of an argument, and decided to keep the chunk in his freezer.

He was arrested by Dutch police, and he told the officers that he had retained the piece, which was frozen in a glass of milk, to prove that he hadn't used a knife during the assault.

There was no longer any chance of sewing the nose back onto the victim's face, by then.

3rd September, 1998. Amsterdam, Holland 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** In a case with more than a few echoes of Modern Urban Social Panic, (nee; the Mad Gasser Of Mattoon and the Chinese Hair bandits) police in Indonesia were said to be protecting more than 200 people from killers dressed entirely in black, Ninja-style clothing who have been rumoured to be attacking their victims with knives in the dead of night.

At the time of going to press, dozens of suspects had been interviewed, but their enquiries had failed to yield any clue as to motive for a series of bizarre murders, now numbering up to a hundred.

The killings apparently started back in August of this year, near Banyuwangi, about 518 miles east of Jakarta.

Witnesses have stated that the mysterious killers, whoever they may be, wear black clothes reminiscent of Japan's feudal period Ninja Assassins. Many victims have been found horribly mutilated.

There is some speculation that political and religious rivalries may well be responsible for at least some of the killings, as earlier reports claimed that certain killers were paid up to £60 per victim.

Jeezly Ol' Crow, we get more than that just for doing one of our Disco's!!!

Talk about life being cheap!!!

6th October, 1998. Banyuwangi, Indonesia. 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

*** A man who was arrested for punching his 123rd priest explained to the Italian police that; 'It's my life's mission. I'll go on bashing priests until the day that I die.'

25th October, 1998. Milan, Italy. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** Peter Johnson (no, not *that* Peter Johnson, my eternally paranoid Evertonian friends and neighbours) a witness at court in Orlando, Florida, was ordered by the judge to change out of his shorts, and promptly came back wearing absolutely nothing but his shoes....

He was jailed for three months for contempt of court.

25th October, 1998 Orlando, Florida 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

TOTAL OVER-REACTIONS

Franco Malgieri was charged with strangling his wife Anita after a blazing argument in the bathroom over... Wait for it... a tube of toothpaste.

She apparently insisted upon squeezing the toothpaste tube from the top, which okay, I'll admit is pretty annoying. But even so....

6th August, 1998. Turin, Italy. 'DAILY SLUR'

*** A farmer elected to hack a total of nine of his neighbours to death with an axe after a dispute with them over ten geese in mainland China.

17th August, 1998. Shaanxi Province, China 'DAILY MANC'

*** In the heart of the Lebanon, Mahmu Mukalled agreed to remove dynamite that he'd strapped to his body after a quarrel with his wife, but unfortunately it went off, killing him instantly, and injuring their three children.

25th August, 1998. Tebnin, Lebanon. 'THE TIMES'

*** A man and a woman appeared in court charged with the murder of Glendon Dandy, who stabbed to death outside his home in Tyseley, Birmingham, after an argument about, of all things, a parking space.

23rd September, 1998 Tyseley, Birmingham. 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

*** A youth aged 17, bludgeoned his parents and four brothers and sisters to death with a hammer after a petty family argument in Medan, 870 miles northwest of Jakarta. Police said that the unnamed youth, the youngest child in the family, was down in the dumps after an argument with his parents, who had had the temerity to ground him. Friends of the youth claimed that he telephoned them and invited them to the house for a party.

When they arrived, he had already moved floorboards and begun digging a grave for the bodies.

3rd November, 1998. Medan, Jakarta. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** A 93-year-old man somehow summoned up the energy to stab his teenage bride to death, a mere six days after their wedding.

The reason? She hid his false teeth for a bit of a laugh.

15th November. Brasilia, Brazil. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** Josef Hartmann, warned his incessantly nagging wife, Hanna, to shut her face or else he would quite literally drive her into the river. She flatly refused, and so he carried out his threat.

Now the car is a write-off and he's been charged with polluting the river Danube in Austria.

15th November, 1998. River Danube, Austria. 'DAILY SLUR'

Please Make Way For The Totally Irrational...

Six men were killed stone dead by a Texas freight train whilst they foolishly elected to sleep on the railway tracks. The explanation given for this quite bizarre behaviour (I mean, how comfortable can a section of railway line be) was that they were labouring under the illusion that they would be safe from snakes there.

The men were believed to be illegal immigrants from Mexico.

14th October, 1998. Texas, USA 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

*** Three illegal Romanian immigrants hammered nails into their heads to avoid being deported from Croatia.

Amazingly, only one of them was seriously injured.

14th October, 1998. Croatia 'LIVERPOOL ECHO'

*** A Mexican woman believed her husband had merely stopped speaking to her after a humdinger of an argument when he stayed in bed for eight days.

It was only after she finally swallowed her pride and decided to confront him that she realised he was dead.

Cayetano Sanchez Luna, 83, is believed to have died of alcoholic poisoning at the couple's home in the village of Tavictapan. His body was found on a bed he and his wife, Margarita Alvarez, shared, covering up to the neck and decomposing.

1st October, 1998. Tavictapan, Mexico. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** Also guilty of a spot of fraternising with the dead was a devoted son who elected to take his father on a last motorcycle ride along the winding street of his native Copenhagen. He bought him a drink and a cigar, and at the end of the three-hour tour, delivered him to the police station in Frederikssund.

The remarkable thing about the city-wide jaunt however, was that his father had been dead for two whole days.

The police, less than enamored with Flemming Peterson's heartfelt actions, charged him with illicit handling of a corpse.

The whole story begins when Peterson Junior turned up at the city morgue to see his late father. He managed to request a few minutes alone with the body, and after dressing the corpse up in leather gear, boots, helmet and sunglasses, he somehow succeeded in smuggling his dear departed father outside. He then tied him to the back seat of his Harley-Davidson, and rode off into the wild blue yonder.

Peterson senior's final journey took him to Copenhagen, 25 miles south of his previous resting-place, on a grand tour of his favourite sights, and watering-holes. There was even time for them to make a quick pit-stop. Alighting at his local, the son propped his father up by the bar, bought two beers, and placed a cigar in his mouth. No one paid the slightest attention, doubtless due to the fact that the

younger Peterson seemed merely to be engrossed in conversation with his admittedly quiet companion. 'I really felt great afterwards,' Peterson Jr, later told the press. 'It helps to be with the deceased, to sit and chat, even though he couldn't hear what I was saying.'

After their stint at the bar, they headed on home to Frederiksund, for the final family reunion with the dead man's widow, and a quick snapshot of the dear departed astride the bike.

The police station proved to be the journey's end.

It was an easy ride, the son later recalled, aside for one heart-stopping moment when the bike stalled and Mr Petersen had to ask passers-by for assistance. He was forced to apologise for his father's reluctance to get off and push. The old man had had a few drinks and was 'dead tired,' Mr Petersen explained, admirably maintaining his sense of humour in a moment of potential crisis.

28th October, 1998. Copenhagen, Denmark 'THE INDEPENDENT'

*** At least Mr Petersen had some degree of respect for his father.

That's certainly more than can be said for Gary Earle, of Gary, West Virginia, USA....

He preserved his dad in his coffin, just in case science should ever happen to discover a way of resurrecting the dead, and decided in the meantime, to use the coffin as a coffee table.

He was quoted as saying; 'He'd want to be useful, so I use him as a table.'

17th November, 1998. Gary, West Virginia, USA. 'DAILY MANC'

Religious Phenomena Doubting Thomas's At The Vatican

Faith, it seems, even amongst the ranks of the supposedly ardent, is a hard thing to come by these days....

On the very eve of the Pope's visit to Croatia, the Vatican decided, in its 'boundless wisdom' to decree that there was no evidence for the 'supernatural visions' at the famous shrine of the Virgin Mary at Medjugorje.

The site, which is actually located in neighbouring Bosnia-Herzegovina, is widely venerated by many practising Catholics, and is afforded by some, the same degree of esteem as that associated with the shrines at Lourdes in France and Fatima in Portugal.

The Pope was scheduled to visit the site at Marija Bistrica near Zagreb, which has been dedicated to the Virgin Mary since the 15th century. Church officials have however, raised doubts as to the authenticity of the reported sightings of the BVM that have spanned the last 20 years. The latest pronouncement by the self-importantly titled 'Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, the Pope's personal doctrinal watchdog, has been (somewhat predictably) greeted with less-than-enthusiastic response by the operators of a religious tour who, at the time of writing, were doubtless raking it in. Even in the midst of war-ravaged Bosnia, where money is understandably at a premium.

Visions of the Madonna have been reportedly sighted at Medjugorje since the June of 1981, when six children claimed that they had seen the figure of the BVM appear

an actually converse with them. Local Franciscan friars were very quick to declare that the visions were one hundred per cent authentic.

Certain of the local bishops however, were not so easily convinced of their genuineness, and headed by Monsignor Pavao Zanic, the then Bishop Of Mostar, issued a statement saying that they could not vouch for the 'credibility' of the apparitions.

Monsignor Tarcisio Bertone, deputy to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, stated that Bishop Zanic had expressed 'a personal conviction,' but later declared that 'on the basis of inquiries carried out so far, it is not possible to state that this case involves genuine apparitions or supernatural revelations.'

Monsignor Bertone said that investigations would continue. There have been three commissions of inquiry into the Medjugorje phenomenon so far, involving doctors and scientists as well as priests.

25th September, 1998. Medjugorje, Near Zagreb, Croatia. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

*** Meanwhile, churches that have embarked upon poster campaigns promising the healing power of faith, were ordered not to promise miracles that they cannot deliver to the public at large.

The Advertising Standards Authority have held that any claims that physical health problems could be cured by the power of prayer should be backed by rigorous scientific evidence....

Yeah, right.

It used the example of the advertising campaign used to herald the arrival of the American evangelist Morris Cerullo in Britain. The posters feature pictures of discarded wheelchairs and hearing aids. One billboard in particular depicted a woman cuddling a child alongside the words; 'I COULDN'T HAVE A BABY. MIRACLES HAPPEN!!!'

Another poster showed a boy with callipers in hand and the caption; 'THEY SAID I'D NEVER STAND ON MY OWN TWO FEET. MIRACLES HAPPEN!!!'

The Authority said such claims were entirely unacceptable because they suggested physical healing without medical proof.

However, it did not uphold a complaint made against the Peniel Pentecostal Church in Brentwood, Essex. A Methodist minister had complained that its advertisement which stated; 'A CHURCH WHERE HEALING AND MIRACLES HAPPEN TODAY. COME AND SEE WHAT GOD CAN DO FOR YOU!!!' was misleading. The church sent testimonials, including seven from doctors, that claimed instances of physical healing had in fact occurred.

The Authority said it would allow the advertisement to continue because the claims did not refer to physical healing specifically and could have referred to spiritual healing, which was not disprovable.

9th October, 1998. Britain, General. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

TOUCHED BY THE HAND OF GOD: Biblical Plagues May Be Historical Fact

Two US scientists have gone on record as stating that they believe that the ten plagues evoked by an angry Moses, may have actually taken place.

They have theorised that this sequence of Biblical curses may well have been a series of linked natural disasters triggered by a deadly organism.

Curtis Malloy, from Maryland, USA, was quoted as saying that he is very much afraid that a similar fate may well befall mankind in the not-too-distant future.

'The Plagues Of Egypt Project' is the brainchild of Dr John Marr, of New York's Department Of Health.

The first plague that triggered the chain reaction of calamities and forced the Ancient Egyptians to give the Israelite slaves their freedom was the pollution of the Nile that, according to the Old Testament, ran red with blood.

Malloy and Marr were led to the microbiotic culprit responsible for the pollution of the Nile following a similar disaster in North Carolina, USA, during 1997. Fish in that southern state were being eaten in their billions by a flesh-eating red microbe which combined with the blood of the fish to provide the explanation for the first plague.

By identifying the cause of the Nile pollution, Marr and Malloy had also found the explanation to the second plague, the frogs, and the fourth plague, the flies. Toads escaped from the water but died too. With rotting toads littering the city streets, an explosion of flies took hold, laying 500 eggs at a time. Flies are carriers of Glanders Disease, last seen at the height of the First World War, where it was employed as a biological warfare agent.

It causes death, leaving victims covered in the boils described in the Sixth Plague. The Third Plague, lice, was the dirty work of the midge. With their natural predator, the toad, removed they would undergo a population explosion. And lice were the cause of Plague Five, the 'animal murrain,' identified by the scientists as African Horse Sickness.

Transmitted by midges, it is a disease killing cows, sheep and goats. The next three plagues, hailstorms, locusts and darkness, are natural calamities that regularly bedevil the Middle East.

With food supplies low, fish killed, and livestock infected by mysterious disease, the Egyptians were left with one source of nutrition, their crops. In desperation to preserve them, they brought on Plague Ten, death of the first-born. Gathering crops too soon, they would have encouraged the growth of a deadly toxin.

By tradition, the eldest child received double portions and would be overwhelmed by deadly bacteria. With no obvious reasons for these catastrophes, the Egyptians understandably saw them as acts of God.

17th August, 1998. Egypt. 'DAILY EXPRESS'

PAGANISM IS ON THE RISE ACROSS BRITAIN

As we race at breakneck speed towards the new Millennium, the news that interest in one of this country's oldest religions is enjoying something of a resurgence, is perhaps, more than a tad surprising. But nevertheless, that very much seems to be the case.

According to that religion's disciples however, paganism is the fastest-growing cult in Britain today, with more than 120,000 practising adherents.

Hospitals and universities are appointing pagan chaplains in increasing numbers, and in deepest, darkest Manchester, a follower of the pagan Wiccan faith has been made a magistrate (See # 13 'DON' for full details of this story).

In the West Country, the number of pagans has been calculated as outnumbering retired majors as a succession of druids and followers of the Wiccan path emerge to announce plans for celebrating the infamous Cornish Eclipse, at the height of the Millennial Summer, this year...

Not surprisingly, the more conservative-minded have been quick to voice their disgust, and issue warnings of moral danger, and one more-paranoid-than-most was a 'DAILY EXPRESS' columnist named Peter Hitchens, who had the audacity to blame the rebirth of paganism as being the root

cause for the increasingly yobbish behaviour of the 'Brits on the Piss' Brigade at holiday resorts abroad such as Ibiza.

Not that such bizarre assertions should really surprise us any.

Pagan cults, by their very nature, have never been able to command a good press. Recent newspaper articles have made much of the fact that the word 'Pagan' has its origins in the Latin 'Paganus,' which translates as a country bumpkin, the dismissive tag that occupying Roman troops used for common civilians. The early Christians adopted this military usage to refer to all those 'heathens' who refused to convert to their 'true religion.'

Today's pagans are said to be a somewhat disparate group of Witches, Druids, Shamans and Odinists, but there are also a number of common threads. The essential tenet of their belief is of course, their oneness with Nature, and their worship of Mother Earth. They celebrate the great Cycles Of The Year starting at Samhain (Hallowe'en, October 31st, of course) the pagan New Year.

They also believe that moral laws are made by Man, and not by God, their common principal being; Do what thou wilt if it harms none.'

Although they draw on religious traditions that long pre-date Christianity, it is left to individual believers to fashion their own idea of the divine.

Most pagans, it is readily conceded, even by their biggest detractors, are 'seekers after truth,' but those very same critics would also be keen to point out that 'Paganisms all-inconclusiveness, its lack of any central creed, denies it the spiritual and intellectual rigour of Christianity, Judaism or Islam. It lacks the moral complexity those great faiths and has no concept of judgement or redemption. There also seems to be an inherent absurdity in a religion that seeks to draw strength from ancient traditions, but says anything goes by way of ritual or belief.'

The same journalist ('THE DAILY EXPRESS's Paul Carter), recounts the profoundly poignant words of the Dorset writer Llewelyn Powys, 'a man who was proud to call himself a Pagan.'

'Powys found his religion in nothing more or less than the adoration of life - *'the detached worship of animal life, of bird life, of fish life...the unuttered sense of glory in the chance of experience. This is the religion below all religions. Natural worship. A constantly heightened awareness of the intricate, unstable world of which we are so fleetingly part.'*

For Powys, who died in 1939, after years fighting a losing battle against tuberculosis, there was nothing stranger or more worthy of celebration than the cosmic accident of being alive. *'How heart-piercing, how shocking, how supremely beautiful is this unexplained, unceasing moment that troubles all that is.'*

Rejecting any idea of Divine Stewardship or immortality, Powys believed that our most solemn duty was to savour every experience of our short lives.

'The simplest actions should be undertaken with a full realisation of their significance, as uncommon opportunities of natural piety, never to come again. To pour out water from a jug, to break bread, to open a bottle of wine are lordly offices.'

This, Carter assures us, is surely the true essence of Paganism. 'Though Powys would have scoffed at computer programmers who dress up as Druids after work, or aromatherapists who fancy themselves as White Witches, they would have his sympathy. In their sometimes silly ways, these are people trying to overcome what Powys called *'Our congenital apathy, our lumpish disposition to take for granted the deep mystery of existence.'*

Today's Pagans may be misguided or ridiculous, or both, but they are brave souls who treat life with due reverence

and refuse to believe, like so many, that there is nothing more than material acquisition.'

24th September, 1998. Britain, General 'DAILY EXPRESS'

Speaking With Dark Voices: Doomsday Cults Gather For The 'Final Conflict'

As the year came to a somewhat inglorious end (what with Bill Clinton's one-man war against the nations who aren't equipped with the technology to fight back - 'the bravery of being out of range,' indeed), so-called 'Doomsday Cults' are being targeted by MI5 as concerns begin to increase that their members are planning to wreak havoc at the dawn of the year 2000....

'We are taking it (the security risk) very seriously and keeping a watching brief,' an 'intelligence source' was quoted as saying. Cult membership is understood, like the aforementioned Pagans, to have wildly increased in number, largely due to the Internet.

Since the late eighties, fundamentalist Christians have pinned their hopes on the return of Jesus Christ to Earth to save Mankind from its self-destructive tendencies. The date of this proposed return is of course, 2000, and according to Janja Lalich, who runs support groups for former sect members, cult recruiters target; *'those who appear to be open to new ideas.'*

'They have adapted their traditional techniques to the Internet world and lurk in Websites dedicated to things like NewAge thinking, herbal medicine and Yoga.'

Concern about these cult's activities has been growing in the wake of the Japanese extremist group Aum Shinrikyo, responsible for the Sarin nerve gas attack in Tokyo's underground railway system back in 1995.

The intelligence source was further quoted as saying; *'Assessments will have to be made as to whether a group could turn out like Aum or whether they are just going to publish large tracts of meaningless drivel on the Internet.'*

Aum, who are fervent believers in a millennial apocalypse, built a poison gas plant capable of producing 70 tons of Sarin.

It is also rumoured to have recruited nuclear scientists and attempted to obtain uranium to help build an atomic bomb. Many splinter groups from the militant Nation Of Islam also entertain Doomsday beliefs. Their activities have come to the attention of MI5 who perceive them as a serious threat.

In recent years of course, there have been many instances of extremist religious organisations carrying out self-inflicted acts of violence. In 1993, 80 members of the Branch Davidian Sect in Waco, Texas, endured death by fire rather than surrender themselves to federal authorities, who they believed were earthly representations of the Antichrist.

A year later, 69 members of the Order Of The Solar Temple committed mass suicide in both Switzerland and Quebec, many of them were dressed in mock-Medieval robes. They, like the disciples of the Heaven's Gate cult, just four years later, believed that their souls would be transported to another galaxy and reborn.

Back in 1978, the Reverend Jim Jones decided to spike the punch with poison and massacre over 900 of his followers at Jonestown, Guyana.

Intelligence agencies believe that the Millennium Bug could also be quite easily exploited by just such extremist groups.

The unnamed source was moved to comment; *'There is expected to be confusion with the date change anyway, so the potential to wreak havoc with computer viruses is massive.'*

And if all that weren't enough to have you running pell mell for the nearest range of hills, consider the news humming down the wires, a month or so later, from the very centre of the 'Holy Land' itself....

Israeli police were said to have been put on a high state of alert in an attempt to prevent the entry of up to 72 members of a Doomsday Cult who disappeared in Denver, Colorado, during the second week in October. At least some of the self-styled 'Concerned Christians' duly turned up, however, and were promptly arrested by the security forces.

The cult's leader, Monte Kim Miller, had previously predicted that a massive earthquake would level the whole of the Denver area, and although the calamity failed to take place, still the cult members fled as though their very lives depended on it.

According to 'experts' on the cult, one of a growing number focusing on Jerusalem as the site of Armageddon, Mr Miller is convinced that he is both God and the Last Prophet on Earth, before the Apocalypse, and that like Jesus, he will rise from the dead after the passing of three days. There were, and probably still are, very real fears that his followers will kill themselves if ordered to do so by their leader.

'He (Miller) talks about dying on the steps of Jerusalem in December of 1999,' states Bill Honsberger, an American 'expert' on the group and its beliefs.

'My fear is that, if Miller's prophecy does not happen, he is liable to do something bizarre to ensure his place in history.'

And this is only part of the nightmare scenario that now faces the Israeli authorities in the run up to the Year 2000. Security forces managed to two Christian pilgrims as they landed at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport, apparently intent upon initiating an attack on the Temple Mount, site of the world's third largest Islamic shrine, in an attempt to *'precipitate Armageddon.'*

They were deported without trial.

These extremists actually believe that if a third temple was to be constructed on the site, currently occupied by Al Aqsa Mosque, it would speed up the return of Jesus Christ to Earth.

The Second Temple, where Jesus used to worship with His Apostles, was destroyed by the Romans. In a new report, the unit for fighting terrorism in the office of Binyamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, has predicted that some of the five million Christian pilgrims anticipated in and around the borders of the Holy Land for the Millennium, could potentially become involved in terrorist violence, especially on the Temple Mount. The report, leaked by the Jerusalem weekly; *'KOL HAIR,'* stated that one of the reasons behind the increasingly bizarre behaviour of the Christian radicals was that *'Apocalyptic incitations that view the Year 2000 as the end of the world, at which time believers wish to find death in places holy to Christianity.'*

Richard Landes, head of the Centre For Millennial Studies, at Boston University, expects tens of thousands of Christians with end-of-the-world visions to flock to Jerusalem for the Millennium; *'Do not let anyone in without a round trip ticket and a place to stay,'* he advised journalists from *'THE JERUSALEM REPORT.'*

'I would say to Israeli security; the Mount Of Olives might be taken over by squatters waiting for Jesus to return. If, in their disappointment, they dig in, you are faced with an impossible position.'

Some so-called Born-Again Christians, most of whom have flown over from the United States, have already taken up

residence on the Biblical Mount overlooking the Old City, seeking front row seats for the Second Coming of the Messiah, and the prediction that His return will usher in a 1,000-year-reign of love, peace and understanding. One particular, 61-room hotel, run by Palestinian Muslims, has written to 2,000 Christian groups residing in the United States, asking them; 'How would you like to be staying at the Mount Of Olives Hotel the day that Jesus returns?'

The fundamentalist Christians already in place, and the thousands expected to follow, (Israeli officials know of three congregations in America selling their possessions in preparation for moving to the Holy Land), share the conviction that the Jews are God's Chosen People, and that the creation of Israel, 50 years ago, was a harbinger of a Second Coming.

22nd October, 1998. Jerusalem, Israel THE DAILY TELEGRAPH/ 24th November, 1998 THE TIMES/ January, 1999 CNN WORLD REPORT

Witchcraft And Demonology In The World Today The Devil Made Them Do It!!!



Luke Woodham, aged just seventeen, who was accused of spraying a school playground with gunfire after stabbing his mother to death, told a court in Philadelphia, USA, that he wasn't responsible for his actions...It was the work of 100,000 Demons.

Luke was alleged to have driven to his school and murdered two pupils, including an ex-girlfriend, in the wake of the fatal attack on his 50-year-old mother, Mary. Her body was found lying on her bed with a blood-soaked

pillow on her head. Her chest was punctured and her arms were slashed, it was assumed she received the injuries in a desperate attempt to fight off her son.

He had previously assaulted her with a baseball bat in a hallway of their home before pursuing her to the bedroom. Woodham claimed in his defence that he was acting under the influence of a group called 'The Kroth,' that apparently included in its agenda a plan to take over Pearl High School near Jackson. He further stated that the group leader, Grant Boyette, 19, had completely influenced him in his subsequent actions.

'I remember I woke up that morning and I'd seen Demons that I always saw when Grant told me to do something,' he cited in cross-examination. 'They were telling me that I was nothing. I would always be nothing, if I didn't get to the school, if I didn't kill those people.'

6th June, 1998. Pearl High School, near Jackson, Philadelphia, USA. THE TIMES'



*** Two other killers sought to blame Forces From The Nether Regions, rather than accept full responsibility for their crimes...

Firstly, in September, Justine Cummings, from Taunton in Somerset, admitted killing the son of a bishop with whom she shared a flat, and was ordered by a judge to be assessed at Broadmoor Special Hospital.

She pleaded guilty to the manslaughter of Peter Lewis, who died from a knife wound on his 27th birthday. Mr Lewis was the son of Richard Lewis, Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

Justine had denied murdering Peter on October 29th, 1997, and her plea to manslaughter had been accepted by the prosecution. The court was told that she was obsessed with Witchcraft, Black Magic and the Occult.

On the day of Mr Lewis's death, Peter had told his parents that he intended to marry Justine a few months down the line. Later that night however, Justine stabbed him in the heart and police and paramedics were forced to cut the fatally wounded man free from a pair of handcuffs with which he'd been bound.

There was no apparent motivation for the stabbing....

28th September, 1998. Taunton, Somerset. DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** And meanwhile, north of the border, up in Edinburgh, the son of a newspaper agony aunt believed that he was the very Devil Himself when he murdered his father with a kitchen knife, before stabbing his mother....

Kenneth McCaskill, 27, a schizophrenic, carried out the attack in Edinburgh's Newtown, last June, after his father, a retired Naval Commander, refused point blank to hand over the family car keys. Kenneth/aka The Devil, in a fit of rage, stabbed Simon McCaskill, 57, a total of eleven times, before plunging the 12-inch blade into the chest of his mother Catherine, 54.

Not surprisingly, a judge at the High Court in Edinburgh, ordered that McCaskill Junior should be detained without limit of time at Carstairs high-security state hospital.

The details of the attack were revealed during the course of the court hearing: On June 21st, (coincidentally or not, Midsummer's Day-one of Witchcraft's Great Sabbats), McCaskill went for a meal at his grandmother's house with his parents. He began acting strangely the minute they returned home at Scotland Street, where they'd lived, without undue incident, for 14 years.

He had been reading a book about 'Devil Worship' when he appeared before his mother in the kitchen, told her he was Lucifer, and tried to kiss her. She told him 'not to be silly' and sent him away.

Later however, he reappeared in the kitchen in an agitated state and ordered his parents to leave the house. He then demanded the car keys from his father and when he refused he became 'infuriated.'

29th October, 1998. New Town, Edinburgh, Scotland.
'THE TIMES'

African Football Team Wiped Out By Witchcraft?

One of the more bizarre accusations levelled at an opposing football side (and if you listen to the merest nanosecond to the bitter, twisted rumblings of Alex 'Demento' Ferguson, you'll be well aware that they can be pretty outlandish), was issued by officials and supporters of Bena Tshadi, in a southern province of the Congo. During a hard-fought game with a side from the nearby village of Basangana, and with the score poised at 1:1, a bolt of lightning struck and instantly killed all eleven members of the Basanganian team, but leaving the entire home team completely unscathed.



Many of the locals at the African village where the game was played were quick to blame the forces of darkness for the tragedy. Dozens of spectators were injured, most of them had been standing on the touchline. They suffered burns, but none of the injuries turned out to be life-threatening.

A local newspaper reported that "lightning killed, at a stroke eleven young people aged between 20 and 35 years of

age during a football match. The athletes from Basangana curiously came out of this catastrophe unscathed.

'The exact nature of the lightning has divided the population in this region for its use of fetishes in football.' Witchcraft is often blamed throughout west and central Africa to explain natural phenomena and sudden bouts of illness.

Sorcery is said to be frequently used in an attempt to influence football matches.

Meteorologists were equally quick to point out that lightning can have dramatically different effects over just a few feet. Whether a person in the vicinity of a lightning strike is killed or else survives completely unharmed depends on the electrical conductivity of the ground and the distance between strike and its victim.

It is possible that the members of the unfortunate team were all on one half of the pitch, which may have been wetter than the other part.

A bit of a stretch, credulity-wise, methinks....

But I guess it just about beats blaming Witchcraft.

The most probable explanation though is a marked difference in the insulating properties of the player's boots. The survivor's could have been wearing boots with thicker rubber soles.

No Pardon For Dead Witches

That (ahem) paragon of truth and justice Mr Jack Straw, not content with back heeling any hope of a fresh inquiry into the Hillsborough Disaster, (and thereby contributing to a cover-up that has a damn sight more basis in reality than any UFO/US government conspiracy), he has now decided to similarly refuse to pardon the infamous Witches of Pendle, hanged in 1612.

The alleged Witches were executed at Lancaster Castle after teeth that were said to have been stolen from the graves of the recently dead were found in their homes.

Local Labour MP Gordon Prentice has been campaigning for Mr Straw to recommend a posthumous pardon (though a fat lot of good it would do them).

In the last week of October however, the Home Office turned him down flat, issuing a statement that said; 'The Pendle Witches were convicted according to the law at the time, harsh though it seems by modern standards.

'The Home Secretary would intervene only if alter evidence proved conclusively that the women did not commit the crimes.'

Mr Prentice was moved to counter; 'It was a terrible miscarriage of justice. It's a pity we cannot right a wrong.'

(Oh, but righting wrongs, Mr Prentice...Wouldn't that set a dangerous precedent for those in power? - Cynical Ed)

1st November, 1998. Lancaster, Lancashire. 'THE SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** And talking about injustices, both ancient and modern, how about this for an absurdity....

Children across Ireland who were planning on celebrating last Halloween, (and, one presumes, all the Halloween's to come), by dressing as Witches were warned that they could actually face imprisonment.

They could be prosecuted under a law dating back 260 years. Mary Hanafin, of the Flanna Fail Party, was quoted as saying; "Since a legal change in 1736, no one can now be convicted of actually being a Witch...However, the statute book still lists pretence to be a Witch as an offence.' 30th October, 1998. Ireland. 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

*** Meanwhile, a man claiming to be a genuine Warlock, raped a total of 203 women in a bid to boost his magic powers...

Indonesian Parimpunan Harahap, 33, told police that he had married some victims and planned to rape a total of 315.

It is not recorded what sentence was passed upon Parimpunan, but another self-styled sorcerer was sentenced to death the previous April for actually killing 42 women in a bid to increase his powers.

5th November, 1998. Indonesia. 'SUNDAYMANC.'

*** And in fact, the previous July, police in Hong Kong were said to have been hunting a 'mysterious Witchdoctor' who was believed to have been responsible for the deaths of five women.

They launched their search after a wealthy businessman's wife, two teenagers and two others were found dead in a flat soon after large sums of money had been withdrawn from their respective bank accounts.

Police also found some unusual implements associated with Black Magic rituals, and had deduced that the women involved all took a dose of poison.

27th July, 1998. Hong Kong, China. 'DAILY EXPRESS.'

*** Another African Witchdoctor was charged with a double murder, after one of his spells apparently failed to work.

The traditional herbalist who hails from Liberia, was said to have cast a spell on two men who requested that he make them both 'bulletproof.'

He decided to test the incantation to see it had been efficacious, by shooting at his clients...Somewhat predictably, the spell failed hopelessly, and both men died.

25th July, 1998. Liberia, Africa. 'THE WEEKLY NEWS'

*** Meanwhile, a priest named Marcello Crespit was jailed for two days for having the temerity to writing a curse on a parking-fine cheque in Sicily.

Strangely enough, the very next day, the police officer who had booked the cleric broke his leg!!!

30th August, 1998. Sicily, Italy. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** Finally, for this issue at least, a yacht that ran aground after a British woman was swept overboard aboard and drowned was later stripped by looters as it lay on a New Zealand beach on November 18th.

The sense of outrage and shame swept the small communities around Great Exhibition Bay, near the country's northernmost tip, after the thieves had the bad sense to violate a *tapu*, or sanctification, invoked by local Maori religious leaders.

The *tapu* declared the area of the beach to be sacred in memory of Anita Dean, 52, meaning intruders were forbidden to set foot there on pain of incurring a traditional curse.

19th November, 1998. 'THE TIMES' Great Exhibition Bay, New Zealand

Vampires On The Prowl Once More

A new series of studies being carried out in deepest, darkest Romania, has reached the tentative conclusion that the Vampire legend may have at their root, reports from superstitious folk confronted by people who had been bitten by rabid dogs.

Studies of the ancient medical records of alleged Vampire attacks in that Demon-haunted corner of the world apparently showed symptoms that were identical to those of the killer disease rabies.

22nd September, 1998. Transylvania, Romania 'DAILY EXPRESS'

*** Certainly not suffering from rabies however, was a knifeman who slashed the throats of an unknown number of tramps, killing at least one, who, when he was eventually arrested by police, told the astonished officers that he was a 2,000-year-old Vampire...



Joshua Rudiger, 21, claimed that he had to drink his victim's blood to remain young. He scrawled the Chinese word for death in blood on pavements after the attacks in San Francisco, USA.

11th November, 1998. San Francisco, USA. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

The Cosmic Joker's Latest Pranks

FRIDAY THE 13TH PART X

That very mention of that date, (aside from conjuring up images of an indestructible, homicidal madman, terrorising Camp Crystal Lake, in a set of overalls and a hockey mask) is enough to strike a bolt of superstitious fear through even the most sceptical of realists. And with good reason, if the following litany of disaster is anything to go by....

1998 contained more than the usual quota of Friday the 13th's. Three, in fact.

The last time that had occurred was back in 1987, the year of the Zeebrugge tragedy, the Hungerford shootings, the King's Cross fire, and the Great (Michael Fish, notwithstanding) Storm.

1998, on the other hand, will be remembered for Clinton's impression of Rambo in the Middle East, Russia's freefall into political and economic chaos, Kosovo on the brink of all-out war, India and Pakistan testing nuclear weapons and sparking another arms race, the Omagh bomb and North Korea just itching to have a go at its US-backed neighbour....

So, no change there, then.

But, if you want some examples of the kind of thing the numerologists would have us believe, let me run just a few of these right by you...

Bob Renphrey has had a whole catalogue of personal disasters. In recent years, Mr Renphrey, who hails from Rhyl, North Wales, and is aged 71, has marked (if that's the right word) the day having a total of five car crashes, getting himself run over by a bike, falling into a river, crashing through a glass door and being made redundant from his job.

His wife, Betty, has not exactly been immune to the spell of ill luck, either. She's fallen down stairs and been hit by a flying piece of stray guttering. That's bad, What was even worse was the fact that three years ago, she wound up in hospital after Bob accidentally hit her in the face with a stick he was throwing for their dog to fetch.

*** Meanwhile, Dave Warren got himself into such a state about the dreaded date that he took out a £25,000 insurance policy back in 1969, just in case anything went wrong.

You may think he had good reason to be cautious...

On the two previous Friday the 13ths, he'd been struck by lightning while in a plane and then his car caught fire. On the latest occasion however, he was more than happy to lose his measly £10 premium.

*** Health authority studies have shown that the casualty rate on the M25 Motorway soared by a whopping 50 per cent on five out of six Friday 13ths that they thought to monitor, despite the fact that thousands of superstitious motorists elect to stay off the roads.

*** Long-suffering England cricket fans will have a less-than-fond recollection of Friday, August 13th, 1976, when (just for a change) the West Indies rattled up a record first innings score of 687-8 score at The Oval.

On the same day, over in New York, Daz Baxter was planning to spend all day in bed such was his trepidation of the approach of *that* date....

Unfortunately for him, the floorboards of his tenement building were rotten through, and he was sent crashing down six floors to his death, still clutching his (ahem) 'lucky' rabbit's foot.

*** One of the most famous Friday the 13th stories of course, concerns the now infamous 1970 Apollo 13 space mission which was launched at (amazingly enough) 13:13 on Site 39 (3 x 13). The mission had to be aborted two days later, on Friday, April 13th.

That same year, on Friday November 13th, more than 300,000 people died as a cyclone devastated Pakistan.

*** Friday February 13th, 1987, coincided with a full moon and drove Robert Bullard, 21, to a suicide attempt. He duly placed his head inside a gas oven, but succeeded only in causing an explosion which resulted in £35,000 damage and injured his mother and a policeman.

Ironically enough, Robert emerged entirely unscathed., Elsewhere, Recorder Thomas Field-Fisher QC was sitting in court in his civilian clothes...Having suffered the misfortune of having his wig and gown stolen.

*** The pilot of a Boeing 747 carrying more than 300 passengers from London to Washington was forced to abandon its journey and return back to Heathrow when it suffered a bout of engine trouble over the mid-Atlantic.

This occurred twice, on Friday October, 13th

*** Twelve people were killed and crocodiles and snakes escaped from Munich Zoo when a series of freak hailstorms hit Germany on Friday, July 13th, 1984. One man died of shock as he bore witness to his house being systematically destroyed.

*** As a rule, new Royal Navy ships never embark upon their maiden journeys on a Friday, ever since one such vessel sailed away in 1796 and was never heard from again. Its construction had started on Friday 13th. Its name was HMS Friday!!!

*** Britain's unluckiest woman (no, not Robin Cook's missus), certainly never looks forward to *that* most inauspicious of dates....

She very nearly died of whooping cough and choked on a clothes peg as a baby, has managed a total of eight car accidents in one journey, and escaped five house fires.

Three weeks before her wedding, the church where she was getting married burned down, and she was mugged on her subsequent honeymoon.

'The worst thing that's happened to actually me on Friday 13th cutting my finger peeling vegetables,' stated Marie, of Skelmersdale.

'But you never know, do you?'

According to a recent survey, an astonishing 37 per cent of people in this country, supposedly renowned for their penchant for hard-headed realism, are wary of tempting fate by walking under ladders, 20 per cent of women always carry a good luck charm and 39 per cent touch wood to ensure good fortune.

But, recent articles in the press have strongly indicated that the superstition about the number 13 in general, and in Friday 13th in particular, is more widespread than any other.

One American economist alleges that Triskaidekaphobia (the official name for fear of all things thirteen-ish) costs the United States a billion dollars a year due to people staying off work, cancelling plane and train journeys and putting off important business decisions.

In Christian culture, the superstition regarding the dreaded date has its origins firmly fixed in the story of the Last Supper and the number of people present at that fateful meal.

Fear of such dates only refer back to the Middle Ages however, and fear of 13 itself is considerably older than these Biblical reference points.

Thousands of years earlier in time, the ancient Babylonians had already taken to regarding the number with a dark sense of foreboding. They inaugurated the concept of the 12 signs of the Zodiac and felt that it was of paramount importance to keep the Sun distinct from them.

Greek mathematicians were also more than aware of the divine qualities of the number 12; its divisibility without remainder by 2, 3, 4 and 6 made it a good solid base for monetary calculations (which is why, incidentally, we wound up with an old shilling divided into twelve pence).

Thirteen, on the other hand, was seen as being favoured with properties that were the exact opposite...It was deemed as an 'ugly number' that spoiled the perfection of 12.

In old Norse mythology, there exists the saga of a banquet of a dozen gods in Valhalla at which Loki, god of Mischief, turned up as an uninvited guest, his presence making up the number 13. The ill fortune that followed resulted in the death of another of the guests.

In 19th century France, such dinner party disasters were avoided by the formation of a society called the Quatorziennes - Fourteenths - who acted as a sort of rent-a-guest at short notice for any dinners or other formal occasions at which the ill-omened 13 were present.

In 1967, a group of Americans launched a campaign aimed at ridding the country of all such 'superstitious nonsense.' Their first act was to rent a plot of land exactly 13 feet long for the princely sum of 13 cents a month.

Their efforts seem, however, to have been entirely doomed to failure....

Anyone watching the construction of the new American Citibank in the heart of London's Docklands, will almost certainly have noticed the fact that the floors of the vast concrete superstructure as the building went up were labelled from one to twelve, then "12+1" and 14.

All such superstition is, as any rationalist will likely announce from the rooftops to the assembled dunderheads looking up to them for answers, complete and utter hokum. The less-cynical however, would point to the somewhat unnerving fact that the number which is has been least frequently drawn in the National Lottery, is not, as you might at first suspect; 13, but 39 - which, curiously enough, just happens to be equal to three times 13!!!

Perhaps the strangest thing of all about Friday the 13th, however, is that the thirteenth of a month is actually more likely to fall on a Friday than on any other day of the week. This can be shown, according to numerologists, by looking at the way the calendar works, with a Leap Year every fourth year, except in the years ending in 00, unless the two figures before the 00 are divisible by four, you can work out that there are exactly 146,097 days in every four hundred years.

And since 146,097 is divisible by seven, that means that 400 years fill an exact number of weeks, so always return to the same day they started (therefore January 1st, 2400, will be on a Saturday, just like January 1st, 2000).

Now, 400 years contains 4,800 months, and 4,800 13ths of the month. And if you work out what days of the week those 4,800 thirteenthths fall on, you find the disconcerting fact that 688 of them occur on a Friday, which is more than any other day of the week.

There's no real reason why this should happen. I guess you can simply put it down to another dose of thirteeny bad luck...

7th November, 1998. General 'TAKE A BREAK MAGAZINE' 'DAILY EXPRESS'

'THE RMS TITANIC' SINKS AGAIN

One of the best examples of the eternally capricious nature of Mr Cosmic Joker Esq, came courtesy of the 'prank' played upon Paul Henshall, of the village of Matlock Bath, Derbyshire.

He had constructed a 17ft long model of the 'Titanic,' replete with a set of working funnels, 1,300 lights and a total of 2,000 soldered connections.

The model had won the Arkwright Cup, awarded since 1903, for the best display at the annual illuminations, and had been attracting crowds of up to 15,000 people every Saturday and Sunday night since her launch in August of this year. The banks of the River Derwent were thronged with delighted onlookers as the ship sailed along the placid dead calm of the River Derwent, with a polystyrene iceberg attached for dramatic effect.

Amazingly, the model 'Titanic,' like her real-life counterpart, was sent to her doom whilst her nemesis, the iceberg, survived unscathed....

After a spell of excessively heavy rain, the ship was capsized and sank straight to the bottom of the swollen river.

Mr Henshall, 43, had attempted a salvage operation, but his bid to 'Raise The Titanic' was hampered by a combination of muddy water and swirling torrent. He was quoted as saying; 'The last I saw of her she was upside

down in the water on Friday night. It was far too rough for me to attempt to go out and get her.'

27th October, 1998. Matlock Bath. River Derwent, Derbyshire 'THE TIMES'

Weird Deaths

Killer Joss-Sticks, Licked By Liquor, Attack Of The Giant Boobs, And A Couple Of Decidedly Sticky-Endings



We kick off this round-up of the bizarre check-outs with the case of Hans Peder, who somehow managed, whilst indulging in a spot of Do-It-Yourself, to accidentally suffocate himself by entangling himself up in an enormous strip of wallpaper...

A friend discovered the tragically unlucky man's body later that same day.

6th September, 1998. Salzburg, Austria. 'LIVERPOOL ECHO.'

*** A batch of tainted liquor served up at a village party succeeded in killing 45 people, blinded 25, and put at least 100 others in hospital in south India.

The drink, believed to be a locally made arrack laced with wood spirit, added to make it more potent, was purchased from a shop in Paruveedhi, Tamil Nadu and served to a large gathering of party-goers.

Eight people were subsequently arrested for manufacturing and selling the deadly liquor, and at least fifty policemen were suspended after the incident.

28th August, 1998. Paruveedhi, India. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** And before you read this little snippet, a word of warning; Perhaps you should consider refraining from chow-de-dowing for a little while, first.

You'll thank me, I'm sure.

In Tampa, Florida, USA, a miserly individual by the name of Gil Sarentis accidentally flushed £25 down the toilet, and

wound up drowning in 1,600 gallons of raw sewage as he desperately attempted to retrieve it.

Gil, 52, fell face down in the, er, shit, after becoming overcome by the methane fumes when he opened up his septic tank.

30th August, 1998. Tampa Florida, USA. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD.'

*** A couple making love in a cemetery (always a less than wise move, you may feel. It feels like its sorely tempting fate to go messing round such sacred places, somehow), weren't killed exactly, but suffered pretty bad injuries after a gravestone fell on top of them.

The 25-year-old woman, who received cuts and bruises, scrambled free and managed to run half a mile to a public phone box to call the emergency services for her stricken boyfriend.

When the firemen duly arrived at Manchester's Southern Cemetery, they found her 27-year-old partner wearing, embarrassingly enough, a skirt and white silk stockings, trapped under a gravestone.

A member of the fire brigade was quoted as saying; 'Some of the lads thought it was a bit of a wind-up, but when we found the man and saw how much pain he was in, we quickly got to work to free him.'

It took five firemen from Moss Side Fire Station to lift the tombstone. The man was treated in the cemetery before being transferred to South Manchester Hospital.

He was later discharged with head injuries.

24th August, 1998. South Manchester. 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** Meanwhile, over in Portugal, a group of dance students were forced to watch in a kind of helpless sense of horror as their teacher plummeted to her death.

She had been trying to demonstrate the correct way to do a tango step, and so wrapped up in enthusiasm was she that the poor woman danced right on out of the fifth-floor studio window. She died instantly.

6th August, 1998. Lisbon, Portugal. 'DAILYSLUR'

*** A stripper with a massive 52-inch bust apparently rolled over in her sleep one night, and succeeded somehow in smothering her husband to death.

The sense of irony was heightened here when it was later revealed that the deceased, Lionel Reed, 33, had actively encouraged his wife to have her already large er, (sexism alert) 'gazanga's' made even bigger by having them inserted with silicone implants.

'He loved my breasts, the distraught 28-year-old was later moved to tell the assembled members of the press. She discovered the body of her suffocated husband trapped under her when she woke.

'I wish I had never had those implants,' she confessed.

Doctors who examined deep-sleeper Lionel's body later calculated that it took him three minutes to be thoroughly stifled by his wife's breasts. And he lay under her for about three hours before she was made aware of the awful truth. The official cause of death was given as 'suffocation.' Medical aide Joseph Forte(!) said; 'He was snuffed out when her breasts pinned him down. He never knew what hit him.'

A so-called friend probably summed up the way most heterosexual males will doubtless react when he said; 'It is a tragic waste, but it's not a bad way to go.'

25th October, 1998. Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA. 'NEWS OF THE WORLD'

*** It might sound like the stuff of far-fetched Faerie-Tale, but a total of six people were killed when a series of three 80ft Joss Sticks suddenly collapsed during a ceremony near Bangkok, Thailand.

3rd November, 1998. Bangkok, Thailand. 'DAILYSLUR'

*** And a fireworks 'expert' was killed as he tried to destroy a batch of spent fireworks in an incinerator.

Michael Mason, 53, who used to organise displays professionally, was caught up in an explosion as he attempted to shut the incinerator door at his woodyard near Knaresborough, North Yorkshire.

9th November, 1998. Knaresborough, North Yorkshire. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

*** And finally, (as all the best newscasters say, when they're nearing the end of their bulletin), a police marksman shot dead a man who had locked himself out of his home after his girlfriend reported an armed burglary in progress.

Michael Fitzgerald, 32, was mistaken for a burglar after his girlfriend, Melanie Jay, reported seeing legs disappear through the kitchen window and did not recognise him. It later emerged that Mr Fitzgerald, an unemployed railway worker, had left his house keys in a jacket in a pub.

Police evacuated nearby homes after being told that the man had also been seen with a gun. Marksmen surrounding Mr Fitzgerald's home in Bedford, last February, saw him lean out of a window, brandishing a gun.

An inquest was told that officers had spent 90 minutes trying to talk to Mr Fitzgerald on the phone. But, when he leapt from the window and pointed the gun, one policeman had opened fire. Mr Fitzgerald's weapon turned out to be a replica Colt 45 pistol.

23rd November, 1998. Bedfordshire. 'THE TIMES'

The Really Bad Idea Department Part II

The decidedly bizarre custom of hurling stones at each other during a festival in Madhya Pradesh, northern India, perhaps not too surprisingly, injured about 800 people, 25 critically.

Villagers chuck stones and avuse a local river in an attempt to secure a 'lucky' tree at a shrine during the Gotmar Festival.

Amazingly, suffering an injury is considered to be a good omen...Which is just as well, really.

24th August, 1998. Madhya Pradesh, northern India. 'THE TIMES'

*** A pregnant woman visiting her local maternity unit in Retford, used a small whisky bottle for her urine sample.

On the way she called at a public lavatory and decided to leave the sample outside the cubicle. When she came out the bottle had been stolen.

'I just hope that whoever took it used a bit of soda water to wash it down,' she later remarked.

September, 1998. Retford. 'THE VIRGINIAN MAGAZINE'

*** And two men had their left arms quite literally tugged out of their sockets during a mass tug-of-war contest in Taiwan.

They'd wrapped the rope around their arms in order to secure a better grip, but with a total of 1,600 people pulling, the strain inevitably proved to be too much.

September, 1998. Taiwan. 'THE VIRGINIAN'

*** The mayor of West Haven, Connecticut, USA, has elected to pull the plug on a flashing sign that warned local people to keep the noise levels down on the beach...It was too loud!!!

24th June, 1998. Connecticut, USA. 'LIVERPOOLECHO'

*** Ever thought you were in the wrong job?

Here's someone who may be forgiven for thinking jus tthat. Since being appointed safety officer for Cardiff Council, David Spear has been knocked down by a police car, run

over by a fire engine, had his neck broken in an ambulance crash and had his hand crushed by a dustbin lorry...

September, 1998. Cardiff, Wales. 'THE VIRGINIAN'

*** And to wind-up this section, two crooks managed to break out of a Brazilian jail and on impulse, hailed a passing taxi to complete their getaway.

Unfortunately for them, however, the driver just happened to be one of their jailers earning some extra cash...He drove them straight back to prison, free of charge!!!

1st August, 1998. Brazil. 'THE WEEKLY NEWS'

WHEN FATE TURNS ITS BACK...

Special Constable Stewart Turnbull was left feeling highly embarrassed when he thought he'd caught a burglar red-handed, only to discover that it was in fact a cardboard cut-out of Angus Deayton.

He was on patrol in Billinghamurst, West Sussex, when he spotted a 'man' in a bookshop window. He called for back-up, but when officers shone a torch through the window, they saw it was nothing other than a life-size model of the John Cleese wannabe from 'HAVE I GOT NEWS FOR YOU.'

6th September, 1998. Billinghamurst, West Sussex. 'DAILY MANC'

*** And another bunch of police officers were called to a bank robbery, only to discover that in fact, it was a troupe of mime artists cashing a cheque.

The group, called Squ-Wiph, had their faces brightly painted and were wearing dark suits to appear at an arts festival in Brighton.

11th May, 1998. Brighton. 'DAILY MAIL'

*** A cab driver by the name of Francesco Monetti, 54, saved for 25 long years to build his wife her dream house. But just as builders were in the process of laying the last few bricks, council workers arrived on the scene and promptly set about knocking it down because it was a whopping big *three* feet out of line.

10th November, 1998. Salerno, Italy. 'DAILY SLUR'

...And A Couple Of Examples Of When Fate Smiles Down

A suicide wannabe somehow managed to escape with little more than minor injuries when he fell from a fourth-floor window into a passing truck loaded with, of all things, mattresses. 'God must want me to live,' Thomas Benja, 46, a butcher from Rio de Janeiro, was quoted as saying on his way out of the casualty department...

12th June, 1998. Rio de Janeiro. 'DAILY SLUR'

*** And an unemployed man who decided to spend his very last pound on a lucky dip lottery ticket rather than pig out on a pie, won £3,086,921. John Roberts, 30, of Edinburgh, was gobsmacked, to say the least.

18th November, 1998. Edinburgh, Scotland. 'DAILY MANC'

A Miscellany Of Weirdness

A type of 'killer seaweed' that has been accidentally released by man is apparently spreading through the Mediterranean at the rate of more than 10 acres a day, according to scientific reports that describe the colonising plant as a 'major biological invasion.'

The alga, *Caulerpa taxifolia*, was first detected in the Mediterranean in 1984 and has since multiplied at an astonishing rate, competing with indigenous species, threatening marine fauna and affecting some 50 mile sof coastline, principally between Toulon in France and Genoa in Italy.

By the start of 1997, the seaweed had invaded an estimated 7,400 acres. A year later, it had spread to 10,600 acres, according to the annual report of the French Marine Environmental Laboratory. The *Caulerpa* suffocates and crowds out other species and appears to be toxic to many Mediterranean creatures, although it is (small mercy's and all that) thankfully perfectly harmless to swimmers. Sea urchins were found to be prefer eating plastic and their own waste than ingesting the seaweed.

A publicity drive has been launched to draw attention to the threat and try to prevent the alga from being spread further by trawlers, boat anchors and diving equipment.

Some 40,000 brochures have been distributed in six languages to fishermen, yachtsmen and divers, with a telephone numbers to call if they spot a fresh colony.

Scientists at Nice are working on a biological solution by introducing Caribbean slugs which feed on the alga.

The seaweed is popular in aquariums because of its rapid growth rate, fern-like fronds and attractive fluorescent green colour. Its origin has long been the source of argument among environmentalists, but now a biologist claims to have established genetic proof that the seaweed was accidentally introduced from an aquarium.

The alga, common in tropical waters, was first found in the Mediterranean near the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco. Molecular analysis 'has demonstrated beyond any doubt that the Mediterranean *Caulerpa* is genetically identical to the colony cultivated in aquariums in Western Europe since the start of the 1970's,' according to Olivier Jousson of the University of Geneva.

He said that the alga represented a 'major biological invasion' and was 'the first example of the introduction into the natural world of a species selected in an aquarium.'

27th October, 1998. Mediterranean. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

THE TUNNEL VISION OF THE 'HUMAN MOLE'

Nearly 6,000 people crowded into the subterranean labyrinth last September in a bid to catch a first-hand glimpse of one of the most enduring of Merseyside's many mysteries.

The Edge Hill Tunnels were opened to members of the public for the last time before contractors start extensive structural and refurbishment work at the famous site. They are expected to be closed for up to two years.

Historian Gabriel Mules eventually hopes to turn the tunnels, built by the local eccentric Joseph Williamson, into a leading tourist attraction.

As the founder of the Joseph Williamson Society he has managed to raise £1 million for the work and is starting the refurbishment with the Stable Yard site, in Oxford Street, Edge Hill.

Williamson himself was born into poverty in Warrington, in 1769, and moved to Liverpool at the age of 11 with only a few shillings and a small trunk numbered amongst his possessions.

He soon found a job with tobacco merchant Thomas Moss Tate, married Tate's daughter, Elizabeth, in the early 1800's, and eventually took over the company. He retired

'He lives in a huge, underground hacienda 675 miles west of Florianopolis, and about 450 miles north west of Buenos Aires. He is accompanied by two doubles.

'I don't believe the British lie that Hitler is dead. I am an American with all my heart and soul, and hope that you will investigate this claim at once.'

In July, 1947, (a month or so after the world had had its first taste of Flying Saucer-mania), a woman passenger allegedly spotted Hitler in a plane flying from Spain to the US.

She phoned the FBI on her arrival at her destination to report that *'Hitler seemed very well-to-do. He told me he owned a very large property.*

'He was carrying two large leather suitcases and two baskets.'

Yet another file, dated September 1950, asserts that the former Nazi leader was earning a living as a knife grinder in the US state of Montana.

'Hitler wanders through lonely country areas grinding lawn mower blades. He claims to be a war veteran with a small pension and sleeps at night mostly in sheds or barns.'

In the previous month, the letter adds, Hitler spent two nights in a barn in the immediate area of the informant's home.

The FBI wrote back telling him to keep Hitler under constant surveillance and keep reporting back.

Not a single one of these literally hundreds of accounts could shake the majority of people's conviction that Hitler had died on April 30th, 1945, together with his mistress Eva Braun.

10th July, 1998. General 'DAILYMAIL'

ASTRONOMICAL ANOMALIES

Scientists attempting to solve the mystery of the origin of life on Planet Earth have come up with the theory that the initial sparks of life may have, in effect hitched a ride from the stars.

To put it simply, the organic molecules that provide the 'building blocks' of nature, arrived on passing comets and meteorites.

British professor James Hough, one of the scientists heading the research team, was quoted as saying; *'This is one of the most amazing discoveries. It is very exciting.*

'The building blocks that make us hitched a ride. They weren't deliberately focused on Earth, but it seemed like an attractive place to land.

'They came down with some force and the Earth suffered tremendously.'

The evidence for this astonishing claim is said to lie in deep space in a cloud of gas 1,500 light years away and in a meteorite which fell to Earth in Victoria, Australia, nearly 30 years ago.

Last year (1997), scientists in Arizona State University, USA, found clues in the Murchison Meteorite, as it became known, showing one form of organic molecules existed before life began on Earth, and may have been present in the material from which the Solar System was formed.

Now astronomers using the Anglo-Australian telescope at Sliding Spring Mountain in New South Wales, have discovered a link in the Great Nebula, in the constellation of Orion, a star birthplace 1,500 light years away.

Professor Hough, who hails from the University of Hertfordshire, was further quoted as saying; *'We know stars are being formed here, and we also know that organic molecules are present.*

'This region may well be similar to the region in which our own Solar System formed.'

The upshot of all that scientific jargon is this; Comets and meteorites carrying tiny fragments of organic matter, sped through space at tens of thousands of miles a second to quite literally blitz the Earth some three and a half billion years ago.

They developed into the first primitive forms of life - the origins of all living creatures.

The new findings will hopefully assist in solving the mystery about the make-up of living things that has befuddled scientists for over 150 years.

31st July, 1998. General 'DAILYMANC'

*** A giant solar storm reportedly collided with the Earth's magnetic field, and threatened to disrupt power supplies and communications around the world last August (1997).

In the event, nothing too untoward seemed to have occurred, but with these winds blowing at more than a million miles per hour, it was little wonder that there were certain scientists who warned that the phenomena could have caused a ferocious geomagnetic storm *'bombarding the planet with electrically-charged particles.'*

The storm originated with a major eruption on the surface of the Sun, the after-effects of which hit the Earth's magnetic field at about 8am GMT on Wednesday, 26th August, according to the US Geological Survey.

28th August, 1998. General 'DAILYMAIL'

*** It has recently been discovered that two of Jupiter's moons have hidden salty oceans that could, conceivably, contain extraterrestrial lifeforms.

Information previously sent back to Earth by the Galileo spacecraft had already led scientists to conclude that one of these moons, Europa, may well have an ocean of slushy water just below its surface. But these new findings seem to indicate that the second moon, Callisto, may be similarly blessed.

Up until now, Callisto was thought to be made up of a combination of solid rock and ice. However, the scientific team led by Krishnan Khurana, of the University of California, in Los Angeles, USA, has stated that both moons exhibited an effect on Jupiter's magnetic field that was consistent with oceans kept liquid by an anti-freeze of salts or ammonia.

Water, is of course, the single most important ingredient for life as we know it, so therefore, the discovery has increased the chances that some form of life may be present on Callisto. Even if it is only microscopic.

22nd October, 1998 'THE TIMES'

*** It may sound like something out of a children's fairy tale at first reading, ('Chicken Little,' immediately springs to mind - Ed), but according to those all-knowing scientists, the sky is actually in the process of shrinking.

Yeah. You heard that right.

Shrinking.

Apparently, this is nothing new. It's part of an ongoing phenomenon that has been recorded since 1958. About five miles of sky have been lost since that date, and 'the experts' have deduced that the figure may well double over the course of the next century.

Researchers studying the Earth's upper atmosphere, 56 miles up, said that the contraction is almost certainly connected to the Greenhouse Effect. Somewhat un reassuringly, they were quick to dispell any fears that such an eating up of the sky, (and that's an image that has disconcerting echoes of the 'reality chompers' in Stephen King's 'THE LANGOLIERS'), holds any degree danger for the people of Earth.

'Nothing nasty is going to happen,' claimed Dr Martin Jarvis, of the British Antarctic Survey based in Cambridge.

the age of 50, a wealthy man, and embarked upon on his life's work from his home in Mason Street, Edge Hill. Why Williamson developed his passion for tunnels remains a mystery, but he is credited with running the first ever job creation scheme, as the army of men he employed to dig them were jobless soldiers returning home from the Napoleonic Wars. His grateful employees dubbed him the King or the Mole of Edge Hill.

The entrance to his underground world was the cellar of his home. It eventually cost him £100,000 and the extensive maze did not follow any particular pattern. Some of the tunnels are only a few feet high, but others, like the one nicknamed the Banqueting Hall, are huge caverns. But Gabriel Mules is of the opinion that some of the excavations were made for a particular reason.

'There is one from Mason Street, right up to St Mary's Church in Mount Vernon. Williamson owned a pew there,' Mr Mules told local reporters.

'I remember, just after the war, when I was a child, we would play in the tunnels by Edge Hill Station and the railwaymen would say "Watch out, or the Mad Mole Will get yer!!!" I think he was an amazing man. He stayed in Liverpool and spent his money on the people. He was a great benefactor for the poor of Liverpool and left this amazing legacy.'

The first stage of work on the tunnels will include a visitor's centre. Once that is in place, Mr Mules hopes to bid for lottery funding to develop their potential even further.

14th September, 1998. Edge Hill, Liverpool 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

THE EASTER ISLAND MYSTERY SOLVED?

Clues to the disappearance of the ancient civilisation responsible for the building of Easter Island's famous 100-ton statues lie in the island's fields, according to a group of American archaeologists.



The theory goes that the population suffered some sort of unspecified environmental disaster, which, the scientists say, could well prove to be a prophetic parable for our own uncertain times.

Two years ago, Ohio archaeologists working for the US Earthwatch Foundation realised that what looked like

natural rock deposits on Easter Island, were actually created by 17th Century farmers. The rocks were used as mulch, to conserve moisture in the soil.

Now the team in linking development in farming technology with shifts in the social hierarchy and a depletion of resources. This, they claim, is what was ultimately responsible for the catastrophic population decline.

As the fields spread, trees were felled, and the ever increasing deforestation led to soil erosion.

Eventually, this caused chronic food shortages on the isolated island, creating hunger and civil unrest.

Easter Island has long been the subject of intense scientific controversy ever since Dutch explorers first arrived there on Easter Day, 1722, and found a barbarous community living among the great statues. The mystery has always been, what happened to the obviously sophisticated society that had originally created the statues.

August, 1998. Easter Island 'FOCUS MAGAZINE'

LEGENDS OF THE FUEHRER

According to recently released FBI files, the discovery of a body in Adolf Hitler's private bunker in the dying days of World War Two, was not enough to convince them totally that the 'Monster' was truly dead.

In fact, the investigators were so concerned that he may have made good his escape from Berlin, that they maintained an active file on him right up until 1972.

During that time federal agents managed to build up a record of over 700 'Hitler sightings' from all over the world.

File No 105-410, compiled in September, 1945, contains a report from an informant claiming that Hitler landed by U-boat in Argentina, accompanied by two women.

It states; *'One and a half weeks after the fall of Berlin, two German U-boats approached the Gulf of San Matias on the south Argentine coast at 11 am.*

'Light signals from the island indicated to the crew that it would be possible to land unseen. Hitler left the second U-boat with two women, a doctor and several heavily-armed bodyguards.

'The fifty-strong Hitler party was welcomed on land by six Argentine officials and the luggage was loaded on mules. Hitler is said to have paid \$15,000 US Dollars in cash as hush money.'

And then, in a file dated November, 1945, another informant said that he had 'certain knowledge' that the Fuehrer was staying on a ranch in New Mexico after landing by sea in California.

Yet, in that same month, there is a reported Hitler sighting smack in the middle of downtown New York.

'It makes sense. New York is the easiest city in the world for him to go underground,' this particular informant wrote.

FBI boss J. Edgar Hoover took the account seriously enough to write a personal letter of thanks and issued an invitation for the informant to drop on in for a drink and a chat anytime he pleased.

A file from November, 1946, contains a letter from a man whose mother saw Hitler dressed in non-descript working clothes in the centre of New York.

'My mother clearly identified him standing at the entrance to the subway on the corner of Houston Street and Bowery,' the unnamed man later wrote.

'My mother knows Hitler from Europe.'

Another file from that same month is based on a somewhat dramatic claim that Hitler is still living in an underground ranch somewhere in Argentina.

'The change though is a dramatic reminder that Global Warming is having profound consequences.'

The new study, which probed 32 years of data gathered at the Antarctic peninsula and the Falkland Islands, reveals for the first time that the shrinkage is global. The effect is believed to be the result of carbon dioxide build up. At lower altitudes the gas acts like a blanket, causing the Earth to heat up. This is because it absorbs infra-red rays and reflects some of them back down on to Earth.

But when the carbon-dioxide accumulates in the thermosphere, the gas siphons heat away, absorbing infra-red and reflecting much of it back to space, where it is lost. As a result, it cools, and the pressure then drops, which causes the ionosphere to shrink.

Variations in the thermosphere can be up to 100 times greater than at ground level, and it can therefore be used as a sensitive litmus test of global change.

17th September, 1998. 'THE TIMES'

WHEN NIGHT BECOMES DAY

Plans were afoot last November (1998), to launch a brand new 'Moon' into the heavens, in what is being seen as the first step towards making the very concept of darkness as obsolete as a New Labour pre-election promise.

This 'new Moon' will be up to five times as bright as the old Full Moon, and it was set to cast its cold, silvery light over a total of 19 selected cities across the Northern Hemisphere including Kiev, Brussels, London, Quebec and Seattle.

It was only due to last for the one night, making 16 orbits of the Earth and then fall into the atmosphere and burn up. The 'Moon' has been christened with the name Znamya 2.5 and is a 25-metre, round, metallic mirror, to be unfurled at the very last minute from one of the Mir Space Stations supply ships, before the ship itself burns up in the atmosphere.

Aboard the Mir, the cosmonauts will be able to control the Znamya's tilt and direct reflected sunlight to specific points on the surface of the Earth.

The purpose of this is to see whether or not there exists the potential for 'mirrors in the sky' to supersede the need for streetlights. That way, all the fossil fuel that's currently burned to power streetlights will be saved, and the evenings will be lit with virtually free, eternal 'moonlight.'

Of course, one comparatively minute mirror, orbiting the Earth and blinking away at various cities as it passes them by isn't going to achieve that much in the short term. The next experiment, scheduled for the Year 2000, will involve a much bigger, 70-metre diameter mirror with the brightness of a 100 Full Moons.

And the eventual ambition of the Space Reggata Consortium - led by the Russian 'scientific production company' Energiya, which services Mir - is to put up about 200 100-Moon reflectors (ie: 20,000 Moons' worth, maybe more), all circling permanently over the Arctic and giving the whole region 24-hour, 365-day sunshine. Space Reggata's intention, essentially, is to abolish the night.

Up until now, the most strident voices to be raised in protest at the concept have come from astronomers, who are already troubled by light pollution in general and see in the consortium's plans the end of the practice of their science - at least from the surface of the Earth in the Northern hemisphere. But the implications hardly stop there. Aside from the fact that people in the region would never again see a star or any of the planets, including the Moon, the whole wild environment - evolved since the very beginning of life to experience night and day (and in the Arctic, extremes of both) - would suddenly be confronted

with a condition that might prevail on an entirely different kind of planet.

October, 1998. 'FOCUS MAGAZINE'

TREADING ON INCREASINGLY THIN ICE

Global warming may well have triggered the unprecedented melting of sea ice in the middle of the Arctic, which has left the remaining ice up to a third thinner than it was 20 years ago.

Scientists studying sonar readings from British submarines fear that the thaw could lead to huge disruptions of the world's ocean circulations, including the Gulf Stream, which keeps Britain and Western Europe (relatively) warm.

A failure or a deflection of the Gulf Stream - which keeps Britain's ports free of ice and ensures that Winter temperatures are warmer than at similar latitudes in Canada and the former Soviet Union - would have a devastating effect on the climate and the economy.

Dr Peter Wadhams, a reader in Polar Studies at the Scott Polar Institute in Cambridge, and Dr Norman Davis, a senior research fellow at the same institute, was quoted as saying that they had compared the ice thickness measurements taken from *HMS Trafalgar* in 1966, with those made by submarines from 1976 to 1987.

The earlier readings showed that ice had thinned by 12 to 15 per cent over that 11-year period and Dr Davis said that the ice was becoming more fragile.

'It is looking considerably thinner. We would not be surprised if the final results show a 20 per cent to 30 per cent difference.'

Ice thickness was, on average, six metres in the 1970's. The latest findings indicate that it might now be on average up to two metres thinner.

The findings add to a growing weight of evidence that dramatic changes are occurring in the Arctic, which may be due to emissions of carbon dioxide and other gases.

The Arctic is a crucial region. The melting and freezing of its sea water drives vast ocean circulations that affect the world's weather and climate in ways that scientists are just beginning to understand. The sea ice also reflects back into space heat from the Sun that would otherwise be absorbed. As a key area of the Greenland Sea freezes in Winter, the resulting build-up of salty water sinks to the bottom, carrying with it huge quantities of dissolved carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

A slowing of the process could accelerate the build-up of carbon dioxide and, as a consequence, speed up global warming.

Dr Helge Drange, of the Nansen Environmental Remote Sensing Centre in Bergen, said; *'It is an area the size of France, a substantial reduction in sea ice.'*

23rd November, 1998. *Arctic Circle*. 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH'

"THE CAMELOT COMET"

According to a recent article in *THE DAILY TELEGRAPH*, a unique historical record contained in tree rings suggests that the passing of the legendary King Arthur, in the sixth century, may have been an even bigger disaster than the ushering in of The Dark Ages...

Researcher Mike Baillie, has hit upon the notion that due to his study of dendrochronology - the study of tree rings - the hunt for evidence of environmental downturns, from wet summers (check out last year for a good example of that, Mikey, old chum - Constantly Moaning Ed), to volcanic

eruptions. These anomalies apparently show up as radically reduced growth rings in ancient Irish, English and European oaks.

Mike asserts that if you cast your eye over the pattern of oak tree rings in the past 1,500 years one set stands out; it starts in AD 536 and goes on until at least AD 645

Interestingly, other workers have already noted references by Mediterranean writers to a 'severe dry fog' or 'dust veil' in 536 and had interpreted this as the result of a volcanic eruption sending dust and acid into the stratosphere.

By way of a fascinating preface to his latest book on the subject, ('EXODUS TO ARTHUR: CATASTROPHIC ENCOUNTERS WITH COMETS,' Batsford Books, £19.99), Mike relates the following;

'This plume of gloom could explain the crop failures and famines which are also recorded around the world in the late 530's. The tree rings were certainly very narrow just about everywhere in 536 but, as far as the oak trees were concerned, 536 was as nothing compared with what happened in 539-541.

What I found fascinating is that two of the traditional dates for Arthur's death are also 539 and 542. So, I thought, let's have a look at Arthurian legend to see if there are any clues to the cause of the disaster.

'There was no good evidence for a major volcano at 540, so I started to wonder what was the most likely cause of an environmental catastrophe associated with an obscured atmosphere might be.

'Perhaps there had been a close brush with a comet, with its dust and debris loading the atmosphere through explosions similar to that which took place in Tunguska, Siberia in 1908, which flattened more than 2,000 square kilometres of forest.

'This suggestion has some indirect support. Cometary astrophysicists had already suggested that the Earth was at 'increased risk of bombardment' by cometary debris between AD 400 and 600, based on the increased records of severe meteor showers in that period.

'Arthurian legend provides more backing for this idea. Arthur is an Apollo figure - a bright God who fires arrows and brings plague. In this case, the Justinian Plague, possibly as bad as the Black Death, breaks out in AD 542.

'But Arthur isn't just a classical God. He's widely believed to be a Celtic God equivalent to the Irish hero Cuchulainn, a rebirth of God Lugh. The description of Lugh also suggest a link to a comet.

'Lugh is famous not least because of a story called "THE FATE OF THE CHILDREN OF TURENN."

'It describes Lugh as having a face as bright as the setting sun, too bright to look at.

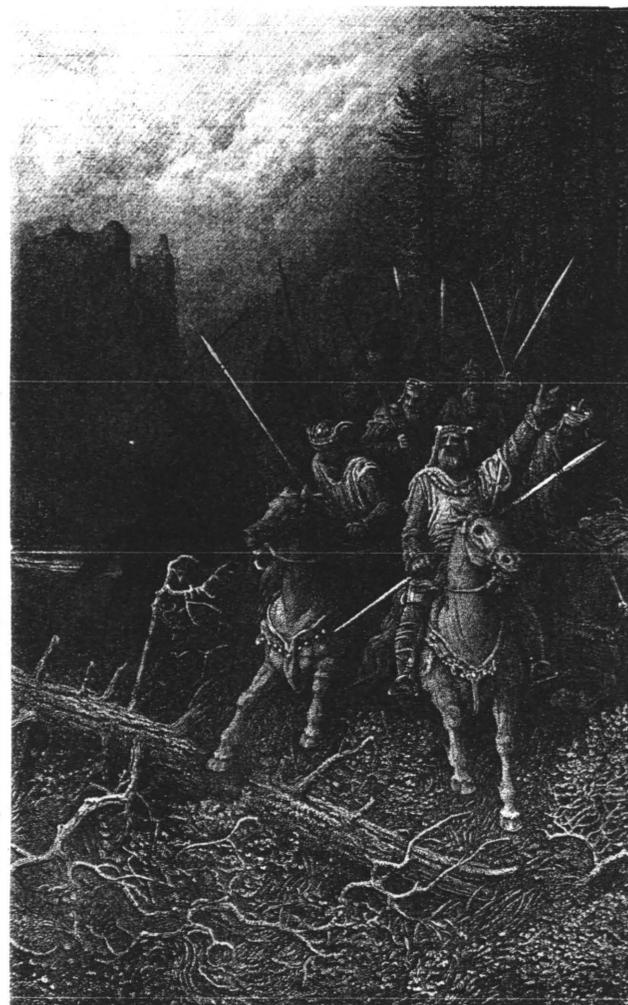
'But the real clue comes with a question asked by the mythological Irish king Bres. In astonishment, he asks the Druids why the sun should be rising in the west, the direction from which Lugh was approaching, when every other day he rises in the east.

'The answer tells it all.

'The Druids say that it is the "splendour of the face of Lugh Lamh Fada." Lamh Fada means "of the long arm, or the long reach." So in mythology, Arthur is a rebirth of a bright-faced God, as bright as the setting sun, who is named for his long arm, and who comes up in the west. This, to me, sounds like an approaching comet. Lugh is said to carry a fiery spear and indeed lets fly three throws of this terrible spear associated with a great mist, darkness and thunderous noise. Its effects can be gauged by another look at Arthurian legend, which is closely linked to the Grail legend. Key to the Grail legend is the concept of a wasteland, where no crops grow and the land is infertile. It

relates to England. Was there a such a wasteland at around AD 540?

'The trees certainly thought so; whilst humans were experiencing the depths of a Dark Age, with crop failures, famines and plague. Even Merlin, Arthur's magician, fits this interpretation.



In mythology, he can be a "red, fiery whooshing dragon, flying in the sky" and, of course, he is famous for throwing thunderbolts. Some sources even suggest he died in, you have it, AD 536.

'The AD 540 tree rings undoubtedly suggest an environmental dimension to the human trauma and plague recorded at that time.

'Furthermore, they suggest that the Arthurian legends are dated to this period for good reason.

'This account also tallies with a description in writings that date from this time by a Mediterranean historian named Zachariah of Mitylene.

'A surviving fragment of his final Book 12, says the following; in addition to all the evil and fearful things described above and recorded below (mostly lost!) the earthquakes and famines and wars in diverse places...there has also been fulfilled against us and against this last generation the Curse Of Moses in Deuteronomy, when he admonished the people who had just come out of Egypt.

'In other words, Zachariah liken the AD 540 disaster, involving cold, reduced tree growth, inundations, crop failures, famines and plague to the Biblical Exodus, some time in the Second Millennium B.C. And, indeed, the Curse Of Moses in Deuteronomy, carries a description of the horrors of the Exodus plague plus, critically, an additional reference to Sodom and Gomorrah.

'So, Zachariah not only tells us of the horrors around AD 540, he gives us a hint that they included "fire from heaven," precisely consistent with the idea of a close brush with cometary debris

'Was there a comet close to the Earth, with devastating effects around AD 540?

'Yes, if you believe the writer Roger of Wendover. It was seen from Gaul (France), and it was "So vast that the whole sky seemed on fire."

Roger also says that in the same year, "there dropped real blood from the clouds... and a dreadful mortality ensued."

'Given the well-recorded Justinian Plague of AD 542, Roger was correct on his "dreadful mortality." As to the "red blood," who knows; however, I'd hazard a guess that he was correct on the vast comet.

'Support also comes from the monk Gildas. His main work was the "RUIN OF BRITAIN," written about AD 540, in which, among other things, he cites a long series of extracts from the Old Testament.

'People have always noted the "catastrophic" tone of these Biblical quotations.

'He mentions the Exodus inundation. David's choice of famine or plague, more plague, Sodom and Gomorrah, the wicked and the sinners consumed, tongues of fire, the land made a wilderness, the stars dimmed, the Sun and the Moon shadowed, earthquakes, a day of cloud and fog, a day of misery and destruction and so on. Whether man or Celtic God, the death of Arthur has much more context than anyone, as far as I can see, has previously realised.

'The tree ring patterns tell us that it heralded a Dark Age, when crops failed, people starved, and there was an Exodus to find pastures new.

'Now all we have to do is find, and date, an impact crater.'

An undeniably thought-provoking theory, and one which, in the pre-millennial times, might just strike a uneasy chord with those of an apocalyptic bent...

26th August, 1998. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

'It's The End Of The World As We Know It....'

The predicted rash of media-fuelled Millennial hysteria has not, as yet (in common with some of the more decipherable prophecy's of Nostradamus), come to pass. That's not to say, of course, that there won't be a greater degree of apocalyptic propaganda as the clock ticks down towards 2000...

One such article appeared in the 'Connected' supplement of a recent edition of 'THE DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

Its contents were so overbearingly doom-laden, I wanted to crawl back into bed, and pull the covers over my head, in the vain hope that I could fall asleep, wake up, and discover that the whole thing had been some monstrous bad dream.

I didn't, of course.

And a mere nightmare, it wasn't.

It was a female researcher's (all-too plausible) prediction for the year ahead.

And it made for pretty grim reading....

According to Wendy Grossman, the most extreme prognosis centres upon the theory that at a little after midnight on New Year's Eve, 1999, public transport will collapse (quite literally. There could be all kinds of accidents, train crashes, planes plummeting from the sky, etc), the food chain will be disrupted, electrical blackouts will cause major discomfort, if not outright chaos, the water supply will fail, and civil unrest will be the direct result because neither the banks nor the Government will be able to fix their software in time to issue social security and other cheques.

Most people seem to be of the opinion that the situation won't ever be allowed to get that bad - that certain things might well be adversely affected by the so-called Millennium Bug, but that, in the end, human adaptability, coupled with the instinct to ensure that civilisation survives no matter what, will see us through.

These eternal optimists will quote the examples afforded by the crisis that befell both Quebec, (when that part of Canada was hit by a power failure that all but paralysed the province for six weeks during the Winter of 1997), and Ireland (when a month-long banking strike required everyone to pull together and exchange handwritten bits of meaningless paper until the banks re-opened and everyone settled up). In neither case, bad as things were, did society tumble into outright anarchy.

However, there does exist among us, a class of people who not only believe categorically that the End Times are all but upon us, but are positively looking forwards to Armageddon.

The hi-tech incarnation of the survivalist movement, mostly prevalent in the United States, emerged in the 1970's, when the fear of global nuclear war seemed to grow with each passing day.

Their new (crazily), hoped for scenario goes a little something like this; small failures due to end-of-year financial projections to start on January 1st, 1999; non-US failures start April, 1999, as the fiscal year turns over; European crash fuels US crash; people start to panic in the US and food, cash and petrol all become scarce, and bank runs become the norm; panic renews in July, 1999 when state fiscal years turn over; September sees the beginning of business computer failures and food riots in some of the larger cities; further crashes on September 9th, 1999, and federal computer failures in October mean major cities start to burn; December sees power cuts and brownouts; New Year's Eve kills off 400 billion embedded chips, sparking failures in water, power and transportation and five to ten years of anarchy worldwide.

If we're lucky and no one either deliberately, or accidentally, kicks off a chemical or nuclear war, only four-fifths of the world's population will die. The survivors will be the smart ones, the prepared ones, the ones who elected to flee the cities at the tail-end of last year and set up entirely self-sufficient homesteads.

However, Damien Thompson, author of 'THE END OF TIME: FAITH AND FEAR IN THE SHADOW OF THE MILLENNIUM,' is eager to point out to anyone who'll listen, that 'one of the paradoxes of apocalyptic belief is the fact that the people who are spinning out these scenes always do so with the wonderful and gleeful attention to detail. From the beginnings of recorded history, people who have been describing the end of the world have done so with a certain amount of relish.'

Nowhere is this line of thinking more apparent than in discussions of the Year 2000 problem on the pages of the Internet. 'We are heading for a disaster greater than anything the world has experienced since the bubonic plague of the mid-14th century,' writes Gary North, another 'End Times' commentator. 'All jobs that didn't exist before 1945 are doomed, except that of computer programming.' Gary advises the rest of us that we ensure that we acquire printed copies of all personal records - insurance policies, birth certificates, bank and mortgage statements. If you fail to heed his warnings, he claims, you are too full of denial to examine the mounting evidence in an objective manner.

Of course, if we're talking here of a complete financial collapse, it may be that you intend to transmute your assets into something a damn sight more durable than mere paper notes. Suppose you choose gold....

Well, in the United States, there are, apparently, executive orders and option open to the government to confiscate gold during martial law, declaration of a national emergency, etc.

So if you choose not to bother with gold, you could try real estate. You can live on a farm.

Alternatively, you can set about hoarding masses of silver, platinum or other items that will doubtless be in huge demand come the apocalypse.

'If there is no recovery, or this is not the return of Jesus Christ,' writes one Internet poster, *'then it may get hairy for a long, long time.'*

Militarism, stubborn independence and the desire to be entirely self-sufficient; anti-government sentiment coupled with the wish to wipe the slate clean and start all over again; and a smidgeon of paranoia, constitute a weird enough, quintessentially American mix; but throw in a dose of good ol' reliable fire and brimstone Christianity, and you have a combination that is potentially explosive.

'In the US, the imagery of the Biblical apocalypse is much closer to the surface than in Europe,' says Thompson. Even so, he agrees, *'you certainly do find on the fringes of evangelical religion in Britain, particularly the fringes of Pentecostal Christianity, Endtime beliefs, and almost anybody who has a sense of the apocalypse is incorporating the fear of the Year 2000, in one way or another.'*

'The Year 2000 is perfect because it actually provides the mechanism for everything breaking down.'

Survivalism, says Thompson, has never been part of the British tradition of apocalyptic belief, but there are signs aplenty that this could soon change. *'It could be a function of the global market in apocalyptic scenarios which has been developing since the arrival of the Internet,'* he suggests. We are, he says, even beginning to find survivalists in Japan, surely a place where the culture is completely antithetical to the rugged kind of jungle ethic demonstrated by people who are fortifying their hillbound homes and laying in guns to shoot the 'evil looters.'

The article even included a list of must-have items, all of which are deemed necessary in order to survive the Final Conflict....

*** At least a year's worth of food: 300lb of grain (wheat, rice, corn or other cereal), 75lb of non-fat dry milk, 60lb of sugar or honey, 5lb of salt, 20lb of fat or oil, and 60lb of legumes (whatever they are).

*** A goodly supply of garden seeds to enable you to grow your own fresh fruit and vegetables including; Courgettes, tomatoes, runner beans, lettuce, spinnach, potatoes, cabbage, brussels sprouts, brocoll, etc. Also you will require gardening tools and several pairs of heavy-duty gloves.

*** Vacuum bags and sealer, to store everything in reasonable-sized portions. Large (25-gallon) buckets made of food-grade plastic with tightly-fitting lids in which to store the sealed bags (always label the buckets on the outside).

*** Water; a gallon per person per day. Keep cool and free of bacteria, viruses, slime, algae, and enviromental contaminants with small amounts of bleach and water purification tablets.

*** Power and light sources; candles, fuel, maybe a low pressure gas stove and cylinders to run it on or some kind of backyard grill you can run on bits of kindling. Generator and fuel for same.

*** Extra clothing and shoes, blankets, sleeping bags, spare glases for the visually impaired, stocks of

toothbrushes, toothpaste, dental floss, cleaning supplies, and not forgetting, plenty of toilet paper.

*** Health. Vitamins and medical supplies. Ensure you get as physically fit as possible.

*** Cash for at least one month's expenses; after that, either the banks will have reopened, or else the entire financial system will have collapsed.

*** Entertainment; books, acoustic musical instruments, board games, playing cards, etc.

*** And finally, it's worth remembering that under British law, it is illegal to own a firearm or ammunition to defend your stockpile.

Metal shutters and sturdy locks may have to suffice.

20th August, 1998. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH.'

Bolts From The Blue Part II

Following on from the story elsewhere in this issue about the mysterious death of an entire African football team, scientists now believe that they have solved the enigma surrounding the previously unexplained deaths of mountain-walkers, that have baffled researchers over the years.

These hikers, often young and healthy, have on occasion been found dead in the moutains without a mark on their bodies.

And the theory proferred in an attempt to solve the mystery...The powerful forces generated by bolts of lightning. It can kill without leaving any tell-tale signs, such as burns, because the bolts discharge close to the victim rather than entering the actual body.

The scientists came up with this possibility whilst they were investigating the death of a 22-year-old golfer caught in the midst of a thunderstorm. The man and three companions had sought shelter under a tree when it was struck by lightning. One suffered burns but survived, and two lost conscousness briefly.

The fourth man's heart stopped and he died - yet there was not a mark on him. Usually lightning deaths are the result of a direct strike, side flash or ground current, all of which leave signs of injury.

But Dr Michael Cherington and his colleagues from the Lightning Data Center in Denver, Colorado, USA, believe that the golfer was killed by a massive magnetic pulse.

They point out to the sceptics that lightning bolts generate very high peak currents of 100,000 amps or more, which can produce intense magnetic fields up to a metre around the point of impact.

These could induce massive currents in the body, say the researchers in the well-repsected medical journal; *'THE LANCET.'*

Depite lasting less than a single millisecond, these currents are well capable of knocking out the heart.

'The lightning may induce what we call loop currents within the human torso without evidence of current entering the body,' claim the researchers.

'If these currents occur during an especially vulnerable part of the cardiac cycle, they could cause asystole (stopped heart beat) or ventricular fibrillation (an often fatal abnormal heart rhythm).'

'The phenomenon could be the reason for at least some of the unexplained 'heart attacks' among hikers found dead in the mountains say the scientists.'

And weather 'expert' (if there can ever be such a thing) Steve Davenport was quick to add that; *'Lightning produces a tremendous burst of energy which, I believe*

could induce a very strong current. There are pretty significant electro-magnetic fields around lightning bolts.' He advised that the most important thing to remember when you are caught in a thunderstorm is not to be the tallest object around (quite easy in my case - short-arse Ed).

'If you find yourself in a wide open field the best advice is to lie down. It's also very unwise to shelter under a tree.'
2nd July, 1998. 'DAILY MAIL'

The Mystery Brain

Police in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, were forced to make a bizarre broadcast last September, for the owner of a lost brain.

The police were handed what the tabloid press coined a 'brain-in-a-bag,' by a college worker. It had apparently been posted through the college letterbox.

Police Sergeant John Anderson was quoted as saying; *'At first we didn't even know if it was human, or if we needed to look for a body.'*

But pathologist John Clark later confirmed that it most certainly was a human brain, about 80 years old, which had been previously laboratory dissected and pickled in formaldehyde.

20th September, 1998. Barnsley, South Yorkshire. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

Keep Watching The Skies!!! UFO UPDATE

Late last October, a certain tabloid news (ahem) paper, featured an interview with former US astronaut Ed Mitchell (*'one of only 12 people to have walked on the Moon'*).

The scientist turned unabashed UFO believer (and a firm proponent of the ETH, to boot), had apparently, caused something of a sensation when he appeared at a conference in the States, during which he claimed he had seen undeniable proof that aliens exist. And not only that, but that they have been visiting our planet for countless years.

The 68-year-old, we were told, now works as a consultant to the still hugely popular 'X FILES' TV series, and was keen to impart the reason for his acceptance of the extraterrestrial origins of UFO's, to *'THE DAILY MANC'S'* hack, John Earls....

He opens the interview with a typically American lack of humility, boasting that *'I am a trained scientist, and because of my position people in high places confide in me.'*

And, as a result, I have no doubt that aliens have visited this planet.'

Stirring stuff indeed, you might think. We await the revealing of the incontrovertible empirical evidence to back up his claims with bated breath. But when it comes, we exhale slowly and feel, not for the first time, more than a tad disappointed.

The 'revelation' that the American Government and governments around the world have literally thousands of UFO files containing reference to unexplained UFO sightings, is hardly groundbreaking news.

That may well be true, but it doesn't prove one iota that any of those 'unexplained sightings' are necessarily of alien spacecraft. They could just as easily be phenomena that

were badly interpreted (even 'expert' witnesses can get it wrong sometimes), astronomical or meteorological anomalies, secret aircraft of one kind or another, the list is potentially endless.

Worse still, is Mitchell's assertion that *'as a scientist, it is logical to me that at least some of these will have been of alien craft'*

Why. Because in reaching such conclusions he can ensure that he makes a few bob on the highly lucrative lecture circuit, (not too mention that even more lucrative book deal)? Or, more charitably, because he simply wishes it were so? (And don't we all?)

Mitchell is quick to counter the suggestions that he is nothing more than a crank however, by stating that; *'The stories I have heard from people who are highly qualified to talk about UFOs, leave me in no doubt that aliens have already visited the Earth.'*

He claims he has been interested in the subject since he joined NASA, 40 years prior to him giving this interview. This interest became rather more of a passion after he landed on the Moon with Apollo 14.

'I felt an overwhelming sense that the universe itself is in some way a conscious being in its own right. This means that all lifeforms, whether on Earth or elsewhere, are all part of one giant consciousness.'

Such philosophical thinking is soon replaced however, by the somewhat smug, self-satisfied comment that he wasn't that surprised therefore when he learned that *'aliens really do exist.'*

Oh, and hot on the heels of that astounding remark, he dredges up that staple favourite of the conspiracy buff, the US/Worldwide Government UFO Cover-up.

Mitchell's finger is so on the pulse, he can even reveal the reason why any government would want to suppress information relating to the presence of Aliens. Apparently, it's all down to one thing; Fear.

In the wake of Roswell, (which *really*, honestly and truthfully, cross-my-heart-and-hope-to-die *happened*, just like the majority of ETH'ers say it happened, and never mind Santilli, and never mind Project Mogul, and never mind the fact that extraterrestrials, a million times further along the road of technological advancement than ourselves, fly zillions of light years without the slightest hiccup, only to experience a bout of pesky engine trouble forcing their craft to crash land the minutethey're over the New Mexico desert), the world it seems, would have panicked had the news been made public.

Well, may be they would and maybe they wouldn't. One thing is as damn sure as mustard; no government, especially back in the post-war days of 1947, could possibly have mounted a cover-up of such spectacular proportions, over something which, essentially, they had not the slightest degree of control (unless of course, they struck a deal with the aliens at the outset - Eternally Paranoid Ed).

To return to Mitchell's interview, it appears he believes that; *'the whole question of extraterrestrials should be looked at in an historical context.'*

He justifies this statement by referring to the historical prevalence for outright scepticism at the founding of new ideas and outlandish theories; *'Five hundred years ago, the astronomer Copernicus was condemned as a heretic for saying that the planet Earth wasn't the centre of the universe but merely a small part of it'*

'Now we laugh at those long-dead fools for not listening to the truth. People who believe in aliens aren't all cranks and some may be looked upon in the future as visionaries similar to Copernicus. Meanwhile, the majority of us still believe mankind is the biological centre of the universe.'

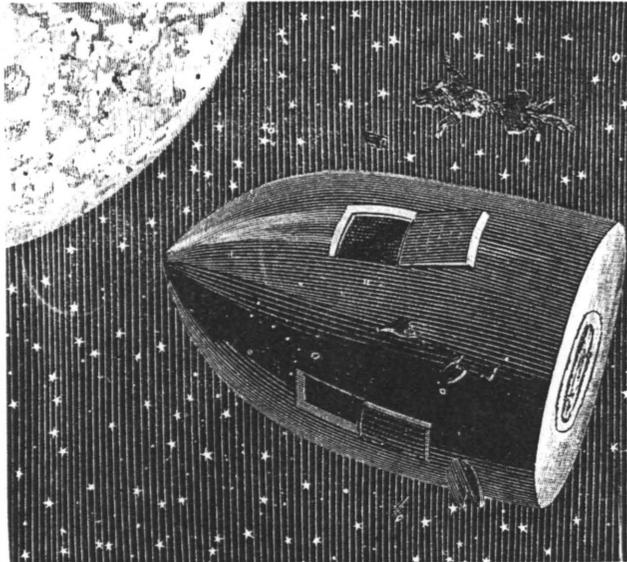
'We will refuse to accept that intelligent life exists outside the the Earth unless we personally bump into an alien while

we're doing the shopping (something which I'm convinced happens frequently when I'm purchasing odds and sods in my hometown of New Ferry - although that might be something to do with the areas high incidence of drug abuse rather than extraterrestrial visitation - Cynical Ed). And still he goes on.

'My training at NASA only allows me to look at things scientifically. Even if I hadn't been shown evidence of alien landings on Earth, the assumption must be that somewhere in the universe another planet is capable of supporting alien life.'

'But if you're starting to think that walking on the Moon added my brain and that I'll believe any old crank theory about ETs, think again.'

'I would describe myself as a cynic. I wasn't convinced about the existence of aliens until I started talking to the military old-timers who were there at the time of Roswell. The more Government documentation on aliens I was told about, the more convinced I became.'



Perhaps we should give ol' Mitchell some credit. At least he doesn't believe that there are alien bases on the Moon. Ashe says, he should know. He's been there!!!

'I even became caught up in a rumour that there was a Moon structure reflected in my space helmet during TV transmissions of my landing. That just isn't true.'

Nevertheless, this comparatively sceptical stance is shaken to its very foundations when he adds; *'It helps though that those in possession of documentation of alien visits to Earth are starting to come forward. The military people I spoke to are sick and tired of the secrecy surrounding Roswell and other such cases, particularly as this information is being leaked.'*

'I firmly believe that this documentation will have to be made public within the next three or four years (funny that, I've been interested in the subject of UFOs for the past 15 years or so, and I can recall hearing pretty much those exact same words being spouted every time someone deems to come forward and profess their belief in the phenomenon).

'And if proof of ETs is finally made public, nobody will be happier than me.'

25th October, 1998. 'DAILYMANC'

Searching For ET On The Internet

Scientists were intent upon seeking the backing of over a million home computer-users in a bid to bolster the search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, last August.

Their plan was aimed at building a giant global 'brain' to scan the heavens for signs of alien radio transmissions.

'Everybody is curious, everybody wants to know if life is out there,' Dan Werthimer, an astronomer based at Berkeley University's Space Sciences Laboratory in California, USA. *'This is a neat way of letting them join in the hunt.'*

The Berkeley Project aims to use 'distributed computing,' apparently a new way of linking individual computers over the Internet, virtually anyone with a desktop PC can potentially join in the hunt.

'Distributed computing is one of the Holy Grails of computer science,' project director David Anderson was quoted as saying. *'If it works, it could be 100 times faster than the fastest current, super-computer.'*

Scientists were hopeful that they could set about launching the project sometime this year (1999), and once up and running, they will use the Internet to parcel out to individual home computers chunks of raw data obtained from the famous Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico.

Aricebo's gigantic dish constantly scans the skies for radio waves that just might have been produced by an alien intelligence.

'We've been leaking TV shows, and radio programmes into space for decades,' says Werthimer. *'Maybe somebody out there is doing the same.'*

What is certain is that the huge volume of radio data that must be analysed has long been one of the main stumbling blocks for previous SETI projects. And even with the benefit of the new super-computers able to complete as many as 200 billion operations a second, the process has been an incredibly slow, labourious task, leaving a whole of scientists frustrated and somewhat disillusioned with the ET hunt.

And that's where, the current team leaders and their 'computer distribution' come in.

Made possible by the rapid growth of the Internet, it allows scientists to break down large computing problems and distribute them through networks of smaller computers. Each solves its own small part of the puzzle, then feeds its answers back into the main computer.

It is hoped that such a system can now help solve, once and for all, the mystery that begs the question; are we alone in the universe?'

28th August, 1998. 'THE EXPRESS'

The Light Of Falling Stars

Following on from the spate of meteor showers featured in the last issue of 'DON,' the skies above the Earth seem to have been lit up with the celestial debris once more, these past few months.

Firstly, the dusty remains of a what was thought to be a meteorite that crashed into Greenland were being in the process of being tested by 'experts' to see if it truly came from outside of our Solar System.

The extreme speed of the object, captured on video tape, suggests that it may have originated in interstellar space, which would make it a first if confirmed.

A giant fireball was seen on 9th December, 1997, over a large part of southern Greenland. Some reports stated that 'the night was turned into day' and others described it as 'a giant millipede with yellow, glowing legs.'

The meteorite was calculated to weigh at least a ton. An expedition to the south-western part of the Greenland ice cap found no large meteorite fragments, only about 200 samples of dust.

21st August, 1998. Southern Greenland 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

***And then, last September, (the 18th to be precise), a much-hyped meteor display failed to materialise over Britain due to a (typically) bad spell of weather; a mixture

of fog and low cloud, which rendered viewing opportunities few and far between.

Not only that, but the majority of the fiery particles arrived hours earlier than had been anticipated by the assembled 'experts.'

Over in Japan, a 19-year-old girl was killed when she plummeted 50 feet into a ravine after she had lost her balance while seeking to catch a glimpse of the shooting stars.

Meanwhile, in Taporley, Cheshire, an enterprising woman tried to claim that her car window had been smashed by a falling meteorite. It turned out upon investigation, however, to have been nothing more than an ordinary stone thrown by a group of local vandals.

19th September, 1998. 'DAILY SLUR'

*** But it was in November, that the most spectacular displays were witnessed and subsequently recorded.

The many cities dotted across the vast continent of Asia, were afforded the best views of the Leonid shower.

Satellite operators, who had been forecasting potential damage to their equipment, such was the intensity of the meteor showers, reported that there had been no problems as the Earth passed through the tail of Tempel-Tuttle, peppering the atmosphere with fragments travelling at 160,000 mph. The majestic sight of so many meteors cavorting across the night skies caused traffic jams, as from the Great Wall of China to New Delhi, India, hundreds of thousands of people (who had obviously never read John Wyndham's classic novel 'THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS,' or else didn't care a fig about their eyesight), gathered to watch in open-mouthed awe.

Tens of thousands of people travelled to central and northern Taiwan where hotels were booked up solid. In Tokyo and other Japanese cities, offices heeded a government plea to dim lights in order to aid the public's viewing.

In northern Thailand, hotels, camp sites and airlines were jammed packed with people heading for Doi Inthanon, at 8,464ft, the country's highest peak.

However, residents in Georgia, the former Soviet State, were advised to stay indoors and to avoid alcohol.

Zhu Jln, an astronomer at Beijing Astronomical Observatory's Xinglong Station, was quoted as saying; 'I witnessed a number of shooting stars which were bright enough to illuminate the faces of the observers at the Station.'

A family in Calcutta, India, said; 'A hot and smelly meteor fell on our home.' It was duly sent to the 'experts' for examination.

To beat clouds and the attendant light pollution, two NASA aircraft left Japan on what officials said was the agency's first major astrobiology mission.

Beverley Allan, of East Anglia University, was in the team studying whether comets help to import amino acids and other organic compounds.

The Leonids were not recognised by all. Rescuers in Norway were swamped with calls from people anxious to report that they had seen distress flares or rockets.

Though the Leonids - so called because the meteors appear to come from the constellation Leo - occur every November, they are usually not that spectacular, but every 33 years, the comet speeds through the inner Solar System and sheds swarms of particles.

The Royal Astronomical Society said that the meteor was on view in Britain between 1am and dawn on the morning of the 18th.

Several people reported sightings the evening before, notably in areas free of excessive lighting and cloud cover.

Watchers in the east of England and Scotland had a better view than those in the west and Wales.

18th November, 1998. 'DAILY TELEGRAPH'

RAF FELTWELL: LISTENING IN ON ALIENS?

And yet another example of tabloid sensationalism appeared in the form of an article quoting the idle theorising of Lord Hill-Norton, the erstwhile defence chief turned current UFO/ETH advocate.

According to the compiler of the piece, Lord Hill-Norton is convinced beyond doubting that a United States Air Force Squadron based in Suffolk, is tracking UFOs which may pose a security threat to the Earth.

'There's something fishy at the base, he's quoted as saying. 'I have asked a number of questions about the base and never get a satisfactory answer.'

Hill-Norton did manage, however, to elicit an admission from the Ministry Of Defence to the effect that they accept that RAF Feltwell does have a special US unit whose purpose is to 'track man-made objects in deep space.'

This, predictably, failed to quench Hill-Norton's thirst for knowledge though, and he still insists that they haven't answered his main question; how many objects remain unidentified, and how many of these were transmitting a signal citing the need for secrecy???

Not surprisingly, the MOD spokesman at the base, who was wheeled out to issue a statement, was less than candid about the exact nature of their activities; 'We are entitled to refuse certain information on topics which we consider to be sensitive.'

But he did apparently admit that UFO's would be tracked if they came within range of the tracking devices. Which, you might think, is hardly an earth-shattering revelation.

'They need to catalogue everything that they can in space.'

Officially, the US 5th Space Surveillance Squadron is part of Britain's early warning system to protect against an enemy missile attack launched from space. Lord Hill-Norton however, refuses to accept that it exists simply to defend the country from earthly enemies.

'For a start, there are no man-made objects in interstellar space. So I want to know what they are really doing.'

'And I want to know what the Government is doing about the UFO problem.'

'There are things flying about in our atmosphere and we don't know what they are, who directs them, or what their purpose might be. We ought to know.'

He winds up the article by saying; 'UFOs are the product of extraterrestrial intelligences.'

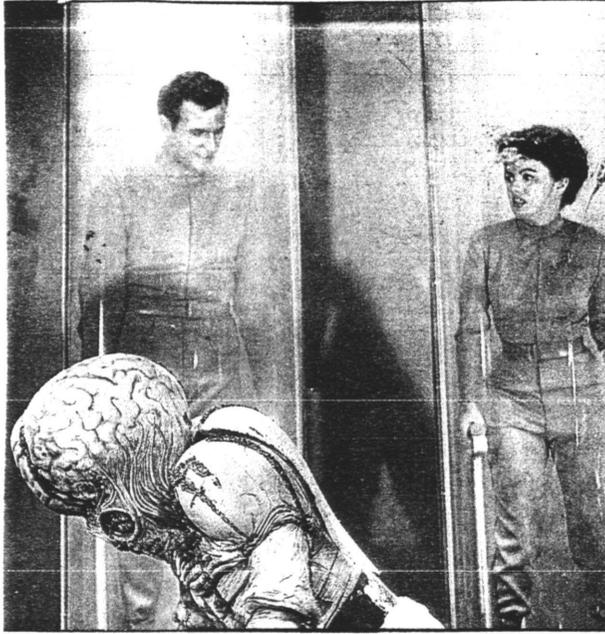
'There is overwhelming evidence that there are physical objects in the Earth's atmosphere and they are man-made.'

13th September, 1998. RAF Feltwell, Suffolk 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

Do Not Adjust Your TV Set!!!

One of the most outlandish claims yet (and boy, we've certainly seen more than our fair share of kooky ones this last, increasingly paranoid decade or so), made by the UFOConspiracy Theorists, is that the science fiction TV programmes of the 19 50's and 60's, (not to mention the innumerable feature films) portrayed alien visitors in a humorous light, because their makers were ordered to heap ridicule on the concept of UFOs and extraterrestrials. Ben Rux, author of a recently-published book, 'HOLLYWOOD VS THE ALIENS: The Motion Picture

Industry's Participation In UFO Disinformation, (Frog Ltd, Berkeley, California, 1997. £16.99), makes the somewhat tongue-in-cheek assertion that film directors and chiefs of TV production were in league with the CIA and MI5 to produce shows that were deliberately aimed at making Allens seem ludicrous and without threat.



(Above): The Mutant of Metulana meets its death in the classic Science Fiction movie; 'THIS ISLAND EARTH.' (Universal, 1955).

Such excessively lurid monsters were a staple part of the 1950's-60's sci-fi boom, and, if we are to lend any credence to the writings of Bruce Rux, they also served to perpetuate a government-sponsored conspiracy to ridicule the notion of UFOs and alien beings...

Programmes such as 'DOCTOR WHO' (with its attendant Daleks, Sea Devils, Autons, Cybermen, et al), 'THUNDERBIRDS,' and 'LOST IN SPACE,' were actually all part of a plot to discredit the real-life phenomenon of UFOs and their occupants, according to the text in Rux's book.

He seems to reserve special attention for the cult hit TV series; 'THE AVENGERS.'

Rux maintains that he is suspicious about the show because 'a substantial contingent of wartime intelligence members helped in the making of the programme.'

'THE AVENGERS' did of course, from time to time, feature some laughably bad plot lines, for example, 'THE MAN-EATER OF SURREY GREEN' which centered upon a gang of mad gardeners out to conquer the world.

Rux further states that *'When any issue is repeatedly ignored on a serious level, and instead made an object of great ridicule, it becomes thought of in exactly such a fashion.'*

With the topic made ridiculous, no one would think to ask about it or pursue it. After all, everyone knows its silly.'

11th November, 1998. 'DAILY SLUR'

CHURCHILL FEARED 'WAR OF THE WORLDS'

No less a person than Lord Irvine, the Lord Chancellor, revealed that an inquiry had been instigated by the late Winston Churchill, into the UFO problem, in the early 1950's.

Churchill apparently asked his then air minister Lord Cherwell, to investigate the matter when he was still prime

minister in 1952, writing; *'What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to? What is the truth?'*

He was told, (the sceptics would say, not surprisingly), that there was no evidence, despite the fact that official documents showed that UFOs were in fact being constantly reported by members of the RAF.

Lord Irvine also revealed that the Government is holding at least 33 top-secret files on UFOs. The documents are currently being held at the Public Record Office in Kew, West London, and Irvine hinted that there may well be more in existence.

But the information remains so militarily sensitive, it cannot be released along side the 23 files reporting sightings that were said to have occurred between 1943 and 1967, which were made public recently.

18th October, 1998. 'SUNDAY MANC'

THE HEARTLESS LAUGHTER OF THE DAMNED

And finally, for this issue at least, consider if you will the following article that appeared in a couple of the tabloids late last year...

Kevin McClure and the 'MAGONIA' crew are gonna' just lurrrrrrvvve this one.

Dr Marilyn Ruben, an American professor (well, it just had to be, didn't it) who runs Michigan University's Alien Abduction Experience and Research Centre, has gone on record as stating that she has prepared an (ahem) foolproof questionnaire that can tell you, in no uncertain terms, whether or not you've ever been abducted by those nasty Grey aliens.

The enquiry form includes such deep, insightful questions as 'Do you have the secret feeling that you may be special or chosen?'

Are there times you find it hard to sleep at night?

Have you ever woken up with a nosebleed, or found blood on your pillow when you wake in the morning?

(Oh, God. I think I can truthfully answer yes to just about everyone of those questions.... Then again, so can most likely just about everyone in the human race. Does that mean we've all been adducted at some time of our lives or other??? Let's read on and find out).

Dr Ruben, who runs the aforementioned centre together with her husband, Daniel, takes a break from her incessant questioning, to say; *'People don't realise they have been abducted because it's said that the aliens are able to wipe their memories (but not their noses, one assumes, if the blood-stained pillows are anything to go by).'*

'But while it's believed that they are able to wipe away any memory of the actual abduction, they're not, for example, able to replace the time that was lost.'

'We aimed to show people that experiences they may dismiss out of hand and put down to drinking too much on a Saturday night, could in fact be evidence pointing to the fact that they have been abducted.'

'The kind of feelings or experiences I'm talking about are where you feel you may be psychic, have dreams you are flying, or have trouble sleeping through the night for unexplained reasons.'

Before beginning their 'research' into the 'science of alien abductions' (now there's a misnomer, if ever there was one), the couple set about personally interviewing countless people who claimed to have fallen victim to the Grey's kidnapping prowess.

'We wanted a clear picture of the experiences these people were having.

'What we found was that a huge number of people in the USA believe they have been abducted.

'This can come from something as simple as losing track of time, to discovering something has been implanted in your body.

People who have been having routine medical checks or medical scans were also discovering things in their bodies which they didn't realise were there. More importantly, they didn't know how they got there.

'Once we had completed the initial stages, we then sat down and devised the questions where the person answering them could not be influenced in any way.'

The Ruben's seem to believe that there are literally thousands of people across the world being abducted on a regular basis.

'We want to make the world aware that there is life out there. We want people to know we are not alone. And that those visiting us have far more power than we do.'

In a bid to assist their 'research' Dr Ruben has posted her self-penned questionnaire on the Internet.

Apparently (and somewhat worryingly), over 4,000 people responded to the enquiry form in Britain alone and Dr Ruben claims that 20 per cent 'discovered' that they had been abducted.

October, 1998. 'SUNDAY PEOPLE'

*** And another author seeking to cash in on the Abduction Mythos, is a lady by the name of Anne Druffel. She claims to have personally spoken to more than 250 'abductees,' and has published a book with the highly dubious title; 'HOW TO DEFEND YOURSELF AGAINST ALIEN ABDUCTIONS' (Plutus Books, £8.99).

She gave a brief overview of these (ahem) top tips to 'THE SCUM,' and they roughly translate as follows;

Mental Struggle:

*** USE IT: In the first stages of abduction (symptoms; paralysis and a general feeling of terror), or while your mind is still able to function - although you may not be able to move.

*** WHAT YOU NEED: Confidence that the technique will work.

*** HOW TO DO IT: Concentrate all your energy on moving one small part of the body - preferably a finger or a toe.

*** RESULT: When movement occurs, paralysis is broken and the visitor vanishes - supposedly scared off by your finger pointing.

Physical Struggle:

*** USE IT: Before you can't move. There is a belief that aliens travel on light and their bodies are very fragile.

*** WHAT YOU NEED: To feel your rights are being violated, a good left-hook or a heavy kitchen appliance.

*** HOW TO DO IT: The urge to fight should be swift and instinctive. It can be used when the aliens are present or are seen to be approaching outdoors. Get angry and lunge at them.

*** RESULT: The intent should never be to kill the intruder, but to warn them you like your privacy.

Righteous Anger:

*** USE IT: Before paralysis sets in or combined with Mental Struggle. This technique is best used after repeated visits or abductions by aliens.

*** WHAT YOU NEED: To be awake., fearless and believe that all humans have a right to life and liberty - Very American!!!

*** HOW TO DO IT: Take up a threatening stance and just shout strong commands at the alien like: 'Go away' or 'Leave me alone.'

RESULT: Shows the visitor that you are not going quietly. But the anger must be focused towards asserting rights rather than hating the aliens.

It's a purely emotional technique.



Protective Rage:

*** USE IT: To protect other members of your household - children and those who cannot look after themselves.

*** WHAT YOU NEED: Strong, assertive voice and a good knowledge of good words.

*** HOW TO DO IT: Focus on the intruder. Think of the family members you love and then curse to your heart's content.

But remember the 'anger' cannot be rooted in fear or despair - try and be positive.

RESULT: If you hold no grudge or hatred, then the ET should get the message - it's a bit similar to Exorcism.

Appeal To The Spiritual :

*** WHEN TO USE IT: Effective whether you are asleep, on the toilet, or in any kind of 'altered state' - such as after visiting the pub.

The most powerful technique yet discovered, since it can be readily used by most people.

*** WHAT YOU NEED: Faith in a spiritual realm, after-life or Angels. Basically, anything even remotely religious.

*** HOW TO DO IT: Crouch down in front of the Alien and start praying or waving the Bible.

If the sky doesn't open up and strike the Alien down, call a priest to come and help out.

*** RESULT: As long as the Alien isn't an atheist then it will get back on board its UFO and go and bother someone else.

It would be tempting simply to dismiss this book as being nothing more than a paranoid's jaundiced view of the UFO phenomena, or else a firmly tongue-in-cheek exercise laced with well-intentioned irony.

The problem is, there will be those who will doubtless accept it, quite literally, as being Gospel.

12th November, 1998. 'THE SCUM'

STOP PRESS

WONDERS OF THE INVISIBLE WORLD:

The Return Of The Hum

Just as this issue was in the process of being finally put together, the following pair of stories came to light, and I simply couldn't resist including them in this, hopelessly overdue edition.

A weird noise, which can apparently, only be detected by certain women in Warrington, Cheshire, made the local news on the very last day of the old year.

Up to a dozen women reported hearing the *'intermittent whining and droning noises'*, the source of which remained an enigma.

One of these severely put-upon ladies was moved to vow that she would leave her home town if the noises persisted, and the others were just desperate for the opportunity for a good night's sleep. Strangely enough, the males, including the investigators sent to the area to attempt to identify the sounds, were unable to hear anything out of the ordinary whatsoever.

'Experts' were quick to voice the opinion that the women were more sensitive to higher and lower frequency sounds and are therefore, more likely to become vexed by the noise pollution.

One of these victimised women, Anne Heesom, 55, came forward to state that; *'It's been going on for eighteen months and it's had such an effect on my life that I'm going to move house. It's a high-pitched, pulsating humming noise and it turns me into a nervous wreck.'*

'The noise abatement officer drove me around the area to try to isolate the noise and we stopped outside a North West Water treatment works. I can actually hear three noises, but there is only one that is really annoying.'

'The officer thought that it could be from one of the generators.'

'It is very bad in the front bedroom, but my husband can't hear it at all. I don't think there is anything they can do about it and I'm so sick of it I'm going to move house.'

The other eleven women on the estate may, it seems, be hearing slightly different noises to those heard by Mrs Heeson.

Andrew Gilbert, the local council's chief environmental officer, was quoted as saying; *'We have only had women complaining.'*

'There are physiological differences between men and women's hearing. The degree of annoyance at noise also changes from person to person.'

'Women tend to be annoyed by certain noises and a lot is to do with the psychology of noise and stress. And if women spend more time at home they will be irritated by noise intrusion.'

The complaints range from intermittent droning and humming to high-pitched whining.

Some women have thought to keep a diary of the anomalous sounds and their homes have been fitted with an audio recorder and a other monitoring equipment.

But when male investigators are dispatched to the scene, they fail to detect any trace of the noises which can be stronger in the women's bedrooms and on cold, frosty nights.

Mr Gilbert, our resident 'expert' on all things acoustic, had this to add to his previous statements; *'They are hearing*

something, whether it is actual or perceived we have to apply objective analysis to find out where it is coming from. We've not closed the file yet.'

A spokesman for North West Water said; *'Health officers have been monitoring it but have not been able to identify where the problem is coming from.'*

31st December, 1998. Warrington, Cheshire. 'LIVERPOOL DAILY POST'

*** It may not be connected in any way, but hot on the heels of the previous account, came news that seismologists have now discovered that the very Earth itself vibrates with a steady hum!!!

Although this 'hum' is said to be well below the level of human audibility, it makes you wonder whether the women of Warrington were 'hearing' something similar in the dead hours of night....

The finding, by several teams, including one led by Dr Naoki Suda of The Nagoya University of Japan, caused a fair smidgeon of understandable bemusement and some scepticism.

Geologists have been aware for the nigh-on forty years that earthquakes can make the Earth ring like the proverbial bell, but there are (thankfully) too few quakes to account for the background Hum.

By the time of the American Geophysical Union's meeting last December, seismologists had accepted the notion that the 'Hum' was indeed real, but were still perplexed in their search for a cause.

Dr Goram Ekstrom of Harvard, has managed to work out that the 'Hum,' which has a frequency of between three and eight minutes, would require an almost constant supply of magnitude 5.8 earthquakes, which occur only once every three days. Dr Suda puts forward the belief that winds may well be the direct cause.

He has found that the 'Hum' comes and goes during the day, peaking at any point on the Earth's surface when the local time of day is between noon and 8pm, and weakening between midnight and 6am.

This is the same pattern as intense thunderstorms over Africa and Asia, and means that extremely powerful winds striking the Earth's surface are responsible for the 'Hum.'

This revelation has disappointed some seismologists who would prefer it to be caused by internal activity of the Earth itself.

20th January, 1999. 'THE TIMES'

Coming In The Next Issue Of DEAD OF NIGHT:

New Ferry In The Dark Hours II: The Legend Of Jenny Greenteeth, The Fortean Aspects Of The Novels Of Stephen King, African Witchcraft, More Ghosts And Devils Over Merseyside, Reader's Paranormal Experiences, Alien Abductions, The Biography Of The Devil, 'Origin Unknown' (ITV's new UFO series Reviewed), Plus all the very latest examples of 'the magic that surrounds everyday life.'

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